



## Individual Advanced Research Opportunities Program

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### **Kosova Immemorial: Monumental Representations of History and Identity in Kosovo**

*A television host asks his sociologist guest about the uncertain future. The expert retorts: "Ah, the future. We can foresee that with total accuracy. It's the past that we have trouble predicting."<sup>1</sup>*

While this joke became popular in former Eastern Bloc countries during the Glasnost period, its punch line transcends this context and in many ways describes the process at work today in Kosovo.<sup>2</sup> As historian John Gillis explains, "we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities."<sup>3</sup> As the Kosovo example will illustrate, this tendency becomes more pronounced at the end of an era, be that ending perceived or actual, when events have occurred that effectively seal off, in thought and in action, one period of time from the present moment. With the former period now designated as "the past," it is now subject to the workings of memory. Likewise, as historian Claudia Koonz

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<sup>1</sup> Claudia Koonz, "Between Memory and Oblivion: Concentration Camps in German Memory," in John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> Although the Albanian majority population of the area uses "Kosova," "Kosovo" will be used throughout the paper for simplicity's sake.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Gillis, "Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship," in John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 3.

has observed, when a society experiences extreme changes that have undermined its social and political orders, as did inhabitants of Kosovo, its *need* to restructure the past is as great as its *desire* to set its future agenda.<sup>4</sup> At this point after the War in Kosovo, inhabitants are not able to choose their history, but now they *are* in a position to choose what they memorialize and how they go about it, deciding what, of their most recent history, will be passed on.<sup>5</sup> With commemorative acts, the inhabitants of Kosovo are now making sense of the events that have recently transpired by representing them in a certain way. One must bear in mind, however, that representation does not stop at simply being a *product* of memory, for it also continually actively *constructs* memory, and thus identity, as well. Through newly built monuments and memorials, inhabitants of Kosovo are not only producing images of what they remember but they and those to follow will draw their group identity from such images as well. In that sense then, to see a memory chosen and frozen in the shape of a newly erected monument is to get a glimpse of the emerging identity of the inhabitants of the new Kosovo. This is the phenomenon that psychologist Nico Frijda calls “appropriating the past.”<sup>6</sup> As Frijda explains, in appropriating the past, inhabitants of Kosovo are shaping “the sense that *this* is the group to which one belongs, with those properties, this history, and this fate, with the potential it had and it may still have and show in the future.” With this in mind, the aim of my research was to scrutinize the visual state of public space in Kosovo today in order to actually discover how inhabitants of Kosovo understand themselves. In short, to get a better sense of the social attitudes, longings, convictions, desires and future possibilities of the inhabitants of Kosovo one must look at what it is they are commemorating and what that commemoration looks like.

Commemorations such as monuments and memorials preserve notions of the past in physical surroundings, serving as the most widely accessible and blatant provocations of particular reflections and memories. It is through individuals’ interactions with such common visual representations that public memory emerges, and it is out of this public memory that a system of beliefs governing societal organization and structures of power emerge. In this sense, “memory” as a concept cannot be understood merely as a particular perspective of past events, but it must be deconstructed and understood as both a private, mental and physiological process *and* a public field for political control, struggle and debate. It is in this confluence of the public and private experience of memory that one can see the pertinence of considering the role of visual commemoration in the construction of national identity.

Because of the current political structure in Kosovo, the images occupying its public space require further investigation. As in all situations, to understand a monument or memorial fully, one must take into account why it was erected and who was responsible for its erection. In other situations, it proves easier to draw the line between what historian John Bodnar calls “official” and “vernacular” memory, or in other words, the messages coming from the institutionalized power and the messages coming from the will of the people.<sup>7</sup> Making such a distinction points out who has control of the story being told, and the monument or memorial is put into context, for it is logical to assume

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<sup>4</sup> Koonz, “Between Memory and Oblivion,” p. 258.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia: Spanish Civil War Commemoration in America*, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005), p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia*, p. 50.

that different entities would have different motivations, and thus would tend to put forth interpretations of the past that would best suit their own agendas. The competition between these differing visions of history is heightened by the fact that in most situations, there are usually a limited number of places, all with varying degrees of visibility, that such monuments and memorials can actually be placed and still maintain legitimacy within the culture at large. As a result of all of these considerations, official memory and vernacular memory will certainly manifest differently, with the version of history being backed by institutionalized power obviously at an advantage in utilizing public space.

In Kosovo, however, because institutionalized power is in transition, there is no clear definition of who has ownership of the new national history, or more importantly, of what that new national history consists. Within the spectrum of official and vernacular memory, the current power structure creates three different main entities, with three different agendas and thus three different ways of depicting history, all competing for the collective memory of the inhabitants of Kosovo. Those entities are the international community, tangibly represented in Kosovo by the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Kosovo Force (KFOR), putting forth the official memory, the Assembly of Kosovo and its political various groups, lying in some awkward position between the official and the vernacular memories, and the inhabitants of Kosovo, reported at 92% Albanian and 8% other ethnicities, exerting the vernacular memory.<sup>8</sup>

Beginning with the international community, the entity from which institutionalized power in Kosovo receives its international legitimacy, it is first necessary to specify the agenda bodies such as UNMIK, OSCE and KFOR must have and how that affects the public space of Kosovo. As representatives of the international community these organizations emblemize the investment the international community has made in ensuring peace and equality in Kosovo. Thus, any visual expression of Kosovo's recent history that UNMIK, OSCE and KFOR have influence on will portray just that: peace and equality. Their hand in shaping the space is seen both through UNMIK's influence on the policies put forth by the Assembly of Kosovo, and through KFOR's protection of Serbian monuments, memorials and Orthodox Churches. Through endeavors of protecting Serbian sites such as the monument to the 1389 Battle of Kosovo Polje, in keeping with the accustomed role of official memory, one notes an interest in promoting unity and peace that is transcendent of regional and local loyalties. One glance at the KFOR soldiers sitting next to the barbed wire that surrounds the site, however, indicates that this official memory is a forced memory.<sup>9</sup> The existence of this simple, stone column with an inscription in Cyrillic, in Serbo-Croatian, commemorating what Serbs understand as their "great sacrifice" for Christian Europe at a battle against Muslim Ottomans in 1389, includes in the new Kosovo a group in the newly emerging identity that the majority of the current Albanian inhabitants do not want included. Its existence is articulating a presence that would suit Albanian interests better if it were an absence.

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<sup>8</sup> "Kosovo in Figures 2006," Statistical Office of Kosovo, <[www.ks-gov.net/esk.main.htm](http://www.ks-gov.net/esk.main.htm)>. In the publication "Kosovo in Figures 2005," the ethnic composition of Kosovo was noted to be 88% Albanian, 7% Serbian and 5% other ethnicities, but in the most recent publication, the percentage of the population made up by Serbians was unspecified.

<sup>9</sup> Public Memory, Dir. Amy Gerber, Lisa Mullins, Video, Flatcoat Films Cinema Guild, 2003.

This forced memory is forcing them to admit a shared history. It sends the message that even though there are not as many Serbs in the area today, there *were* more before, at least enough to warrant a monument in their Slavic language and script. The Serbs themselves might be increasingly more absent from the physical place, but the part they once played in Kosovo's history will remain very present as long as this visual aspect of that part remains in Kosovo's public space and thus the public memory of those who live there. By allowing signs of Serbian existence like this monument to still stand, the international official memory is committing the inhabitants of Kosovo to a history, and thus an identity, that the Serbs play a role in. Whether the monument is portraying specific information about the Serbs that were there, or simply standing as a testament to the reality that Serbs, either in 1389 fighting the Ottomans or in 1989 under Milošević, were in fact once there, the existence of this monument does not depict history in a way that the Albanian majority of Kosovo wants to remember it. On a literal level, what the monument portrays goes against any conception of history that is convenient for their agenda of legitimizing their claim to the area. What is perhaps more dangerous, however, is that the presence of this monument and other signs of Serbian life in Kosovo actually juxtaposes with the increasing absence of Serbs themselves, standing as a suggestion of the atrocities Albanians, in turn, committed against Serbs. On a latent level then, this monument could be hated by Albanians not because it forces them to remember the Serbs and what they did to Albanians, but because it memorializes their own crimes against Serbs.

Perhaps the greatest indication, however, that the official memory being put forth by the international community is a forced memory, is the certainty achieved through experience and through intuition that places such as the memorial for the 1389 Battle of Kosovo Polje would cease to exist were they not under KFOR protection. In terms of experience stands the destruction of statues of medieval Serbian rulers by Albanians as soon as NATO troops had made the area safe enough for them to do so.<sup>10</sup> According to local Serbs, the memorial to the Battle of Kosovo Polje itself was recently vandalized. Some Serbs say the vandalism took place when KFOR troops had stopped guarding it for a period, while others claim that the vandalism was carried out in the presence of KFOR troops. Whether or not such accounts about the vandalism of the monument are accurate, such accusations nevertheless demonstrate a fear of such occurrences among local Serbs. One Serbian man claims no personal knowledge of such vandalism, but is quite certain that the monument will be destroyed as soon as Kosovo becomes independent.<sup>11</sup> In terms of representation, such fears are well-founded, for out of intuition it is known, as author Tim Judah correctly states, that there is more to destroying each others' monuments than nationalist driven vandalism.<sup>12</sup> The destruction is an attempt to control history, for within history lies the control of the future, and it is at this point of destruction where the vernacular memory confronts the official memory. In a process described by German historian Winfried Speitkamp as sort of "symbolic voodoo murder" on those in power, the destruction of Serbian memorials by Albanians signifies a change in the political tides.<sup>13</sup> By destroying Serbian monuments, Albanians are not only rejecting but also erasing the Serbian interpretation of history. Symbolically,

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<sup>10</sup> Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) pp. 1-2.

<sup>11</sup> Saša Jovanov, Personal Interview, 2 August 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Judah, pp. 1-2.

<sup>13</sup> Winfried Speitkamp, *Denkmalsturz: zur Konfliktgeschichte Politischer Symbolik*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1997), p. 5.

it is a process of liberation, for they are freeing themselves from a past and a tradition constructed and put forth by and thus beneficial to Serbs. While no one can say definitively what will happen to sites such as the memorial for the Battle at Kosovo Polje in 1389, it seems logical that the possibilities could range from outright demolition to simple abandonment and neglect. Either possibility, however, speaks of the inevitability that such monuments, and such interpretations of history, will eventually be wiped from public memory, and hence cease to play a role in the emerging identity of the inhabitants of Kosovo.

An extension of the workings of the official memory being put forth by the international community is seen in how public space is controlled by the Assembly of Kosovo, the inhabitants' democratic legislative body. Simply by reading the laws passed by the Assembly, one gains a sense of this body's synchronicity with the intentions of UNMIK, for each is preceded by the statement that "[t]his law is applicable together with the UNMIK Regulation number..."<sup>14</sup> With this kind of relationship between the two bodies, it comes as no surprise that the Assembly's approach to issues of public space in Kosovo, seen through laws passed on construction, public procurement, spatial planning and the protection of cultural monuments, are often supporting if not simply mirroring attributes of the official memory being shaped by the international community's efforts. Such support is most clearly seen in the language used in laws about public space, such as in Law number 2003/14 on Spatial Planning, which claims it is "meant to promote an inclusive and participatory process of formulating development strategies and physical plans, which includes all stake holders and communities without discrimination."<sup>15</sup>

Because of its direct connection to the inhabitants of Kosovo, however, the Assembly's contribution to the public memory cannot be classified entirely as official. Although much of its members' decisions are influenced by higher levels of institutionalized power, as representatives of the inhabitants of Kosovo and as inhabitants themselves, these decisions have a kind of tie to the vernacular memory as well. Their position in shaping this memory is thus compounded in that their decisions bear a cultural legitimacy not present in the official memory being forged by outside forces. Perhaps this ambiguous position between the official and the vernacular is better understood in terms of the Assembly's presumed motives. On one hand, the Assembly's motive of making a case to the international community for independence makes it necessary that they still play by the international community's rules. The understanding of events that presents itself as most beneficial to the Assembly for this end then is one that appeals to the international community with universal or noble ideals, but that also legitimizes their claim to independence. On the other hand, the Assembly's desire for legitimacy in the eyes of its own people requires that they somehow construct and maintain their own connection to the events of the war as the Albanians in Kosovo understand them. In looking at the monuments that exist in this confluence of the official and the vernacular, an argument reminiscent of the right to self determination emerges.

Such examples include statues of Mother Teresa, placed in cities like Priština/Prishtinë, Mitrovica/Mitrovicë, and Klina/Klinë after the war. Through these images of Mother Teresa, the inhabitants are in a sense recovering something that is missing from them,

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<sup>14</sup> "Latest Laws Approved by the Assembly of Kosovo," Assembly of Kosovo, <[www.assemblyofkosovo.org](http://www.assemblyofkosovo.org)>.

<sup>15</sup> "Law Number 2003/14 on Spatial Planning," Assembly of Kosovo, <[www.assemblyofkosovo.org](http://www.assemblyofkosovo.org)>.

for in these images, the most accessible message is one of peace. It is an image and a message that most people, no matter who they are, are comfortable with or can relate to. The universal inclusiveness of such images thus remains congruent with the international community's drive for a pluralistic identity for Kosovo. In answering the question as to why inhabitants of Kosovo would choose Mother Teresa as their messenger of peace, however, the exclusive effect such statues have on a public conception of identity becomes apparent. Mother Teresa was Albanian, not Serbian, and she was Catholic, not Orthodox, so while her image stands first and foremost as an emblem of peace, it also stands as a badge of the Albanian ethnic standard shaping the conception of what it means to be an inhabitant of Kosovo.

Another seemingly benign memorialized figure takes the massive shape, next to the new Kosovo Government Tower in downtown Priština/Prishtinë, of Skënderbeg, the great Albanian national hero who turned against the Turks in a battle in 1443. Crafted in and copied exactly from the Skënderbeg monument in the city of Kruja, Albania, when this monument was moved to Priština/Prishtinë after the war, Albanians from all around lined the road from the Albanian border of Kosovo to Priština/Prishtinë, welcoming the statue to its new home and paying tribute to the man it represented.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps it is this figure's distance from the most current events that shield the international community from viewing it as provocative, for the figure's ancient dress and grand demeanor exude that its presence has more to do with history than with politics. As previously discussed, however, because of the workings of memory and identity, history and politics are indelibly intertwined, and thus the presence of this monument is inevitably political. While the monument's surface message seems to be celebrating courage, honor and loyalty, like the statues of Mother Teresa, this figure also is Albanian, not Serbian, and as if this badge of identity were not enough in itself, he is an historical figure. His historical presence as an Albanian works to champion the Albanian claim to a great history, with no sign of Serbian involvement. His existence puts forth that the Albanians are an historical people and therefore, by the argument of self determination, have the right to have their own state. In this sense, Skënderbeg's presence, like Mother Teresa's, brings something to the inhabitants of Kosovo that seems to have recently been lacking, namely continuity and grounding. With his image occupying public space, the public memory can seize the feeling of continuity that it offers and make it a part of the present in what scholar David Lowenthal calls "the search for a simple and stable past as a refuge from a turbulent and chaotic present."<sup>17</sup>

As the frequency with which these two images are reproduced and distributed suggests, Mother Teresa and Skënderbeg are, in essence, Albanian national icons, simultaneously ensuring through their presence and shaping through their form the future that lies before the inhabitants of Kosovo. As their forms suggest, that future is both inclusive and exclusive. The public memory that these images create is inclusive in that it includes opportunities that the international community is comfortable with, such as not being exclusively Muslim, the religion that most Albanians, in varying stretches of the word, define themselves as being a part of. With Mother Teresa being Catholic and Skënderbeg having fought against the Muslim Ottomans, the fact that a population whose majority describes itself as Muslim selects these two figures as national icons appeals to the international community on a very basic level of tolerance and harmony.

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<sup>16</sup> Migjen Kelmendi, Personal Interview, 13 July 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia*, p. 8.

The public memory that these images create is exclusive in the sense that it forges an exclusively ethnically Albanian identity, and as such, calls for independence from that which is not Albanian, or more plainly, from Serbs. What is necessary to note, however, is that while this conception of identity ideologically closes off any options in the future for being linked to that which is not Albanian, to that which is Serb, it keeps open a future in which Albanians in Kosovo feel linked to other Albanians in other places, such as the country of Albania itself. The fact that Kosovo's capital, Priština/Prishtinë, not simply settled for but heartily welcomed a *copy* of a statue already existing in Albania itself, rather than demanding an original makes the eager acceptance of such a linkage and subordination to the Motherland apparent. Albanian newspaper editor Mijgen Kelmendi believes this monument indicates how "these people eagerly need to be a part of the whole," revealing how "they long to belong."<sup>18</sup>

Although the complexities of transitional government make it impossible to draw a clear line between the forces behind official versus vernacular memory, as official memory gives way fully to vernacular memory, even more possibilities, for the present and for the future, manifest in visual form. While Serbian monuments remain guarded and statues of Mother Teresa are erected, the shape of Kosovo's public landscape has been mostly controlled by grass roots initiatives from the people. As such, one can see how by necessity, the public identity that emerges from such initiatives is tied more directly with the trauma just recently experienced in Kosovo, thus exhibiting an understanding of history that goes beyond ethnic lines and is distinctly *Kosovar* Albanian. While it cannot be denied that many of these war-torn people's motives of forging a certain understanding of events have to do with the necessity of closure, the visual manifestation of that closure can also be seen as a rebuttal to Serbian claims, before and during the war, that, compared to the telling number of Serbian Orthodox churches and burial sites, Kosovo contained no visual indications of an historic existence of Albanians. Now, through the existence of several grotesque civilian burial sites such as those seen at Vlačica/Llashticë and Makovac/Makovc, the Albanian claim to these areas cannot be disputed, for whether a valid claim existed before or not, seeing these graves suggest that these grounds have now been consecrated with their blood. The very prominent visual realization of these graves works on multiple levels, for while their form offers comfort to those who have lost and their permanence offers proof to Serbs of a rightful claim to the land, their mere presence conveys to all who see them the atrocities suffered by the Albanians at the hands of the Serbs, making a convincing case to the international community for the necessity of Albanians' freedom from such suffering. Quite simply, the presence of such elaborate graves, juxtaposed against the virtual absence of a Serbian equivalent, show that it was the Albanians that were the victims, making observers sympathetic to their plight. Furthermore, on a more subtle level, such visual representations work to legitimize any violence that might have occurred on their part as an active resistance of self defense and retaliation.

The space that these monumental forms fill in the Albanian Kosovar comprehension of their most recent history is best understood by looking at the visual realization of the graves themselves. As can be clearly seen on the civilian graves in Vlačica/Llashticë, the word "MARTIR!" precedes each person's name and each headstone is crowned with

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<sup>18</sup> Migjen Kelmendi, "How come two identical statues appeared in the two different cities of the Balkans," Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center, <<http://platformgaranti.blogspot.com/2004/01/mijgen-kelmendi-south-east.html>>.

the Albanian state symbol of a black double-headed eagle on a bright red background. Through this representation, all of these people, from the 65 year old on one end of the row to the 3 month old on the other, are elevated from merely having been civilian casualties to having died a martyr's sacrificial death. Such religious visual language is seen even more strongly in the gravesite at Makovac/Makovc, where the terraced hillside arranges the bodies of the dead in a pyramid-like structure which ascends into altar-like centerpiece, where all the names of those sacrificed have been emblazoned. These burial sites are religious shrines, not of the Christian or Muslim sort, but rather of the religion Albanian poet Pashko Vasa calls Albanianism.<sup>19</sup> By portraying these people as martyrs of Albanianism, such graves ascribe the deaths of these civilians to a national significance. They have not just died in senseless acts of violence; they have died for a cause, for the Albanian nation.

This sense of martyrdom is taken to an even greater extent with the roadside commemoration of Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) fighters. While it seems that a degree of legitimacy might be lost from the messages of these monuments since they are along remote roads rather than in the center of Priština/Prishtinë, their pervasiveness, both in number and in blatant visibility, combat any sense that they might not be representations of mainstream sentiment. Whether these structures are actual graves or simply memorials, like the civilians, these individuals are "MARTIRET." Also like the graves of many of the civilians, this word is usually accompanied by an etched image of the dead person's face. As with the civilians, such a representation of these people and their deaths conveys that these fighters did not just die, but were sacrificed for a greater Albanian cause. From the emotional standpoint of these individuals' families and friends, such a representation gives the loss of their loved ones' lives purpose, acting as closure and consolation. From the strategic standpoint of the greater Cause, the fact that these individuals fought and lost their lives for it lends legitimacy and importance to it. The transmission of this symbiotic relationship is made even more effective by presenting to observers the human faces of the fallen. Seeing these faces not only keeps the message of the monument distinctly Albanian through inclusions like national Albanian caps, but it also makes the loss, and the message of the monument, even heavier by reminding observers that these slabs of granite are meant to represent human beings. While most of these memorials, composed of large granite slabs, invoke the classical language of monuments, imparting on the observer a sense of unmoving permanence in shrine-like form, they also take on a distinctly Albanian form, as seen most clearly in one roadside monument in the shape of a black eagle, embracing with its protective wings its own core, which is made up of the faces of fallen KLA fighters.

To see the ultimate visual expression of this prevailing vernacular memory, one must consider the Adem Jashari Memorial Complex in Prekaz. At this site in March of 1998, Serbian police laid siege to the family compound of KLA Commander Adem Jashari, killing 53 Albanians, with the majority of them being Jasharis. Today, the local municipal board, with the help of funds from locals, the Assembly of Kosovo and Albanian Diaspora abroad, has erected scaffolding and preserved the house in its post-siege condition as part of a "Memorial Complex" for the "massacred" family and their "legendary commander."<sup>20</sup> From the scaffolding hangs a picture of the "arch-hero"

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<sup>19</sup> Judah, *Kosovo*, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Emin Halimi, Ajnishahe Shala, *The Jasharis: the Story of a Resistance*, (Skenderaj, Kosovo: Rilindja, 2000), pp. 8-36.

himself, dressed in camouflage with a gun at his side.<sup>21</sup> It is the same image that, despite UNMIK's protests, hovers over Priština/Prishtinë atop the sports complex in the center of the city. High above Aden Jashari waves the Albanian flag, and in the distant fields that receive his gaze lie the bodies of his friends and family killed in the "massacre." To reach the complex one travels down a well kept, newly paved road, complete with street lamps. At the site itself visitors peruse a small, makeshift gift shop with books in both Albanian and poorly translated English about this specific site, the war, and Albanian history in general. Just outside the gift shop visitors line up to sign a massive guestbook and write their own personal messages. Upon my own visit to this place, another visitor said to me, "I brought my sons here last summer; it is a pilgrimage every Albanian must make." Walking around the compound, one notices that there are no plaques and no explanations. All that is in sight, save the distant burial grounds, is the picture of Adem Jashari with an accompanying inscription that reads "he is alive," the Albanian flag, and the ruined house covered in scaffolding. In a sense, the simplicity of the site not only assumes that visitors must already know of the great event that occurred there, but it suggests that if the story were confined by words on a plaque, the true meaning of the momentous sacrifice might be diminished, for what could be more powerful than seeing the site of such weightiness with one's own eyes? As one leaves the compound and approaches the burial site, two KLA fighters come Kosovo Protection Corps officers in red formal uniforms emerge from a green hut and stand in a salute and the entrance to the graves. At the foot of each grave stands a wooden marker, and on each grave rests a mound of plastic flowers and wreaths. With 2 Albanian flags flying overhead and the KLA symbol and a message of glory looming behind the graves, this portion of the "Adem Jashari Memorial Complex," like the preserved compound, demands a sort of veneration through its simplicity.

When asking what kind of history monuments such as these present to the world and carry into the future, it is of no surprise that it is one quite beneficial and praising of the Albanian ethnic standard, much like the monuments commissioned and maintained by the Assembly of Kosovo. The difference, however, is that the Albanian identity being presented in these monuments is not being drawn from distant world figures or fifteenth century history, but rather from the most recent experiences of the inhabitants of Kosovo. These monuments are making a specific understanding of the most recent events a pivotal part of the identity of Kosovo's inhabitants. By celebrating death, the monuments of the vernacular memory suggest that, if it was not already before, the soil of Kosovo is newly consecrated with the blood of Albanians. By suggesting that the current state of the nation draws its strength from these great deeds, these monuments can also be seen not just as exclusive of Serbs by not representing them, but as actively anti-Serbian since it was fighting against the Serbs that is being sanctified. These monuments also differ from those produced within the space between the official and the vernacular in that their visual manifestations, as well as their messages, are very violent. The architecture itself is not very warm or soft, but rather harsh, cold and unmoving. In many ways, this aesthetic reflects the very real harshness of suffering and loss experienced by the groups producing these monuments, which are in most cases local townspeople and family members. The austere depiction of such suffering, in turn, makes a stirring plea to the international community, using discomfort as a mobilizing force. At the same time, however, this aesthetic is almost fetishized, being reproduced throughout the countryside with a kind of cultish, religious allegiance to violence and

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<sup>21</sup> Halimi, Shala, *The Jasharis*, p. 20.

death. What is more, even greater implications for the endurance of this concept of history and identity arise when their permanence is almost ensured by being tied to markers of actual burial grounds. So in short, from these monuments is formed a durable identity based not just on being Albanian, but on violence and on active struggle against Serbs.

While the resulting public memory must emerge out of the intersection of all of these varying realms of official and vernacular memory, the pervasiveness of memorials in the public space of Kosovo putting forth a version of history advantageous to the Albanian people at large indicates the power of the vernacular over the official in the current political power structure. Many of these representations were put in place very shortly after the war, when there was no system in place to regulate spatial planning. Now that these representations are in place, to question them or to suggest their removal is to stand against the Albanian cause, against the martyred, newly liberated nation. As such, even locals who might disagree with their message tend to remain silent. The statue of KLA commander Zahir Pajaziti in the center of Priština/Prishtinë, next to the Grand Hotel, is an example of this. This statue occupies one of the most prime positions in downtown Priština/Prishtinë and was put there not by the Kosovo Assembly and not with the permission of the international community, but by the “Association of Families of Martyrs of the KLA,” immediately after the war, when no structure was in place to regulate such acts.<sup>22</sup> While some local Albanians in private express dismay at the statue’s presence, they choose not to voice their concerns in public, either because they feel their opinion would not make a difference or because they believe they will be accused of being anti-Albanian. One Albanian man who did voice his opinion, told me others accused him of being paid by Serbs to say such things.

Adem Jashari’s image hovering over Priština/Prishtinë suggests that the international community’s ability to control such representation has been similarly stunted, illustrating in its persistent existence the international community’s ultimate failure to shape public memory. For obvious reasons of not wanting to show favoritism to ethnic Albanians, not wanting to alienate the remaining small number of Serb inhabitants, and not wanting to uphold violent resistance as a standard, the international community in Priština/Prishtinë has ordered that this image be taken down on more than one occasion. Its enduring glow proves these attempts have failed. Another means by which vernacular memory seems to trump official memory can be seen in the sheer number of locally erected KLA memorials that exist compared to the low survival rate of anything Serbian, from Orthodox churches to simple statues. Finally, it is the multitudes of visitors and “pilgrims” to the Adem Jashari Memorial Complex, writing messages about “the light of Albanian renewal” and decorating the multitudes of graves with plastic flowers and wreaths, that demonstrate the victory vernacular memory has had over official memory.<sup>23</sup> Whether or not the international organizations on the ground could have done more to prevent such representations from becoming so pervasive and taking such a great hold of the population is debatable. As it stands, however, the international community’s presence, in terms of visual representation and identity construction, has not fostered a civic, inclusive, supra-ethnic identity, but has in effect provided the peace and stability necessary for Albanians to regroup and set to work, with newer, stronger material no less, on a nation-building project based exclusively on ethnicity.

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<sup>22</sup> In Albanian, “Shoqata e Familjeve të Dëshmorëve të UÇK-së.”

<sup>23</sup> Halimi, Shala, *The Jasharis*, p. 5.

As the inhabitants of Kosovo head toward independence, this proves to be the mainstream account of history and the mainstream locus of identity. To describe *this* group, as was proposed as the objective of this paper, is to thus see that it is not Serbian, and not Orthodox, but militantly anti-Serbian and militantly Albanian. When Kosovo is finally Kosova, these KLA monuments will continue to crowd the public landscape and hence the historical landscape and the public memory. The omnipresence of KLA monuments perpetuates a notion that the current state of Kosovo, out of war and on the brink of independence, must be attributed to the sacrifices and toils of the KLA. Furthermore, these monuments demand a kind of reverence for violent activism, conflating violence and active resistance with what it means to be Albanian.

The ability for such representations to have been created, however, has just as much to do with local politicians' actions as it does with the international community's inactions. In an attempt to garner legitimacy for themselves, different political parties, to varying degrees and in different ways, have contributed to the production and propagation of this dominant image of the KLA martyr. Most closely related to the erection of such statues, referred to as "the heroes" by the local population, are the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK). As the two parties that claim to be the successors of the KLA, their approval and support of the construction of monuments to specific KLA fighters from their regions can be seen as an attempt to transfer the legitimacy that the KLA possesses in the eyes of the population to themselves. Through such initiatives, these political parties are attempting to quite literally cement their ties to the KLA and all that the KLA stands for in the eyes of the local population. They do this while holding office, not only by allowing groups to erect such statues, but by actually donating the very spaces in cities and towns for the monuments and if possible, by contributing financially.

Understandably, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), late President Ibrahim Rugova's party, has not launched or supported such initiatives while in office, for by nature of being the party of Rugova, it is clear that the legacy of the KLA is not theirs. In some cases, while in office, the LDK has actively stood against the erection of such monuments. Parim Kosova, curator of the Albanian League of Prizren Museum Complex, remembers in June of 2003, how the Association of the Families of the Martyrs of the KLA tried to erect statues of the "heroes of Prizren," in congruence with the "will of the population," despite the municipality, run by the LDK at the time, refusing to give them permission to do so.<sup>24</sup> According to Kosova, the LDK later lost votes because of this. More recently however, efforts on behalf of the LDK to claim a piece of the war legacy for themselves have been seen, most notably in the erection of the statue of Armed Forces of the Republic of Kosova (FARK) fighter Agim Ramadani in Gnjilane/Gjilan in April of 2005. As an individual, Ramadani was not only a warrior, but is known to the inhabitants of Kosovo as a writer, painter, musician and an intellectual as well. By memorializing this figure, the LDK thus had potential to create a representation differing from the other "heroes" by stressing his peaceful, intellectual merits as well as his sense of duty to his fellow Albanians. In its final manifestation, however, it differed only slightly from the statues raised by the PDK and the AAK, in that Ramadani also holds a book in addition to his gun. In the original mock-up, Ramadani was only armed with a book and a small pistol on his hip, but at the insistence of the municipality, a large

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<sup>24</sup> Parim Kosova, Personal Interview, 28 July 2007.

rifle was added to his figure.<sup>25</sup> This inclusion not only reveals the LDK's motive of wishing to be associated with the powerful war legacy existing among the inhabitants of Kosovo, but it also demonstrates how codified the population's understanding of such representations has already become. In this way, the LDK attempts to present their very own martyr, showing inhabitants of Kosovo that they too played a role in fighting for the Albanian cause. What is ironic in this entire attempt, and what betrays the deceptive nature of representation in general, is that Ramadani was not a member of the LDK, but rather of the National Movement for Liberation of Kosovo (LKCK), a small, marginal and radical party.<sup>26</sup> The insignificance of this detail to the image makers demonstrates just how necessary an association with the war legacy, real or fabricated, has become for political viability in Kosovo.

What may seem most striking about the prevalent role of violence in the Kosovar Albanian identity, from an outsider's perspective, is that it exists simultaneously with the ideals of love and peace championed by images of Mother Teresa. Adem Jashari is also an icon in the religion of Albanianism. In some ways, this amalgamation could be seen as a kind of reflection of the identity shift from Ibrahim Rugova's people of passive resistance to the KLA's people of active resistance that occurred as violence mounted between 1990 and 1999.<sup>27</sup> What is seen now, however, among the understanding of the population, as well as in the efforts of the LDK discussed previously, is not a shift from one opposing campaign to another, but a conflation of the two. In the very same square where Zahir Pajaziti's statue stands now hangs an enormous poster of the late Rugova. When asked about both representations occupying the same space, it does not even occur to locals that one should detect some kind of contradiction. All that matters to Albanian onlookers is that they were both Albanians who fought for their fellow Albanians, with no distinction between violence and passivity and no active reflection on the difference between the two.

Both visual and verbal evidence thus show that this militant Albanian identity has solidified, for in attempts to tap the vernacular memory for their own advantage, politicians from all parties have begun to turn the vernacular into the official, seemingly with disregard for the wises of the international community. By enshrining the vernacular memory as the official memory, the political elites of Kosovo not only receive legitimacy, but further lend it to these representations and understandings of history. They have taken the initial, immediate post-war grievances of the people and solidified them into a national identity. This makes the development of a supra-ethnic, civic mentality virtually impossible, for such an understanding of the identity and qualities of the group one belongs to will continue to dictate Kosovo's future. Through this selective, specific kind of commemoration, a certain understanding of history, events and one's relationship to these things emerges. Roland Barthes would call this the creation of myth through the workings of specific denotations and their connotations.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Fazli Blakçori, Personal Interview, 9 August 2007.

<sup>26</sup> "Kosovo after Haradinaj," Crisis Group Europe Report, # 163, 26 May 2005, <<http://www.globalpolicy.org/security/issues/kosovo1/2005/0526icgreport.pdf>>, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Judah, *Kosovo*, pp. 125-126.

<sup>28</sup> Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, (London: Sage Publications, 1997), pp. 38-39.

So what myth emerges from the visual representations filling the public space of Kosovo today? Simply put, representations in the public space of Kosovo today put forth a myth about violence and independence, suggesting that violence is what will have achieved for them their independence, and as such, that violence and suffering is central to their identity, to what it means to have been an Albanian in Kosovo. The way in which the war in Kosovo actually unfolded, however, proves that this myth is in fact a myth. Furthermore, the fact that the majority of the funds used to create the monuments perpetuating this myth came from Albanian Diaspora, who by and large did not witness the war in Kosovo, suggests once again that this myth is in fact a myth. The independence that Kosovo will most surely receive in the coming years will not have been a direct achievement of KLA violence as the new national myth suggests. NATO forces are the ones who won the war in Kosovo, and to be sure, the international community did not even consider what was going on in Kosovo to be a war until the NATO air strikes began on March of 1999.<sup>29</sup> At the point when the international community decided to step in, the KLA's actions against the Serbs had been greatly deescalated.<sup>30</sup> In essence, the KLA's lack of retaliation juxtaposed against the Serbian offensive was what produced the brutal images necessary to mobilize the international community into action. The fact that the reason for the KLA's lack of retaliation was not a strategic decision but the inability to counter the Serbian forces compounds matters.<sup>31</sup> What is worse, even when the KLA was engaging in violence against the Serbs, other than terrorizing handfuls of Serbian policemen or other representatives of Serbian power, it achieved no meaningful strategic advances.<sup>32</sup> In a sense, just like the KLA claimed a sort of victory as they came back into Kosovo on the heels of NATO, driving out remaining Serbs, destroying their monuments and burning their homes and churches, their monuments are now claiming victory through violence in the minds of the public.<sup>33</sup> While it could be argued that the violence they had been involved in prior to the Serb offensive is what stimulated the offensive and thus provided opportunity for the international community to be stirred, it must be maintained that the KLA's violent actions are not what directly won the war in Kosovo and put its inhabitants on the current path towards independence, although taking a look around Kosovo might suggest otherwise.

Nevertheless, the myth that has emerged as a result of how the monuments in Kosovo treat the issue is understandable, for as Frijda states, "it is a heavy burden to feel that one's fate is determined by the power of other people, and there is a need to perceive past events as results of one's own doing...one can negotiate with that burden or deal with that need by choosing what in one's past one appropriates, with the neglect of that which one either does not wish to appropriate or that one cannot blame on others."<sup>34</sup> What might be of greater importance to the workings of this myth are the implications it has for the future through ideological space that it gives access to. Although the public memory forged out of the official and vernacular voices creates an identity that is independent from Serbia, because this identity is so critically tied to the concept of ethnicity it in no way suggests that it is necessarily ideologically independent from

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<sup>29</sup> Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War*, (NY: PublicAffairs, 2001), pp. 221-222.

<sup>30</sup> Judah, *Kosovo*, p. 171.

<sup>31</sup> Judah, *Kosovo*, p. 171.

<sup>32</sup> Judah, *Kosovo*, p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> Judah, *Kosovo*, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Glazer, *Radical Nostalgia*, p. 47.

Albania. In other words, in the concept of identity that emanates from these monuments and their treatment of history and of events, the ideological option of a Greater Albania still exists. Whether it exists as a political or an economical option is another issue, but the fact that the idea of a Greater Albania can still exist as an ideological option in the newly emerging identity of the new Kosovo brings into question what progress has really been made in creating a lasting, democratic peace for these people and stability in the region.

Furthermore, the prevailing aesthetic of the public space in Kosovo implies that the current peace is more or less contingent upon an Albanian ethnic standard, and this is certainly a far cry from the notions of pluralism and inclusiveness that flow from the international community's intentions in democratic peace-building. The international community has failed at creating a supra-ethnic identity and a civic state. Whether the hopes of some Kosovar Albanians that all states containing Albanians will one day be united under the auspices of the European Union, whether political and economic situations continue to keep a possibility like a greater Albania from being an option or whether current popular sentiment shies away from such a union at the moment due to recent experiences, the identity emerging from the New Kosova is indelibly intertwined with the constructs of an Albanian ethnicity, and as such, it will be this construct that has a hand in shaping the people's future.

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