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Endorsement and Social Role of the Ethos of Conflict in Serbia

JASNA MILOŠEVIĆ ĐORĐEVIĆ
Singidunum University, Belgrade

FRANCESCA DI NAPOLI
University of Milano – Bicocca

ŽIVOJIN ĐURIĆ
Institute for Political Studies, Belgrade

Summary

The study's aims are to analyze the endorsement of the ethos of conflict (EoC) narrative in the Serbian-Albanian conflict among the adults in Serbia, its relation to political conservatism, and its role in pushing conservative political action. A total of N = 1613 adults (aged 18+) were recruited for face-to-face interviewing, in a representative sampling procedure, in December 2019 in Serbia. The results show high endorsement of EoC in the Serbian-Albanian fray; the mediation effect of EoC (having both high EoC and high conservatism is associated with greater political activism); the relation between EoC and political activism is moderated by age (the older population endorsing higher EoC was more politically active). In the future, we should address more actively the mobilizers of reactionary political actions in public and individual spheres, to better understand the mechanisms for achieving long-term peace.

Keywords: Ethos of Conflict, Serbian-Albanian Conflict, Political Ideologies, Political Activism

Introduction

Research Context: The Serbian-Albanian Conflict

The indicators of intractable conflict are present in the long history of the Serbian-Albanian conflict. Therefore, it is important to explore the endorsement and predictors of EoC in order to suggest peace strategies. From the perspective of

the Serbian population, the existence of numerous monasteries and cultural monuments placed in Kosovo (and Metohija) built during the first Serbian medieval state of Raška (existed from the 11th to the 13th century) and the Battle of Kosovo (1389) represent the most important key points for national identity (Pešić, 2018). Raška is considered the heart of the Serbian medieval cultural, spiritual, political, and economic heritage. It experienced the greatest rise during the time of Stefan Nemanja. The Battle of Kosovo (1389), fought between the Serbian and Ottoman Empires, nowadays is a crucial national myth, while reliable historical accounts are scarce. Leaders of both sides, Serbian Tzar Lazar and Turks' Murat were killed in that battle, and it had huge consequences that delayed the further progress of both sides. The Serbs defended their lands, with numerous victims, while the Turks had to withdraw. Consequently, a year after the battle, weakened Serbia was forced to accept a vassal relationship that opened the way for Turks to further enslave the Balkan Peninsula. However, the day of the battle, known as Vidovdan, is celebrated today as a constitutive element of Serb ethnic and national identity. This historical event represents the core of the Serbian national identity today. The strength of national identification was empirically confirmed as a significant predictor of intergroup attitudes and behavior (Maloku *et al*., 2019), while the symbolism of this battle nowadays continues to load the nationalistic narrative in Serbia. For the Serbian population, Kosovo represents a similar myth as Jerusalem to Jews (Maloku *et al*., 2016).

The Serbian-Albanian conflict in its recent form continued throughout the 20th century, particularly during the first Balkan war (1912-1913) and the two world wars (1914-1918, and 1939-1945). Under the Tito regime (1943-1980), repressions of all nationalisms kept together different nationalities in the same state. The weak Kosovo autonomy had no practical consequences and feelings of nationalism were immediately repressed (Elsie, 2010). The student riots in 1968 reached the Balkans as well and ended in repression, but with a few upgrades in Kosovo's rights for the Albanian people, finally confirmed by the new constitution of 1974. Immediately after Tito's death, the first riot in Kosovo occurred and was repressed with violence (Ramet, 2010). Furthermore, after Tito died in 1980, the growing economic crisis started in line with the reemerging political cleavages between (con)federalism and centralism, as well as between political liberalization and retrenchment (Ramet, 2002). Multiple factors resulted in war conflict in the Balkans (Perović, 2021): the structure of the state institutions, the relations among the republics of socialist Yugoslavia, religious communities, interpretations and engagement of intellectual elites in the regional centers (like SANU Memorandum in 1986), cultural differences and collective interpretation of the past. Global political changes of that time also contributed to the Balkan issue, like the fall of the Berlin Wall. From 1991 to

1999 violent wars started in the Balkans, first in Slovenia (1991), then in Croatia (1991-1995) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995), and finally in Kosovo (1996-1999). At that time, violent conflict narratives were spread around the Albanians and Serbs: the Albanians were seen as a threat to the Serbian population, while the idea of a "Serbian genocide" was the excuse for the rising Albanian nationalism (Benson, 2001). Two major events helped the situation to escalate, ending up with the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia: the entrance into the political scene of Slobodan Milošević in 1987 and the dissolution of the Yugoslav territory in 1992. Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Macedonia achieved independence, only Serbia and Montenegro – plus Kosovo – formed the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Under these circumstances, Serbia and Kosovo went in two opposite directions: Serbia ruled by Milošević tried to limit and repress Albanians in Kosovo, while Kosovo continued its war for independence (together with creating the new constitution and conducting non-official elections) (Bethlehem and Weller, 1997) through violent military actions led by Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK). The conflict gradually became of increasing international interest, involving the United States, Russia, the UN, NATO, and the OSCE. After the failure of the Rambouillet negotiations as the last attempt at reconciliation (the Agreement for Peace and Self-Government in Kosovo was not accepted while the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo continued, along with the armed conflict between Serbians and Kosovo Albanians), NATO ordered the first strategic bombings on Yugoslav soil in 1999. Subsequently, the UN Kosovo Force (KFOR) entered Kosovo to restore order and peace.

Although a formal agreement after military involvement was reached between the two sides for peace negotiations, at least two fundamental issues remain till today: the number of human lives lost and the material damage; and the fact that the declaration of independence remains one-sided. Although widely recognized by a number of states, Kosovo remains non-recognized by Serbia and some other countries (the most important, among others, are China, Russia, and Spain), despite UN pacts (such as resolution 1244). Unfortunately, empirical studies from Kosovo show that Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo continue to live highly segregated, with almost no interaction in everyday life, and there is no willingness to establish a contact of any kind in the future (Maloku *et al*., 2016). Therefore, it is essential for the region to empirically analyze and understand better the major conflict narratives among the population and their interplay with conservative political action.

Collective Conflict Narratives as a Tool for Dealing with Intractable Conflicts and Their Role in Collective Action

All indicators of intractable conflict are present in the Serbian-Albanian conflict (Međedović and Petrović, 2013): it is existential and looks irresolvable, protracted

(continuously lasting at least a generation, constantly present in the public messages of media and politicians), with perceived goals as a zero-sum nature (only one winner admitted) (Kriesberg, 1993; 1998). Intractable violent conflicts are resistant to change and peace, and require an extensive investment of psychological and material resources of group members and government officials. Numerous psychological mechanisms help people cope with intergroup conflicts, especially violent intractable ones. Those mechanisms are also socio-psychological barriers to peace identified as: 1) General worldviews (political ideology and conservatism); 2) Ideological and contextual conflict beliefs; 3) Freezing psychological processes that impede a change in these beliefs (Kruglanski and Webster, 1996).

Collective conflict narratives between Serbs and Albanians persist today, dividing and distancing two nations in rivalry, representing a barrier to the prosperity of both. Conflict-supporting narratives, supporting the in-group and delegitimizing the out-group, have a fundamental role in intractable conflicts, they make the in-group goals and perspective stronger and stable, providing an explanation of the events and satisfying the needs (Laszlo, 2008). In-group supporting narratives, propagated by both sides' works at the individual and the collective levels, are often pushed in the international context, to receive the material, moral and political support (Cronin, 2010). Crises around ethnic conflicts often become cultural issues because those narratives frequently represent the core of national identities. As carrier groups occupy important positions in societies, they articulate and represent the meaning of the relevant events (around conflict). They function as the spokespersons that interpreted the event to the broader public. This kind of constructing a story is "a complex and multivalent symbolic process that is contingent, highly contested, and sometimes highly polarizing" (Alexander *et al*., 2004), which tends to produce the master narrative of pain. Master narratives provide an explanation of the events around several key questions: the conflict content (what happened), the characteristics of the victim (who are the victims), the relation of the victims with the broader public (audience identification with the victims), and the responsibility of the actors involved (who is the perpetrator) (*ibid*.). Often employing the use of collective memory (Wertsch, 2002), events of the past are presented in a way that benefits the status quo and justifies the in-group (Buckley-Zistel, 2009; Liu and Hilton, 2005). Collective narratives are well spread, with a compulsory characteristic (Hammack, 2011), bind the society together, and serve as social glue, a way to see the world and interpret events, express solidarity and a feel of social identity. Collective memory, described as all the narratives regarding the initiation of the conflict, provides a meaningful frame of the past of the society (Paez and Liu, 2011). Such narratives support the in-group and delegitimize the out-group, and support conflict, with the help of biases and distortion of events, such as the magnification

of supportive themes and marginalization of contradictory information-selection of the sources, fabrication, omission of information, and the use of identity-forming language (Auerbach, 2010; Baumeister and Hastings, 1997).

In this study, we are investigating the ethos of conflict, one of the psychological mechanisms that help community members to face intractable intergroup conflict; it's a social belief that provides a dominant orientation in society (Canetti *et al*., 2017). Incorporating narratives that stem from EoC can have grave consequences for reconciliation and might represent the barrier to peace in societies with a history of violent conflicts. EoC serves as a prism that helps society members involved in the conflict to interpret and make decisions and set goals according to the ideology, to understand a complex reality like war and conflicts, gathering group members together against one out-group enemy. Bar-Tal defined EoC as "a configuration of central, shared societal beliefs, that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society and give meaning to societal life under conditions of intractable conflict" (Bar-Tal *et al*., 2012). The components of EoC (*ibid*.) are the following societal beliefs: a) The justness of the in-group's goals; b) Security (Burton, 1990); c) Positive collective self-image (Sande *et al*., 1989); d) In-group's victimization (Bar-Tal *et al*., 2009; Vollhardt, 2012); e) Delegitimizing the opponent (Bar-Tal and Teichman, 2005) and legitimizing the in-group's violent acts; f) Patriotism (Shils, 1968); g) Unity (Bar-Tal, 2007); h) Peace.

These elements are connected to each other and are part of a coherent and unique ideological worldview, showing that EoC is a type of ideology, a prism through which society members involved in conflicts understand and interpret reality (Bar-Tal *et al*., 2012). EoC does not stand alone and is inter-correlated to other psychological concepts. Political ideology (a structured system of opinions, attitudes, and values about the human being and the society; Adorno *et al*., 1950) might navigate a person through difficult times, and serve the needs to guide perception, interpretation, and behavior, as setting the future (Kerlinger, 1984; Shils, 1968; Van Dijk, 1998). Jost *et al*. (2003) suggest that conservative political ideologies tend to fulfill the same needs of control, predictability, and a sense of order that an EoC offers in times of conflict. In consonance with this theory, Bar-Tal *et al*. (2012) found a positive relationship between EoC and political right-wing ideology; other scholars found a positive relationship between EoC, Militant Extremist Mind-Set (MEMS) and conservative attitudes (Stankov *et al*., 2010; Međedović and Petrović, 2016) and political party preference (Međedović and Petrović, 2013); EoC can serve as a mediator between conservatism, pro-violence, and the view of the world as vile (subscales of MEMS).

EoC may have a role in coping with distress (might not always be conscious), threats and anxiety, feelings that are frequently present in conditions of conflicts

(Canetti *et al*., 2010; Canetti-Nisim *et al*., 2009; de Jong *et al*., 2001). Lavi *et al.* (2014) demonstrate that EoC works as a double-edged sword regarding its protective role from distress. Even if adherence to an EoC limits negative consequences to distressed situations, like threat perception and negative emotions, it is also true that participants with high EoC display negative emotions regardless of exposure to stressful situations (see also Laor *et al*., 2010). Distress is also related to hostile attitudes and a propensity to violent acts, prejudice, political intolerance, etc. (for a review, see Canetti *et al*., 2017). EoC provides strategies for keeping control by understanding stressful situations (e.g. Taylor, 1983). Ideologies serve as a support to decision-making and guiding behavior, reducing information processing and sparing resources that lead to cognitive bias (Bar-Tal *et al*., 2009). Selectivity of attention and interpretation bias end with the interpretation of political information that fits the already-existing worldview and beliefs (see Iyengar and Ottati, 1994). Memory retrieval holds information that is in favor of the in-group: members of the in-group tend to attribute internal and stable causes to the out-group, but the opposite trend is shown when attributions are made about the in-group. These beliefs shape the society members' sense of reality and sense of uniqueness as a part of a collective group (Bar-Tal, 2000; 2001; Markus and Kitayama, 1994). EoC is similar to other concepts like system-justification ideology (Jost and Hunyady, 2003), protecting society members from the terror of the thought of death, particularly present in conditions of conflict and war (Greenberg and Arndt, 2011). Therefore, EoC represents a barrier to peace, associated with interrelated beliefs, values, attitudes, emotions, and narratives that oppose changes (Bar-Tal and Halperin, 2011); it exists through mechanisms like the control of mass media and censorship of incompatible information, punishing and rewarding, delegitimizing sources of information, and closing archives (Bar-Tal, 2007; Horowitz, 2000; Kelman, 2007).

One of the consequences of EoC that is under-investigated in the current research is participation in collective actions. Understanding collective actions nowadays includes the large scale structural characteristics (Duncan, 2012; Ostrom, 2010): number and heterogeneity of participants, type of communication, motives for action, and the ways of connection. Traditional political action such as voting, joining interest groups, or protesting no longer covers the wide range of civil activities that have become a possible repertoire for activism in the real or online world (Milošević Đorđević and Žeželj, 2017); collective civic engagement has changed in the past decades (Sampson *et al*., 2005). Civic activities might represent a different level of engagement, from soft ones such as discussing or expressing an opinion to hard ones such as protesting or volunteering. This spectrum of activities requires different levels of motivation, resources and skills, varying from very low to very high involvement. Despite the asymmetry of engagement required, all mentioned actions represent the tool for making the social change that might come in different

forms in terms of socially desirable outcome (the essence of change): progressive or conservative; system-supporting versus system-challenging; reactionary right-wing versus progressive left-wing. A lot has been investigated about progressive collective action and factors that promote engagement in collective action for positive social change (Schutz and Sandy, 2011). However, we would like to focus on the reverse side of collective action: the inter-connections between the conservative political ideologies, EoC, and how they foster and shape commitment to conservative forms of collective action that resist social change, preserve traditional values and protect the rights of advantaged groups.

Aims and Hypotheses of This Study

The study aims to analyze the endorsement of the EoC narrative in the Serbian-Albanian conflict, its relation to political conservatism, and its role in conservative political activism in Serbia. Our main hypothesis: the ethos of conflict is, statistically, significantly associated with political conservatism that pushes the members of the groups involved to be more politically active.

H1: High endorsement of the EoC narrative about the Serbian-Albanian conflict among adult citizens of Serbia, due to the intractable nature of the conflict. We assume that the EoC explanation of the Serbian-Albanian conflict would be highly endorsed (the mean on the generated EoC scale would statistically differ from a theoretical mean).

H2: Existence of mediation effect between political values (political ideologies), attitudes (the ethos of conflict), and behavior (political action): conservative political ideology contributes to creating an EoC between Serbs and Albanians that serves as a mediator between political ideology and political action. General political values are associated with attitudes explaining the conflict, all predicting political action. Therefore, conservative political ideology is linked to political activism via the mediating role of EoC: the conservative viewpoint defines a specific Serbian-Albanian EoC narrative that has a role in a stronger tendency to actively achieve politically driven goals.

H3: Moderation effect will be tested, while exploring the connection of EoC with socio-demographic variables (gender, age, and education).

Method

Respondents and Sampling

A total of 1613 adult (aged 18+) citizens of Serbia were recruited for face-to-face interviewing in a stratified three-stage probability sampling procedure in December 2019. The research was supported by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and

Technological Development (project number 179009), granted to the Institute for Political Studies. The sampling frame was based on the data from the 2011 Census. Sampling was done in three stages. The first stage sampling was done by polling station territory. The second phase consisted of random selection of households from randomly selected addresses (seven households by sampling points). The third stage included randomly selected respondents within households. The average length of the interview was approximately 30 minutes. Research procedures adhered to APA (American Psychological Association) ethical guidelines. The sample's demographic parameters are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The average age		46.17
The average number of years of education		13.05
The average financial situation (1-5)		2.81
Sample structure		**Percent %**
Gender	Male	53
	Female	47
Education	Primary school and lower	8.2
	Secondary school	51.9
	University and higher	39.9
Religion	Orthodox	87
	Catholics	4.9
	Muslim	2.1
	Other	6
Total number of respondents		1613

The sample, although representative by selection procedures of respondents, turned out to be slightly skewed toward the male, educated portion of participants. However, the average number of years of education is around 13 years, which fits the population figures. Following other parameters (e.g. average age of the adult Serbian population, according to the Statistical Office of Serbia, is approximately 43) the sample is representative of the general population.

Instruments

Political conservatism was measured on a scale consisting of 6 items rating with a seven-point Likert scale, measuring the position of respondents between extreme attributes (political left/right; global/national; Euro-Atlantic/Euro-Asian orienta-

tion; neoliberal/social; Atheism/Religious; civic/patriotic). (Cronbach Alpha = .83.) Factor analysis of this scale revealed only one factor, explaining 53.301% of the variance, with all positive factor loadings from .636 to .840.

The ethos of conflict was assessed using the revised scale (Međedović and Petrović, 2020) consisting of 29 items on a five-point Likert scale (1 *completely not true* to 5 *completely true*). (Cronbach Alpha = .90.)

Political activism (positive civic participation – engagement) was assessed through the version of the offline activism scale with 7 items, in which the participants were asked to mark how often they took part in specific political activities in the past 6 months (Milošević Đorđević and Žeželj, 2017) on a four-point Likert scale (1 *never* to 4 *often*). Different levels of political engagement were operationalized (I openly expressed my opinion on the political issues; I tried to persuade other people to agree with my political opinion; I was wearing a T-shirt or a badge with a slogan supporting a political idea; I signed a petition; I participated in meetings/ rallies to support a political idea; I volunteered in organization / was a member of some organization; I would vote in political elections). (Cronbach Alpha = .89.)

Socio-demographic variables were measured in a standard set of questions about gender, age, education, and economic situation (with no information about urban/rural).

Results

Missing value analysis: When looking at the missing values in our data set for our main variable, we see that EoC single items have approximately 4-7% of the missing values (around 5% of the missing values); but the whole scale has 25.3% of the missing values. The other important variable for our analysis – political activism has 9.2%, and social conservatism has 12.8% of the missing values. Therefore, we excluded respondents with missing values from the dataset.

The results testify to high endorsement of EoC in the Serbian-Albanian fray among the Serbian adult population. The instrument of EoC shows a mean of 3.48 on a scale of 1 to 5 (Table 2). The results revealed high EoC (M = 3.48; SD = .57; $t(1325) = 30.449$, $p < .001$) of the adult population in Serbia when explaining the Serbian-Albanian conflict, against the theoretical scale midpoint of 3.

When collapsing the 29 scale items of different Serbian-Albanian conflict explanations into one dimension scale, five factors emerged in Exploratory factor analysis (EFA): the first strongest factor in the EFA accounting 33.593% of the variances, while all others explained less than 10% of the variance. The majority of the adult Serbian population understands the Serbian-Albanian conflict as a zero-sum nature with only one culprit and possible winner.

Table 2. Summary Statistic for Each EoC Item and EFA

	M	SD
The cultural monuments of the Serbian people dating back to the Middle Ages are reason enough that Kosovo must always belong to Serbia.	4.07	1.07
Serbia should not invest in armaments more than it is doing today. R	3.01	1.37
Loyalty to one's country requires the support of one's countrymen in every way.	3.91	1.07
We should not let the Kosovo Albanians see any disagreements among the Serbs regarding the politics regarding Kosovo.	4.21	.99
During the conflicts in Kosovo in the last hundred years, the Serbs were usually the victims of Albanian aggression.	4.02	1.01
Most Serbs have always aspired to resolve the conflict with the Albanians in Kosovo peacefully.	3.83	1.08
Security issues of Serbs in Kosovo and Serbia should not be among the main government priorities. R	2.78	1.42
Only since they are a strong and persistent people, do the Serbs manage to continue to survive in Kosovo.	3.97	1.08
Serbia has not done everything it can to peacefully reach an agreement with the Albanians in Kosovo.	3.24	1.26
The exclusive right of the Serbs to Kosovo stems from its status as their historical homeland.	4.08	1.05
Strengthening the armed forces is the only way to feel more secure in our country.	3.70	1.15
Encouraging loyalty to the homeland should be one of the education system's most important goals.	3.78	1.14
If the Serbian people are not united, they are in danger of annihilation.	4.11	1.03
Peace cannot be achieved without compromise. R	4.00	1.07
There are values no less important than self-sacrifice for the homeland. R	3.55	1.18
Despite Serbia's desire for peace, the Kosovo Albanians have repeatedly forced war.	4.00	1.02
We must be united when it comes to the national interest of the Serbs.	4.15	1.03
The Serbs have no fewer negative qualities than the Kosovo Albanians. R	3.15	1.24
Serb history shows that we were the victims of somebody else's aggression in every generation.	3.88	1.07
The negotiations regarding the Serbian-Albanian conflict in Kosovo will not be resolved shortly and will last for decades.	3.80	1.07
We can trust the statements of the Kosovo Albanians that they want peace. R	2.53	1.23
All means are allowed to ensure the security of the Serbian state.	3.42	1.19

Loyalty to the homeland should be above all other values.	3.56	1.14
Our people are as strong as they are united.	4.06	1.02
Young generations must be aware of the danger in which our nation is.	3.93	.98
It is possible to find moderate people among the Albanians in Kosovo who want to end the conflicts. R	3.57	1.05
Everyone should express their attitude, even if it is against the position of the ruling party. R	4.16	.93
Peace in Kosovo can only be achieved when Kosovo is fully returned to the sovereignty of the state of Serbia.	3.62	1.18
The Kosovo Albanians were victims of the conflict just like the Serbs. R	2.95	1.25
EoC scale	3.48	.57

R = reversed items

Table 3. Correlation Matrix Between Measured Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Ethos of conflict (1)	/	.523**	.178**	-.074**	.155**	.019
Political conservatism (2)		/	.175**	-.083**	.117**	.011
Political activism (3)			/	-.068**	.125**	-.022
Gender (4)				/	-.010	.039
Age (5)					/	-.265**
Education (6)						/
Mean	3.48	4.39	2.02	-	46.17	13.05
SD	.57	1.19	.75	-	15.72	2.84
Scale	1-5	1-7	1-4	1-2	18+	0-

Table 4. Regression Analysis of the EoC Predictors

	Standardized coefficients beta	T	sig
Political conservatism	.507	20.700	.000
Gender	-.031	-1.277	.202
Age	.091	3.595	.000
Education	.042	1.665	.096

When looking at socio-demographic variables, older adult citizens endorsed EoC more ($r = .155$; $p < .001$); the level of education has been of no significance; association with gender is very low although significant due to the sample size. The regression model showed that only age appears as a significant predictor of EoC among other socio-demographic variables. Correlation analysis (Table 3) and regression analysis (Table 4) confirmed the significance of the model; F = 119.307; sig = .000; R = .529; $R^2 = .280$. Among the measured predictors, two variables were significant predictors of EoC: political conservatism and age, while controlling for other socio-demographic variables.

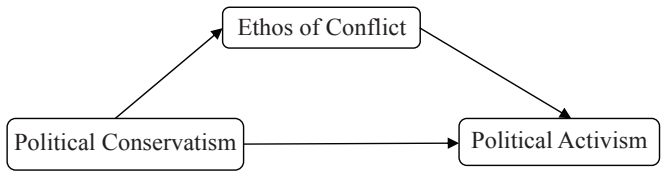
To better explain the relationship between relevant variables, we conducted additional mediation and moderation analysis. Mediator is the variable that mediates the relationship between the predictor and criterion variables, providing a better explanation of the connection between the two variables. When the connection between the predictor and the criterion variable is determined, we can examine in the moderation analysis the conditions under which this connection exists (i.e., whether it changes at different levels of the moderator variable).

For these reasons, we checked for interactions between the predictors of political activism. Our results show significant mediation between EoC and political conservatism (Table 5). Data strongly and significantly confirms the mediation effect of EoC (conceptualized as a product of political conservatism and antecedent of conservative political action).

Table 5. Mediation Effect of EoC – Indirect and Total Effects

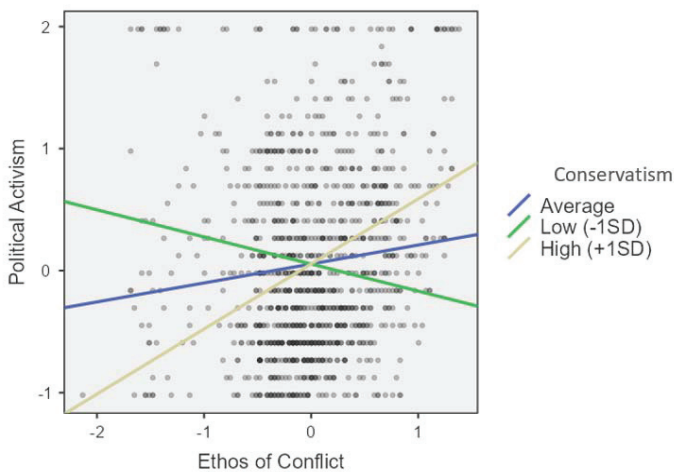
				95% C.I.				
Type	Effect	Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	β	z	p
Indirect	Political conservatism → ethos of conflict → political activism	0.033	0.012	0.010	0.057	0.053	2.83	0.005
Component	Political conservatism → ethos of conflict	0.247	0.012	0.223	0.270	0.528	20.57	< .001
	Ethos of conflict → political action	0.135	0.047	0.043	0.228	0.100	2.86	0.004
Direct	Political conservatism → political action	0.080	0.022	0.036	0.123	0.126	3.60	< .001
Total	Political conservatism → political action	0.113	0.019	0.076	0.150	0.178	5.99	< .001

Figure 1. Schematic Presentation of the Model



The plot below (Figure 2) shows how EoC and political conservatism are in antagonistic interaction (political activism having high EoC or high conservatism, but both may interfere with each other). People that hold politically conservative attitudes (thin line in Figure 3) with incorporating higher EoC, are more willing to be involved in political action. For those citizens who inclined more to the political left (thick line in Figure 3), higher EoC is associated with lower political action. This data indirectly illuminates the nature of political action citizens are involved in. Therefore, those who are high in political conservatism and EoC scale are more prone to be politically active.

Figure 2. Relation Between Political Conservatism, Ethos of Conflict, and Political Action



The relation between EoC and political activism is not moderated by any demographic variable but age (Table 6). There might be a difference in the way citizens of different ages cope with the EoC mentality influence (that is pervasive in

the way of thinking and seeing reality). In other words, it might mean that every member of the society has an EoC thinking style at some level, but there are differences in the way younger people deal with it and are involved in the political life of the society. In that sense, the older population more easily transforms high EoC into political action (Figure 4).

Table 6. Moderation Effect of Age – Moderation Estimates

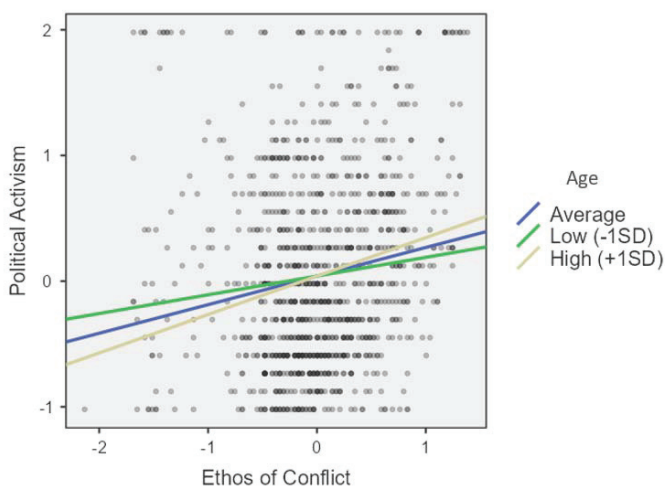
	Estimates	SE	Z	p
Ethos of conflict	0.227	0.039	5.80	< .001
Age	0.004	0.001	2.54	0.011
Ethos of conflict * Age	0.005	0.002	2.20	0.028

Simple Slope Estimates

	Estimates	SE	Z	p
Average	0.227	0.039	5.80	< .001
Low (-1SD)	0.149	0.053	2.83	0.005
High (+1SD)	0.306	0.054	5.71	< .001

Note: Data shows the effect of the predictor (Ethos of conflict) on the dependent variable (Political action) at different levels of the moderator (Age)

Figure 3. Moderation Effect of Age



Discussion

In the recent periods, the conflict between Serbian and Albanian populations is still unresolved on political, intergroup, and individual levels. In this study, we are analyzing political orientations and EoC among the Serbian adult population, and their interplay with collective action. The results from the present study empirically confirmed the high level of EoC containing negative out-group attitudes related to the Kosovo conflict and Albanians from Kosovo, affirming the first hypothesis (**H1**) (and previous findings from other authors, Stankov *et al*., 2010).

Several studies conducted both in Israel (Canetti *et al*., 2017; Hall and Hobfoll, 2006; Shamai and Kimhi, 2006; Solomon and Lavi, 2005) and in other settings (Bonanno and Jost, 2006; Echebarria-Echabe and Fernandez-Guede, 2007) confirmed the association between exposure to political distress and violence (indicator of intractable conflicts) that navigates excepting conservative ideologies such as political right-wing (Canetti-Nisim *et al*., 2009; 2013; Hall and Hobfoll, 2006), belligerent policies (Gordon and Asher, 2001; Echebarria-Echabe and Fernandez-Guede, 2007; Skitka *et al*., 2006), and other non-compromising attitudes (Kimhi and Shamai, 2006; Solomon and Lavi, 2005). Perception of threat proved to be an important predictor of group animosity represented in attitudes and behavior (Esses *et al*., 2001; Jackson *et al*., 2001), exclusionism (Canetti-Nisim, Ariely and Halperin, 2008; Canetti-Nisim *et al*., 2009), political intolerance and xenophobia (Canetti-Nisim and Pedahzur, 2003; Quillian, 1995), militarism (Bonanno and Jost, 2006), and support for investing in the military (Huddy *et al*., 2005). The Serbian-Albanian ethnic conflict diagnosed as intractable represents a continual political threat, confirmed in our study to be interpreted mostly by an EoC belief that provides a dominant orientation in society and is associated with conservative ideology and readiness for collective action. Political conservatism is positively associated to out-group animosity and support of aggressive activities (De Zavala, Cislak and Wesolowska, 2010). Different social threats that individuals are exposed to in everyday life, grounded at the socio-psychological level (EoC represents the individual attitudes as a response to threat from the out-group), could be aggregated and, due to the process of social construction influenced by opinion-making leaders, transformed into cultural trauma, such as the case of Kosovo as an open wound for both populations.

Academic studies conducted in Kosovo confirm that both groups (Serbs and Albanians) have negative stereotypes of each other (Maloku *et al*., 2016), also associated to the ethos of conflict. The result of our study strongly confirms the correlation between political conservatism and EoC among the adult Serbian population, found also in previous research (Međedović and Petrović, 2016; see Bar-Tal *et al*., 2012).

EoC can have grave consequences if it leads to violent conservative political activism: the zero-sum nature is the root of the violent act and represents the base for EoC. Moreover, it is about the existential and central meaning of the members' lives, and it requires the investment of psychological and material resources, often life sacrifices, that perpetuate the idea that the goal can be reached only through death, an honorable and victimized life loss for the in-group and a necessary and not-important life loss for the out-group members. The association of EoC with political activism has been confirmed in this study. Further, the mediating role of EoC between political ideology and political collective action has also been confirmed (**H2**).

Finally, among all measured socio-demographic variables, only age might serve as a moderator between EoC and political activism. Therefore, we conclude that **H3** has been partly confirmed.

Limitations

We only analyze data provided by respondents in one time slice, therefore our study has cross-sectional limitations. It would be good to compare the data from the longitudinal survey and to measure changes in EoC in different conflict settings across time; besides, we measured only a few variables and their association with EoC. Other variables like the vile world and other psychological factors need to be more broadly addressed in future studies. Since the scale of political action does not specifically measure right-wing action, but more general activism, we only indirectly conclude the activism tendency at the right-wing side of the political spectrum of citizens.

Conclusion

One of the main issues of studies like this one is how to overcome narratives like EoC? Studying EoC is of international importance, as conflicts through the online use of narratives often mobilize the world's public opinion. Conflict-related narratives tend to strengthen the barriers to the peace-making process (Bar-Tal and Halperin, 2011), representing obstacles at both intra-societal and inter-societal levels (Bar-Tal, 2007; Wolfsfeld, 2004; Cronin, 2010). In this study, we presented how strong EoC is among the Serbian adult population as a perception of the Serbian-Albanian conflict. Barriers to peace could be gradually eradicated through the construction of new narratives that support peace, and that goes towards reconciliation and resolution of the conflict (Staub, 2011). Hayner (2001) proposes a way to conflict resolution that is called "truth commissions", a situation in which rival sides stand together and discuss their own experiences about the conflict. According to Bar-On (1996; 2008), a dialogue based on each other's narratives could be an efficient way to overcome differences in viewpoint and undermine the ethos of conflict.

Contact could function as a way to trigger empathy and understand each other (Žeželj *et al*., 2020). However, this process requires the participation of institutions and politicians with concrete actions (Nadler *et al*., 2008). Formal proposals and policies must stand on real and concrete changes; otherwise, they could also backfire and confirm the already existent negative narratives on the out-group.

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Mailing Addresses:

Jasna Milošević Đorđević, Faculty of Media and Communications, Karađorđeva 65, Belgrade, Serbia. *E-mail*: jasna.milosevic@fmk.edu.rs

Francesca Di Napoli, University of Milano – Bicocca, Piazza dell'Ateneo Nuovo, 1, 20126 Milano MI, Italy. *E-mail*: f.dinapoli1@campus.unimib.it

Živojin Đurić, Institute for political studies, Svetozara Markovića 36, Belgrade, Serbia.