

TRACING MEMORIES OF WAR: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF CITIZEN ATTITUDES TOWARDS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS DURING THE KOSOVO WAR

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Abstract: *This article explores the attitudes and perceptions of citizens towards human rights violations, massacres, and war crimes committed during the Kosovo War of 1998/99 through empirical research conducted twenty years post-conflict. The study is unique in its endeavor to measure such attitudes and perceptions within a temporal distance of two decades and for its focus on how individual memories of these events have been passed down to generations born post-1999. The study draws data from a survey conducted with 262 Kosovo citizens and content analysis of secondary sources like scholarly literature and reports from international organizations. The results highlight the structural changes in Kosovo citizens' evaluations and perspectives concerning the 1998/99 war events, providing a comprehensive and contextual understanding of their assessments. The implications of this study hold the potential to greatly enrich our understanding of how societies remember, interpret, and transmit their histories of conflict.*

Keywords: *Kosovo war, human rights, violations, crimes, attitudes, empirical research*

INTRODUCTION

The War in Kosovo during 1998/99 was a tragic period characterized by numerous violations of human rights, massacres, and crimes perpetrated against the civilian population. The intensified Serbian offensive in the summer of 1998 resulted in the death of approximately 1,500 Albanians, while 300,000 individuals were compelled to flee their homes in search of refuge. By the commencement of NATO attacks against Serbian army targets on March 24, 1999, further killings of Kosovars had taken place, and the forced displacement of the population continued unabated. Throughout the entire 78-day bombing campaign, as indicated by NATO data, close to one million Kosovo Albanians were violently expelled from the country, with half a million internally displaced within Kosovo's territory. Tragically, thousands lost their lives, while others became victims of rape. Moreover, their private property was systematically burned and destroyed, cultural and historical heritage sites were looted and demolished, exacerbating the irreparable loss suffered by the people of Kosovo.¹

This article aims to measure and analyze the attitudes and perceptions of citizens regarding human rights violations, massacres, and crimes that occurred during the war, through empirical research carried out in the territory of Kosovo over twenty years after the 1998/99 war. The participants came from different backgrounds, including 231 ethnic Albanians, 12 Serbs, and 19 people from other minority groups like Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians, showing the mixed population of the region.

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¹ ROBERTS, A. NATO's 'Humanitarian War' over Kosovo. *Survival*. 2006, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 102-123.

The Kosovo War (1998–1999), a significant conflict in the Balkans, was marked by severe human rights violations. These included genocide, as defined by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity as outlined by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998). This study examines how these events are remembered and perceived by Kosovo citizens.

While the existing literature contains diverse and pertinent sources that shed light on the human rights violations, crimes, and massacres that occurred in Kosovo during the 1998/99 war, no previous empirical research has been undertaken to gather field-based data with a twenty-year temporal distance. Consequently, this study fills that gap by exploring structural changes in Kosovo citizens' attitudes, perceptions, evaluations, and perspectives concerning the events of the 1998/99 war. Additionally, the research facilitates the identification of intergenerational transfers of these attitudes, tracing the transmission of individual memories of these events to individuals born after 1999 who rely solely on historical perceptions. This constitutes this paper's primary purpose and innovative aspect, which has not been previously addressed.

The research findings will be compared with data gathered from secondary sources, encompassing scholarly literature and reports by international organizations that were actively engaged in monitoring and reporting on the events transpiring in Kosovo at the time. This correlative approach seeks to enhance the credibility of the analysis and ensure a comprehensive and contextual understanding of the perceptions and assessments held by Kosovo citizens.

I. THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL LAW: FROM ANCIENT CODES TO THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE

International law, in its structured form, has been recognized relatively recently. However, as an archaic concept, it was presented early on. Examples of human behavior by monarchs towards others were scarce. The growth of cities, the organization of states, and the development of relations between peoples around 2000 BC defined the initial rules that would later be known as international law.² The basic principles of international law, although in an embryonic form, began to be applied to certain developed societies during that time. The king of Babylon, Hammurabi, proclaimed the famous code that bears his name. The code commenced with the phrase: "I established these laws to prevent the powerful from oppressing the weak."³ He had two fundamental goals: to prevent violent acts perpetrated by those who possessed power over others and to protect the common values established within the kingdom.

The Hittites, an ancient people who resided in the Anatolia region, which corresponds to present-day Turkey, developed a code of laws to uphold their values and establish order within their kingdom. This code emphasized two core principles: justice and fairness, par-

² PICTET, J. *Zhvillime dhe Parimet e së Drejtës Ndërkombëtare Humanitare. [Developments and Principles of International Humanitarian Law]*. Tiranë: Henry Dunant Institute Geneva, 2000, p. 12.

³ Ibid.

ticularly during times of war. In instances where the Hittites emerged victorious, and the enemy surrendered, the inhabitants of the conquered territory were spared from harm.⁴

The ascent of human rights from the national to the international level in the realm of international law can be traced back to Roman law. The Latin term *ius gentium*, which translates to “law of nations,” constituted a legal framework that applied to all individuals, irrespective of their citizenship or nationality. In ancient Rome, it was employed to denote the legal regulations governing relations between states and diverse nationalities. In modern times, this term has been utilized to signify international law and the principles that govern the conduct of states and their interactions with one another.⁵

One of the most renowned authors in the field of international law, Hugo Grotius, proposed using the term *ius gentium*, which encompassed the concept of *ius inter civitates*, referring to the rights between states. This framework encompassed not only the laws governing relations among peoples but also the laws regulating interactions between states.⁶ The treatment of citizens within the borders of a sovereign state was traditionally regarded as an internal matter that fell under the jurisdiction and responsibility of that state alone.⁷ In the past, human rights were often perceived as internal affairs of a state, granting the state the authority and obligation to address internal issues based on its own assessment and discretion. This approach opened up the possibility for states to employ any means they deemed necessary, including resorting to brutal violence against residents within their territory.

Confronted with such circumstances and growing societal pressure, states started enacting specific laws to safeguard human rights. In the Middle Ages, England emerged as a state that took substantial strides towards protecting human rights and establishing domestic legislation. Of particular historical significance are the Magna Carta Libertatum of 1215, the Declaration of Rights Act of 1689, the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America in 1776, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen in 1789. These documents hold particular value in advancing human rights and their recognition within the legal frameworks of their respective societies.⁸

The development of international law, especially in Europe, was significantly influenced by historical events, notably the French Revolution (1789–1793). This pivotal moment profoundly impacted the propagation of progressive ideals, including the notion of legal equality among states and the transfer of concentrated sovereignty from absolute and feudal monarchs to the people. Additionally, the revolution promoted ideas of freedom and human rights, which played a crucial role in shaping the development of international law.⁹

Atrocities and brutality witnessed during World War I had a profound impact on countries, leading to the emergence of progressive principles in international law. In response

⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵ FELLMETH, A., HORWITZ, M. *Guide to Latin in International Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 155.

⁶ GRUDA, Z. *E Drejta Ndërkombëtare Publike*. [Public International Law]. Prishtine: Rilindja, 2001, p. 4.

⁷ SCHABAS, W. *Gjenocidi në të Drejtën Ndërkombëtare*. [Genocide in International Law]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 18.

⁸ GRUDA, Z. *Mbrojtja Ndërkombëtare e të Drejtave të Njeriut*. [International Protection of Human Rights]. Prishtine: Rilindja, 2001, p. 8.

⁹ GRUDA, Z. *E Drejta Ndërkombëtare Publike*. [Public International Law]. Prishtine: Rilindja, 2001, p. 28.

to this, nations played a vital role in establishing and promoting the idea of an international organization that would strive to prevent future wars. The objective was to replace the old international order, which relied on a balance of power, with a new, more cooperative and multilateral system.¹⁰ This new order aimed to encourage states to reduce their armaments, facilitate peaceful resolution of international disputes, and foster conditions conducive to respecting the principle of self-determination.¹¹

Indeed, the League of Nations represented a significant milestone in establishing a supranational mechanism by the international community. However, despite its efforts to maintain peace and security, the organization ultimately failed to prevent the deterioration of international relations, leading to World War II. Following the war, states recognized the need for a more effective multinational mechanism that would include the world's major powers. This led to the creation of the United Nations. The UN Charter, which was signed in June 1945, includes the Statute of the International Court of Justice as an integral part, reflecting the importance of the court in the functioning of the UN system.¹² With the enactment of the UN Charter, a multinational mechanism for the maintenance of international peace and security was established. In line with this objective, the UN General Assembly, under its jurisdiction and in accordance with Article 13, adopted the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. This convention aims to combat the crime of genocide, regardless of whether individuals or states commit it. World War II was a global conflict that engulfed 61 countries and affected three-quarters of the world's population. The war resulted in an estimated 55 million casualties, with approximately 30 million of them being civilian populations.¹³

States took concrete action in establishing a unique basis of international norms for the prohibition and punishment of the crime of genocide, based on the 1941 Atlanta document. This is the first international document to lay the foundation for determining principles regarding the determination of allied states to punish the aggressors who caused World War II. The document was intended to ensure and guarantee human rights, as well as to punish offenders.¹⁴

Based on this initiative and in recognition of the need to hold accountable those responsible for the atrocities committed during World War II, an agreement was reached in London in 1945 among the allied forces (U.S., France, England, and the Soviet Union) to establish an international military court. The purpose of this court was to judge individuals who had committed war crimes that fell outside the jurisdiction of individual states but within the purview of the International Military Court. In such cases, state sovereignty would not apply, and instead, the principle of an international approach to the protection of freedoms and human rights would be implemented.¹⁵

¹⁰ MARLEKU, A., EMINI, A. The Role of Congress of Vienna in the Emergence of Multilateralism. *Acta Universitatis Danubius*. 2016, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 67–73.

¹¹ GRUDA, Z. *E Drejta Ndërkombëtare Publike [Public International Law]*. Prishtinë: Rilindja, 2001, pp. 28–29.

¹² United Nations. Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice. In: *United Nations*. [online]. 22. 5. 2023 [2023-05-22]. Available at: <<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter#:~:text=The%20Charter%20of%20the%20United,force%20on%2024%20October%201945>>.

¹³ BOYLE, D. *World War II: A Photographic History*. London: Metro Books, 2001, p. 592.

¹⁴ SALIHU, I. *E Drejta Penale. [Criminal Law]*. Prishtinë: UBT, 2016, p. 340.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

The Allied states were successful in prosecuting and punishing individuals responsible for crimes committed during World War II through the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal, which was established in 1945.¹⁶ The court played a crucial role in bringing the perpetrators of crimes committed during World War II to justice and holding them accountable for their actions. After conducting 216 court hearings in 1946, the court reached decisions for 22 out of the 24 defendants. Among them, three were released, four were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 10 to 20 years, and three were given life sentences. The court also pronounced the death penalty, through capital punishment, for twelve of the defendants.¹⁷

In addition, to address the crimes committed by Japanese forces, the International Military Tribunal was established in Tokyo in 1946.¹⁸ Of the defendants brought before the court, 25 were found guilty on most of the charges presented against them. Among these defendants, seven received the death penalty, sixteen were sentenced to life imprisonment, and two were given probation.¹⁹ The handling of the Nuremberg and Tokyo cases, with relatively few individuals punished and the relatively short duration of the imposed sentences, highlighted the need for the international community to develop tools and mechanisms to ensure that crimes did not go unpunished. This led to the establishment of an imperative within the international arena to punish the crime of genocide.

The term *genocide* was coined by Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin in 1944. According to him, the concept of genocide combines the Greek prefix “genos,” which means race or tribe, with the Latin suffix “cide,” meaning killing or murder.²⁰ The profound influence on Lemkin was reflected in the Nazi policies of systematically killing Jews during the Holocaust. Additionally, his understanding was shaped by the impact of earlier cases throughout human history, where actions were directed at destroying specific groups of people.²¹

Genocide was officially recognized as a crime in international law in 1946 by the United Nations General Assembly through resolution A/RES/96-I. However, its significance became more pronounced when it was established as an independent crime in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, commonly known as the Genocide Convention. As of January 2018, the Convention has been ratified by 149 countries. The importance of the Convention is further emphasized by statements from the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which has consistently affirmed that the principles embodied in the Convention are part of customary international law. Consequently,

¹⁶ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. International Criminal Justice Since Nuremberg In: *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* [online]. 16. 5. 2023 [2023-05-16]. Available at: <<https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/simon-skjodt-center/work/ferencz-international-justice-initiative/transitional-justice/international-criminal-justice-since-nuremberg>>.

¹⁷ Britannica. Nurnberg Trials: World War II Trials In: *Britannica* [online]. 18. 5. 2023 [2023-05-22]. Available at: <<https://www.britannica.com/event/Nurnberg-trials>>.

¹⁸ SALIHU, I. *E Drejta Penale. [Criminal Law]*. Prishtine: UBT, 2016, p. 344.

¹⁹ MEGERMAN, S. Tokyo War Crimes Trials: The International Military for the Far East In: *The Tokyo War Crimes (1946–48): Notes, Selected Links & Bibliography*. [online]. 22. 5. 2023 [2023-05-22]. Available at: <<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/tokyo/tokyolinks.html>>.

²⁰ LEMKIN, R. *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*. Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace at the Runfordpress, 1994, p. 79.

²¹ United Nations. Genocide. In: *Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect* [online]. 22. 5. 2023 [2023-05-22]. Available at: <<https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>>.

even if states have not ratified the Genocide Convention, they are still obligated to recognize and treat genocide as a crime prohibited under international law. Non-ratification of the Convention does not exempt states from this responsibility. Therefore, the Convention imposes binding obligations on all states, including those that have not ratified it.²²

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court includes provisions regarding the crime of genocide, encompassing various actions targeting a specific group. These actions include killing members of the group, causing physical or mental harm to members of the group, imposing measures to prevent births within the group, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. These actions are recognized as deliberate acts intended to destroy, either wholly or partially, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group.²³ Through this, the intention is to ensure that those responsible for the crime of genocide are brought to international justice and do not escape punishment. This, in turn, will have an impact on preventing future instances of genocide.²⁴ To establish a solid legal foundation, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 96, which defines genocide as the denial of the right to exist of entire human groups. It equates genocide to the denial of the right of individual human beings to live, highlighting the gravity and profound violation of human rights inherent in this crime.²⁵

II. UNDERSTANDING THE KOSOVO CONFLICT: EXPLORING HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The tense relations that led to a direct war between the Serbian state and the Kosovo Albanians cannot be fully understood by solely analyzing the conflict that took place in 1998/99. Therefore, to establish a solid historical context upon which our arguments will be based, it is necessary to briefly examine the key developments that serve as evidence of human rights violations against the Albanian population in Kosovo.

The origins of the Kosovo crisis can be traced back to 1912–1913, when Serbia forcefully invaded Kosovo following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. It should be noted that the incorporation of Kosovo into Serbia has never been recognized as legal.²⁶ Since then, Serbia has implemented brutal measures against the majority of Albanian residents in Kosovo. These methods have included violent deportations, mass killings, and ethnic cleansing campaigns, all aimed at achieving the Serbization of Kosovo. This state strategy of ethnic cleansing to remove the Albanian population from Kosovo persisted even after the end of World War I, during the establishment of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, in which Kosovo was included as part of the South Slavic Kingdom.²⁷ During this period, the

²² Ibid.

²³ International Criminal Court. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. In: *International Criminal Court* [online]. 1. 7. 2002 [2023-05-22]. Available at: <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/RS-Eng.pdf>>.

²⁴ US Congress. S.1851 – Genocide Convention Implementation Act of 1987. In: *congress.gov* [online]. 10. 4. 1988 [2023-04-21]. Available at: <<https://www.congress.gov/bill/100th-congress/senate-bill/1851/text>>.

²⁵ SEGALL, A. *Punishing Violations of International Humanitarian Law at the National Level*. Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 2001, p. 44.

²⁶ MALCOLM, N. *Kosova: Një Histori e Shkurtër. [Kosovo: A Short History]*. Prishtinë: Koha, 2011, pp. 226–227.

²⁷ WELLER, M. *Shtetësia e Kontestuar: Administrimi Ndërkombëtar i Luftës së Kosovës për Pavarësi. [Contested Statehood: The International Administration of Kosovo's War for Independence]*. Prishtinë: Koha, 2011, pp. 73–74.

prohibition of the Albanian language and the denial of the existence of Albanians became common tactics used to exert pressure on Kosovo Albanians. Additionally, there was a widespread program of colonization and settlement of Slavic speakers in traditionally Albanian-inhabited regions. Simultaneously, various forms of injustice were perpetrated, such as the confiscation of land belonging to Albanian peasants, to encourage Albanians to migrate to Albania or Turkey. It is estimated that during January and February 1919 alone, Serbian troops killed approximately 6,040 people and destroyed 3,873 houses.²⁸

During that time, the severe human rights abuses were not widely discussed or addressed at the international level. There were no established mechanisms in place to monitor or address these violations. Following the conclusion of World War II, Kosovo once again came under Serbian rule within the Communist Federal Yugoslavia. The region was granted autonomous status within the larger framework of Serbia.²⁹ Even during this period, Serbian repression in Kosovo against the local Albanian population remained severe. Thousands of Albanians were forcefully compelled to emigrate to Turkey as a result of these oppressive measures.

The improvement of the political, social, and cultural position, as well as the establishment of conditions for adequate institutional representation for Albanians, began only in the late 1960s. The main achievements of this period of change, which commenced in 1968, culminated in the 1974 Constitution. Through this constitutional amendment, Kosovo and Vojvodina were declared an autonomous province within Serbia. As an autonomous province, Kosovo had its own administration, assembly, and legal authority while also being a part of both Serbian institutions and the federation, including the collective presidency and federal parliament. These bodies also encompassed the National Bank and the power to engage in international relations.³⁰

However, this new status of Kosovo within the Yugoslav Federation was often referred to as a “quasi-republic.” The situation further deteriorated following the outbreak of student demonstrations at the University of Pristina in 1981. These demonstrations were brutally suppressed, with the deployment of police and military units, including newly formed territorial protection units from across Yugoslavia, where a state of emergency had already been declared. Serbian nationalist rhetoric against Albanians became more hardened. Kosovo Serbs and Montenegrins also began staging public protests in the mid-1980s. Ivan Stambolic, the leader of the Party in Serbia, claimed that this surge of nationalist sentiment was directed and promoted by the intellectual elite in Belgrade.³¹

Amidst the escalating inter-ethnic tensions, Slobodan Milosevic emerged as a prominent figure. Recognizing the political advantages of exploiting this issue, he positioned himself as the defender of Serbian interests, initially in Kosovo and later throughout the former Yugoslav territory. Against this backdrop of tension, the Serbian Parliament initiated the process of amending the Serbian Constitution, aiming to significantly curtail Kosovo’s autonomy. These amendments would grant Serbia control over Kosovo’s police,

²⁸ MALCOLM, N. *Kosova: Një Histori e Shkurtër. [Kosovo: A Short History]*. Prishtinë: Koha, 2011, p. 284.

²⁹ WELLER, M. *Shtetësia e Kontestuar: Administrimi Ndërkombëtar i Luftës së Kosovës për Pavarësi. [Contested Statehood: The International Administration of Kosovo's War for Independence]*. Prishtinë: Koha, 2011, pp. 73–74.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³¹ CLARK, H. *Civil resistance in Kosovo*. London: Pluto Press, 2000, p. 17.

courts, civil protection, and other key areas of social, economic, political, and educational power. They also sought to enforce administrative directives and promote the use of an official language.³²

The abrogation of Kosovo's constitutional position was accompanied by a series of legal, administrative, and political measures that targeted Kosovo. This included the closure of Albanian-language newspapers, Radio and Television stations, and the Albanian Institute. Moreover, over 18,000 teachers and approximately 376,000 students were denied access to public school education. During this stage, violations of freedoms and human rights were widespread, characterized by mass dismissals of Albanians from their workplaces, arbitrary arrests, torture, and imprisonment without trial. Reports from international institutions indicate that at least one member from each Albanian family was either summoned to the police station, detained in prison, or awaited trial, underscoring the extent of these human rights violations.³³

The violation of human rights against the ethnic Albanian population by the Serbian state escalated with the outbreak of war in 1998, posing the risk of a potential humanitarian catastrophe. The unfolding events on the ground transformed the Kosovo crisis from a human rights issue into a full-blown humanitarian crisis.³⁴ Various international organizations specializing in human rights violations have gathered data and statistics on the extent of Serbian violence and repression against civilian populations. The evidence clearly shows that the Serbian military, police, and paramilitary forces implemented a relentless “scorched earth” offensive. This offensive was strategically designed to intimidate the civilian population and diminish support for the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) among residents.³⁵ During this period, there were multiple instances where police officers were witnessed looting houses, destroying already abandoned villages, burning crops, slaughtering livestock, and conducting mass executions. These actions clearly violate the rules of war and international humanitarian law. It is important to note that the majority of those killed in these acts were civilians, further highlighting the severity of the human rights violations committed.³⁶

In August 1998, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that there were 260,000 internally displaced people within Kosovo, and an additional 200,000 individuals had fled outside of Kosovo.³⁷ Likewise, throughout the entire month

³² WELLER, M. *Shtetësia e Kontestuar: Administrimi Ndërkombëtar i Luftës së Kosovës për Pavarësi. [Contested Statehood: The International Administration of Kosovo's War for Independence]*. Prishtinë: Koha, 2011, p. 86.

³³ KOSOVAR INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT. *Raporti Kosovar: Konflikti, Reagimi Ndërkombëtar, Leksionet e Mësuara, Komisioni i Pavarur Ndërkombëtar për Kosovën. [Kosovo Report: Conflict, International Response, Lessons Learned, International Independent Commission for Kosovo]*. Prishtinë: KIPRED, 2005, p. 31.

³⁴ WELLER, M. *Shtetësia e Kontestuar: Administrimi Ndërkombëtar i Luftës së Kosovës për Pavarësi. [Contested Statehood: The International Administration of Kosovo's War for Independence]*. Prishtinë: Koha, 2011, p. 129.

³⁵ HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH. *Nën Pushetin e Urdhrave: Krimet e luftës në Kosovë. [Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo]*. New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002, p. 49.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ KOSOVAR INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT. *Raporti Kosovar: Konflikti, Reagimi Ndërkombëtar, Leksionet e Mësuara, Komisioni i Pavarur Ndërkombëtar për Kosovën. [Kosovo Report: Conflict, International Response, Lessons Learned, International Independent Commission for Kosovo]*. Prishtinë: KIPRED, 2005, p. 55.

of September 1998, OSCE observers stationed on the border with Albania reported incidents of shelling on villages in the Prizren and Gjakova regions. Consequently, there were daily incidents of house burning. The flow of refugees into the Northern Albania region remained steady, with cases of around 100 people crossing the border daily. Additionally, in the previous week, another 3,500 refugees from Montenegro were forcibly deported.³⁸

In response to the emergency created by the widespread human rights violations and extreme atrocities committed by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY)-Serbia, international humanitarian organizations, including the International Red Cross, they regularly published reports on their findings on the ground. The situation escalated to such an extent that the International Red Cross officially addressed the crisis in Kosovo. The institution affirmed that from a humanitarian perspective, it had become evident that civilian casualties were not merely collateral damage. In Kosovo, civilians had become deliberate targets and the primary victims of the conflict.³⁹

This campaign orchestrated by Serbian forces against the vulnerable civilian population reached its peak when, on September 27, foreign observers discovered the lifeless bodies of 21 Albanian civilians. They had been executed and found in a forest near the village of Abri e Epërme of the Drenica region. Among the victims were women, children, and the elderly, emphasizing the indiscriminate nature of the violence perpetrated against the civilian population.⁴⁰ During the subsequent search in the area on the following day, more murders were discovered and documented. Thirteen Albanian men were found executed in a neighboring village called Golubofoc. Human Rights Watch, in its report *A Week of Terror in Drenica*, provides details of the massacre. On Saturday afternoon, September 26, 1998, a total of 21 members of the Delijaj family, all civilians, were killed. Fourteen individuals were found dead in a nearby forest where they had sought refuge out of fear of bombings. Among these victims, six were women aged between 25 and 62, and five were children aged 1.5 to 9 years old. Two of the men killed in the forest were over 60 years old. All fourteen victims found in the forest were wearing civilian clothing. Most had suffered close-range gunshot wounds to the head, while some bodies displayed signs of mutilation. For instance, the leg of 62-year-old Hava Delija had been amputated below the knee. In addition to the fourteen individuals killed in the forest, seven other members of the Delijaj family were killed by government forces near their residential house. The remains of a 94-year-old man, Fazli Delija, were discovered burned inside his house, which had been set on fire. Habib and Hysen Delijaj were both executed by Serbian police officers in front of Hysen's wife and children. Adem Delijaj was found near the forest with his throat cut. In the following weeks, the decomposed bodies of two girls, Antigona and Mihane, and Hajriz Delijaj were found in the same area, victims of the same brutal crime. The month of September concluded with a total of 492 Albanians killed, raped, and executed, all in blatant violation of the norms of war and the right to life.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid., p. 54.

³⁹ WELLER, M. *Shtetësia e Kontestuar: Administrimi Ndërkombëtar i Luftës së Kosovës për Pavarësi*. [Contested Statehood: The International Administration of Kosovo's War for Independence]. Prishtinë: Koha, 2011, p. 134.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 152.

⁴¹ Humanitarian Law Violations in Kosovo: A week of terror in Drenica. In: *Humanitarian Law Violations in Kosovo* [online]. 10. 3. 2023 [2023-03-10]. Available at: <<https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/kosovo/index.htm#TopOfPage>>.

The tragic course of events continued with relentless attacks throughout October 1998. In that month alone, 172 Albanians were killed, including 11 children, 16 women, and 42 individuals aged 55 and above. Adding to the grim toll, from the outbreak of the war until that point, a total of 1,770 Albanians had been killed by Serbian forces. Among the victims, 203 were women and 193 were children. Furthermore, 86 Albanians died due to cold weather, lack of food, and inadequate medical supplies.⁴²

Most studies and reports conducted by researchers and international institutions focus on identifying facts and presenting arguments demonstrating the blatant violation of human rights in Kosovo over the years. This examination particularly emphasizes the period starting from the early 1990s and reaching a climax with the armed conflict in 1998/99 between the military and paramilitary forces of Serbia and the Kosovo Liberation Army. There are numerous verifiable facts and arguments that indisputably demonstrate the severe human rights abuses in Kosovo during that period. In fact, these abuses formed the primary justification for NATO's implementation of a "humanitarian intervention" known as a 78-day aerial bombardment campaign targeting Serbian military and strategic locations.⁴³ The aim was to stop the widespread killings and crimes occurring in Kosovo at the time.⁴⁴ However, to date, there has been no empirical research conducted with the citizens of Kosovo regarding their attitudes and perceptions of the crimes that occurred during that period, more than 20 years after the war's end. This paper aims to fill that gap by analyzing these attitudes and comparing them with factual data about the events. Additionally, the research seeks to understand and analyze the trans-generational perceptions that have been passed down to individuals who were not born or were very young during the war in Kosovo. It explores their perceptions and attitudes towards the violence, murders, and crimes that took place before and during the war. Hence, the study does not solely target those with a personal memory regarding these developments but also includes individuals born after 1999 and who have learned about the war in Kosovo through books, literature, or the verbal stories shared by friends and family.

III. DATA AND METHODS

This article employed two methodological approaches: survey and content analysis. The researchers emphasize that using multiple methods for data collection and addressing research questions assists in verifying the validity and reliability of the data and findings. Consequently, the approach known as "triangulation" will be employed for this purpose.⁴⁵

In this empirical research, a survey was conducted with 262 citizens of Kosovo. The participants were diverse, including 231 ethnic Albanians, 12 Serbs, and 19 individuals from other minorities (Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians), reflecting the complex demographic composition of the region. The participants were selected based on the causal principle, and

⁴² OSCE. *Kosova: An analysis of the Human Rights Findings of the OSCE Kosovo Verification Mission October 1998 to June 1999*. London: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1999, p. 7.

⁴³ MARLEKU, A. GASHI, B., KRASNIQI, V. The Role of US in the Security of Kosovo. *Revista De Ştiin e Politice*. 2017, Vol. 38, pp. 38–48.

⁴⁴ ROBERTS, A. NATO's 'Humanitarian War' over Kosovo. *Survival*. 2006, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 102–123.

⁴⁵ MATTHEW, B., ROSS, L. *Research Methods: A Practical Guide for the Social Science*. London: Pearson Education Canada, 2010.

their identities remained anonymous. Given the Serbian violence and terror that occurred throughout Kosovo, respondents from various regions were included in the study, ensuring a representative sample. The survey consisted of two parts: the first part collected general demographic information, while the second part focused on measuring the attitudes and perceptions of respondents regarding the events of the Kosovo War in 1998–1999.

The first part of the survey included seven questions aimed at gathering demographic data that encompassed all strata of Kosovo's population. Special attention has been paid to respondents who are over the age of 18 in order to analyze the variables of subjects who were born before 1999 and have memories of the 1998/1999 war. However, we also pay special attention to those born after the war in order to identify the transgenerational elements of perceptions and attitudes about the war in Kosovo.

In the second part of the survey, we included nineteen questions that address the object of the research. In the entire set of questions, the respondents had the opportunity to answer with “strongly agree”, “agree”, “don't have an opinion”, “disagree” or “strongly disagree”. So, in this case, the Likert scale system with 5 alternative options was used.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The first part of the data collected through the survey includes information on gender, age, residence, religion, level of education, employment, and monthly income of respondents, as shown in Table 1. Based on the descriptive statistical analysis, we can conclude that the arithmetic average of the respondents' age is 3.02. Therefore, when we consider the Likert scale, the average age falls between 31 and 45 years. The minimum age value of respondents is 18–30 years, while the maximum value is over 60 years. The standard deviation for age is 0.820, indicating that, on average, the data deviates from the arithmetic average. However, in our case, the deviation is not high because it is close to the arithmetic average of 3.02.

On the other hand, the average arithmetic for gender is 1.31, which corresponds to 61% male and 39% female based on the Likert scale. The standard deviation for gender is 0.820, indicating that, on average, the data deviates from the arithmetic average. Similarly, in this case, the deviation is not high because it is close to the arithmetic average of 1.31.

As for the level of education of the respondents participating in the survey, the arithmetic average is 2.61, which indicates that, according to the Likert scale, respondents must have at least a bachelor's degree. The minimum value of education is a secondary school, while the maximum value is a doctor of science. The standard deviation for the level of education is 0.820, showing that, on average, the data deviates from the arithmetic average by 0.820 units. Again, this deviation is not high as it is located near the arithmetic average of 2.61.

Based on this interpretation of statistical analysis, it can be concluded that the sample contained in the study is representative. This allows us to have useful data that provides solid and supported conclusions. The statistical analysis indicates that the study includes individuals who have personal memories of the war in Kosovo, as well as individuals who were born after the war and perceive it as a historical event rather than a personal experience. In terms of geographical range, respondents are from different parts of Kosovo. Additionally, participants in the research have different educational backgrounds, ranging from those who completed high school to those who have attained a doctoral degree.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Mosha	62	2	5	187	3,02,820	,893	,304		,816	,599
Gjinia	62	1	2	81	1,31,465	,861	,304		-1,302,599	
Vendbanimi	62	1	2	87	1,40,495	,404	,304		-1,899,599	
Religjioni	62	1	3	66	1,06,307		5,204,304		28,624,599	
Niveli i Studimeve	62	1	4	162	2,61,894		,004	,304	-,740,599	
Punesimi	62	1	3	77	1,24,592		2,337,304		4,155,599	
Te hyrat mujore	62	1	5	175	2,82	1,325	-,362,304		-1,289,599	
Pyetja 9	62	1	2	93	1,50,504		,000	,304	-2,068,599	
Pyetja 10	62	1	2	105	1,69,465		-,861,304		-1,302,599	
Pyetja 11	62	4	5	306	4,94,248		-3,634,304		11,577,599	
Pyetja 12	62	2	5	305	4,92,454		-5,762,304		33,414,599	
Pyetja 13	62	2	5	296	4,77,777		-3,261,304		9,096,599	
Pyetja 14	62	1	5	297	4,79,771		-3,827,304		14,157,599	
Pyetja 15	62	1	5	269	4,34	1,173	-1,519,304		,753	,599
Pyetja 16	62	2	5	280	4,52	1,112	-1,888,304		1,615,599	
Pyetja 17	62	2	5	281	4,53	1,082	-1,930,304		1,833,599	
Pyetja 18	62	2	5	304	4,90,534		-5,427,304		28,365,599	
Pyetja 19	62	2	5	300	4,84,632		-3,883,304		14,136,599	
Pyetja 20	62	2	5	301	4,85,649		-4,314,304		17,166,599	
Pyetja 21	62	1	5	198	3,19	1,618	-,373,304		-1,490,599	
Pyetja 22	62	2	5	298	4,81,743		-3,634,304		11,577,599	
Pyetja 23	62	2	5	299	4,82,690		-3,773,304		12,920,599	
Pyetja 24	62	2	5	286	4,61,947		-2,251,304		3,472,599	
Pyetja 25	62	2	5	284	4,58,967		-2,088,304		2,765,599	
Pyetja 26	62	1	5	214	4,45	1,467	-,288,304		-1,399,599	

Table 1: Demographic Data and Explanatory Variables
Source: Author's own calculations

To understand the attitudes and assessments of respondents regarding human rights violations, massacres, and crimes in Kosovo during 1998/99, we included a series of questions in the second part of the questionnaire. Based on statistical analysis, if respondents believe that genocide was committed by Serbian forces during the 1998/99 war in Kosovo, the average score according to the Likert Scale is 4.45. This indicates that respondents strongly agree that there was genocide by Serbian forces in Kosovo. The minimum value on the scale is 1, which corresponds to “strongly disagree” and represents 0% of respondents. The maximum value is 5, which corresponds to “strongly agree” and represents 88% of respondents. The standard deviation is 1.46, suggesting that, on average, the data deviates from the arithmetic average by 1.46 units. However, this deviation is not significant and does not meaningfully affect the overall accuracy of the model, as it is close to the ar-

ithmetic average of 3.45. Analyzing the results from the perspective of the percentage of responses, it is found that 88.1% of participants in the study indicated that they “strongly agree” that there was genocide committed by Serbian paramilitary and militaristic forces in Kosovo. Meanwhile, 7.66% stated that they “agree,” while 4.2% of participants stated that they “have no opinion” on this matter.

Questions:	Total respondents	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	I have no opinion (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	TOTAL
P10	262	92 %	6 %	0.7 %			100 %
P11	262	83.1 %	13.4 %	2.6 %	0.7 %		100 %
P12	262	86.2	11.4	2.2			100 %
P13	262	84.2	11.4	2.2	1.1 %	0.7 %	100 %
P14	262	59 %	21.4 %	4.9 %	11.8 %	2.6 %	100 %
P15	262	85.8 %	13.4 %	0.3 %	0.3 %		100 %
P17	262	78.1 %	17.2 %	4.5 %			100 %
P17	262	92.3	6.8	0.7 %			100 %
P18	262	84.2 %	9.5 %	6.1 %			100 %
P19	262	94.2 %	5.3 %	0.3 %			100 %
P20	262	18.7 %	3.8 %	18 %	30.6 %	28 %	100 %
P21	262	91.9 %	6.5 %	1.5 %			100 %
P22	262	87.7 %	9.5 %	2.6 %			100 %
P23	262	79.3 %	11.1 %	7.6 %	1.9 %		100 %
P24	262	77 %	15.3 %	5.7 %	1.5 %	0.3 %	100 %
P25	262	28.3 %	25.6 %	20.3 %	20.6 %	4.9 %	100 %
P26	262	88.1 %	7.66 %	4.2 %			100 %

*Table 2. Number (n) and percentage (%) of responses of participants in the study
Source: Author's own calculations*

The participants in this research were asked if they estimate that the governing bodies in Belgrade were also aware of the actions of the Serbian paramilitary and military forces. Based on statistical analysis, we can conclude that the arithmetic average for the above question, according to the Likert scale, is 4.9. This indicates that respondents “fully agree” that the actions of the Serbian military forces were known to the governing bodies in Belgrade. The minimum value on the scale is 2, corresponding to the category “disagree,” and represents 0% of respondents. The maximum value is 5, corresponding to the category “strongly agree,” and represents 84% of respondents. The standard deviation is 0.583, suggesting that, on average, the data deviates from the arithmetic average by 0.583 units. However, this deviation is not significant and does not meaningfully affect the overall accuracy of the model, as it is located close to the arithmetic average of 4.9.

Even the historical evidence is in fair correlation with the conclusions that emerge from the answers of the respondents in the survey, confirming that the actions of the Serbian

military and paramilitary forces had been notified to the government bodies in Serbia. Moreover, it is evident that the entire plan for ethnic cleansing was devised by policy-makers and ideologues in Belgrade with the intention of executing it through the respective bodies on the ground. Research shows that intelligence services of Western countries successfully unraveled a detailed operation known as “Operation Horseshoe”, which was conceived and designed by institutions in Belgrade. This information was disclosed by the German Foreign Minister at the time, Joschka Fischer, in an interview with the *Berliner Zeitung* newspaper. Fischer stated that the Serbs had formulated a plan as early as February 26, 1999, a month prior to the initiation of the NATO bombing, with the objective of forcibly and systematically expelling the Albanian population from Kosovo. This plan clearly demonstrated that the expulsions of Kosovars from their homes were coordinated and well-orchestrated. Notably, Slobodan Milosevic himself confessed to Western diplomats and military officers that his intention was to exterminate all Kosovo Albanians and empty Kosovo within a two-week timeframe.⁴⁶

Another indication of such an operation was that some of the main intelligence agencies had warned Western leaders about the high likelihood of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo.⁴⁷ Given the course of events, no intelligence was needed; rather, it was essential to reconstruct the military actions of the Serbian security forces during this period. Based on this publicly available information, which was accessible to everyone, it was confirmed that ethnic cleansing in Kosovo was not a spontaneous reaction of Serbs to NATO bombings. Instead, it was an action that was carefully planned and orchestrated by the political and ideological elite of the Serbian state. The majority of reports, analyses, research, and documentation on crimes against humanity and the strategy for genocide against the Albanian population, which were prosecuted at the time by the Belgrade authorities, clearly demonstrate that there was a coordinated and systematic campaign to terrorize, kill, and expel ethnic Albanians from Kosovo. This campaign was organized at the highest levels of the Serbian and Yugoslav governments at that time.⁴⁸

Regarding the question of whether the expulsion of the Albanian population from their homes was carried out under the organization of the Serbian state, the results indicate that the average response on the Likert scale is 4.53. This suggests that respondents “fully agree” that the expulsion was orchestrated by the Serbian state. The minimum value recorded is 2, which corresponds to the alternative “disagree” on the Likert scale and represents 0% of the respondents. The maximum value is 5, which corresponds to the alternative “strongly agree” on the Likert scale and represents 92% of the respondents. The standard deviation is 1.08. This indicates that, on average, the data deviates from the arithmetic mean by 1.08 units. While this deviation is not significant and does not undermine the overall accuracy of the model, it is worth noting its proximity to the average value of 4.53.

⁴⁶ BELLAMY, A. *Kosovo and International Society*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022, p. 164.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ ABRAHAMS, F. *Nën Pushtetin e Urdhrave. [Under the Power of Orders]*. London: Human Rights Watch, 2001, p. 82.

These results, stemming from empirical research on the attitudes of Kosovo citizens regarding the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo Albanians carried out by the Serbian state in 1999, are corroborated by numerous international reports, authors, and experts specializing in the region. Additionally, statements made by Serbian policymakers at that time support these findings. International reports have highlighted that starting from March 24, 1999, Serbian military, police, and paramilitary forces initiated a campaign of ethnic cleansing, population expulsion, and mass killings targeting the Albanian civilian population in Kosovo. Throughout this period, Serbian propaganda attempted to shift blame onto NATO as the main responsible party for the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Kosovo. In an exclusive interview with US media in April 1999, former Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic himself asserted that the refugee crisis was a direct consequence of NATO bombings.⁴⁹

As a result of the campaign, as reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), within three weeks of the NATO bombing, 525,787 refugees were forcibly displaced to neighboring countries. In total, government forces expelled 862,976 ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, while hundreds of thousands more were internally displaced within the country. It is important to note that this expulsion was not an isolated event limited to the period after March 1999. Prior to that, a significant number of people had already been displaced. Shockingly, over 80% of the entire population of Kosovo and 90% of Albanians were forced out of their homes as a result of these actions.⁵⁰ The majority of these refugees found temporary shelter in refugee camps or were hosted by families in neighboring countries such as Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵¹

Displacement (outside Of Kosovo)	863.000
Displacement (within Kosovo)	590.00
Murder	Over 10,000
Disappeared	2.500 ⁵²
Burnt villages	More than 5000

Table 3: Number of displacements, killings, missing and burned villages in Kosovo
Source: Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development⁵³

⁴⁹ AP ARCHIVE. Yugoslavia, Belgrade, Slobodan Milosevic Interview. In: *You Tube* [online]. 22. 4. 1999 [2023-03-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCtjWuryr40>>.

⁵⁰ ABRAHAMAS, F. *Nën Pushtetin e Urdhrave. [Under the Power of Orders]*. London: Human Rights Watch, 2001, p. 4.

⁵¹ KOSOVAR INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT. *Raporti Kosovar: Konflikti, Reagimi Ndërkombëtar, Leksionet e Mësuar, Komisioni i Pavarur Ndërkombëtar për Kosovën. [Kosovo Report: Conflict, International Response, Lessons Learned, International Independent Commission for Kosovo]*. Prishtinë: KIPRED, 2005, p. 248.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

Another evidence of the goals that Belgrade had designed to ethnically cleanse Kosovo of Albanians can be found in the case of “identity cleansing”. Refugees deported to Albania were frequently stripped of their identification documents before being allowed to cross the border. Many Albanians had their documents destroyed before reaching the border, suggesting that the Serbian government aimed to obstruct their return.⁵⁴ In this context, the UN Secretary-General also voiced strong objections to the widespread campaign of ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Serbian military and paramilitary forces.⁵⁵

One of the goals of the research was to measure the attitudes and perceptions regarding the question of whether the Serbian paramilitary and military forces have destroyed the property and documentation of the Albanian population. According to the Likert scale, the value assigned to this answer is 3.19, indicating that respondents generally “agree” that Serbian military forces have destroyed the wealth and documentation of the Albanian population. The minimum value recorded is 1, which corresponds to the option “strongly disagree” on the Likert scale and represents 0% of respondents. The maximum value is 5, corresponding to the alternative “strongly agree” on the Likert scale and representing 91% of respondents. The standard deviation is 1.61. This indicates that, on average, the data deviates from the arithmetic mean by 1.61 units. However, this deviation is not substantial and does not significantly affect the model’s overall accuracy, as it is in proximity to the average value of 3.19.

The same findings, as indicated by these research results, are corroborated by information obtained from various other sources, including analyses and professional reports compiled by official institutions. According to these sources, the total number of cultural heritage sites destroyed by Serbian forces during the Kosovo War in 1998 and 1999 exceeds 2,700, encompassing objects of significant historical and cultural importance.⁵⁶ Additionally, it has been reported that more than 1,500 archaeological and ethnological artifacts were taken from museums in Kosovo and transferred to Serbia in 1998.⁵⁷

Attacks on civilian property were one of the defining characteristics during the NATO bombing campaign.⁵⁸ The vast majority of those expelled from Kosovo during this period reported instances of destruction of civilian property, looting, and theft. Over 500 villages were reported to have been burned, with 54 of them identified as mostly or entirely destroyed. These attacks were primarily and exclusively carried out by Serbian forces, targeting the property of Kosovo Albanians, particularly during their forced eviction from their homes. Serbian forces implemented this plan by first bombing civilian homes to destroy them, followed by the forced expulsion of the inhabitants. In many cases, after the

⁵⁴ ABRAHAM, F. *Nën Pushtetin e Urdhrave. [Under the Power of Orders]*. London: Human Rights Watch, 2001, p. 6.

⁵⁵ WELLER, M. *Shtetësia e Kontestuar: Administrimi Ndërkombëtar i Luftës së Kosovës për Pavarësi. [Contested Statehood: The International Administration of Kosovo's War for Independence]*. J. Prishtinë: Koha, 2011, p. 279.

⁵⁶ HERSCHER, A., RIEDLMAYER, A. Monument and Crime: The Destruction of Historic Architecture in Kosovo. *Grey Room*. 2000, Vol 1, pp. 108–122.

⁵⁷ RAMOSAJ, F. *Kundër harresës-Gjenocidi i Serbisë në Kosovë 1998-1999. [Against forgetfulness – The Genocide of Serbia in Kosovo 1998-1999]*. Prishtinë: Instituti për Hulumtimin e Krimeve të Luftës, 2017, p. 294.

⁵⁸ ROBERTS, A. *NATO's 'Humanitarian War' over Kosovo. Survival*: 2006, Vol. 41, No. 3, pp. 102–123.

villagers were expelled, Serbian forces also looted the homes of Kosovo Albanian citizens. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), citing a November 1999 report from the UNHCR, nearly 40% of all residential homes suffered severe damage (category III and IV) or were completely destroyed (category V).⁵⁹

When the respondents were asked whether they consider that the killings were carried out without trial by the Serbian military and paramilitary forces, the arithmetic mean, according to the Likert scale, was 4.77, which means that the respondents “strongly agree” that the Serbian military forces murdered without trial. The minimum value on the scale, 2, which corresponds to “disagree,” was chosen by 1.1% of respondents. On the other hand, the maximum value on the scale, 5, which corresponds to “strongly agree,” was selected by 84.2% of respondents. The standard deviation of 0.77 indicates that, on average, the data deviates from the arithmetic mean by 0.77 units. This level of deviation is not substantial and does not significantly affect the overall accuracy of the model, as it is close to the arithmetic average of 4.77.

On the other hand, based on the HRW reports regarding the crimes committed by the Serbian forces and the number of actions carried out for the extrajudicial execution of civilians, the various commanders who were responsible for those areas were aware of the actions. Carried out by these forces. The worst thing is that they have not taken any concrete measures to prevent or stop such actions, not only from the Serbian military, police, and paramilitary forces but also from the politicians. There is no evidence in any case that they have declared such actions as reprehensible. In this form, they should at least raise awareness and minimize the commission of other murders for as long as the conflict continues.⁶⁰

In this case, it is evident that Serbian military, paramilitary, and police forces not only disregarded the principles of reporting charges against individuals but also denied them the right to self-defense in both civilian and military courts. What is even more distressing is that they carried out mass bombings, executions, and the separation and isolation of individuals, including children. These actions were clearly orchestrated by military and political leaders with the sole objective of physical elimination, creating instability, panic, and conducting ethnic cleansing. The gravity of the situation is further underscored by the discovery of mass graves in Serbia, indicating not only the executions but also attempts to conceal the evidence of these crimes. The deliberate nature of these acts, coupled with the absence of any judicial process, highlights the severe human rights violations committed against the Albanian population.

The empirical evidence from our research vividly illustrates the enduring psychological and social repercussions of the human rights violations during the Kosovo War. The surveyed individuals, both those who experienced the war and the younger generation, exhibit a profound understanding and awareness of the atrocities, namely genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. This awareness is not just a recollection

⁵⁹ HUMAN RIGHT WATCH. *Nën pushtetin e urdhrave, Krimet e luftës në Kosovë*. [Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo]. Tiranë: Botime Korbi, 2002, p. 152.

⁶⁰ HUMAN RIGHT WATCH. *Nën pushtetin e urdhrave, Krimet e luftës në Kosovë*. [Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo]. Tiranë: Botime Korbi, 2002, p. 470.

tion of past events; it profoundly influences contemporary perceptions of justice, governance, and interethnic relations in Kosovo. The narrative of these violations, strictly defined and condemned under international law, forms a crucial part of the collective memory and identity of the Kosovo people. It underscores the necessity for robust mechanisms in transitional justice and reconciliation processes.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents a structured analysis of the attitudes and perceptions of citizens residing in Kosovo regarding human rights violations, massacres, and crimes that took place during the wars of 1998 and 1999. The survey reveals a significant consensus among respondents, with over 88% of them considering that Serbian paramilitary and military forces committed genocide against the Albanian civilian population during the Kosovo War. Additionally, 84% of the respondents believe that the relevant government bodies in Belgrade were informed in advance about the criminal actions carried out by paramilitary and military forces on the ground. Such a finding is in harmony with the numerous data published in various reports by renowned international organizations such as HRW.⁶¹ Moreover, even renowned scholars who closely monitored the events during that period reached similar conclusions.⁶² The intentional character of the crimes, evident in statements made by political leaders and the presence of coordinated military operations, further substantiates the assertion that the Serbian government actively participated in the atrocities perpetrated in Kosovo.⁶³

The findings of empirical research, coupled with the historical context of the conflict, shed light on the deliberate and premeditated nature of the ethnic cleansing campaign. It has been proven that the objective was not solely to remove the Albanian population from their homes forcibly but also to eradicate their cultural heritage, documentation, and property. An overwhelming majority of respondents, over 90%, fully agree that one of the aims of the Serbian forces, after expelling the population, was the systematic destruction of Kosovo Albanians' property, including cultural and historical artifacts. Additionally, before the Albanian refugees were forced to cross the Kosovo border into neighboring countries, their documents were deliberately burned. In this way, it was intended that in addition to ethnic cleansing and destruction of property,⁶⁴ to carry out an "identity cleansing" for the population.

The study underscores the lasting legacy of the human rights violations committed during the Kosovo War. The findings reveal that the memories and perceptions of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, as meticulously defined by international law, are not mere historical footnotes but are integral to the so-

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² BALL, B., BETTS, W. SCHEUREN, F., DUDOKOVICH, J., ASHER, J. *Killings and Refugee Flow in Kosovo March-June 1999*. New York: American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2002.

⁶³ AP ARCHIVE. Yugoslavia, Belgrade, Slobodan Milosevic Interview. In: *You Tube* [online]. 22. 4. 1999 [2023-03-10]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jCtjWuryr40>>.

⁶⁴ HERSCHER, A., RIEDLMAYER, A. *Monument and Crime: The Destruction of Historic Architecture in Kosovo*. *Grey Room*. 2000, Vol 1, pp. 108-122.

cietal and political fabric of Kosovo. These violations have implications for how justice is perceived and sought by the citizens, shaping their expectations from national and international legal frameworks. The study highlights the critical role of historical memory in shaping current and future human rights policies, emphasizing the importance of addressing these past crimes in creating a foundation for lasting peace and stability in the region.