Protest as Insurgent Citizenship Practice against Hydropower Development in Kosovo's Periphery

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Abstract

Following the enclosure of mountain rivers in the municipality of Štrpce in southern-eastern Kosovo as a result of a small hydropower development, residents continue to look with hope for the delivery of justice and the undoing of these infrastructural developments. The residents' hopes are challenged by the daily struggles of informal political exchanges, failing water infrastructure, and rising unemployment. Despite these obstacles, the power of the rivers themselves has infused hope into the community. During the protests against the construction of hydropower plants between 2018-2020, the rivers played a vital role in shaping the community's insurgent citizenship practices. This ethnography aims to describe and discuss the dynamics of urban citizenship and politics of legalism by residents of the municipality who resisted the plunder of water resources by political and economic elites. By examining citizenship practices of resistance against hydropower plants between 2018 and 2020 in the context of Serbian parallel governance structures in the municipality, I intend to present and discuss the relational dimensions of water infrastructures. As well as how it mediates renegotiations of political subjectivity and belonging in the relationship between citizens and the state. I did fieldwork in October for several months in different areas of Kosovo but mainly in the municipality of Štrpce. Based on ethnographic research, I argue that residents' collective action against the small hydropower plants in the municipality act as a form of "insurgent citizenship" (Holston, 2008) that seeks to reformulate the existing forms of differential access to rights and public services among the inhabitants in the municipality.

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Introduction

"I belong here and not that [small hydropower plant]! It must go! I have been drinking this water since I was a baby, and humans are made of 80% water!" Miroslav condescendingly waves his large arm across a deserted basketball court to the grey façade of the powerhouse at "obe reke" which means "both rivers meet" in Serbian, in the municipality of Štrpce, Republic of Kosovo. He was part of a group, varying between 50 to 500 people, who gathered regularly by the small bridge that leads across the river Bolovanka before it meets with the river Kaludjerka to protest the construction of one out of four small hydropower plants from the end of 2018 until the beginning of 2020. Once the plants were completed in 2020, their gatherings also stopped. Miroslav continues, "What happened here is a crime, and I blame the municipality who let this happen." He refers to the construction permits that were issued to the private investor company Matkos Group d.o.o. by the local government for four small hydropower plants on the Lepenac[1] River and its tributaries starting in 2013, without ever providing residents with the opportunity to raise their concerns. Mid 2019, it was revealed that neither the Ministry of Environment followed procedural law when issuing water permits to the investor. His gaze travels past the only car parked in the corner of the large playground nearby water reservoir of the town. "This water reservoir was built by Bulgarians during the second world war and had been supplying the town until they [the excavators] came and destroyed it." In early 2019, the residents of Štrpce were informed about an accident at the construction site of one of the plants by the public utility company (Notice by the Utility Company 2019). The notice read that residents were asked to use the tap water for technical purposes only because an oil leak at one of the excavators had contaminated the drinking water system. Miroslav vividly recalls that day in January and how policemen and Kosovo's special forces were calling back the surging crowd of angry residents at the bridge. The residents of Štrpce came to stop heavy machinery from causing more harm to the already battered riverbanks.

[1] The river is also referred to by its Albanian name Lepenc, depending on the mother tongue of the speaker. I will continue using Lepenac by default but switch to Lepenc if it was used in concrete situations.

The municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpcë in south-eastern Kosovo has been affected by the regional hydropower development since 2015 (Mari, 2020). Residents of the rural municipality in Kosovo's periphery, like those in neighbouring countries, protested against the enclosure of their mountain rivers. The first protests emerged in 2015 in one of the villages in the municipality, Donja Bitinja/Bitia e Poshtme, located next to the Lepenc River, the largest river meandering throughout the glacial valley before entering North Macedonia. Residents learnt from workers that their ongoing cleaning work along the riverbed prepared the grounds for laying water pipes which channel parts of the river to a run-off-the-river type of hydropower plant (HPP) in the next village called Viča/Viçë. Their protests at the Lepenc river were joined by residents from neighbouring villages, such as those from Štrpce, who commenced their opposition at the end of 2018. Between 2015 and 2020, villagers, with the help of supporters and non-governmental organisations, managed to prevent the complete installation of pipes by gathering around excavators, rallying local municipalities and advocating their case in meetings with national politicians, international ambassadors, and state officials. As they were opposing hydropower plants at different locations in the municipality throughout 2018 and 2020, the protesters in Donja Bitinja/Biti e Poshtme and Štrpce/Shtërpcë's[2] united over their demands to immediately stop the construction of the hydropower infrastructure along the rivers.

The accumulating damages ranged from directly affecting the already debilitated local drinking water systems and irrigation water supply, which are essential for sustaining vulnerable livelihoods based on growing raspberries in Kosovo's periphery, to the destruction of the ecological well-being of the river systems. Regardless of the environmental ministry's public announcement, that no hydropower plant in the municipality fulfilled the legal requirements to be built or to operate as they lacked valid environmental permits (KOSID 2020), four hydropower plants and three intakes were completed by 2020 and several kilometres of river stream were enclosed into pipes.

[2] By law, town names have to be in Albanian and Serbian in Kosovo, I am settling with names of the towns that were most commonly used by my interviewees. In the case of Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme, my interviewees constantly changed them, hence I am including both languages.

The question I am going to address in this research project is how do hydropower infrastructure, place-based belonging, and the politics of parallel governance structures interact and shape one another in the case of hydropower development in the municipality of Štrpce? Conceptually, I am drawing on Holston (2008), Anand (2017) and Muehlebach (2017) at the intersection of citizenship, water infrastructure and environmental justice in the context of hydropower plants and their contestations in Štrpce, Republic of Kosovo. Empirically, my thesis draws on ethnographic research carried out with residents in the municipality of Štrpce and members of international organisations in Pristina, including participant observation, interviews, go-along methodologies and archival research. Working primarily in a framework drawn from urban scholarship, my argument is that the protests against the small hydropower plants in the municipality act as a form of "insurgent citizenship" (Holston, 2008). For Holston, "insurgent citizenship" disrupt unequal power relations embodied by housing regulations perpetuated by legal and political systems Brazil (ibid.). In the case of Štrpce, it manifests itself through residents 'politicisation of the water grabbing by the construction of small hydropower plants and their protests targeting Kosovo's corrupt and oppressive post-war economic and clientelistic political system. Additionally, residents 'place-based identities motivated their protests against water enclosure, thereby co-constructing a narrative of belonging to the river and its landscapes that challenge dominant ethnonational discourses.

Recent research on collective action and small hydropower development in southeastern Europe work most ardently on social movement processes such as frames and strategic mobilisation (Galić, 2022; Oliverelić & Petrović, 2021; Mišić & Obydenkova, 2021) and in part to articulate how rural inhabitants politicise water grabbing by mobilising "beyond ethnicity" (Milan, 2019; Kapetanovic, forthcoming), or across different social cleavages (Rajković, 2020; Kurtović; 2022). I hope this research project might highlight the general applicability of the subfield of anthropology of citizenship and infrastructure to study contentious action against the techno-political management of water infrastructure in southeastern Europe. Finally, my empirical findings seek to address the virtual gap on this topic in the case of Kosovo.

In what follows, I will first describe my methodology and provide a historical contextualisation of the field in Chapter 1 before engaging with my main arguments based on ethnographic data in the following chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on the various forms of differentiated citizenship coalescing in the context of the Serb parallel governance structures. Chapter 3 deals with how public infrastructure and the resulting services mediate specific relationships between citizens and the parallel state in the municipality of Štrpce. In Chapter 4, I discuss Holston's notion of "insurgent citizenship" (2008) and apply it to the contentious mobilisations by Štrpce residents against the small hydropower development in the municipality since 2018. In Chapter 5, I consider different expressions of legalism and the protestor's demands for justice following the completion of the hydropower plants.

1. Ethnographic Research on Parallel Water Governance and Hydropower Development

This chapter provides an overview of my methodology and of the hydropower development and the separately administered water infrastructure in one of Kosovo's Serb-majority municipalities.

1.1. Methodology and Positionality

The research question driving this thesis is how hydropower infrastructure, political subjectivity, place-based belonging, and the politics of parallel governance structures interact and shape one another in the case of hydropower development in the municipality of Štrpce in southern Kosovo? To answer my question, I first conducted a historical analysis based on archival data on the parallel governance structures in the municipality of Štrpce and the local water management from 2000-2023. Thereby, I sought to establish why and how the hydropower plants on the Lepenc river and its tributaries were problematised by the local population during the protest from 2018 until 2020. I narrowed my inquiry by using keywords that focused on the political and economic processes of public service provision as they relate to water management in the municipality of Štrpce when accessing digital archives of governmental agencies of Kosovo, such as the Water Services

Regulatory Authority of Kosovo (ARRU), digital governmental repositories of relevant laws on water, energy and environmental protection, the management plan of Šar national park and archives of international organisations or international financial institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) that belonged to the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

To explore if and how hydropower infrastructure shapes residents ʾpolitical subjectivity and place-based sense of belonging, I went to Kosovo in October 2022 and April 2023 to conduct semi-structured and ethnographic interviews and participant observation. My short trip in October 2022 entailed visiting Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, to conduct ethnographic interviews with NGO staff pursuing court litigation against hydropower projects in Kosovo and ethnographic observation at Kosovo's first river summit. During my field research in April 2023, I carried out interviews and ethnographic observation in the municipality of Štrpce, which is nestled in the foothills of the Šar national park. I interviewed key figures of the protests against the hydropower construction in 2019 as well as residents in the town of Štrpce and the nearby villages of Brezovica and Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme. Most of these interviews were carried out with the generous help of a local translator living in nearby another village. I also conducted semi-structured interviews in English with journalists and NGO members in Pristina or online from Austria. In most interviews, I was able to draw on my cultural capital as a former volunteer for the NGO GAIA Kosovo, which had been part of the protests and had sued the private investor and the Ministry of Environment in 2021. I found difficult to access women who actively participated in the protests, partially because the protests were overwhelmingly joined by men, but also because my key informant provided me access to man only. Hence, I relied on new acquaintances and informal conversations to obtain their perspectives which was challenged by limited knowledge of the Serbian language.

In total, I conducted ten in-depth and twelve ethnographic interviews throughout April 2023 and 5 ethnographic interviews in October 2022. The in-depth interviews took up to 1 hour and were based on semi-structured questionnaires. Three interviewees met with me at the basketball court in

front of the hydropower plant at *obe reke*, which offered me the possibility to experiment with go-along interviews (Lee & Ingold, 2006). Go-along methodology entailed walking next to my interviewees and translator in the basketball court of the small hydropower plant Shtrpce at *obe reke*, while they interacted with the surroundings to illustrate and emphasise their stories and arguments. This method offered an additional layer of reflexivity as well as provided me with a more immediate sense of the material consequences when discussing the hydropower plant's consequences on the riverine system, the drinking water infrastructure and their own health. My interviewees would frequently point out the exact places where they had protested years ago, or vividly recount their lived experience of police violence in situ while walking around the court (Lee & Ingold, 2006; Garcia et al., 2021, p. 1). I chose to revert to static interviews in *Kafanas*, which means Cafe in Serbian, since I found it difficult to sustain interview flow, as residents passing by would frequently interrupted the translation process by starting their own conversations.

Ethnographic interviews occurred spontaneously and did not follow any particular structure. Albeit informal, I tried to follow what Rubin & and Rubin call the "responsive interview model," which means I adjusted my approach to "accommodate the interviewee as well as the variety in the interviewing situations." (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 9). I engaged in many unplanned ethnographic conversations with guests at the Bed & Breakfast where I was staying, or while helping out with everyday activities in the kitchen of the B&B. Although the owners were not involved in the protests, our informal conversations helped me make more sense of other pressing concerns that were worrying people, such as the gendered implications of financial hardship. Talking to younger adults helped me grasp how the ongoing integration process of the Kosovo Serb parallel institutions into the Kosovo state affected plans for their future, with many considering leaving to Serbia. Other conversations provided me with insights into the topic of mobility and security, which were connected to the severe lack of employment in what the majority of my interviewees referred to as living in an "enclave" surrounded by Kosovo Albanians. Combined these conversations diversified my understanding of locals' perspectives across different generations, gender, education and employment significantly.

Accordingly, I adjusted my semi structured questionnaire to consider the pervasiveness of economic precarity across different spheres of life.

While this approach helped me trace the overlapping and contrasting political claims about the perceived implications and impacts of hydropower infrastructure and belonging, it also shaped my reflections on my positionality. My interviewees frequently put me in their position and asked about my attitude towards geopolitical issues such as the war in Ukraine and Kosovo's independence. I was often asked to actively reflect on my privilege of being able to learn Serbian and conduct research in a place that many young people wish to leave, but struggle to do so because of economic and political issues. In essence, these inquiries pressed me to actively consider my structural position as a European university-educated woman who could do research in the first place and freely move between Austria and Kosovo. At the same time, I also was challenged to consider who I am personally and how it shaped my methods. I have visited Kosovo every year since 2017 to see my friends, go hiking or volunteer with environmental NGOs. These experiences shaped my assumptions and methods and effectively resulted in me carrying and reconstructing the field, as I have been coming to Kosovo over the years.

1.2. Small Hydropower Development in a Parallel State

For my ethnographic research, I spent most of my time in the town of Štrpce, one of 16 villages in the municipality of Štrpce. According to the 2011 census, Štrpce has an estimated 6,949 inhabitants. However, since the census was boycotted by ethnic Serbs and current regional depopulation trends in rural areas in, these numbers are presumably less in 2023. After the war in 1999, the municipality of Štrpce has had two competing governance structures known as parallel state structures. This has resulted in two mayors, two municipal assemblies, and essentially two town governments, with the Serbian structure being called the interim municipal council until 2008. After Kosovo's independence, politicians running for office in the Kosovo government also obtained seats in the Serbian one, which informally merged the two structures. As I was told by a former employee of an

international organisation, “In essence, it was people from the same party *who* manage both administrations.” Politicians would discuss policy proposals in the interim council and take them to the Kosovo-run assembly to enforce them (Interview Mile). More recently, the EU-led Brussels dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo about the Kosovo’s sovereignty has impelled the integration of the competencies previously held by Serbian parallel structures, who were considered to breach Kosovo’s sovereign territory by Kosovo state and international organisations. As of 2023, the political wing of Serbian governance structure was shut down while employment in the public sector and specific public services such as water supply were still administered by them (Interview Mile).

The town has two hydropower plants finished in 2020, HPP *Shterpce* with an installed capacity of 5.03 MW (Mega Watt) and HPP *Brezovica* with 2.01 MW. The latter is at shouting distance from the bustling city centre, which is made up of cafes, grocery stores, local bank branches of Raiffeisen and NLB Komercijalna bank, a healthcare centre as well as the municipality building, a local branch of the Basic Court of Ferizaj/Uroševac and the gated Kosovo Police station. Along these places, the main road connects the municipality and crosses over the gushing meltwater currents in the Miloshtica river headed for the parent river, Lepenc. Along with the construction work of the hydropower plants from 2018 until 2020, the private investor company Matkos d.o.o. walled in Miloshtica’s riverbed with two concrete barriers to channel the water flow from *obe reke* at the highest end of the town, where its tributaries Bolovanka and Kaludjerka meet, and the HPP *Shterpce* was erected, towards the currently inactive HPP *Brezovica* at the confluence with the Lepenc river at the other end of the town. The river embodies nature’s wrath to many residents in town due to its recurring flooding that have created tremendous damage in the town.

Its omnipresence in the town points to the different ways of connecting to the mountain rivers in town. Its rumbling and splashing in the riverbed create a constant white noise that pervades most outdoor soundscapes. On my daily walks through the neighbourhood, I observed the countless brooks and creeks contouring properties or intentionally being channelled by make-shift or concrete drains through courtyards to supply households with additional water from the mountain rivers. Some

households inserted small hoses into these channels or diverted them towards robustly built water fountains that were throbbing with meltwater in their gardens, ready to be used for cleaning the car, washing dishes or even as drinking water, as I was told. These walking observations of auto-constructed water infrastructure coincided with my errands to fetch water bottles on the main road. Most interviewees reported that the water quality is below drinking water standards since the construction of the hydropower plants at *obe reke* impacted the groundwater supply for the nearby water reservoir. The local reservoir is 10 meters downstream of the HPP *Shtrpce*, beyond where Bolovanka and Kaludjerka meet. According to my interviewees, it was built after the second world war and renovated in 2009 with structural funds by the European Commission. "It used to supply the majority of households in the town with drinking water from an underground spring," as Miroslav told me. But during the construction phase of the hydropower plants, the local utility company issued a public notification in January 2019 claiming that an oil spill at the construction site contaminated the drinking water system (Public Utility Notice, 2019).

While drinking water quality had been re-established in the following weeks, according to the utility company, two blue and black coloured plastic hoses were attached to the concrete shell of the water reservoir at *obe reke* by the private investor, according to interviewees. They reached into the riverbed of Bolovanka for several kilometres to supplement the diminished water quantities from the reservoir. Regardless of the reported issues of accessing water, along with changing colour and quality of water, some residents remain assured by its natural drinking water quality and thus continue to drink the water from the reservoir. I experienced firsthand the uneasiness resulting from the need for more information about water management in the municipality. After drinking tap water for several days, I formulated my opinion about the water quality through my embodied experience of feeling nauseous and sick.

Nevertheless, according to the utility company's official communication, the water quality is safe despite temporary issues with water pressure and main breaks. The resulting uncertainty and alternative knowledge production about the water quality of the tap water in the town drove my

research project towards the politics of water management and the competing knowledge about the water quality based everyday access to water(s). As much as the Miloshtica river's strong currents were stirring up my initial research plans, I quickly learnt in ethnographic interviews that a cyclic water scarcity further beset the town's water supply once the meltwater receded and water demand by raspberry farmers weighed down on the already diminished water capacities.

The hydropower development also beset the riverbeds of the Lepenc river in the village of Brezovica and Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme and its tributaries in the Šar National Park. Similar to the drinking water issues in the town of Štrpce, the village of Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme is facing water scarcity during the summer months when increased water is needed to irrigate the raspberry fields, which are cultivated by the majority of its residents. Matkos d.o.o. built the HPP *Sharri* in the village Brezovica and the HPP *Vicha* in Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme and HPP *Lepenc 3* in the municipality of Kaçanik (see figure 1). Respectively, each plant was built with the installed electricity capacity of 2.1, 6.45 and 4.6 MW (KOSID 2020, see figure 1). There are also intakes for the plants built in four locations inside protected zones of the Šar national park (see "intake" in Figure 1). They capture the river streams in dams and put them into downstream pipes to increase the speed of the natural current before it hits the turbines in the powerhouses at a lower altitude. At the powerhouses

in the municipality, the water pressure activates a generator to produce electricity fed into the national grid.

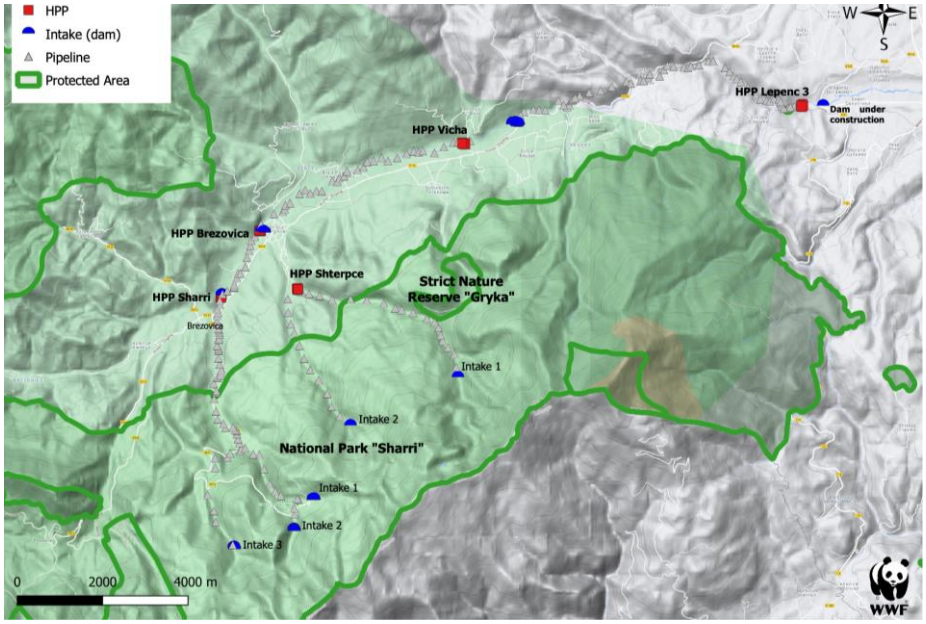

Figure 1 (WWF, 2020)

During both field trips, I visited several intakes in the protected zones of the national park. I went to the powerhouses in the municipality of Štrpce, except for HPP *Lepenc 3*, due to time constraints and it being part of a different municipality. The surrounding environment and riverbanks of the rivers still carry the imprints of the work by the excavators. At the same time, the powerhouses are by design beautified through recently planted trees and lawns, artificially aligned rocks, but also by grass curtains along fences to block the view from nearby roads.

2. Differentiated Citizenships in Serb Parallel Governance Structures

In this chapter, I discuss various forms of differentiated citizenship coalescing in the context of the Serb parallel governance structures and explore how public services mediate specific relationships between citizens and the parallel state in the municipality of Štrpce. Drawing on Karsniqi (2015), I start from the premise that Kosovo's multicultural citizenship regime produces differentiated forms of citizenship, which I found to be furthermore entrenched through the informal relationships maintained by the Serb parallel institutions. I discuss my empirical data in the light of the notion of "relational clientelism" (Nichter, 2018) as well as concerning Ian Madison's PhD (2019) thesis on

public services and competition for legitimacy by the parallel states in Kosovo. Madison found that Kosovo Serbs 'dependency on Belgrade's provision of public services and funds for employment diminishes "group solidarity" local Serbs (Madison, 2019, p. 222). Yet, he points out that the local political parties retained their ability to control residents 'agency to interact with the Kosovo state due to the former's employment in the local public sector (ibid., p. 202). I draw on Nichter's notion of "relational clientelism" (2018) to look at the local-level forms of interdependency and negotiations of agency by residents when they engage with local authorities.

Stefan reaches for the lighter on the table, runs his thumb down the side, and lights a cigarette. Then he turns to look outside the window towards the municipality building towering over the centre of Stprce. "I believe the government has to do its job here and take care of us. But it does not do that, and that is why people can no longer live here because they cannot feed their families," he says. The music in the cafe drones on while he takes another hit and continues explaining that "they say that 10 000 people left in the past years, but it must be more than that…a lot of people just leave because they want a better life and good jobs," he concludes. Stefan is in his early 20s, he finished high school and has been searching for a decent job for the past two years. Apart from several gigs as an online English teacher, he had not been able to find employment that pays well apart from working as a waiter in a cafe. So he aspires to something else and decides to try his luck on a tourist VISA to a European Union member state, as long it will be issued in time to start with a prearranged position.

Stefan holds a Kosovo passport which requires him to apply and pay for a 90-day Schengen VISA at a consulate or embassy of the visiting country, either in Pristina or a neighbouring country. He could have also opted for the Serbian passport, as does any person living in the territory of Kosovo according to Serbia's current citizenship legislation. Still, he said that the bureaucratic procedures take too much time, plus with that passport, he also has to endure VISA application procedures to go anywhere beyond Kosovo and Serbia. Apart from imparting the general atmosphere of economic insecurity and depopulation in the rural municipality, Stefan's pragmatic reflections also reveal the

parallel legal citizenship regimes that shape his plans to emigrate as they give rise to forms of differentiated citizenship.

Under the law, citizenship exists to provide all citizens in a nation-state with equal rights (Leydet, 2014). In the case of war-torn Kosovo, the emerging multicultural citizenship regime enshrined in Kosovo's constitution responded directly to the post-conflict theatre marked by polarised ethnopolitical identities and ongoing status negotiations between the former Yugoslav Republic of Serbia and the newly established Republic of Kosovo. It, therefore, promulgated a differentiated citizenship regime based on group rights, which used ethnicity as a primary form of identification (Krasniqi, 2015, p. 200). Krasniqi argues that "if equality is established legally among all citizens, politically every citizen is defined as a member of an ethnic, religious or linguistic community," which officially comprise Albanians, Serbs and Roma-Ashakali-Egpyptian (RAE),3 Turks, Gorani and Bosnians (Ibid., p. 202; italics). From a legal-formal perspective, differentiated citizenship then seeks to counteract any systemic inequalities among these groups by "granting of special group-based legal or constitutional rights to national minorities and ethnic groups" and thereby supplementing a universal notion of citizenship (Mintz et al., 2013, p. 89). In the case of Kosovo, this amounts to constitutionally guaranteed group rights such as reserved seats in the parliament, at least two ministerial portfolios in the government and proportional representations, and quotas at other levels of governance, besides enhanced powers to local level municipalities with a majority of individuals form non-dominate communities (Republic of Kosovo 2008).

In reality, these legal provisions neither ensure substantial equality among citizens nor facilitate a shared notion of membership to a common political community (Krasniqi, 2015; 2019; UNDP/Riinvest, 2003). While Kosovo Albanians enjoy relative political dominance, Kosovo Serbs' political position is buttressed by Serbia's interference in Kosovo's statehood, which other non-dominant groups such as Roma lack thereof. Subject to systemic discrimination and economic

[3] This identity label, also often referred to as REA, was coined by the UN administration in Kosovo to group three ethnolinguistics minority groups under the one to facilitate their political representation and access to group specific rights. For more, see Sigona 2012.

exclusion, the latter struggle to access fundamental citizenship rights, as many remain stateless or internationally displaced since the war (Sigona, 2012; Krasniqi, 2015; Civil Rights Defenders, 2018). For Krasniqi, the formal citizenship rights collide with "the mismatch between the idea of liberal states and the practice of group differentiation and the emergence of a hybrid political order" in Kosovo (Krasniqi, 2015, p. 202). The latter emerged from the contestation over Kosovo's statehood by members of the Serb community after the war, along with Serbia's interference in its statehood through its parallel governance structures and its de-recognition campaign. During an interview with one of the protestors, who fervently accused the political bodies in Kosovo of being involved in the hydropower development, reminded me that although he acknowledges the operation of the government in Pristina and engages with its judiciary branch in Štrpce, to him, "Kosovo remains a part of Serbia." Hence, the legal forms of differentiated citizenship are additionally nuanced by the everyday negotiations and consequences stemming from the parallel citizenship regimes and individual negotiations of ethnic and national belonging.

Štrpce is one of six Serb-majority municipalities in the south of Kosovo where inhabitants with Serbian identity documents can access Serbia-funded social welfare benefits and jobs managed by parallel institutions at the local level. Although the state stopped being Serbian by the end of the war, when the former province of the Yugoslav Republic of Serbia became subject to the UN administration, the Serbian political elite retained the local governance structures. Prior to 2008, they entailed education, health, and justice and security institutions, which according to Madison, "all operated without a municipal umbrella" (Madison, 2019, p. 209). By the time Kosovo's declared its independence in 2008, the Serb-majority settlements across Kosovo consolidated their Serbia-funded parallel governance structures parallel to UNMIK state-building efforts in Kosovo (Madison, 2019, p. 187). The Belgrade organised elections in 2009, marked by a turn-out of almost 80% in Štrpce, created official parallel municipalities with elected officials, to the dislike of the international administration (Crisis Group, 2009). Not living in the geographically adjoining regions with Serbia proper has fostered a more cooperative approach to the Kosovan Albanian society by the municipality

as well as among its Serbian inhabitants, "albeit only precariously so," as Bieber states (Bieber, 2015, p. 290). The northern Serb municipality remained under direct Serbian control and has ever since had greater access to practical services such as employment in Serbian state institutions, tax-free status of Kosovo, social benefits, and public services provisions (ibid.).

By contrast, Serbs living south of the Ibar were put on a more constrained "life-line" from Serbia while also provided social welfare payments and employment opportunities in the public sector (Madison, 2019). Either way, the parallel Serb institutions were essential to Serbia's territorial claims of Kosovo, whose position was enshrined in the 2006 Constitution of Serbia. The provisioning of employment in public institutions thus is often read as a political tool aimed at sustaining Serbia's legitimacy as the caretaker of its citizens in Kosovo (OSCE, 2007; Madison, 2019; Interview Mile). In 2011, the Serbian government provided financial support to up to 40.000 Serbs with social welfare benefits or employment in public sector jobs (Bieber, 2015, p. 197). In the case of Štrpce, this entailed jobs in the municipality, the primary and secondary school, health care centre and public utility companies anchored in the parallel system since the 1999s (Prelec and Rashiti, 2014; Interview Mile). Many of the employees were also employed in the parallel Kosovo structures and earned double salaries.

Providing benefits to the Serb population is conditioned and reproducing informal political exchanges between citizens and the local political elites. Crucially, these "continent exchanges; *as* (…) its benefits extend beyond election campaigns" (Nichter, 2018, p. 70, *added*) are a persistent socio-political phenomenon that thrives off legacies of the war, institutional structures, and the general socio-economic hardship in a peripheral mountain village. Citizens' political support therein results in continued access to Serb-funded social assistance and employment. In so far, these informal political exchanges for this research project might be best approached as "relational clientelism," which emphasises the mutual interest in preserving them as strategic tools for survival by both politicians and citizens (Nichter, 2018, p. 5). Nichter argues that "relational clientelism's" emergence and continuity are strongly influenced by a weak state, structural inequality, and limited access to

public goods (ibid.). Albeit to varying degrees, all of these factors are arguably present since the post war period in Štrpce.[4]

While relying on my qualitative sample and existing secondary literature, "relational clientelism" captures everyday situations often referred to as "politics." But it also emerges as a form of social capital that is needed to sustain their livelihoods (Interview Mile). A young woman in her mid-20s, working for a local NGO, told me to quote her saying that "You can only get something through politics here" (Interview Dunja). Concomitantly, it is common knowledge that the local political elite exercises pressure on inhabitants to vote for particular candidates by threatening them with the termination of benefits (Prelec & Rashiti, 2015; Bieber, 2015; Kostovicova, 2008). Those who have brushed their coercive power associate this clientelist relationship with fear and precaution, as potential punitory reactions are anticipated if the reciprocal contract of their informal political exchanges is not upheld. Ivan, a fellow in his 40s, formerly employed by the municipality, told me over a coffee, "I am sorry to tell you, but this story here does not have a good ending. You cannot fight the system here; you will only lose." During the opposition against the hydropower development in 2019, residents reported of local authorities threatening protestors with the loss of social benefits or bribing them with building materials (Interviews Ivan, Vedran, Gjorgej, Stefan, Novak, Mile). Nichter's "relational clientelism" (2018) thus helps me grasp the more nuanced roles of citizens and politicians in determining the benefits of their informal relationship and its persistence.

This relationship is, however, subject to transformation amidst the contemporary withdrawal of the Serbian parallel institutions in Kosovo. With the onset of EU-mediated status talks between Serbia and Kosovo in 2010, the parallel administration's political capacity started to wane while its administrative wing remained active (Prelec & Rashiti, 2015; Interview Mile). This largely stems from the fact that Serbs beyond the northern part of Kosovo afford less political leverage to Serbia's policy towards Kosovo due to the ongoing integration process into the Kosovo system (Interview Mile; Prelec & Rashiti, 2015). Hence, employment opportunities decrease along with the receding

[4] For more on this aspect, see Madison (2019).

political wing of the parallel institutions in southern municipalities, encouraging young people to leave Štrpce for better work. Boris, whose three children have already left for Serbia in search of work, sums up the current situation soberly. "This is the worst situation by far. People are living. This government that they elected lied to them; they promised them jobs but only gave them some small things. Our people have a saying, 'They gave them a nail and took their heart.'"

The NGO worker Dunja voiced similar intentions, telling me that she will be "gone from there in two years or so." Unlike in most municipalities in the north of Kosovo, "there are not enough jobs here." While many employment positions in the public sector had already been on paper only, and others entail only part-time positions, they fear these positions will not be transferred in the Kosovo system. A political expert says this affects the younger generations hardest since "you cannot have a whole community of, I do not know, 10,000 people being on the government's payroll, right." Following the Kosovo police raid in 2022 and the arrest of several municipal officers of the interim municipal council and the long-time mayor of Štrpce Bratislav Nikolic on corruption charges, the Serb parallel administration was eventually forced to shut down its political administration (Mustafa & Sami, 2022). Nonetheless, its executive capacity of overseeing public utility companies and distributing social benefits and employment is still "up and running," according to Mile.

To sum up, based on Karsniqi (2015), I argue that Kosovo's multicultural citizenship regime produces differentiated citizenship forms. Moreover, material benefits, public service provisions, and the parallel citizenship provided by the Serb parallel governance structures further entrench this hierarchy of citizenship (ibid.). At the same time, it constitutes unequal power relations between citizens and political elites. Hence, Kosovo's multicultural citizenship is not only usurped by Serbia's interferences in its statehood, but citizens are further subject to differentiation by unequal access to political elites and, in turn, material benefits. However, as indicated in my interviews, citizens always have an exit option as they consider leaving the municipality for better employment. This chapter's focus on differentiated citizenship sets the stage for Chapter 3, where I will further explore how citizenship is not solely a formalised legal status definition granted by a nation-state that entails rights,

obligations and privileges (Smith & Waller, 2000) but includes lived experiences, social dynamics and power relations, which render it subject to fluctuation and change (Appadurai & Holston, 1996; Yarwood, 2017).

3. *Enclosing Rivers and Abject Citizens in the Municipality of Štrpce*

In this chapter, I explore how the parallel water governance in the Municipality of *Štrpce* and water infrastructure damaged by the construction of hydropower plants mediate specific dynamics of the prevailing informal relationships between citizens and the state. Drawing on urban citizenship literature (Anand, 2011, 2017; Holston, 2008; Roy, 2004; McFarlane & Rutherford, 2008) and the anthropology of infrastructure (Larkin, 2013; Appel et al., 2018; Wilkinson, 2019) and political ecology (Bakker, 2010 Swyngedouw, 2015), I argue that the inadequate parallel water management not only highlights differential access conditions among inhabitants in the municipality of Štrpce but contributed to the polarisation of the unequal positions of residents in prevailing forms of "relational clientelism" (Nichter, 2019, p. 70). In the final subsection, I will draw a parallel to an extreme case of marginalisation which evokes Rodgers and O'Neill's phrase of "infrastructural violence." (2012) Following the war, oppressive camp infrastructure overseen by the United Nations (UN) for internally displaced persons castigated Roma families in North Mitrovica as abject bodies.

Much like water supply services, water infrastructure is never just a mere service provision but has technical and socio-political characteristics. Larkin reminds us that infrastructure is an epistemological frame that helps capture how it "facilitates the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space" (Larkin, 2013, p. 329). In the context of modern polities, this is embodied in what Appel et al. (2018) mean by the "promise" of infrastructure; an assertion that aims to improve the material well-being of everyone. In response, the subfield of anthropology of infrastructure has emphasised how infrastructure mediates power by transforming political subjects to be easily submerged in capitalist and nation-state systems (Larkin, 2013). But the contrary may also be the case; as modern infrastructure actively excludes social groups through dispossession (Stefanez-Alier, 2002). The case Štrpce points to the ways in which infrastructure projects have

selective benefits and burdens that affect social groups differently. The infrastructural neglect through the inappropriate water governance and market-driven enclosure of rivers highlights the inability of infrastructures to equally deliver on their modern promises in society (Swyngedouw, 2015).

Hence, a recurring theme is discussions about emerging forms of material inequality due to differential access conditions or the variable quality of the infrastructures. As such facilities are differently "experienced along the lines of race, class or other forms of social stratification," as Wilkinson argues (2019, p. 42). For Wilkinson, "infrastructure invariably creates inequality, in so far as members of different communities interact with them in divergent ways" (ibid., p. 42). Rodgers and O'Neil (2012) capture the resulting material and social suffering from oppressive infrastructure, differential access and its absence as "infrastructural violence." Similarly, Appel et al. (2018) argue that the water crisis and consequent lead poisoning of residents in two largely African-American cities showed how chronically mismanaged water infrastructure reproduces racism in everyday life and human health (Appel et al., 2018, p. 1-2). These findings resonate with the common tenor in urban citizenship scholarship that has well-established empirical evidence from different cities showing how urbanisation processes and neoliberal restructuring can deepen inequalities and contribute to the exclusion of marginalised groups (McFarlane and Rutherford, 2008; Roy, 2004; Anand, 2017) or result in the racialization of ethnic groups such as Romani people (Picker, 2017).

Similarly, research on public service provisions such as water supply shows how urban water governance, concerning privatisation and enclosure, leads to exclusion and marginalisation (Bakker, 2010) and environmental injustices (Swyngedouw, 2015; 2004). On the surface, the breakdown of the existing water infrastructure in the wake of the construction of the hydropower plants in the village of Štrpce and Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme point to the systemic failure to maintain the water infrastructure in the municipality. Nevertheless, the subsequent damage varied in scale based on residents ʾprior access to water infrastructure. According to the urban plan for the municipality of Štrpce of 2013, the existing water network for the town of Štrpce has been supplied by an underground water reservoir at *obe reke* and covers most households (Urban Plan, 2013, p. 62). However, the

document lacks any documented sources and can't be verified. A former engineering high-school teacher informed me that the first water reservoir in the town of Štrpce was built around the 1900s but no longer serves the town. After the second world war, Bulgarian engineers constructed a new water reservoir that supposedly met the town's demands until it was damaged by the construction work on the riverbed in 2019.

Faced with a general lacuna of public information about the water supply networks in the municipality, I construed a patchwork knowledge of Štrpce's water supply system, which came together as being historically decentralised and in dire need of modernisation. During each interview, I learned how village individuals accessed their water differently. Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme depend on wells or cisterns for drinking water, while Štrpce and Brezovica were supplied with a piped water network that delivered untreated water for technical use only in the past years. These water reservoirs were supplied by underground water springs and free-fall water pipes, built during Yugoslavia, channelling water from springs in the national park to households in the valley. What characterises these networks is that they are sporadically maintained by the public utility company in Štrpce or are supervised by selected villagers (Interview Boris; Interview Liridon).

The urban plan of Štrpce recognises the general need to modernise the water infrastructure in the municipality but lacks clear descriptions of specific locations or subsections that are malfunctioning across the municipality. It lists service quality issues such as the lack of wastewater treatment facilities and water purification facilities as well as water pressure and continuity because of the changing hydrological cycles affected by meltwater from the Šar mountains and seasonal water usage for agricultural and raspberry farming in the municipality (ibid., p. 63). The resulting water supply shortages from May until September further configure the hydraulic status quo because the majority of inhabitants either cultivate raspberries or rely on them as their livelihoods. However, the hydropower development's enclosure of the mountain rivers and the subsequent disconnection from existing water infrastructures have exacerbated differential access conditions to water between the villages and within them.

I met Liridon during his lunch break to interview him about the hydropower plants and their continuing impact on his life and work cultivating raspberries nearby the Lepenc River. Most families in his village own raspberry fields and are confronted with seasonal water scarcity exacerbated by the absence of large quantities of the Lepenc waterway enclosed by pipes to produce renewable energy. Besides selling raspberry juice and doing agriculture, he runs his own business and works in construction.

During the protests in Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme, he emerged as one of the key figures representing his village in the fight against the private company. Along with other representatives from the village, he advocated for a stop with the municipal and state governments since 2015. Before we start the interview, he offers me a cup from a white coloured water suspender, neatly sitting along the wall in his office. Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme has never had access to a pipe network for distribution but depended on donations and installations of water cisterns, pools and other temporary replacements for proper access to a water supply system in the municipality (Interview Liridon). During the construction work in 2019, households in his village underwent several months without drinking water and had to revive electric pumps in their old wells. “We sent the complaints to the municipality, but that did not work out, then we were forced to do it on our own, we put the engines again into the well, and we drew water, so we had drinking water. As for irrigation, that depended on the rain. God was doing the job where it rained,” he told me.

Today, he still relies on water from his wells, the river and the rain, as neither the municipal nor state authorities have provided his village with any viable assistance to overcome the impacts incurred by the hydropower development. Although part of the municipal water networks is maintained by the public utility company “New Public Utility Company Shtrpce,” Liridon claims that the company only sporadically covers his village because no one is paying utility fees. Pressed for a solution to this longstanding form of disconnection without institutional support, he proposes his take on a reformed water governance strategy in the municipality to ensure better service provision. He believes “there should be one company that should completely manage the water and deal with the

reservoirs so that we would have a reason to pay for the water and not misuse it." As of 2023, the "New Utility Company Shtrpce," registered under Serbian law and administered by the remaining parallel administration as a public utility company, is perceived as effectively maintaining only the network in the town of Štrpce and leaving other villages fend for themselves (Interview Oliver's mother, Boris, Dejan, Vedran, Mile).

Despite their promises of serving human needs, public infrastructure and public services produce varying experiences upon which people construct collective and social worlds (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979). In that sense, the inadequate water supply experienced differently across the municipality may still communicate shared meanings that link societies together (Migdal, 2001). Stefan tells me that the lack of care about the water supply following the oil leak in 2019 by the former and the incumbent municipal government only reinforced his feeling of abandonment. He told me that Štrpce "is no man's land… this government here…they are paid to take care of jobs and the drinking water or nature, but they do not do it." His frustration points to what political sociologists understand as the "idea of the state" being expressed through the "main myths and symbols" of public services and infrastructure to its citizens (Gupta, 1995; Hoslti, 1996, p. 83).

Liridon from Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme also felt that the local authorities do not consider him and other residents in the town as eligible for specific citizenship entitlements. Inhabitants of Donija Bitinija/Bitia e Poshtme had already dealt with self-managed water supply infrastructure such as wells before. They had to expand their provisioning strategies in the face of less water supply by purchasing or fetching water from other villages. Dunja, a young woman working for a local NGO, told me that her family regularly fills up 5 to 10-litre cisterns of potable water in Prevalla, several kilometres from their home. Their water from the tap is not safe for drinking and is used exclusively for technical purposes. After unsuccessfully addressing these issues with the local municipality for several years following almost five years of protesting the hydropower development, Liridon said he feels "as if we were not citizens of this municipality."

His frustration over not being perceived as a rights-bearing citizen in the eyes of the local municipality resonates with Nikhil Anand's ethnography about the disconnection of Muslim settlement dwellers from formerly working water supply networks in Mumbai, which he claims points to the "precariousness and reversibility of citizenship gains" (Anand, 2017, p. 203). Similar to urban citizenship scholarship (Holston, 2008), which shows how urban laws and policies engender precarious and differentiated populations, for Anand this kind of disconnection produces abject populations (cf. Ferguson 1999; Kristeva, 1982). Drawing on Ferguson's notion of being "disconnected," he uses abjection to describe "an active relation, and the state of having been disconnected requires to be understood as the product of specific structures and produces of disconnection" (Ferguson, 1999, p. 238; *added*). Overall, the varied experiences of disconnection experienced by inhabitants of the municipality echo Ferguson's notion of being "disconnected from a political and social system that they "were once able to access", even if differential in nature (Anand, 2017, p. 194).

Their dissatisfaction with the water supply is generally embedded, if not aggravated, by the general feeling of having been pushed beyond the biopolitical 'care 'by both Serbia and Kosovo, and the local political elite. As discussed in the previous Chapter, the limited employment opportunities in the municipality and the ongoing political integration of Kosovo Serb parallel structures into the Kosovo system play a crucial role in shaping how residents perceive and judge local actors ' complicity in the hydropower development and subsequent plunder of water resources. Vedran expresses his anger at being abjected by the municipality and the national government of Kosovo by blaming the deterioration of their drinking water supply on "the action driven by vested interests," which catapulted them back to the "middle ages." In the same vein, Nikhil Anand draws on Ferguson in his ethnography to illustrate how the regulations and policies of the water sector produce and sustain abject populations (Anand, 2017, p. 195).

While Anand focuses on iterative processes between the actors engaged in water management, which produce and sustain abject citizens, my empirical research points more towards structural

factors. These include the parallel water governance and the wider socio-economic backdrop of water grabbing. Štrpce residents and water are rendered abject through the structural negligence of maintaining and managing water infrastructure and subsequent water enclosure through informal political exchanges that commodified the municipal water resources to the detriment of local communities (Veldwisch et al., 2018). Hence, the disconnection from water resources through the enclosure of the mountain rivers not only revealed pre-existing differential access conditions to water infrastructure across the municipality but that also points to regional and global forms of water expropriation (Bieler and Moore, 2023).

In Štrpce, like in other neighbouring countries, complex administrative systems and parallel water governance structures coexist, while corruption in public institutions is pervasive (Kmezić, 2020). This creates opportunities for individuals to abuse their power for personal gain, including through the control of water resources (Dogmus and Nielsen, 2020; Gallop, 2021). Since the early 2000s, numerous small hydropower plants have been built along thousands of rivers in the region under the guise of EU-driven renewable energy transition, causing significant pressure on local water resources and ecosystems (Gallop, 2020). While the opposition to building small dams may seem like a local issue, it can actually be seen as part of a larger global movement against water exploitation (Stefanez-Alier et al, 2016). And yet, the resulting forms of abjection are mediated by historical and contextual specificities.

Štrpce's water governance historically emerged at the cross-roads of Kosovo's liberal state building processes, administered by the UN, and the consolidation of the Serb parallel state structures in the 2000s. Unlike smaller Serb enclaves in Kosovo, the Štrpce municipality's existing water network and Serbia-funded utility company provided a basis for the local government to resist the UNMIK and World Bank-driven liberalisation of Kosovo's water sector in the early 2000s (Krampe 2017; Crisis Group 2009). As part of the wider rejection of the top-down reform attempts by the Kosovo Trust Agency by municipal utility companies across Kosovo, the Serb majority municipalities opted out of these restructuring programmes and several regional water management

companies were established between 2003 and 2008 to cover Kosovo's territory (Krampe, 2017). Driven by the narrative of privatisation as a way of increasing the economic feasibility of the sector, the European Union headed pillar under the UNMIK administration established the Kosovo Trust Agency to oversee the restructuring of publicly owned utility companies from Yugoslavia (Krampe 2017; UNMIK 2004). Krampe argues that in the same vein, as smaller enclaves refused to pay for water fees to regional water companies, the Serb-majority municipalities such as Štrpce and Novo Brdo opposed restructuring its public utility companies because they rejected the new authorities in Pristina following the war in 1999s (Krampe, 2017).

Up until now, the ownership of the only existing public utility company is with the Serb parallel administration (Interview Mile). It is not only subject to Serbian law but also to donations and budget allocations by the Republic of Serbia since it lacks full access to international funds for infrastructural development in Kosovo, the Government of Kosovo's budget, nor to regional planning processes while collecting a modest amount of service fees (Crisis Group, 2009; Madison, 2019; Interview Mile). In addition, the hydrological condition of the mountain rivers in the municipality nor the operation of the utility company have been subject to regular monitoring by any relevant institutions or agencies in the Kosovo government. There is a virtual absence of any surface water monitoring of local streams apart from the Lepenc river at its spring and in the municipality of Kaçanik by relevant Kosovo agencies such as the KHMI (Kosovo Hydro Meteorological Institute) or the Water Monitoring Centre of the National Institute of Public Health (NIPH). Similarly, details about local infrastructure and surface waters is generally absent from reports on the state of water in Kosovo (Kosovo Environmental Protection Agency 2010, 2015; World Bank 2019).

Finally, Anand's use of" abjection" (2011) can be considered more effective when it comes to explaining how RAE communities in Kosovo have been systematically neglected in terms of being granted access to basic infrastructure. The case of internally displaced people (IDP) from the RAE communities living in camps on contaminated land in northern Kosovo from 2000 until 2010 encapsulates an acute case of abjection. These families were not only pushed beyond the biopolitical

care of the UNMIK administration but catapulted into life-threatening conditions without safeguarding for their well-being.

Following the retaliatory violence by Albanians targeting RAE families living in the Roma Mahalla in Mitrovica in the wake of the 1999 war, UNMIK provided temporary shelter and basic food to approximately 600 fleeing persons in the location of Cesmin Lug and Zitkovac. Others went to the former military barracks at Kablare or the village of Leposavic further north. The former two sites are located next to tailing piles full of lead-contaminated soil from the Trepca complex, a mine for lead and other heavy metals which is known to be contaminating the region since the 1970s (Human Rights Watch, 2009, p. 4). The living conditions in the camps were significantly jeopardised by regular exposure to lead-contaminated soil in addition to a lack of access to essential infrastructure like water and sanitation with limited access to power.

UNMIK was found to provide little effort to prevent possible health damages during its mandate, while it kept the site open for longer than its planned"45 to 90 days" (UNMIK, 2016, p. 45, 60). After NGOs started publishing evidence of lead poisoning among the residing families in 2004. Blood tests with toxic lead levels among children encouraged the World Health Organization (WHO) to conduct its own research and propose a relocation strategy for UNMIK (Brown et al., 2009). As the Roma Mahalla in Mitrovica was being reconstructed, a task force initiated a resettlement process to other military barracks about 200 meters from the original sites, called Osterode. Some returned to the new buildings in the former site of the Roma Mahalla in 2007 but most IDPs in Cesmin Lug refused to relocate. In the meantime, resettled families struggled to establish their lives in Mitrovica due to a lack of assistance by the UN in the resettlement process and subsequently emigrated from Kosovo, which discouraged the remaining families still in Cesmin Lug from resettling (Human Rights Report, 2009, p. 6-7).

In 2006, a complaint was filed on behalf of the families from all camps with the UN's Office of Legal affairs, accusing UNMIK of criminal negligence that caused severe health damage to Roma families while violating their human rights to life and family life and a lack of legal remedy (Mehmeti

et al., 2006). Due to the persistent NGO advocacy and several reports by the international organisations, the camps were closed in 2010, two years after UNMIK transferred its competences as the de face administration of Kosovo to the Kosovo government. Up until 2016, however, UNMIK took any responsibility for the accumulating health impacts and family traumas of living in the camps (Bower et al., 2022).

In 2016, the UN Human Rights Advisory Panel of Inquiry (HRAP) held UNMIK accountable for exposing RAE IDPs to "contamination, coupled with poor living conditions in the camps, a situation which lasted for more than ten years, had been such as to pose a real and immediate threat to the complainants 'life and physical integrity." (UNMIK, 2016, p. 15). Their conclusions resonate with Michelle Murphy's notion of abject locations as "a densely populated elsewhere within the here," as it highlights the inhumane living conditions in which RAE families endured for almost a decade (2006, p. 157). The panel also took issue with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for UNMIK (SRSG), calling him out on his "discriminatory and debasing" rejection of any responsibility (ibid., p. 16). He accused IDPs 'lifestyles of causing the substandard living conditions, which had inflicted them with health damages, while claiming that the living conditions of the camps generally complied with their historically deprived position in Kosovo (ibid.).

Similar to how Anand Nikhil describes the abandonment of the Premnagar population, abjection in the case of Roma families is "enabled by the cultural politics of city engineers" (Anand 2017, p. 195). In other words, this disconnection results from a "dialectical process produced out of deeply situated discursive relationship and material practices, where histories of difference are emergent and reproduced through production, management and maintenance of urban infrastructure" (Ibid.). UNMIK's work with and around administrating the camps is embedded and productive of "histories of difference," which are reproduced through their administration of the camps. The resulting forms of infrastructural abjection reveal how racial discrimination and derogatory notions of culture were reified to produce abject populations (ERRC, 2016). At the same time, the UNMIK administration breached its international law obligations that pertain to members of "internally

displaced persons," such as the RAE communities (ibid.) UNMIK was found guilty of disobeying with its legal obligations under Article 2 of the ECHR and failed to undertake steps to "remove the complainants from a situation where they suffered inhuman and degrading treatment in fulfilment of its obligations under Article 3 of the ECHR" (Rorke, 2023, p. 38).

The abjection of Roma families in these camps, indexed by the inhuman infrastructural provisions and resulting health damage, shows the precariousness of citizenship at large and further undoes Kosovo's multicultural citizenship regime. Well after the last families were resettled to their neighbourhood Mitrovica, members of the three communities continue to struggle to obtain justice since the UN had not provided anything beyond a public apology and the installation of a trust fund (Bower et al., 2022). Finally, this case also reaffirms Krasniqi's thesis of uneven citizenship in Kosovo, as discussed in Chapter 2, since members of all three communities continue to face socio, political and structural challenges while being entangled in conflicting political interests by Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serbs (Krasniqi, 2015).

To sum up, as indicated in Chapter 2, Kosovo's differentiated citizenship regime reifies a politics of difference. It fails to address persisting structural inequalities that sustain unequal access to substantive rights to members of different non-majority communities. By drawing on urban citizenship literature, in Chapter 3 I argue that citizenship is an inherently contingent form of political subjectification. As such it is subject to the interaction between citizens and the state but also between residents of a town and those structurally situated in more powerful positions (Holston, 2013; Anand, 2017). The parallel water governance by the Serb parallel administration created differential access conditions across the municipality in the first place, which the damage from the hydropower construction furthermore expanded across the municipality. My main argument is that the inappropriate provision of water supply coincides with the overall receding of biopolitical care by the local authorities. In tandem, these processes render residents in Štrpce as abject populations, albeit to varying degrees. Thus, building on the premise that both water supply and its infrastructure mediate

the state's address to its citizens, residents 'disconnection from safe and irrigation water is due to the water grabbing indicates the emergence of another layer of differentiated citizenship.

While the disconnection by the hydropower plants is more "passive" and negotiated within social relations shaped by "relational clientelism", the case of IDPs in Northern Mitrovica provides for an "active form of infrastructural violence" driven by antigypsyism (Rodgers & O'Neill, 2012, p. 406-407). I use this basis in Chapter 4 to contextualise the burgeoning protests against local and government officials in the municipality that aim to stop the construction of the small hydropower plants.

4. Insurgent Citizenship Practices Against the Enclosure of Rivers

In this chapter, I discuss the protests against the small hydropower plants in Stprce from 2018 until 2020 in light of Holston's notion of "insurgent citizenship" (Holston, 2008). My main argument is that the citizen struggles represent a form of insurgent citizenship because it addresses the asymmetrical relationship between residents and local and national authorities in the context of the hydropower development. As discussed in Chapter 2, the protests coincided with the receding care provisions by the Serbia-funded governance structures in the municipality and differentiated citizenship rights. Residents protesting the enclosure of the river thus respond to the limitations and exclusions of formal citizenship and informal political relations with the political elites in the municipality. By asserting their rights and entitlements through acts of protest and collective action across ethnic lines, the protesters in the municipality disrupted the "established formulas of rule, conceptions of right, and hierarchies of social place and privilege" and align with "insurgent citizenship" (Holston, 2008, p. 7). The fact that the protests were targets by police violence and pressure by local elites is symptomatic of their insurgent potential. Even if they did not prevent the construction of the four hydropower plants in the municipality, as Vedran who was a key actor in the protests emphasised, "they knew they were doing the right thing." (Interview Vedran, *added*)

Citizen Protests as Insurgent Citizenship

The law is not solely in the hands of the state but can be taken over by various actors with differing, disputed, and intersecting interests (Holston, 2010; Haberkorn, 2011; Kmezić, 2020). Vedran tells me, "At one point, our entire fight was so much in line with the law that it turned out that we were the only ones protecting it!" In their daily protests, residents of the municipality claimed the letter of the law to defend themselves from the predatory interests of private investors and political elites. They would meet at *obe reke*, at times visited by NGO representatives and supporters, and build human shields to withhold the excavators from entering the riverbed of the Kaludjerka River at the border of the Šar national park. Their protests and ways of appropriating the law as a contentious tool resonates with what James Holston proposes as the notion of "insurgent citizenship" (2008).

Holston uses the term to describe the emerging ways residents in marginalised urban peripheries of São Paulo mobilised to defend their property and land rights against land swindlers in ownership disputes (Holston, 2013, p. 94). Insurgent citizenship denotes several ways formal nation-state citizens negotiate the Ardentian notion of the "right to have rights" in the face of socio-economic inequality and oppressive neoliberalism (Holston, 2009, p. 230). By contesting historically entrenched notions of "what it means to be a member of the modern state," these acts of citizenship can reinvent themselves and foster democratic change in a political community characterised by systemic inequalities and clientelist relationships (ibid., p. 274).

Considering the well-established forms of informal political exchanges in the local municipality, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, residents take the streets to question the municipality's responsibility for the ongoing destruction of their rivers and thereby challenge the established order of things in Štrpce. Throughout 2019, the protesters became aware of the role of local authorities, members of the Environmental Ministry, and other political representatives in causing environmental damage. Their calls thus questioned social norms and informal rules of conduct that both constituted and were constituting the parallel governance structures in the municipality, as explored in Chapter 2.

Since Holston locates the sites of insurgent citizenship in semi-legal urban peripheries of São Paulo, it warrants an explanation of how I apply it to a rural municipality in Kosovo's periphery. Holston argues that any marginalised social group may challenge unequal power relations and exclusive urban governance as they assert their right to the city and demand access to basic infrastructure, public services and political recognition (Holston, 2013, p. 95). However, he mainly locates sites of insurgent citizenship in "the realm of the homeless, networks of migrant, neighbourhoods of Queer Nation, auto-constructed peripheries in which the poor build their own homes in precarious material and legal conditions (…)" (ibid.). In this case, the city is emblematic of inequalities and sites of socio-spatial exclusion because it is "the container of this process but its subject as well - a space of emergent identities and their social organisation." (ibid.) The resulting incongruence of citizenship, due to differential treatment of people based on their gender, race, education and access to property, "shapes citizens 'grounds on which they engage in the struggle to challenge the conditions on which one belongs to society" (ibid.).

In the case of Štrpce, "insurgent citizenship" practices emerge in the context of multiple differentiated forms of citizenship that are correlated with ethnic identities of residents in the municipality (Krasniqi, 2015). As explored extensively in Chapters 2 and 3, unequal power relations affect formal citizenship entitlements and access to political and economic elites shapes access to material benefits such as jobs (Nichter, 2018). Simply being a formal citizen does, therefore, not guarantee access to civil, political, and social rights when informal relationships with political elites in the municipality are involved.

In that sense, although Western urban centres are believed to be the harbours 'of societal dynamics (Lefebvre, 1968), the existence of Kosovo Albanian parallel structures,[5] followed by Serbian parallel states throughout Kosovo's post-socialist history, suggests that complex processes of negotiating ethnic belonging and social stratification reach into rural areas (Madison, 2019). Yet, this case does not fit with the research paradigm of divided societies (Baliqi 2018; Wiese & Agrarian

[5] For a history about the Albanian parallel state created from 19900 and 1991 by Kosovo Albanian parties following Serbia's abolition of Kosovo's autonomy in 1989, see Madison (2019); Clark (2000).

2017), as its essentialist and bounded readings of social groups contrast with multiple and conflictual negations of identity in the municipality of Štrpce.[6] Instead, in the absence of the anticipated support by local and national authorities in Kosovo or Serbia, I argue that "insurgent citizenship" manifests itself through residents 'politicisation of natural resource extraction and protests against Kosovo's corrupt and oppressive post-war political system, embodied by the enclosure of rivers through the construction of small hydropower plants.

Unequal Power Structures Temporarily Disrupted

According to Holston, any "citizenships gains" are vulnerable to repressive counteraction by political elites, who seek to secure their superior position through direct violence or the misuse of political or legal avenues (Holston, 2008, p. 274). In Štrpce, protestors were met by two types of pushback of varying degrees of intensity. First, the residents of Štrpce were gradually abandoned by their local authorities while trying to secure their support at the beginning of the protests in 2018, which tapped into a latent legitimacy crisis among residents. For Nichter, "declaring support" plays a crucial role in sustaining the ongoing informal exchange of votes by citizens and material benefits by incumbent political actors, as it signals the "credibility" of their promises (Nichter 2018, p. 74, *added*). Their gradually waning support hence instilled suspicion and frustration among residents.

Following a petition against the construction work and subsequent meetings between the protestors and the municipality of Štrpce, the mayor suspended all construction work throughout the municipality in the first few months of 2019. Whilst still in the dark about the economic and political processes that enabled the hydropower development in their municipality, protestors declared the fight over. However, throughout 2019, the municipality authorities negated their declared support, which furthermore damaged their credibility in the eyes of the protestors. Nichter argues that particularly during bouts of adversity and heightened vulnerability, politicians 'signalling support and

[6] I m following Brubaker (2002) who claims that analytical approach to social groups by divided societies scholarship reifies the logic of "groups."

citizens 'requesting benefits are crucial in tackling the "dual credibility problem, as both citizens and politicians are concerned about whether each other's promises are trustworthy" (Nichter, 2018, p. 73).

The interview with Đorđe, another important figure in the protests, encapsulates the bitter disappointment at local authorities 'feigned declarations of support. He recalls the former mayor of Štrpce at the end of 2018, "The president promised us that the machines would be gone and if they refused to leave that he would personally force them. He said that, and he kept that promise. The excavator did go, but they returned after some time…The municipality knew everything already [about the hydropower construction process]." Đorđe's response underlines how the local authorities ' unresponsiveness in relation to the hydropower development revealed their already curbed relationship with residents, which I elaborated on in the previous chapter. In addition, local authorities were reported to enact indirect pressure or buy-off citizens with building materials to undercut the protest gatherings throughout the protest gatherings in 2019. Out of fear of the consequences, many residents stopped joining them. Those still protesting reasoned their decisions by claiming that people were against all of this, but that the local authorities were threatening them with the loss of their jobs and access to social welfare payments," as Boris stated. Ultimately, both the absence of caretaking by their political representatives and the growing pressure exerted on protestors undermined the credibility of local authorities in the eyes of the protestors.

Second, the recurring police violence is the other more direct expression of repression by local and national authorities. Protests in Štrpce and the village of Donja Bitinja/Bitia e Poshtme coincided throughout 2018 and 2020, as did their brushes with police violence. Residents recurrently clashed with law enforcement bodies during protest gatherings at *obe reke* or the Petrovic bridge, 50 meters further down towards the town of Štrpce. So did Kosovo Albanians and Serbs from Donja Bitinja/Bitia e Poshtme next to the Lepenc River or on the main road leading to the centre of Štrpce. Most of my interviewees can viscerally recall the first protest against the police, escorting the machinery to the construction sites, which ended with ROSU special police forces protecting excavators and violently dispersing the crowd.

For Đorđe, the local police' action against the gathering crowd felt like a betrayal. Police force is commonly viewed to be an extended arm of states (Wiatrowski & Goldstone, 2010). Since local police officers and Kosovo special police forces were implicated in violently repressing protestors, the local and national governments were viewed as illegitimately exercising their asymmetrical power against them. Miroslav, the engineering teacher from Štrpce, remembers vividly how "the ROSU forces were standing close by the powerhouse where the baggers were working while the police would keep us away by the bridge." He shared a view standard among my interviewees of the entangled complicity of their local and state authorities. The fact that the police did not distinguish between men and women, age or belonging to a specific ethnic community in the municipality only reassured Miroslav that political actors were engaged in illicit dealings at the detriment of any inhabitant in the municipality. With his voice raised, Miroslav tells me, "When the Biti people[7] were here, they also fought the police. The police treated them equally, no matter if you are Albanian or Serbian." Thereby, protests in Štrpce tie in with broader trends across the region pointing to grass-roots mobilization "beyond ethnicity" (Milan, 2019, p. 2-3), particularly in the rural context (Kapetanovic, forthcoming) against the dispossession of nature, which I will get to in the section below.

Political Effects of Insurgent Citizenship

Insurgent citizenship actions can potentially disrupt power relations and create inherently more democratic citizenship than previously anticipated, according to Holston (2008). Looking back on the 2019 demonstrations, Vedran argues, "The municipality is still afraid of us, or me in particular." The local authorities are not concerned about them "because they could in some way influence them or do something to them," he declares, "but they are afraid of the movement becoming a strong political alternative if we had the support of the people." Together with pressuring people to stop, the local authorities ʾgradual abandonment gave him enough reasons to believe that they seriously threatened the "entrenched process of domination and deference that gave its everyday sense of order and

[7] "Biti people" refers to Kosovo Albanians as well as Serbs from the neighbouring village of Donja Bitinja/Bitia e Poshtme.

security" (Holston, 2008, p. 274) in the municipality. At the same time, Vedran accepts the reality that they did not achieve their initial aims. He believes that the relationship between the new government and protestors has returned to a "normal" state of affairs. The new mayor no longer pressures former protesters to stop engaging with the hydropower plants.

However, not everything returned to normalcy. He points out that their collaborations with Kosovo Albanians from Donja Bitinja/Bitia e Poshtme transformed into friendly relationships after the protests faded. A resident from the neighbouring village also assured me of the collaborations between the Albanian and Serb communities that thrived off a shared notion of belonging to the river. "We, both Serbs and Albanians, lived here together during Tito's time, then during the 90s, there was war… That is all politics; it has nothing to do with us. The war happened, but we did not look at each other as Serbs or Albanians; it did not matter. Moreover, this land is ours and should be open," explains Liridon. His stated emotional attachment to the place and the river highlights how place-based identities undergird the political mobilization of some residents in the municipality (Kojala, 2020).

Dunja, the NGO worker from Donja Bitinja/Bitia e Poshtme, offered me a similar reading of the emerging solidarity across ethnic lines. To her, the protests illustrated how "water is beyond politics because it is about life and that when something is so vital to living, people get together to defend it and put nationality aside." She calls it a form of citizen mobilisation "where politics does not matter." Her argument resonates with Ciara Milan's (2019) notion of social movements "beyond ethnicity," which is based on her research on social movement frames that challenged ethnopolitical narratives in Bosnia and Hercegovina during the country-wide protests in 2014. While "politics" in Dunja's case refers to an ethnopolitical agenda that serves the predatory interests of political and economic elites, I argue that the protestors still conceive water as political. It refers to a form of "vital politics" (Muehlebach, 2017) since they defended the rivers to protect life itself. Similarly, demonstrators defended the river as an intergenerational gift from past generations (Rajkovic, 2020). "The river is something so holy, something that keeps us alive," Dejan said. It is the reason our

forefathers were able to survive here." As a result, water means life that must be preserved to be passed on to future human and non-human life and, as such, drove residents 'engagement in insurgent practices.

To sum up, I discussed the protests against the small hydropower plant in Stprce from 2018 until 2020 in light of Holston's notion of "insurgent citizenship" (Holston, 2008). My main argument is that the protests against the small hydropower plants represent a form of insurgent citizenship because political authorities at the local and national level in the context of hydropower development. Moreover, the protester's emergent place-based identities reveal potent force to challenge the exclusionary understandings of ethno-national belonging, which are crucial to the persistence of the parallel governance structures in Kosovo. By extension, these mobilisations also draw out the limits of legal-formal citizenship policies that foster cross-ethnic membership in Kosovo's political community (Kymlicka, 1996), as discussed in Chapter 2. Place-based identities drawing on the symbolic meanings of rivers and their natural riches may hold the more effective potential to frame new identities (Milan, 2019).

The next chapter focuses on protesters 'politics of legalism, as they struggle to come to terms with the illegally operating hydropower plants in 2023. Chapter 5 actively draws on the underlying power relations encapsulated by informal political exchanges in everyday life in the municipality, as discussed in Chapter 3, when discussing the inherent ambivalences in leveraging rights- and law-based demands to seek justice and accountability for the illegal building and operating of the hydropower plants.

5. Protesters' Politics of Legalism: Negotiation Justice in the Face of Misrule of Law

In this chapter, I consider different uses of legalism by protestors when demanding justice, following the completion of the hydropower plants in 2023. "Legalism, at its simplest, establishes rules, principles and categories, which stand apart from practice and which can be reused to order the messy reality of everyday life" (Pirie, 2019, p. 15). Protestors in Štrpce make use of different legal notions to promote social change and political transformation amidst the twisted reality of the hydropower power development. Put differently, the politics of "legalism" refers to the active pursuit of justice through the nation's legal system while using more abstract concepts like "rule of law," "citizenship," or "basic rights" in their demands to political institutions.[8]

My main argument is that their appeals to the functioning rule of law serve as a broader call for democratic accountability by public institutions (Magen & Morlina, 2008). Protesters initially framed their demands to stop the construction of the hydropower plants in terms of their claims to land and the vitality of the river. In parallel, they called upon their entitlements within the law of international human rights and their social contract with their local authorities. After insurgent citizenship practices could no longer prevent the completion of the plants in 2020, a small number of residents and NGOs from Pristina transferred the fight to the courts. From thereon, demands towards implementing the law and accountability of legal institutions are called upon.

However, the enduring political indifference and the weak rule of law pose explicit threats to obtaining justice in the long run, leaving protesters feeling fatigued and defeated. Residents ʾpersistent demands for justice and political accountability through law enforcement coincided with everyday experiences of abuse of law and political power, which I explored in more detail in Chapter 2. Formally, the rule of law concept is highly regarded as indicative of the democratisation process in the transition of former Yugoslav countries because it symbolises fairness, justice, and order to international actors.[9] Still, putting it into practice has been found difficult due to factors such as

[8] For similar discussions on how citizens make use of the law and the legal system to obtain social or environmental justice see (Haberkorn, 2011).
[9] For a discussion about the rule of law and anticorruption in the EU integration process, see Kmezić et al. (2014).

corruption and the manipulation of elites but also due to the conditionality regime by the European Union integration process, which can cause it to be used as a means of oppression (Kmezić, 2020).[10] A few former protesters still consider the law a viable option to obtain some form of justice and remedies for the damages linked to their protest activity and the construction of the hydropower.

Rights-based Demands for Justice

At the beginning of 2019, Štrpce protestors published their first petition, which based their demands on the international law of human rights. For instance, it states that apart from violating the law on public participation, the project serves only "individual interests," which jeopardises their "right to potable water and to coexist with nature" (Apel Naroda Štrpce, 2018). In an interview with a regional newspaper, a former biology teacher who was representing the locals further draws on his duties as a citizen to protect what was given to them by god (Kossev, 2019). By employing these rights-based demands, residents sought to be both considered rights-bearing citizens and members of transcendental community while the local authorities should respect the law on water and environmental protection. In parallel to appealing to international law, their claims derive from their contributions to the communal life amidst difficult circumstances marked by isolation and economic hardship. As a rural municipality in south eastern Kosovo, as the petition states, they" survived" through the "waters from these rivers used for irrigation gardens and raspberry fields" since the war (Apel Naroda Štrpce, 2018).

Once all four hydropower plants were completed by 2020, protesters 'rights-based demands for environmental justice entailed a stronger focus on legal violations by the private company and political officials. Their rights-based demands, on the other hand, emphasised their civil rights and duty to protect the rivers from the arbitrary use of power by political and economic elites. In this case, they insisted to be viewed as rights-bearing citizens not only by local authorities but also by their

[10] The resulting ambivalence of the modern rule of law in the context of Kosovo is part of larger understanding of how the rule of law and democratisation in the Western Balkan are captured by political elites and institutional characteristics in the region since the war and the subsequent EU integration process, cf. Kmezić, 2020.

legal institutions in Kosovo. Consequently, their use of rights-based discourses reveals how notions of rights and justice are culturally constructed and negotiated by the residents. Based on their everyday experiences of the contradictions between the state's claims to legitimacy and state-sanctioned resource exploitation, they experience themselves as curtailed rights-holders. Stefan, who is getting ready to leave Kosovo, did not participate in the protests but shares the view of not being seen as a rights-bearing citizen by political authorities with the protester. Even so, he frames his frustration over the prevailing forms of unchecked economic and political power in the local government with the recurring expression of defeatism, "How to change the situation here if everyone has been doing wrong for so long.

Demands for Law Enforcement and Accountability

Vedran tells me that their "obligation was strictly to obey the law and to convince the Ministry to take just one step," as he continued to gaze at the black and blue coloured plastic tubes that crawl from the new water reservoir 10-meters downstream from the hydropower plant, into the Bolovanka River. He gestures with his large hands towards the powerhouse and continues, "That is to adopt the decision to stop the project until the court does its job." Mid-2019, the environmental minister Matoshi announced that none of the constructed hydropower plants had valid environmental permits, albeit the local government authorities had granted some construction permits. "The plant at *obe reke* does not have any [construction, operation or environmental permit]," Boris adds to Vedran's claim. "I got the proof for it in the ruling of my lawsuit," he sighs. Because the local government in the municipality issued the construction permit, minister Matoshi publicly claimed that his ministry could not stop their construction by withdrawing the environmental permit they issued.[11]

Faced with corruption and "relational clientelism," their appeal to the rule of law thereby calls upon its democratising function to challenge and control existing unguided power structures that

[11] The lawsuit against the ministry of Environment and the private investment company by the NGO Gaia and NGO GLPS was built on the fact that the ministry violated procedural law on numerous accounts when it issued environmental permits to the company, see GLPS, 2021.

allowed the hydropower plants to be produced. In that vein, Vedran declares that "to stop it [the hydropower operation], the court should take over and investigate everything, who is financing this, who is involved, and then, if they find that everything is clean, they should let them do it. Even though I am still against them." His aspirations towards the functioning rule of law echo Magen and Morlino's (2008, p. 7) conceptualisation of it as "the foundation upon which every other dimension of democratic quality ultimately rests."

However, in the absence of any responsibility for wrongfully issuing permits to the private investor at both governance levels, as the Ministry of Environment also violated procedural law in issuing several permits, the construction of the four plants went ahead. Three plants continue to operate today despite needing valid operational and environmental permits (Interview Kadri). Vedran's main hope is that the law on protected zones will eventually provide them with some form of justice: "Even though nobody in the government, the current minister Liburn Aliu or any other minister, does want that, I think we will live to see the dams that collect water being taken down because the built infrastructure of the plants violated the law on environmental protection in the national park."

Dunja, on the contrary, tells me that the hydropower plants "are here to stay." Not unlike Novak, she thinks there is no tangible resolution to the water issues resulting from the hydropower development at this point. To her, "it is all about politics here, and the municipality is complicit in the hydropower development," implying that as long as incumbent politicians at the municipal authority remain in power, there will not be any "happy ending to this story," as my translator once said. These appeals to the rule of law are not only embedded in the lived reality of relational clientelism and the absence of functioning democratic processes, but also suggestive of the malfunctioning of its basic principle; access to justice.

Justice Delayed

Boris filed his lawsuit in 2020 after the police dispersed the last bastion of protestors to enable the construction company to install the final stretch of pipes. With the help of the local police, excavators broke through the crowd to cross the property his family had lived on for over two generations. In the meantime, he had been summoned to the basic court several times. Each time, he was told that his hearing was postponed. To Boris, it is clear that "the judge is corrupt, and he cannot hold the trial because he sees my lawsuit is right."

On the other hand, Vedran offers a different explanation, arguing that the "judge might not be corrupted but afraid of the consequences of his ruling against the system." What unites their reactions is their understanding that they are facing "a larger political-economic assemblage." (Kurtovic, 2022, p. 2) Like in other cases of illegal hydropower development in the region, renewable energy is a "rent-generating sector" (Aurrial & Straub, 2006) and gives rise to diverse alliances between political officials, parties, private businessmen, individual residents, law enforcement, and the judiciary. In contrast to the desires of "the honest people," as Vedran would describe the protesters, they are conceived of as perpetuating their "individual interest" from illegal benefits.

These various interwoven forms of institutional neglect and violence turned the remaining protesters towards ad hoc collaborations with other political and civil society actors from Kosovo. It also encouraged individuals to liaison with national advocacy coalitions in Pristina that initiated a country-wide petition to halt the ongoing hydropower development across Kosovo. Represented by two NGOs from Kosovo, local residents filed a lawsuit against the water permits issued to the private investment company by the subdivision of special planning of the Ministry of Environment.

Their court case was filed in 2021 against the Ministry of Environment for violating procedural law when it issued water permits and extensions for one of the hydropower plants in Štrpce and against the private investor for violating the law on public participation and causing accumulated damage due to the prolonged construction processes (Interview Dion). The initial ruling of the high court confirmed that the hydropower plants were not serving the public interest and that every issued

permit should be suspended, but the final verdict is still outstanding. For the legal NGO, "this case should have served as a legal precedent for stopping all the other cases in the country," hitherto their engagement was not only enabled by specific funding of their legal centre but driven by their focus on "strategic litigation" to foster reforms in Kosovo's legal framework (Interview Dion). While legitimate in its pursuit, the underlying logic of the lawsuit did not address the ongoing material impacts of the hydropower plants in everyday life in Štrpce and the prevailing calls for environmental justice.

Much like in other countries in the region, these forms of alliances are nonetheless key in fighting the hydropower plants in the legal realm when other legal venues or informal relationships have been exhausted while the impacts of the hydropower plants continue to accumulate. In April 2023, a section of the pipe in Donja Bitinja/Bitia e Poshtme/Bitia e Poshtme, channelling parts of Lepenc to the hydropower power Viche, erupted. Watching the footage of the rupturing water pipe in Donja Bitinja/Bitia e Poshtme/Bitia e Poshtme from his office in Pristina, Dion told me the sight of it made him feel uneasy because "things are going on as they were before the filing of the lawsuits."

Justice beyond the Law

Finally, residents imbue the river with a significant agency that traverses the rule of law to instigate social change. Regardless of changes in the local and national political landscape, the failed promises by incumbent politicians and lengthy legal processes recalibrate expectations towards the democratic function of the rule of law. Against this backdrop, interviewees imbue the mountain river currents with more leeway to undo the hydropower development. While legalism remains central to the argumentation of protesters that I interviewed, the rivers 'force to break apart the hydroelectric infrastructure equally emerged as an anticipated solution to the enclosure of the rivers. This vision of extra legal justice emerged at the crossroads of a strong sense of revenge for the reckless pursuit of capitalist interest and the feeling of defeatism. So be it that the "river remembers," as a retired resident declared to me in a *Kafana* following the explosion of a segment of the water main that channels

Lepenc River to the HPP *Vicha* in the village of Donja Bitinja/Bitia e Poshtme/Bitia e Poshtme, and that it "will not forgive those whose economic interest was prioritised at the cost of local livelihoods and the non-human living beings in their home called Šar mountain." The memory of the last flood in 1979 that ripped through public infrastructure and tore down houses in Štrpce surfaced in other interviews as well and inserted hope into their lamentations about undoing political influence on the judiciary to eventually deliver justice and accountability "of individuals or gangs of criminals" at the local and national government. For example, another interviewee astutely assured me, "Nature will strike back and that through a storm, things will get broken." Hope is therefore carried forward by the river's entangled forces with its environment, as it takes out all the infrastructure of the hydropower plants and evil in their community.

Finally, due to the overwhelming feeling that Kosovo's legal apparatus is difficult to change, if not hostile towards them, the river's agency to take care of itself holds an even stronger position. Aron, a business owner in town, turned around the interview roles when I asked him about the solution to the ongoing consequences of the hydropower development. "There is no justice for us because we are too small, but we have this prophecy that there will be a flood (…). Have you not heard of it?" The river is therefore envisioned to salvage itself and its grievances over time in the absence of justice by the law. Liridon similarly ended our interview by saying that in the end, "Lepenc is Lepenc; it does its own thing."

Conclusion

My research indicates that citizens 'protests against the hydropower development in the municipality of Štrpce, Republic of Kosovo, from 2018 until 2020 seriously challenged their deep-seated power relations with political and economic elites despite falling short of stopping the construction of the plants. Additionally, residents 'place-based identities motivated their protests against water enclosure, thereby co-constructing a narrative of belonging to the river and its landscapes that challenges dominant ethno-national discourses of who belongs to the territory of Kosovo.

Relying mainly on urban citizen scholarship and anthropology of infrastructure to conceptually grasp these protests, I argue that their collective action against the small hydropower plants in the municipality acts as a form of "insurgent citizenship" (Holston, 2008) that seeks to reformulate the existing forms of differential access to rights and public services among the inhabitants in the municipality. As Anand rightly points out, citizenship can be "claimed through formal practices of voting, everyday performances of social belonging, and also through demands for the resources of states - water services, schools, and health care" (Anand, 2017, p. 8). Residents ' politicisation of the river enclosure by private capital and subsequent opposition to the small hydropower plants target Kosovo's corrupt and oppressive post-war political system. Additionally, unpacking the intersecting forms of differentiated citizenship in the municipality of Štrpce reveals that not only do the parallel citizenship regimes in Kosovo as well as the parallel Serb administration produce differential access to public services and rights, but so does the municipality's parallel water governance and decaying water infrastructure.

Finally, inhabitants 'contemporary appeals to a functioning rule of law serve as a broader call for democratic accountability by public institutions (Magen & Morlina, 2008). As demonstrated by their demands for the rule of law and accountability of political authorities, advocating for the implementation of laws on environmental protection and continuing their fights through civil law court cases represents a means for fostering a fairer society and a legal framework that considers them as rights-bearing people. At the same time, given the overwhelming feeling that Kosovo's legal apparatus is difficult to change and compromised by undue political interference, the river's agency to enact justice holds an equally prominent position in residents 'calls for justice.

My observations and conclusion might be an exciting starting point to explore further how "water is a substance that has a unique power to evoke passions, attachments, and a sense of connection and belonging which enrols bodies in new socialites, alliances, and politics in unpredictable ways" (Watson, 2019, p. 135) in relation to the literature on space, place and ethnic identity construction in Kosovo (cf. Kostovicova, 2005). Alternatively, based on more extensive

empirical research, further ethnographic studies may apply a socio-material assemblages' approach to why and how residents negotiate their disconnection from public infrastructures with those that manage against the wider structural backdrop of the particular facilities or services. In particular, I am thinking with Anand's "hydraulic citizenship" (2017), who considers water infrastructure as a "social-material assemblage" as it mediates diverse and unstable relationships between the state, citizens, infrastructure, and its materiality while being renegotiated through informal connections to water infrastructure (Anand, 2017, p. 8).

This approach may be equally fruitful in studying how members of Romani communities devise connecting strategies and means to access water despite political and legal exclusion from basic infrastructure networks. Focusing on their agency amidst oppressive structural and systemic forces of racism, or economic marginalisation, calls for an engagement with infrastructural abjection and citizenship practices as they emerge from a "dialectical process produced out of deeply situated discursive relations and material practices (…) and overlapping histories" (Anand, 2017, p. 490). In this case, this would necessitate a critical engagement with existing scholarship on how culture has been reified as a means of survival (Ladányi & Szelényi, 2006) or its critiques claiming that Roma can alleviate themselves from poverty within neoliberal market economies (Stewart, 2000, 2002), without perpetuating the radicalisation of poverty.

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