Religion and the politics of identity in Kosovo
Duijzings, G.H.J.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
English Summary

Kosovo is an area which has become known by now as an example of a conflict-ridden and segregated society, where ethnic divisions are reinforced by the religious divide between the Christian Orthodox Serbs and the (mainly) Muslim Albanians. This rift is usually perceived as a hard and fast line of division, but—as I try to show—the area has also a history of coexistence, with considerable movement across ethno-religious barriers, through social and economic ties, cultural diffusion, religious exchange and conversion. Instead of two ‘ethnic’ societies, I prefer to speak here of one single frontier society, in which periods of confrontation have alternated with periods of intense contact and co-operation.

The tension between conflict and symbiosis is at the core of this study, which contains seven case studies about ethnic and religious groups living in the region (Albanians, Serbs, Croats, and Gypsies) and the religious dimension in their efforts to construct or transform their identities. The chapters that are included in this dissertation can be read separately, as they describe different, usually local, arenas and contexts; the emphasis is on the historical and ethnographic detail. All chapters deal, however, with themes that are interconnected: they revolve upon the ways identities are formed and transformed, as a result of wider political developments, and how religion and ritual help, on the one hand, in establishing forms of community across ethno-religious boundaries, and on the other hand, in creating divisions, drawing borders and delineating (ethnic) identities. In spite of the variety, all chapters share certain theoretical assumptions which are sketched out in the introduction. Although the focus is on Kosovo, the scope is much wider, covering developments in Croatia, Bosnia, Albania, Macedonia, and Serbia as well.

Most of all, I try to challenge the idea that ethnic and religious identities in Kosovo are clear-cut and fixed. When we take a long-term perspective, what is most striking is that identity, at least at the local (or micro) level, has been full of ambiguities, caused by processes of religious conversion, dissimulation of identity, and other forms of manipulation, which are seen as important survival strategies in conditions of endemic violence and existential insecurity. People have changed their ethnic identity or converted to another religion, without completely abandoning the cultural legacies of previous identities. In addition, identity is seen as a multifarious phenomenon, subsisting in a range of categories (religion, gender, kinship, class, the urban versus rural dichotomy) that do not necessarily correspond to the modern ‘national’ or ‘ethnic’ ones.

In the past, the centers of political and religious power have tried to overcome the ‘hybrid’ and ‘multi-faceted’ nature of identity in peripheral areas like Kosovo, with or without violent means and mostly with varying and limited success. Periods of intensified homogenization, in which political and religious regimes have tried to gain control over territories and unruly populations, often with violent means, have alternated with other periods in which boundaries—the territorial ones as well as the cognitive ones—seemed to fade. The nationalist wars in the former Yugoslavia have again pushed the complexities and ambiguities of identity into the background, erasing elements of mixture and ‘pollution’ that are threatening the newly established national states, forging single and unambiguous identities out of a population that is of diverse origins, and substituting, at least for the time being, ethnic and national categories for all others.