

UDK: 323.1(497.115)"200"=111  
Prethodno priopćenje  
Primljeno: 21.9. 2011.

## A War of Myths: Creation of the Founding Myth of Kosovo Albanians

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A distinctive Albanian character is present in the shaping of Kosovo's statehood. The official politics of history and identity diminish the importance of other ethnic communities and focuses on Albanian mythology, represented by mixture of contemporary and historical personalities, events, places and memories. Integrative and European-leaning from outside, Kosovo is more and more particular and Albanian from inside, leaving many doubts and uncertainties about the intercultural future of Europe's newest state.

**Keywords:** Kosovo, Albanians, founding myth, memory, identity politics

### 1. Introduction

Kosovo mythology might be perceived as one of the indirect causes for bloodshed surrounding the wars, conflicts and atrocities made in this newly independent state. Kosovo might also be regarded as the place where the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia began. The 1981 student unrest in Prishtina, the province's capital, showed the fragility of post-Tito Yugoslavia, as an omen for future years (Ker-Lindsay, 2009; Ramet, 2000; Udovički, 2000). Kosovo was again, in 1989, a centre of a nationalistic outbreak. Then President of Socialist Republic of Serbia, Slobodan Milošević gave a speech on Kosovo (Gazimestan) Field, marking the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo battle, with a reference to the possibility of "armed battles". Ten years later, Serbia attacked Kosovo Albanians, and twenty years later Kosovo was already an independent state. Throughout all these years two myths fought for the truth about Kosovo, two political myths with anti-democratic sentiments, extreme nationalism and new authoritarianism. One of them is the Serbian one which perceives Kosovo as the heart and soul of Serbian national and religious identity; this one is well known and

in this paper it will be regarded only as an opposite to the new myths of the Albanian side. The other one, the Albanian one, is the basis for Kosovar nation-building. These mythologies proclaimed themselves as saviors of the nation and civilization. In a poor attempt to follow Samuel Huntington's version of the clash of civilizations, Serbs and Albanians unconsciously followed the ideas of Fernand Braudel, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee in arguing that states were significantly influenced by their civilizational position (Hansen, 2000: 346), i.e. based on their historical and religious identities, in this case presented by Christian Orthodox Serbs and mostly Muslim Kosovo Albanians. Although the concept of Huntington's conflict of civilizations (at least understood in a way as Braudel understood them) was disputed and still is the subject of complex discussions, he correctly pointed out the importance of cultural and historical background for the events and conflicts in modern world, and especially so in the Balkans. The aim of this paper is to explain how and why Kosovo Albanians use the history and culture to promote "Albanianess" of the new Kosovo state. Opinions expressed here are focused on politics of history and identity, on places of memory and specific



events which form the overall official politics of Kosovar identity, but which bear an unofficial Albanian mark. Under the pretext of a European-oriented new state, built upon the togetherness of six ethnic communities, this paper shows how, in fact, there is little or no mention of other communities, except the Albanian one, in the building of the youngest state in Europe.

## 2. Building a New Nation

Nation-building gained broad acceptance in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War. Numerous multi-national states experienced heavy conflicts and the policy of nation-building came after peace operations conducted by various international organizations, primarily United Nations, NATO, European Union and African Union. Kosovo is one such case. The United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) authorities, together with the military presence of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX), with the help of other European Union (EU) initiatives, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) are making the nation-building process coming true. Jochen Hippler considers nation-building as a policy that "constitutes a hinge between foreign, development and military policy for the purpose of preventing or managing violent conflicts, achieving local and regional stability, and facilitating development" (Hippler, 2005: 4). Such a presence of various international organizations in Kosovo bears a question of legality to enter internal state-building, despite the principle of non-interference under the UN Charter, which can always be overruled by the Security Council. External nation-building, like in the case of Kosovo, is thus always questioned and disputed. Hippler conceives nation-building as a three-fold process, including a process of socio-political development, a political objective, as well as a strategy, and integrative ideology. The latter includes the founding myth of the Kosovar nation. Nation-building will only be successful in the long term if it stems from an integrative ideology. This is not an easy task. Hippler sees nation-building necessarily as a process of forming of a nation which has no specific identity or loyalty attached to a tribe, a clan, or an ethnic or ethno-religious group (Hippler, 2005: 8). In Kosovo, as we shall see, this is not so easily distinguishable, even among the Kosovo Albanians themselves. Integration of a society is what Hippler names as the core pattern of communication between different and loosely associated

groups. At the same time, this is where international organizations have failed. It would not be conceivable in any specific way to convince, for example, Albanians, Goranis and Ashkalis to be one Kosovar nation, as all three have an already established national consciousness. In this regard, the international community has put all its effort and energy in the biggest national group, the Albanians, as the core of the Kosovar nation. In this way, they jeopardized the possibility for other ethnic groups to perceive themselves as part of the Kosovar nation.

In Hippler's opinion, a crucial component of nation-building is the development of a functional state apparatus that can actually control its national territory (Hippler, 2005: 9). In Kosovo, a substantial role is carried out by international organizations, including the protection of national territory, and it thus lacks the Weberian principle of statehood: monopoly of legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order. In that way, state-building is an important aspect of nation-building, with loyal personnel that does not identify primarily with individual social, ethnic or religious communities, but rather with the state and the nation. Without social mobilization and political integration, there is no nation state in pluralistic societies and no process of socio-political development, which ideally allows initially loosely linked communities to become a common society with a nation state corresponding to it. Hippler acknowledges it takes quite an amount of luck for everything to be solved correctly, because the new nation has to bear economic integration, cultural integration, political centralization, bureaucratic control, military conquest or subjugation, creation of common interests, democratization and establishment of common citizenship or repression. Hippler also understands a problem which heavily persists in Kosovo, namely if belonging to the nation is to be determined according to language, ethnic origin or religion rather than on the basis of civil equality. Hippler sees two arising problems here:

"First, there is a danger that ethicizing the political discourse in the context of latent conflicts and social mobilization will lower the threshold for violence and trigger violent conflicts which are ethnically structured. Secondly, such a context transforms the nation-building process: instead of striving for or achieving the integration of society as a whole, the alternative then arises of conducting nation-building either as a repressive project of hegemony by one ethnic group over others or bringing



about a situation of competition between different nation-building projects conducted by the various ethnic groups. Both lead to the intensification of existing conflicts and the risk of these being waged in a violent manner in the future" (Hippler, 2005: 12).

In Kosovo, this problem arises from the bottom up. The Constitution of Kosovo, much different from most surrounding countries, does not recognize one particular ethnic group as a domicile nation. The preamble is approved by "the people of Kosovo", and Article 2 states that "The Republic of Kosovo is a state of its citizens". The peoples are not mentioned as nations or ethnic groups, but as communities, and the names of these communities are mentioned only in the articles about the division of power in the state. Article 64, Paragraph 2, on Structure of Assembly, explicitly names the communities:

"In the framework of this distribution, twenty (20) of the one hundred twenty (120) seats are guaranteed for representation of communities that are not in the majority in Kosovo as follows: (1) Parties, coalitions, citizens' initiatives and independent candidates having declared themselves representing the Kosovo Serb Community shall have the total number of seats won through the open election, with a minimum ten (10) seats guaranteed if the number of seats won is less than ten (10); (2) Parties, coalitions, citizens' initiatives and independent candidates having declared themselves representing the other Communities shall have the total number of seats won through the open election, with a minimum number of seats in the Assembly guaranteed as follows: the Roma community, one (1) seat; the Ashkali community, one (1) seat; the Egyptian community, one (1) seat; and one (1) additional seat will be awarded to either the Roma, the Ashkali or the Egyptian community with the highest overall votes; the Bosnian community, three (3) seats; the Turkish community, two (2) seats; and the Gorani community, one (1) seat if the number of seats won by each community is less than the number guaranteed."

In the government, power-sharing insists on one Serbian representative and one representative for other ethnic communities. The constitutional provisions are a direct effect of the Ahtisaari package, transformed in his comprehensive proposal which determines the outlines

of the future state (Ahtisaari, 2007). Ahtisaari stressed the importance of a multi-ethnic society, with several official languages. But, the situation on the ground is quite different. Albanians basically can offer quite big minority rights because they themselves are the overwhelmingly biggest ethnic group in Kosovo. Of the 230.000 Serbs and other non-Albanians who fled Kosovo before the international peace-keeping troops arrived only a small number returned. The Albanians themselves are victims of terror, corruption and organized crime. Kosovo institutionalized ethnicity (Bieber, 2004: 2) and the power-sharing lacks fundamental features of cross-ethnic cooperation. Based on Arend Lijphart's model of consociative democracy, Kosovo can also be understood as a failed attempt of power-sharing, because it has a fragile territorial autonomy and basically poor veto rights, which include only a possibility to delay procedure (Bieber, 2004: 3). Apart from provisions in the parliament, also, the international community did not show much respect for democracy, especially in early years. Council of Europe's human rights envoy Álvaro Gil-Robles stated:

"...it is clear that the very structure of the international administration as well as certain powers retained by its various branches, substantially deviate from international human rights norms and the accepted principles of the rule of law" (Gil-Robles 2002: 4).

The problem from the international law standpoint is also that Kosovo is not a fully recognized state, nor a UN member. In fact, NATO, for example, is still conducting its mission Kosovo Force (KFOR) based on UN Resolution 1244, which does not perceive Kosovo as an independent state. Kosovo is also under heavy influence of Western forces and particularly United States. Self-determination is thus one of the central demands and concepts of Kosovo Albanian nationalistic politics. It is best conceived in the Vetëvendosje movement (which literally means "Self-Determination"), a quasi-movement nationalistic party in Kosovo, which considers UNMIK administration to be a non-democratic regime, and requests full self-determination and independence immediately (Party Manifesto). In the meantime, United States Institute for Peace stated in its report that the Albanian question "will almost surely require more extensive regional arrangements than exists today" (USIP, 2002: 4). Reports like this, however, place a heavy burden on Balkans politics. If the Albanian question

is to resolved everywhere in the Balkans, then it must be perceived as one common territory. This is, at the same time, the greatest desire of ultra-nationalistic Albanian forces in Kosovo, but also in some neighboring countries. The spirit of Greater Albania, thus, has not yet vanished in the history of great nationalistic ideas' failures.

### 3. Mythology and Politics

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has shown a remarkable return to political mythology, history and old-fashioned national and ethnic identity. It was often accompanied by a conflict, sometimes very violent one, just as was the case in the republics of ex-Yugoslavia. New political communities arose, with the need of establishing the political institutions, but also comprehensive and mutual history, remembrance and historical legitimization. The context of Central and South-eastern Europe was particularly under influence of historical revisions and the search for a true national identity. This middle-space, *Mittleuropa* or *Zwischeneuropa*, shares the cultural and religious "raw cosmopolitanism", meaning a plethora of religious denominations and cultural backgrounds living one next to another. The real *Mittleuropa* has a distinctive Catholic character, with early Christianization and the history of conflict with Islam. Yet, they share quite much of the mentality with the rest of the region, essentially in conceiving themselves as a threatened nation, with a feeling of a profound tragic and suffering, loneliness from other nations, lack of solidarity among the neighbors and open prejudices. In the past, all of them have had illiberal, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, often with xenophobic and anti-Semitic elements. The particular case of Yugoslavia had several reasons for difficult nation-building: unfavorable geopolitical conditions, extreme differences in the level of economic development, great cultural heterogeneity, and dual process of nation-building, romantic nationalist idea, different pace of nation-building and state-building, no hegemonic nation that could successfully keep its dominant position (Zakošek, 2007: 36, 37). When the Berlin Wall fell and a new democratic wave spread across the former communist states, nations began to re-write their constitutions. This constitutional engineering was various, but many included vast preambles with historical references going back to the early stages of statehood. Slovakia, for example, found its roots in the Great Moravian Principality, a medieval vassal state founded with the help of St. Brothers Cyril and Metho-

dius. Croatia, on the other hand, included all historical documents of bigger importance, starting from the Croatian principalities in 7<sup>th</sup> century and ending with the Homeland War in the 1990s. Kosovo's constitution is noticeably different from many other former communist countries. Firstly, Kosovo and Albania were under foreign rule for centuries, but central power (either of Istanbul, Vienna or Belgrade) was indeed very weak, and Albanians did not know the classic totalitarian or authoritarian institutional paradigm, but a deeply patriarchal and clan-divided society. Only with Enver Hoxha in Albania came a new kind of paternalism. After the fall of communism, the revival (*Rilindja*) was in fact a start anew. The preamble of Kosovo has no historical reference and is very short. It is more like a plea, stating that the people of Kosovo are determined, committed and convinced to freedoms and equalities, democracy and prosperity, stability and peace, and with an intention to enter Euro-Atlantic integrations. But, at the same time, Kosovo prepared itself for building of national founding myths, as the basis for future state, with a distinctive Albanian character.

The renowned 20<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Ernst Cassirer explained that in man's practical and social life there is a defeat of rational thought, much different from scientific researches which consists a basis of our everyday life influenced by modern technology and scientific breakthroughs. He perceives myth not only as a product of intellectual processes; it sprouts forth from deep human emotions (Cassirer, 1946: 43). However, Cassirer stressed that myth cannot be described as a bare emotion because it is the expression of emotion: "The expression of a feeling is not the feeling itself – it is emotion turned into an image" (Cassirer, 1946: 43). Indeed, this image, in the creation of myth of the state, is intertwined with culture, music, poetry, arts. Cassirer said: "To the true romanticist there could be no sharp difference between myth and reality; just as little as there was any separation between poetry and truth. Poetry and truth, myth and reality interpenetrate each other and coincide with each other" (Cassirer, 1946: 5). The more poetic it is, the truer it becomes. Myth is filled with the most violent emotions and the most frightful visions, says Cassirer. But in myth man begins to learn a new and strange art: the art of expressing, and that means of organizing, his most rooted instincts, his hopes and fears. It is not at all a new phenomenon in history of mankind's thought. But, the core issue is whether this brings happiness and prosperity to the mankind.

Plato thought it doesn't. In his famous dialogue *Gorgias* Plato points out that the triad of Logos, Nomos, Taxis (Reason, Lawfulness and Order) constitutes beauty, truth and morality. It appears in art, in politics, in science, and in philosophy. They are the virtue of each thing, of a soul or any live creature and it is the evolution of rightness. Maybe we can conclude that, as men are by nature imperfect, this triad is of perfect and divine nature, so Plato strived for impossible. The myth destroys the very foundation of Plato's Republic.

In his research on mythology of the post-communist countries, the Romanian political scientist Tismaneanu stated that political myths are "responses to the sentiments of discontinuity, fragmentation, and the overall confusion" (Tismaneanu, 1998: 6). This trend, in fact, is not new. It persisted during the whole period of communism, hidden within the myth of brotherhood and unity among socialist nations. Post-communist nationalism is a political and ideological phenomenon with a dual nature: as an expression of an historical cleavage, it rejects the spurious internationalism of communist propaganda and emphasizes long repressed national values; also, it is a nationalism rooted in and marked by Leninist-authoritarian mentalities and habits, directed against any principle of difference and primarily against those groups and forces that champion pro-Western, pluralist orientations (Tismaneanu, 1998: 7). Tismaneanu showed vividly the examples of Romania and Serbia, where post-communist governments were formed by ex-communist forces. In the case of Slobodan Milošević, he recognized an astute demagogue who cynically exploited Great Serbian nationalism to further his own hegemonic-dictatorial purposes.

In post-communist mythological landscape, the myth of suffering is omnipresent. According to this vision, no other nation has suffered as much as the one of the speaker, who simply cannot understand why the outer world is so insensitive to his or her nation's unique plight (Tismaneanu, 1998: 8). It is evident in conspiracy theories in the case of Serbia, where the whole West, Freemasons and Vatican act together against bravery and patriotism of the Serbian people. In Croatia it is profoundly present in the myth of Croatian soldiers who never fought in conquering wars and in the character of the Homeland War as a just, defensive and collective fight for the independence long dreamed of. The suffering on Kosovo is entrenched in a parallel system of life, in an imposed isolation (see below). Members of the nation are gathered around this

myth in order to become closer and to "invent a tradition" in the words of Eric Hobsbawm, or to "imagine a nation", like Benedict Anderson would say. The nation is a big solidarity, says Ernest Renan, and it is based on victims and their sacrifice which is understood as necessary in the past, present and in the future (Renan, 1995: 56). Political myth transcends logic, it is elusive, but because of this elusiveness, it has a coherent and complete belief system. There is neither legitimacy nor logic other than its own. Tismaneanu mentions major themes around which such political mythologies revolve: Golden Age (innocence lost, glorious patriarchal beginnings, the fall into modernity); victimhood, martyrdom, treason and conspiracy; salvation and the advent of the millennium; charismatic saviors (who can be heroic individuals, allegedly predestined classes, or biologically defined races); and ultimate bliss in the form of revolutionary chiliasm, when leader, movement, nation, and mankind become one, whether in life or death (Tismaneanu, 1998: 9). Its principal function is to imagine a reality in accordance with certain political interests.

Historical places and events form a particularly important part of political mythology. History has great significance in legitimizing current political regimes, especially if they are identified with a charismatic savior with a sense of history (like Franjo Tuđman in Croatia, who was a historian himself, or the Gandhi-like leader of the Kosovar Albanians, Ibrahim Rugova). Common history produces common feelings and strengthens the nation. If it is connected to live emotions of particular people, it is prone to intimate use in every aspect of their life. In a research made by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen on popular uses of history in American life, a 50-year-old African American high school counselor from Alabama described how a focus on experience grounded his reflections on the past:

"If you didn't live through certain things, you just go by what people say, what history says. If they lived through it they know what they are talking about. I lived through segregation. My grandchildren are learning about it in school. It's hard for me to know anything that I didn't come through. I didn't come through slavery times. But integration times I came through. When my kids read something they can say, 'Is it true?' and I know because I was there" (Rosenzweig and Thelen, 1998: 37).



Memory of one person is not only individual memory, however: it forms our identity and secure the context for certain thought or action which are partly learned, partly borrowed, and part of common complex itself, constructed, maintained and forwarded by family, community and culture (Moore, 1992). In situation of common suffering of particular ethnic group, like Kosovo Albanians in the 1990s, this version of the story is very social-integrative and it legitimizes certain idea or regime. It is especially important in big historical events like war. Heroes and places of memory form significant part if this legitimacy and the recollection of "true" version of events, encoded in historical books and official historical account. According to Croatian political scientist Tihomir Cipek, for a political order to be legitimate, a common conception of history acceptable to the majority must be formed. He points out that a capability of forging a dialectical connection between collective memory and an interpretation of the past is profoundly necessary to found a democratic political community (Cipek, 2011: 27). The context of memory shapes the national identity and vice versa. In the case of France, for example, it went so far that the French Parliament voted on an act on memory, *lois mémorielle*, in order to regulate the nation's relation to its own history. Otherwise, common amnesia might blast the whole historical version into oblivion. Transiency is one of basic characteristics of memory, with periodical "flashbulb memories", often conceived as a vital part of testimonies on war criminal courts like ICTY (Dulanović, 2011: 35). Dimitrijević (2005) classified types of history in question as: (1) History that is the past, left to historians, and without much significance for current events, (2) History integrated in collective memory, segments that represent social, cultural and political foundation of communal life, (3) Heritage of the old regime, comprising institutions and values, personalities and processes in previous, mostly anti-democratic regimes, and it brings with it the economic, political and lawful heritage, as well as the heritage of evil. In this way the past very much influences contemporary political and social development.

#### 4. The Mythology of Kosovo Albanians

As many other founding mythologies, so was the Albanian also perceived as a fight against injustice. The victim role is very visible in the Albanian history in Kosovo. Historian Marco Dogo accused Kosovo Albanians of having "constructed a historical pedagogy based in self-pity", while

the anthropologist Reineck observes suffering (*vuajtje*) as a fact of life, because the Albanians "identify themselves as a backward, forgotten, plundered people, characteristics which they feel make them special" (Clark, 2000: 45).

Kosovo Albanian mythologies persisted over centuries, but their true realization came after NATO's operation in 1999, the first military operation in the history of the Alliance, and the beginning of international missions of UN, EU and OSCE. At that time, the number of Serbs diminished, as well as of some other ethnic groups. Few of them returned, mainly in Serbian autonomous municipalities like Gračanica and Štrbce. Kosovo Albanians, on the other hand, gained much power and freedom to establish a rule of order according to their needs and ideas.

Kosovo's constitutional framework bears no marks of historical rootedness of the new established country. The flag and the emblem give a symbol of a unified nation. The blue flag bears a yellow geographical form of Kosovo with six yellow stars around it, confirming Kosovo's determination, as vested in the Constitution itself, to strive towards Euro-Atlantic integrations. The six stars represent six ethnic communities living in Kosovo. The flag is basically an answer to Ahtisaari proposals which include "own, distinct, national symbols, including a flag, seal and anthem, reflecting its multi-ethnic character" (Ahtisaari, 2007). Everyday showing of the flag is a bit different. Although there are visible Kosovo's flags, an overwhelming number of flags in Kosovo, on tops of houses and on the roofs of many buildings, are Albanian. It is a red banner with a double-headed black eagle. Heraldic history of the Albanian flag suggests its origin in Byzantium, but it is also believed to have its origins in the seal of the greatest Albanian hero Skanderbeg. A variation of Albanian colors is present also in the emblems and flags of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK). In highly unofficial and unscientific research, the author of this article found out from citizens of Prishtina how these two flags are mutually compatible. "Kosovo is our country", say the most of them, "and thus we embrace the Kosovo flag". "But", they continue, "we are Albanians, and the flag of all Albanians is red-black". Surely, their ethnic relatives in neighboring countries embrace the Albanian flag as well, giving a sense of togetherness and commonness, although living in quite different surroundings.

## 5. Places of Memory

Also, other visible marks bear an Albanian accent. The most important place of memory in Kosovo today is the Prekaz valley, pretty much opposed to the former most important place of memory on Kosovo Field (Gazimestan), incorporating the Serbian myth. Prekaz is a small village in north-western Kosovo with martyr symbolism. The story begins in December 1991, when Serbian police surrounded the village and opened fire. Villagers resisted. Albanian political leaders reacted almost immediately, calling for a peaceful solution. The police raided the village, looking for Adem Jashari and his brother, who were active against Serbian oppression. They escaped to Switzerland, helped by a schoolteacher Jakup Krasniqi, a former political prisoner and current chairman of Kosovo Parliament. In 1993, Jashari returned and transformed his home in Prekaz to a centre-place for forming the Kosovo Liberation Army (*Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës*). On 22 January 1998, police attacked the Jashari family compound in Prekaz. The Serbian forces returned on 5 March, surrounding the village and killing Adem Jashari and more than 40 members of his family. Today, their graves form a memorial center. It consists of white graves, among them the grave of Adem Jashari guarded by a ceremonial guard, with the nearby fountain resembling a traditional Islamic prayer fountain. There is a path leading to the hill above, with a secret compound for *kaçak* fighters (Albanian guerrilla fighters) involved in battles around Prekaz. Jashari's burned and destroyed house is preserved intact, while visitors pass by pictures and murals of Adem Jashari and his fellows. The bearded sculpture of his image is also present everywhere in Kosovo. There is also an information center built in modern victorious architecture style. The scenery is packed with red-black Albanian flags and symbols of UÇK. Strangely enough, there is no mosque in Prekaz, and Islamic symbolism is present only in form of a crescent on the graves of country's martyrs.

Prekaz brings additional symbolism for Albanians. This memorial site is called the field of peace. In early 1990s, this was the site where Albanian families came for a ritual of reconciliation and ending of blood feuds and blood vengeance. This tradition began to spread after the fall of communism, based on centuries of feuds according to the 15<sup>th</sup> century *Kanun* or Canon of Lëke Dukagjini, which enshrined the principle. A retired professor Anton Cetta, fearing the danger of disunity among Albanians on troubled

Kosovo, called for reconciliation in Prekaz. Reappearance of blood feuds based on *Kanun* was not welcomed by everyone. A human rights activist Pajazit Nushi, whose organization had recorded some 40 blood feud related murders from 1999 to 2003 (Judah, 2008: 29), perceives blood feuds as "a consequence of the poor functioning of law and order and the institutions that regulate the law". Stephanie Schandwer-Sievers thinks it derives from Roman law, and today it has become part of the canon of Albanian identity (Fischer and Schwandner-Sievers, 2002). *Kanun*, however, is not only a blood feud code. It includes the pillars of the very essence of Albanian identity: honor (*nderi*), hospitality (*mikpritja*), right conduct (*sjellja*) and loyalty to one's clan (*fis*). The supreme expression of the Albanian moral code is the vow, *besa*, which was an extremely important part of cohesiveness of the movement of civil resistance in the 1990s. Every hero and every martyr bears these characteristics. Additionally, in the most marginalized areas of northern Albania the collapse of the former regime provoked recourse to pre-communist customs. Here, a revitalization of traditionalist ritual and rhetoric has occasionally produced a fragile order; including the negotiation of local authority and the redistribution of land (although this has mostly benefited particular interest groups at the expense of those who could not claim land rights through descent). Reference to *Kanun* here is contested and situational, unpredictable, provoking new conflicts and subject to an abuse of local power which many locals detest and wish to see replaced by the more predictable exertion of state law (Schwandner-Sievers 1999). Lastly, criminal interest groups, often deriving from the most disadvantaged parts of northern Albania and Kosovo, have used "tradition" to conceal their informal interests and to enforce group cohesion via the threat and usage of violence against those defined as "traitors", both inside and outside the country (Schwandner-Sievers 2001).

Another martyr place of memory is the village of Raçak. In early 1999, the massacre of civilians, including women and children, drew attention of Louise Arbour, prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The head of OSCE's mission in Kosovo described the atrocities as following: "A village that had one KLA member would be subject to being surrounded by artillery, being surrounded by the army, being surrounded by the police, being bombarded for hours; the police units would then go in, separate the men and the boys, take them off and essentially pillage and loot and burn

the village” (Pond, 2006: 103). Raçak is today a vital commemoration site, whose red graves bear the two-headed black eagle sign.

## 6. Albanianism as Religion

It should be noted here, as Tim Judah does in his introduction book on Kosovo (Judah, 2008), that these martyrs cannot be compared to *shahids* (a traditional name for Islamic martyrs who fought and died for the faith). Quite contrary, Albanian martyrs are called *dëshmorëte kombit* (martyrs of the nation), and they, in the very essence, represent the sacrifice for their country and their unrecognized or oppressed nation. These *kaçak* warriors stem from the 1912 revolts in Kosovo. They were fighting against Serbian, and later Yugoslav rule. Their most famous military leaders were Azem and Shota Bejta, and the political leadership was vested in the Committee for the National Defense of Kosovo. They supported rebellion inside Kosovo, lobbying for the liberation and re-unification of Albanian lands. Their general set of rules in 1919 was the same as in 1990s (Clark, 2000: 27). These included peace with all local Serbs who do not stand with weapons in their hands, and protection of all houses and churches. In response, Belgrade brought *četnik* brigades. Azem Bejta made eight demands in 1919, which again echo in 1990s (Clark, 2000: 27): recognize Kosovo’s right to self-government, stop killing Albanians, stop taking their land, stop the colonization program, stop army actions on the pretext of “disarmament”, open Albanian schools, make Albanian an official language and stop interning the families of rebels. According to some historians, *kaçaks* made strong symbolic demonstration of the fact that many Kosovo Albanians did not accept the legitimacy of Serbian or Yugoslav rule; and they seriously obstructed the colonization program, to the point where many would-be settlers were reluctant to go to Kosovo, and many who went returned home (Clark, 2000: 28), which again resembles the situation in 1990s. In the Second World War, however, *kaçaks* were regarded as fascist collaborators in the later Yugoslav official history, although the *Balli Kombëtar* (National Front, BK), was in fact a resistance movement against the Italian occupation of Albania, but in 1943 the cooperation with the communist-led National Liberation Movement of Albania broke down. The communists openly started to interpret the fighting with BK as anti-fascist struggle. In response, BK became openly collaborationist, with an open goal of the unification of Kosovo with Albania (Clark, 2000: 29).

Jashari is the new Skanderbeg, the real national icon for Kosovo Albanians. His image is ubiquitous; he embodies the struggle and continuous resistance of Albanians. His image and founding myth of Kosovo is so strong, that he becomes a visual and symbolic icon even for Albanians living outside Kosovo. Islam, on the other hand, does not play a vital role among *kaçaks*, although Jashari, his whole family and almost all *kaçak* fighters in Prekaz were Muslims. In 2000 there were estimations to be around 60 thousand Albanian Catholics in Kosovo, and very few Orthodox Albanians (Judah, 2008: 7). It follows the pattern of Albania proper, where some 10 percent of population is of Catholic religious background, and some 20 percent belong to Orthodox churches, among them mostly to the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania (CIA World Fact Book, 2009). The estimates of Muslim population are between 70 and 79 percent, although all of these are data for religious background, and not for practicing religion. Generally speaking, Albanians are a very secular people (Judah, 2008: 8). Quite a number of practicing Muslims, on the other hand, belong to the liberal Sufi, Bektashi group, regarded as heretical by most Muslim worshippers in Islamic world community (*ummah*). Islam in Kosovo adopted local traditions. Kosovo was once a central point of Balkan Sufism, standing on *Via Egnatia*, a major link between Istanbul and Balkan countries. Towns like Peja (Peć), Djakovë (Đakovica) and Prizren, together with Albanian centers in Albania proper (Berat, Gyirokastër, Krujë and Tirana), and in Macedonia (Skopje/Shkup, Tetovë) were centers for important Sufi brotherhoods, especially Ria'iyya and Bektashiyya (Norris, 2006: 9). Brotherhoods acted like secret societies, and the Bektashi order started to have more a rational and free-thinking aura, bearing a political message. No wonder, thus, that the brothers Frashëri, often considered as the founding fathers of Albanian nation, were Bektashi, and Naim Frashëri’s major work is called *Bektashi Pages* (Norris, 2006: 10). Influenced by Turkish and especially Persian thought and poetry, Albanian Sufis spread an idea of togetherness and equality.

Also, it is noteworthy that the Illyrian tribes of Dardanians, who are favored among the Albanian ethno-genetic researchers of Kosovar ancestors, were fiercely Catholic, closely connected to Vatican. This connection never ended, and there are speculations given from a close associate of Ibrahim Rugova, the leader of Kosovo Albanians, Catholic priest Lush Gjergji that he convert-



ed to Catholicism before he died.<sup>1</sup> Although the Catholics were in a worse condition than Orthodox believers in the Ottoman times, the Catholics promoted Albanian education. Jesuits set up an "Illyrian College" in Italy in 1574, and there was a widespread phenomenon of crypto-Catholicism, i.e. families who publicly adopted Sunni Islam, but received Catholic sacraments in private (Clark, 2000). The identity of Albanians, however, does not stem from religion, but from Albanian national consciousness. Albanian Catholic poet Pashko Vasa wrote in 19<sup>th</sup> century that "the religion of the Albanians is Albanianism", which was included in the slogan of the nineteenth century League of Prizren, the first experience of real Albanian nationalism. This body fought for unification of the Albanian lands and the establishment of an Albanian state within the Ottoman Empire. Later on, the League opposed Istanbul and started to fight against it. In 1878, 300 Albanian delegates from four Ottoman provinces (vilayets) where Albanians lived (Kosovo, Monastir (today Bitola), Janina and Scutari or Shkodër) gathered in the city of Prizren in southern Kosovo to form the League. The purpose was initially to protect Albanian lands against assaults from neighboring countries - Bulgaria, Greece, Serbia and Montenegro, and it was the first such organization made up by both Muslim and Christian Albanians. It was a herald of new Albanian rebirth or renaissance or *Rilindja* (Trix, 2010: 359). It was the beginning of Albanianism as a religion. Albanians would need a national narrative to make their sovereignty claims sound plausible: from pieces of tribes, they had to defend the cause of an Albanian nation and create one distinctive Albanian culture. Sami Frashëri wrote at that time: "Albania runs greater risks that will show their roots in times of peace, without blood and arms. It is the war of schools and literature, the war of nationalism (...) The Greeks, the Slavs and the other neighboring countries do not want to recognize the existence of Albanian nation. Each of them uses their own faith to attract those Albanians sharing their religion". This is why the attractive force of religion in providing to the collective association was dangerous for Albanians. They are a threat to nationalistic religion and precisely the reason why Albanians turned out to be quite an "atheist" people (Ypi, 2007: 667). Language and history became indicators of the country's authenticity and formed the basis for *Rilindja* (Ypi, 2007: 668). Ypi compared the rise of the Albanian nation to the classic idea of civic national-

ism, expressed in the thought of Rousseau (Ypi, 2007: 671), but focused on a specific difference: Albanians had hardly ever experienced citizenship in an autonomous political community, but for the mythical Illyrian age and the short season of anti-Ottoman resistance under Skanderbeg. These two form, therefore, the very foundation of the Albanian nation. But, the future might bring some unexpected turns. The center of Prishtina is packed with Christian symbols. Mother Theresa Boulevard forms the pedestrian zone in the very city center, finished with her statue. Mother Theresa, born Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu in Skopje, was of Albanian Catholic origin (although her family was in fact Vlach). At times of Rugova's rule her image spread across Kosovo, as a symbol of peaceful Albanian desire and plea. Around the University of Prishtina compound, which also forms the very center of Prishtina, there are also two churches. One is an unfinished Serbian Orthodox Church (the so called Milošević's Church, because the Serbian leader started to build churches all around Kosovo in 1990s, symbolizing the Serbian character of Kosovo), and the other one is Mother Theresa Catholic Cathedral, the ownership of Catholic Church in Albania and Kosovo. The biggest mosque, however, is in the Old Town (*çarshia*). The Muslim movements now request that the central Kosovo mosque be built around the University, next or opposite to the Catholic Church, shouting at the same time about Christian occupation of Albanian Muslim identity. Otherwise, identity formation is very ambiguous in Kosovo; people change their ethnic identity or convert to another religion without completely forgetting the legacy of previous identities. Their belief systems are thus based on unconscious and unreflective fusion and borrowing (Duijzings, 2000). Although religion plays a complex role in the development of group identities, Albanians have never really stressed the importance of religion for their society. But, Duijzings reminds that even Albanians at one time attempted to use religion as a marker, but it failed, because the nation is divided into at least three, or as Duijzings suggests, possibly four religious traditions: Muslim, Catholic, Orthodox and Bektashi. The heterodox Islam in the Balkans is especially in focus here as it gave rise to a number of identities. The religious differences were blurred: "Muslims and Christians of different ethnic background have visited each other's sanctuaries, worshiped each other's saints and ignored the evident theological objections of religious orthodoxies" (Duijzings, 2000: 2). Thus, common pilgrimages or Crypto-Catholicism were possible. And all these developments were political constructs, as Duijzings

1 See <http://balkanupdate.blogspot.com/2006/01/rugova-died-christian.html>.

suggests: "...the formation and transformation of ethnic and religious identities is determined by wider political developments (Duijzings, 2000: 22).

## 7. A New Politics of History

Prekaz is the founding myth of new Kosovo and Jashari is the new hero, but Kosovo has a deep desire to defend itself, in a way, from "other heroes". One of them is for sure Miloš Obilić, a mythical character of Serbian history. He is the legendary assassin of Ottoman sultan Murad I, a holy warrior canonized in Serbian Orthodox Church, although his historical presence in the Battle of Kosovo, and the battle itself, is often contested by various historians. Albanians contest the very nationality of Miloš Obilić, although in those times the notion of nationality used to be somewhat blurry and instable. According to the Albanian version, Miloš was in fact Kopiliqi, an Albanian version of the contested true name of the Serbian hero. In that way, Albanians diminish the importance of Kosovo Battle for the Serbs, and paradoxically revoke Albanian traditional resistance to every foreign rule, including the Ottoman Empire. That is one of the reasons why a town near Kosovo battlefield is still called Obilić (Obiliq), and has not changed its name, like some other towns in Kosovo.

The politics of history gains ground in Kosovo today. It derives from the "founding fathers" of Albanian nation, brothers Frashëri, who turned their people "from a scattered array of clans into a nation". Albanians consider themselves as Illyrians and Dardanians, calling thus sometimes Kosovo Dardania, meaning the Pear Country. Kosovo is a name of Slavic origin, meaning blackbird field, and bears special significance for Serbs, as "the cradle of Serbian civilisation" and "Serbian Jerusalem". The Kosovo Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova toyed with the idea of renaming Kosovo Dardania (Judah, 2008: 31). The question "who was here first" was always a fierce debate among Albanian and Serbian historians. Albanian biggest contemporary writer Ismail Kadare has showcased the common Albanian standpoint to it:

"Any discussion on Kosovo today begins with the cliché: 'sacred territory for the Serbs'; the 'cradle of the Serbian nation.'...The core of [Serb] mythology goes as follows: at the time of the Battle in 1389, the Serbs were a majority in a region that was at the heart of their Kingdom; the Albanians only came into the territory after the battle. This is a crude

distortion and its effect in any public discussion on TV or elsewhere is to pre-empt any Albanian from putting across a different view or attempting some clarification of history... The Battle of Kosovo was not a confrontation solely between Serbs and Turks. It was a battle fought by all the people of the Balkans united against an invader. All the histories list the names of the Balkan peoples who fought alongside one another against a common disaster: Serbs, Bosnians, Albanians and Romanians... The Battle which should have been preserved in memory as a symbol of friendship between the Balkan peoples was appropriated by criminal Serbs to serve their purposes." (Judah, 2008: 24, 25).

Albanians claim descent from the ancient Illyrians, while Slavs did not arrive in Kosovo until the sixth and seventh centuries AD. This claim is very important, because Serbian authorities, regarding this as an Austrian-instilled myth (in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, before Albania gained independence), treat Albanians as immigrants and twice in the twentieth century they have sought to "repatriate" Albanians in Turkey (Clark, 2000: xx).

Called the modern day Skanderbeg, Jashari stands next to the biggest hero of Albanianism. Skanderbeg is omnipresent in every part of Balkans where Albanians live. His statues adorn the main squares in Albanian cities. A very ambivalent historical figure, Gjergj Kastrioti was born in 1403, as a son of an Orthodox Christian Albanian nobleman. He was later sent as a hostage to Istanbul, where he converted to Islam and took the name Skanderbeg, from the Turkish İskender Bey, meaning "Lord Alexander" (Judah, 2008: 25). In 1443 he returned in Albania, converted back to Catholic Christianity and began his fight against the Turks. His vision was vivid among 19th century Albanians, although most of them were Muslims. Projecting the images in contemporary world about past is often difficult to prove scientifically, especially because Skanderbeg's daughter was married to a Serbian prince. Skanderbeg both allied with and fought against the Serbs. Overall, Skanderbeg was a truly Albanian hero, combining all possible religions, friends and foes of Albanian tribes, keeping the Albanian readiness to fight for the homeland. Over the centuries his religious orientation, the defender of Christianity, as he was known in the Christian world, was avoided, as well as his real domain, which never included Kosovo (Fischer and Schwandner-Sievers, 2002: 43). Skanderbeg's 25-year revolt against Ottoman rule is also

a proof for Serbians who regard Albanians as vital ally of Turkish rule over the Balkans. In fact, Albanians continued to take part in conspiracies and military campaigns against the Ottoman Empire, and there were frequent local revolts against new taxes, conscription, or attempts to disarm the local population. Some also used banditry as a form of defiance (Clark, 2000: 25).

## 8. Peaceful Resistance

Among Albanians, education was always regarded as a national breakthrough. Over the centuries various conquerors and governments refused to give education in Albanian language, fearing it could spread Albanian nationalism. Education was also one of the ways for peaceful resistance, another founding myth, vested in the cultural rising in Yugoslavia and the parallel education system in 1990s. The cultural revival came with the opening of the University of Prishtina, and with the Prishtina Radio and TV, and the *Rilindja* publishing house. The University was especially necessary, since a little number of Albanian students traditionally went to study to Belgrade or Zagreb. Although it boasts with many faculties, the most important ones were humanities and social sciences. A huge amount of Albanian students enrolled, with little or no professional perspectives afterwards. The cultural re-awakening spread also in the countryside. Ibrahim Rugova recalls cultural and literary evenings and festivals in 1970s, especially in Prizren, where Kosovo Albanians discovered themselves and ended blood feuds, and also some academic connection was possible between Prishtina and Tirana (Clark, 2000: 40). There, Albanians rediscovered their historical heroes and events, completing in this way the politics of memory, places and events. It ended with uprisings and riots in 1980s, labeled in the academic community as national awakening and demonstrations sparked by socioeconomic conditions and grievances. Some called for the unification with Albania, but this style of irredentism (especially called so in Belgrade) was not very plausible. As socio-economic conditions were among the major reasons for uprisings, it would be difficult to expect for people to call for the unification with Albania, which was in far greater economic difficulties, as well as under harsh dictatorship of Enver Hoxha. The main call was – Kosovo Republic! Albanians wanted their own republic within the Yugoslav federation, which would change boundaries, taking in some parts of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, as well as full respect of their national rights, recognizing Albanians as one of the federative nations.

The prospect of violent conflict in difficult times was vigorously announced in Slobodan Milošević's speech at Gazimestan Field. Albanians easily understood the message. All violent and armed rebellion would finish in too many victims and it will be crushed by Yugoslav People's Army (*Jugoslovenska narodna armija*, JNA). Kosovo Albanians started to build their identity linked to non-violence, with the image of Ibrahim Rugova as a modern-day Gandhi. Village football teams got new names, such as *Durim* (Endurance) or *Qendresa* (standing firm) (Clark, 2000: 46). The formative experiences for this strategic decision came from Trepča miners, who went through cold and snow for five full days, sticking the protest columns and inviting for the protest manifestation. Some 400.000 people protested and the event went without a single broken window, any kind of vandalism or destruction (Clark, 2000: 48), while avoiding any gesture or slogan which could insult the Serbian people. Resistance was often symbolically understood as a rebellion of Albanians, workers and humans, because the Serbian attitude was perceived as an attack on all three components. The vacuum left after the fall of communism was filled with new organizations, prone to introduce democratization and Europeanization of Kosovo. In the first half of 1990, some of these organizations issued an important declaration "For Democracy, Against Violence", giving accent again on non-violence as the option for survival. Philosopher Shkelzen Maliqi often regarded non-violence as being imposed on Kosovo Albanians: "The strategy of nonviolence was somehow self-imposed as the best, most pragmatic and most efficient response to Serbian aggressive plans." (Clark, 2000: 66).

The non-violent liberation movement, however, ended in armed resistance. Kosovo Albanians waited hastily for some sort of Dayton Agreement in Serbia, after Milošević signed the treaty. When Serbian military and police operations turned from Bosnia to Kosovo, young Kosovars, disappointed with the international community and Rugova's silent opposition, turned violent. This was the creation of the Kosovo Liberation Army that started guerilla warfare for freedom (Pond, 2006: 102).

## 9. Conclusion

The collapse of Yugoslavia was often considered by cultural scholars as a consequence of primordial Balkan mentality, ancient hatreds between Balkan tribes. Although the nationalistic sense of necessity for belonging is crucial in

this area, it nevertheless diminishes the importance of what I call “raw cosmopolitanism”, i.e. the necessity to live next to Other and to tolerate the Other. Kosovo might be an extreme case of primordial or essentialist nationalistic outburst, because the rate of inter-ethnic marriages or connections between the communities was and still is rare. Nevertheless, it did not diminish the ethnic mosaic living in Kosovo yesterday, as well as today, although on a smaller scale. International influence and instrumentalization by political leaders such as Slobodan Milošević surely favored the conflict, but I would stress the vital conclusion of Beverly Crawford, that post-war institutions of ethno-federalism in Yugoslavia cemented the logic of identity politics in the Yugoslav federal structure (Crawford, 1998: 206), especially after constitutional changes in 1974., which brought the decline of central power and diminishing of loyalty to the federal state (Crawford, 1998: 231).

Objective account of history is an academic discipline, but rarely a political one. The creation of Kosovo state is a very modernistic achievement. Successful displays of ethnic symbolism in 1980s and 1990s, often artificially contrived, drew attention to those ethnic divisions perpetuated by past institutional incentives (Crawford, 1998: 199). In the best manner of classic 19<sup>th</sup> century national rebirth, Kosovo Albanians combined national myths, stories, memories and territorial pretensions with political maneuvers and current political possibilities. But, Kosovo might be regarded as a special case. The country that has not yet fully gained recognition in the world as an independent country, gives an image of a state based on civic nationalism, with wide protection of every ethnic community's rights and with profound sense of Kosovar nation based on mutual respect and no specific ethnic background, as well as the constitutionally expressed desire for Euro-Atlantic integrations, shown also in the euro as a national currency. However, the image and policies show that Kosovo government and most of its citizens perceive their state as an ethnic Albanian country. Many even question whether Kosovo really is considering staying an independent country or is the creation of Kosovo merely a first step toward a Greater Albania, comprising of Albania proper, Kosovo, Western Macedonia, and parts of Montenegro, Serbia and Greece where Albanians live as a majority. The opinion polls about this question are ambivalent. United Nations Development Program in Kosovo made a poll in 2007 which showed that only 2.5 percent of Kosovo Albanians

wanted to merge with Albania, and 6 percent said they would like to live in an independent Kosovo (UNDP, 2007: 16). After independence, this thinking changed vastly. According to Gallup Survey made in 2010, 81 percent of Albanians in Kosovo supported the idea of Greater Albania, 62.8 percent in Albania proper, and 51.9 percent of Albanians living in Macedonia.<sup>2</sup> Albanian president Sali Berisha reacted instantly and in several occasions, repeating that Tirana had no desire for a Greater Albania. Still, under the banner of common country, there is a distinctive Albanian cover, incorporated in official history, museums, places of memory, commemorative centers, monuments, graveyards, names of cities, streets and squares, use of language (Serbian, as second official language is practically spoken only in Serb enclaves, coupled with the usage of the Cyrillic alphabet), and separation of ethnic communities in enclaves. Official history shapes the minds of new generations and leaves little or no space for alternatives or for common history of all ethnic communities living in Kosovo. This political imaginary has no academic backup, but as is usually the case in politics of history, it does not need one. History is a reference point for a particular political agenda and interest. It does not diverge much in Kosovo today, from Kosovo yesterday. Contemporary Albanian political mythology is very similar in power, focus and methods to Serbian political mythology about Kosovo. Combined, they make a powerful clash point, a war of the myths which ended in violence and armed conflict. The Albanian myth prevailed. In that way, Kosovo Albanians are heading toward the politics of oblivion, with total annihilation of earlier history, and their role, positive and negative, in historical events. It is the common view that the nation with previous authoritarian or totalitarian past should look more into the future, leaving the burden of heavy history behind. But, at the same time, they are not dealing systematically with political, cultural and moral heritage of the past, and it threatens to fall into historical subjectivity, isolating certain events from broader picture, and to historical revisionism, which is a legitimate scientific act, but can be very much instrumentalized by political actors.

2 See Gallup, 2010, <http://www.balkan-monitor.eu/index.php/dashboard>.

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## Rat mitova: Stvaranje utemeljiteljskog mita kosovskih Albanaca

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Poseban albanski karakter prisutan je u oblikovanju kosovske državnosti. Službena politika povijesti i identiteta umanjuju važnost ostalih etničkih zajednica i usredotočuje se na albansku mitologiju, predstavljenu kroz mješavinu sadašnjih i povijesnih ličnosti, događaja, mjesta i sjećanja. Integrativno i usmjereno Europi, Kosovo je sve više partikularno i albansko iznutra, ostavljajući mnoge dvojbe i neizvjesnosti o interkulturalnoj budućnosti najnovije države Europe.

**Ključne riječi:** Kosovo, Albanci, osnivački mit, sjećanje, politika identiteta