

# Narrative and Nationhood: The Battle of Kosovo

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**NARRATIVE AND NATIONHOOD: THE BATTLE OF KOSOVO**

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**ABSTRACT:** This thesis explores the centrality of myth in the master narrative of Serbian ethno-nationalism that erupted in the late 1980s through the 1990s. By looking at Serbian folk epics depicting the battle of Kosovo, this thesis examines the role of myth as a part of Serbian identity and culture. The way the myth of the battle of Kosovo is remembered is a way of reconstructing the past through using themes in the myth to manipulate public memory and political consciousness. This thesis shows that while myth represents a key construction of a master national narrative, the narrative does not represent the stories of all members of the nation. The theoretical and official “history” of a nation is separate from the lived history of individuals. The last chapter uses gender as a lens to examine the master national stemming from the Kosovo myth, showing how the national master narrative connects to the “myth of the all pervasive patriarchy” in how history is understood. The last chapter also shows how the themes of nationalism in the myth of Kosovo did not only exist on a theoretical gendered level, but in how state actors controlled or attempted to control women’s bodies as part of the nationalist project.

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I ultimately owe this thesis to the political environment in which it was written: a national environment of ethnic-driven hate, “fake news,” and the promise of return to a mythical “greatness;” a campus environment where silence continues to be violence. I hope this thesis makes a small contribution to the battle for “truth and justice” that Nuhanovic continues to fight for every day, by telling his story.



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## Introduction

June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1989 marked the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. The national holiday, St. Vitus' Day, or *Vidovdan*, commemorates the ancient battle, where Christian armies, under Serbian Prince Lazar, fought Ottoman troops at the field of blackbirds, or *Kosovo Polje*, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1289. Leader Slobodan Milosevic went from Belgrade to Kosovo and gave a speech to commemorate the occasion. His speech spoke to the "historical truth" behind the myth of Prince Lazar's claimed defeat. In Kosovo, the place of this famed battle, he not only calls for Serbian unity, but also calls on "the memory of the Serbian people" in order to "return dignity" to the Serbian people.<sup>1</sup> It was here and at this time that Milosevic celebrated his rise as leader of Serbia, where he claimed Kosovo was the sacred heart of the Serbian people and the heart of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In the following years after this speech was made there would be war, genocide, international intervention against the Serbian regime, and a personal international prosecution against Slobodan Milosevic. These events started with the memory of what happened at *Kosovo polje*.

Historically, there is little we know about the actual battle of Kosovo; historiographical perspectives of the story have evolved depending on time and political context. Generally, Lazar is recognized a symbol of sacrifice, he is Christ, and his death is a promise for the resurrection of the Serbian state from the oppression of outsiders. While there are few historical accounts of the battle, there are many traditional Serbian epics, or long form poems written about the battle and Serbian suffering. These epics were written after the battle, and were passed down orally, mostly through women, before being written down into an anthology by Vuk Karadzic. These epics,

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<sup>1</sup> "Speech of Slobodan Milosevic at Kosovo Polje April 24 1987." Accessed April 30, 2018. <http://www.slobodan-milosevic.org/news/milosevic-1987-3-eng.htm>.

which popularized and historically grounded the feelings of Serbian suffering and the promise of redemption, have made the battle of Kosovo a potent part of Serbian identity and national consciousness. As the battle is remembered, these feelings are transferred into the public memory and political consciousness, giving fire to the Serbian mission during the 80s and 90s of creating a Greater Serbia. With the Kosovo myth as a key part of Serbian identity, disputing the history of the myth is an existential threat to national Serbian existence itself.

This thesis will explore the centrality of myth in the master narrative of Serbian ethno-nationalism that erupted in the late 1980s through the 1990s. By looking at Serbian folk epics depicting the battle of Kosovo, this thesis will examine the role of myth as a part of Serbian identity and culture. The way the myth of the battle of Kosovo is remembered is a way of reconstructing the past through using themes in the myth to manipulate public memory and political consciousness. This thesis will show that while myth represents a key construction of a national narrative, the narrative does not represent the stories of all members of the nation. The last chapter will use gender as a lens to examine the national narrative represented in the public history and political discourse.

### An Overview of Kosovo's History

The modern territory of Kosovo is situated in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula. With Albania to the east, Bosnia to the north, Serbia to the east, and Macedonia to the south, Kosovo is landlocked. It is isolated by mountain ranges on the southern, western, and northern borders. On the southern border there is the Sar Mountain range, the 'Accursed Mountains' on the western border, and the Kopaonik range on the northern border.<sup>2</sup> Internally, Kosovo is divided

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<sup>2</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, (New York, New York University Press, 1998), 3.

in half by a range of hills, which go from the northern border to the southern border. Despite its mountain ranges on several sides, there were two important trade routes through Kosovo. The first of them is "...linked it with the city of Shkodra, a major trading centre in north-western Albania," while the second connects Kosovo to what is now Dubrovnik, where traders could access the Adriatic coast.<sup>3</sup> The mineral wealth, as well as the strategic importance of Kosovo, has contributed to the historic conflict over the land, and in the language, which is used to claim it.

Serbs refer to the western half of Kosovo as "*Metohija*." The name came from the Greek *Metoh*, meaning, "estate owned by the church." The reference to monastic estates shows the history of many "orthodox monasteries were granted rich endowments here...by medieval Serb rulers." In the medieval period, "the Metohija region became the spiritual nucleus of the Serbian nation."<sup>4</sup> While the historical claim regarding monastic estates in this region is accurate, Kosovo Albanians take issue with using the word "*Metohija*" to refer to the western half of Kosovo as "it seems to imply that the identity of the territory itself is bound up with Serbian Orthodox land ownership." Kosovo Albanians refer to the western half of Kosovo as "'Rrafsh i Dunkagjinit', the 'Dunkagjin plateau'" This in reference to a notable Albanian ruling family from the medieval period.<sup>5</sup> The modern political autonomous entity of Kosovo did not exist as a singular political unit in medieval Serbia. It was previously divided between the Serbian districts of Lab and Sitnica. During the Ottoman period, the province of Kosovo included modern Kosovo in addition to parts of Macedonia proper, Serbia proper, as well as parts of Montenegro. The

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>4</sup> Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1998), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, 3.



modern political borders were completed in 1946, when it became an autonomous region within the Yugoslav federation under Josip Tito.

Looking at the eastern half of Kosovo, nearest Serbia, there is some confusion as to the historical emergence of the name. This part of Kosovo is simply called 'Kosovo.' The first mention of the name Kosovo appears in the writings on the myth of the battle of Prince Lazar. This battle is believed to have taken place in 1389 on Kosovo Polje, "the 'Kosovo field (or plain).'" While the name Kosovo Polje is associated with the Battle of Prince Lazar, in a geographical sense, Kosovo field "can describe not just the battlefield but the whole rolling plateau..."<sup>6</sup> *Kos* means blackbird in Serbian. As the symbolism of the Serbian blackbird is an important marker of territorial ownership given the historic site of the battle, it is also a common name for places throughout the region.

The Serbs are a Slavic people, who first invaded the Balkan Peninsula in 547 and 548 A.D. , during the reign of Byzantine emperor Justinian.<sup>7</sup> The greatest invasion of the Slavs into the Balkan Peninsula started in the 580s A.D. Though the Slavs migrated during this period, they "came to the Balkans as permanent, largely agrarian settlers."<sup>8</sup> The history and origin of the Albanian people is far more contested than that of the Serbs. There are two main schools of thought in regard to the Albanians' origin. The first claims that the Albanians were Illyrians, while the second claims that they were Thracians, who both lived in the Balkans in the pre-Roman and Roman periods. By historical record, "Albanians first emerge in ... 1043, when Albanian troops appear fighting alongside Greeks in the army of a rebel Byzantine general." In the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, there is also a record of "a long-established Albanian presence in the

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<sup>6</sup> Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984), 33.

mountains of Montenegro...”<sup>9</sup> By the mid-1400s, Albanians were beginning to migrate down from the mountains to Kosovo plains in order to settle and farm.<sup>10</sup> Notably, though Albanians are in the Balkan Peninsula, they do not identify as Slavic people, and claim to be ethnically different than their southern-Slav neighbors.

For the Albanian people, there is a division within the population between two different groups: the Gëgs and the Tosks. The Gëgs inhabit the region of northern Albania and Kosovo, while the Tosks inhabit the southern portion of Albania proper. While the origin of these two groups is shared, “differences between the Gëgs and the Tosks are a matter partly of way of life. “The differences between these two groups developed based on location and social development. In the north, clans “clans developed their special social system; in the less mountainous landscape of the south, whatever quasi-clans that may have existed were more or less swept aside...” Language differences between these two groups are also noticeable, however they are “not large enough to get in the way of mutual intelligibility.”<sup>11</sup> Language has been a political issue within Albania proper, and when “unified literary Albanian” was put into law in 1972, “it was based- partly for political reasons- much more closely on Tosk than on Gëg.”<sup>12</sup>

Between Serb and Albanian, one of the most obvious differences is in language. During the medieval period, Serbs spoke two dialects: “old easter Stokavian and Torlak (or Prizen-Timok).” Old easter Stokavian was spoken mainly in Serbia proper near eastern Bosnia along the Drina river, while Torlak was spoken elsewhere Serbia and in Kosovo. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century these dialects began to merge and “increasingly separated themselves from the other dialects of their

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<sup>9</sup> Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, 28.

<sup>10</sup> Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo*, 17.

<sup>11</sup> Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

respective groups.”<sup>13</sup> Serbian belongs to a family of Slavic languages and different dialects of the Balkans including Croatian and Bosnian. Serbian is similar to the other Slavic languages, but extremely distinct from Albanian, which is part of a different family of languages. So, while Serbian “clearly separates Serbs from Albanians, it does not so clearly constitute Serbs as Serbs...”<sup>14</sup> Hence, Albanians are often not identified as Slavic people, as they do not speak a Slavic language. The privilege of Serbian over Albanian languages in Kosovo is an important issue related to historical memory and discrimination in educational institutions and in government.

The development of identities based on religion can be traced to the period of Ottoman conquest. The Ottoman administration under Mehmet II constructed “a socio-cultural communal entity, the *millet*, based on religious adherence rather than ethnic identity.”<sup>15</sup> While the tax, property, and military systems did segment the population of the Ottoman Empire, the systems divided on the basis of religion, and not ethnicity. Then, Christians were not differentiated into various ethnic groups. Serbs only differentiated themselves from Croats after ideas of their nationalities came from Croatia and Serbia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Miranda Vickers argues that the system brought non-Muslims in, but also allowed them “to retain their own cultural and religious freedoms.” The system was in fact designed for the “the heterogeneous nature of society in the Balkans” in order to maintain peace.<sup>16</sup> The level of Ottoman tolerance in the Balkans is sometimes disputed among academic scholars, however there is a basic consensus on the Ottoman tax, property, and military systems. Additionally, though the systems favored some

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<sup>13</sup> Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 47.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History*, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian*, 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

groups (i.e. Muslims) over others, the tax, property, and military systems still allowed for all members of society to practice their beliefs without being persecuted.

Under Ottoman control, as Dennis P. Hupchick has shown, three cross-sector aspects of society were influenced in the Balkans: the military-administrative, the religious-legal, and the social-economic.<sup>17</sup> Since in the Ottoman Empire the military was vital, the government followed a similar structure and those with military experience could gain a path towards political power. For example, even starting as a slave in the military, the most promising men were appointed officers and the smartest were then given opportunities to train to be a *vezir*, or grand advisor, to the sultan.<sup>18</sup> The Ottomans integrated the Balkans into their military domain, and with their Ottoman administrative power they provided education for the boys that they took from Christian lands. Some in the Christian communities saw this favorably, though others were obviously resentful of their children being taken away to fight for an invader's army.

In the religious-legal sector, Islam was especially integrated into law. A large segment of the Albanian people accepted Islam "and thus became 'first-class' subjects in the Ottoman empire."<sup>19</sup> So long as Christian and Jewish populations accepted the "domination of Islam and its temporal authorities and accepted inferior legal and social status,"<sup>20</sup> they were protected and their own laws generally remained valid within their communities. The Albanians of Kosovo embraced Islam in particular, possibly due to the threat of Serb expansion in order to gain

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<sup>17</sup> Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Balkans: From Constantinople to Communism*, (New York, St. Martin's Press, 2002), 124.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>19</sup> Hugh Poulton and Miranda Vickers, "The Kosovo Albanians: Ethnic Confrontation with the Slav State" in *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State*, ed. Hugh Poulton and Suha Taji Farouki, (New York, New York University Press, 1997), 141.

<sup>20</sup> Hupchick, *The Balkans*, 133.

Ottoman protection.<sup>21</sup> Although some Bosnians and Albanians converted, there is not significant evidence of any forced conversions to Islam. The financial benefits, such as opportunities to enter into elite classes or for peasants to be exempted from the poll tax, *jizya*, were sufficient.<sup>22</sup> Hupchick defines the divisions of society in the Ottoman Empire as “...religiously between superior Muslims and inferior non-Muslims and politically between military rulers and ruled.”<sup>23</sup> While there were marked divisions, the socioeconomic structure and Ottoman governance of society seemed to be inclusive, as members from all backgrounds were able to participate in trade. In terms of guiding the economy, the Ottoman government seemed to have a laissez-faire approach. The utmost goal for the Ottoman leadership, just as in other empires such as the Roman, was stability in terms of general peace and tax revenue. Apart from taxes and keeping the peace, members of Ottoman society not subscribing to the Islamic religious order were able to live relatively autonomous lives, though they might have to pay more in taxes and get less societal benefits.

Religious and ethnic nationalisms were quelled during the reign of Yugoslav leader Josip Tito, with his communist regime and slogan of “brotherhood and unity.” After the death of Tito, Yugoslavia began to break apart. Serbians had a majority of control, and other groups wanted to govern their own land, independently. Poulton and Vickers argue that Serbian nationalism was “a direct result of the feelings of many Serbs that they lost out in the creation of national states following the collapse of the Ottoman empire...”<sup>24</sup> The concept of Greater Serbia, similar to the concept of a Greater Albania, is both ethnocentric and based off of historic context of division. The historical context of southern Slav group identities before modern nationalism also affected

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<sup>21</sup> Poulton and Vickers, *The Kosovo Albanians*, 141-142.

<sup>22</sup> Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 41.

<sup>23</sup> Hupchick, *The Balkans*, 135.

<sup>24</sup> Poulton and Vickers, *The Kosovo Albanians*, 139.

later nationalisms, as each group “maintained a collective memory of their medieval statehood...”<sup>25</sup>

The breakup of Yugoslavia resulted in gruesome fighting following the declarations of independence by Slovenia, Croatia, and then Bosnia, in the early 1990s. When Bosnia declared independence, genocide broke out, mostly with Serb forces and Serb-Bosnians killing Bosniaks, or Bosnian Muslims. Serb leader Milosevic and Croat leader Tudjman strove to divide up Bosnia for Serbia and Croatia, respectively, and the Bosnian Muslim population represented a problem to both. For the Serbian regime under Milosevic, the plans to systematically kill Bosniaks and were tied to the memory of what happened at Kosovo field in 1289 and to its promise of a free, Orthodox, Greater Serbia.

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<sup>25</sup> Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 23.

## Chapter I: Myth and Memory

The concept of a myth is somewhere between fiction and fact; myth toes the line between story and reality. The idea of myth, or the Greek *mythos*, grew in opposition to “the reasoned discourse of *logos*” where myth came to exist in a “discourse opposed both to truth (myth is fiction) and to the rational (myth is absurd).”<sup>26</sup> If myth exists in a discourse in which it is opposed to the idea of rational truth, people to create myth and share myth are denied agency in sharing their own worldview. Looking at how people who believe in myth understand their reality offers more insight into the complexities of ‘truth’ offered by the mythopoetic discourse. As Schopflin realizes, analyzing myth is helpful in understanding “the criteria of selection [of knowledge]” Looking from an inside perspective, as Schopflin asserts, for those members in a culture who venerate myth, the myth “... creates an intellectual and cognitive monopoly in that it seeks to establish the sole way of ordering the world and defining world-views.”<sup>27</sup> Not only is the analysis of myth important in understanding how knowledge is arrived at and privileged in a society, but it is also essential to understand how people who create myth and share myth see their own culture, and how they see their own truths.

Myths “clarify the *raison d’etre* of beliefs, customs... and most importantly, they make it possible to discover operational modes of the human mind...”<sup>28</sup> Notably, the split between the rational and irrational is not relevant, “...for the symbols of myth have metaphoric value and serve a crucial social function in maintaining the given social order.” This is crucial, as myths contain both a particular component, related to a specific story with specific characters, and they

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<sup>26</sup> Joanna Overing, “The Role of Myth: an Anthropological Perspective,” In *Myth and Nationhood* eds. in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schopflin (Taylor & Francis 1997), 2.

<sup>27</sup> Schöpflin, *Myths and Nationhood*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Ivan Strenski, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Levi Strauss and Malinowski*, (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1987), 132.

also contain a universal component, which represents a broader moral truth about a society or about power structures. As Cassier finds,

“the particular concepts within the mythical consciousness seems at first glance totally individual, something which can only be felt but in no way known and understood. And yet beneath this individual phenomenon there lies a universal... [which] encompasses and determines the particular configurations of this thinking and, as it were, sets its imprint upon them.”<sup>29</sup>

This statement from Cassier is essential in understanding how mythopoetic discourse shapes identity on an individual level and also on a collective level. The earlier assertion of Schopflin that myth creates an “intellectual and cognitive monopoly” is relevant in connection to Cassier’s thoughts, as myth is both a way of privileging knowledge, establishing power structures in the social order, and also a way for individuals to understand the world around them on a particular level. As Cassier finds, the “mythical consciousness” is not totally an “individual phenomenon.” Mythical consciousness has a universal component as well, which has a broader and more impactful effect on the “configurations of [individual] thinking.” Therefore, myth exists on an individual and particular level as well as a universal level, which impacts how myth impacts individual members of a society, the discourse on truth, and power structures and morality in the broader social order.

The function of myth as “a symbolic statement about the social order” has an impact on the society in which it originates, as it “reinforces social cohesion and functional unity by presenting and justifying the traditional order.”<sup>30</sup> As Mylonas discusses, myths serve as “integrated symbols.” Myths are integrated because they combine “observable phenomena and various constitutive elements in the shape of animate and inanimate objects that then become

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<sup>29</sup> Ernst Cassier, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Mythical Thought*, (Yale University Press, 1955), 61.

<sup>30</sup> Overing in *Myth & Nationhood*, 7.



bearers of fundamental notions.”<sup>31</sup> Myths are significant because not only do they describe observable phenomena but they also have this aspect of fundamental notions, or experienced truths. As Schopflin finds, in myth, “boundaries are established within the community and also with respect to other communities.” The privileging of mythic knowledge is vital to understanding social order, as “[those] who do not share in the myth are by definition excluded.”<sup>32</sup> Language is another way that myth solidifies fundamental notions and specific knowledge and worldviews, as language, “including both symbolic and grammatical codes, exposes a community to a particular experience, to particular ways of constructing the world.”<sup>33</sup> Clearly, myth is important in determining individual’s worldview, privileging certain forms of knowledge, and constructing the social order. However, it is still not clear how the study of myth fits in to a historical analysis.

As Mylonas poses, “A question hence arises as to whether myths essentially pertain to an intended interpretation (falsified or accurate) of our memories, or they instead constitute a coherent historical record.”<sup>34</sup> Schopflin would respond to this question by asserting that myth “is about perceptions rather than historically validated truths...” He says that the importance of myth lies in the “ways in which communities regard certain propositions as normal and others as perverse and alien.”<sup>35</sup> Overing sees myth as “a time honored tradition and deep-rooted cultural notion [that] is reproduced and thus perpetually re-created in the present.” The reproduction of myth is essential to grasp how people understand their own history, and how this understanding of one’s own history changes over time. For Overing, myth represents a “continuous re-creation

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<sup>31</sup> Christos Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals: The Quest for an Eternal Identity*, (Budapest, Central European University Press, 2003), 151.

<sup>32</sup> Schopflin, *Myths and Nationhood*, 20.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>34</sup> Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals*, 149.

<sup>35</sup> Schopflin, *Myths and Nationhood*, 19.

in contemporary discourses, a work in progress without final form, though the participants will see it as stable and possibly static.”<sup>36</sup> Clearly, while myth might not be considered as a historical account, it is certainly vital to the understanding of a culture and how people interpret their own history and identity over time.

The function of myth in the study of history and historical moments is complex and significant. Zanic realizes that “Historical reality is far more complex and 'illogical' than myth-makers could ever imagine”<sup>37</sup> Myth is therefore not necessarily any less logical than other ways in which a given society remembers their past. As Matthias/Vuckovic point out, history is “a good deal less informative than are poetry, folklore, and song; less vividly hallucinatory, it is more like a mirage.”<sup>38</sup> Kotur also speaks well to the importance of art and poetry in conveying truth. He writes that although “[Art] never appears as an empirical reality.” It “provides access to true reality—a deeper, more spiritual reality.”<sup>39</sup> Especially in the myths that this thesis will discuss, the confluence of the sacred and historical memory is powerful.

Not only were they myths themselves both preserved and also changed, but the re-emergence of myths in which the “temporal proximity of past and present underlines the need for a continuous regeneration, revelation, inspiration or instruction by which truth, personal or collective, is declared.”<sup>40</sup> While certain elements of fundamental truths about the narrative of a

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<sup>36</sup> Overing in *Myths and Nationhood*, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Ivo Zanic, “New Myths for Old,” *Index on Censorship* 28, no. 4 (July 1, 1999): 161.

<sup>38</sup> John Matthias and Vladeta Vuckovic, *Battle Of Kosovo*, (Athens, Ohio, Swallow Press, 1999), 11-12.

<sup>39</sup> Krstivoj Kotur, *The Serbian Folk Epic: It's Theology and Anthropology*, (Philosophical Library, 2015), 27.

<sup>40</sup> Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals*, 162.

nation's history are preserved, myths, as they are constantly retold, are also constantly reinvented and relived, as the stories become "keyed to a particular historical moment."<sup>41</sup>

In Serbia, the historical significance of myth is potent through the tradition of ballads and poems. As Cecil Stewart recounts, in Serbia, "The records of the past were preserved, not in history books, but in heroic ballads..." Stewart elaborates on the passage of history from one generation to another, as these ballads "were relayed from one generation to another, and were invariably embroidered in the process."<sup>42</sup> Pavlovic examines how the oral tradition in the Srem region regarding myth was particularly strong. In this region there were many monasteries, and several monastic writers were influenced by the gospels and also by the Byzantine tradition of hagiography.<sup>43</sup> In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Serbia was "literate as well as powerful," resting upon the language of the Old Church Slavic and a strong "byzantine literary inheritance."<sup>44</sup>

The importance of oral narratives was substantial, as this is how stories were kept alive in church or in folk songs throughout the Ottoman period. The folk songs were sung with a *gusle*, which is a single stringed instrument, and could be remembered even by those who could not read, which lent to their longevity.<sup>45</sup> Oral narratives were created in "*deseterac*, the ten-syllable poetic line especially reserved for the *junacke pesme*, or "heroes' songs" by the singers, or

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<sup>41</sup> Paul A Cohen, *History and Popular Memory: The Power of Story in Moments of Crisis*, (Columbia University Press, 2014), 10.

<sup>42</sup> Cecil Stewart, *Serbian Legacy*, (London, Gallen and Unwin, 1959), 62.

<sup>43</sup> Aleksandar Pavlović, "Rereading the Kosovo Epic: Origins of the 'Heavenly Serbia' in the Oral Tradition." *Serbian Studies: Journal of the North American Society for Serbian Studies* 23, no. 1 (2009): 85

<sup>44</sup> Milne Holton and Vasa D. Mihailovich, eds. *Songs of the Serbian People: From the Collections of Vuk Karadzic*, (Pittsburgh, Pa, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 45.

<sup>45</sup> Cohen, *History and Popular Memory*, 10.

*guslari*.”<sup>46</sup> The notable Vuk Karadzic, who lived from 1787 to 1864 created a compilation of the Serbian epics in 1814.<sup>47</sup> This was significant in that he made the epics “accessible to the newly literate classes among the Serbs themselves, arming them with the core ingredients of a new nationalist faith.”<sup>48</sup>

The only epic song which conveyed this idea of Lazar’s choice was “collected from a blind woman who was a professional epic singer and lived near the center of Lazar's cult” This song became part of a strong tradition in the Kosovo cycle. From the late fourteenth century, religious literature “formulated and propagated” the central Kosovo myth of Tsar Lazar’s choice of a kingdom on heaven and a kingdom on earth. Pavolic points out that “this motif was certainly not a constituent portion of the epic tradition as a whole but a historically conditioned response of a narrow circle of blind singers.” The “professionalization and institutionalization of the oral tradition in Srem” was an important aspect of the historiography of the motif and also the oral tradition.<sup>49</sup> Next, this thesis will examine several key epics that relate to the confluence of religious inspiration and national identity, as well national remembrance.

There are several poems that are part of the “Kosovo cycle,” though the most impactful poem is called “Downfall of the Serbian Empire.” This poem describes the choice that Prince Lazar faces before the battle of Kosovo, in which the Serbian army is perceived to have suffered a devastating defeat in popular memory. Cohen, along with many other historians and authors, point out that it is not clear that the battle was a devastating defeat, militarily speaking. All that is known is that Tsar Lazar and Sultan Murad were both killed. The military result “seems in fact to have been somewhat inconclusive.” Notably, it was not at the Battle of Kosovo, but in 1459,

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<sup>46</sup> Milne Holton and Vasa D. Mihailovich, eds. *Songs of the Serbian People*, xiii.

<sup>47</sup> Cohen, *History and Popular Memory*, 11.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>49</sup> Pavlović, *Rereading the Kosovo Epic*, 94.

“some seventy years later, that Serbia finally succumbed to the Turks.”<sup>50</sup> While the Battle of Kosovo may not have been significant militarily, the epics that followed and the veneration of Tsar Lazar took hold in the moral memory of the Serbian people, and later, in the logos of the Serbian nation.

This excerpt from the “Downfall of the Serbian Empire” describes Lazar’s choice:

*Oh, Tsar Lazar, of honorable descent,  
which kingdom will you choose?  
Do you prefer the heavenly kingdom?  
Or do you prefer the earthly kingdom?  
If you prefer the earthly kingdom,  
saddle the horses, tighten the firths!  
You knights, belt on your sabers,  
and charge against the Turks:  
the entire Turkish army will perish!  
But if you prefer the heavenly kingdom,  
build a church at Kosovo,  
do not make its foundation of marble,  
but of pure silk and scarlet,  
and make the army take the Communion and prepare;  
your entire army will perish,  
and you, prince, will perish with it.*<sup>51</sup>

This poem posits the classic dilemma of the Kosovo myth, which is whether Lazar will choose the kingdom on heaven or the kingdom on earth. If Lazar chooses the earthly kingdom, he is promised that, “the entire Turkish army will perish.” This promise solidifies the idea that the loss at Kosovo was indeed a conscious choice and also that the choice Lazar made more venerable, as he was promised that he would have won against the Turks if he had chose to. The idea that Lazar chose defeat on earth proves the moral, Christ like component of the myth. As Anzulovic examines, this “function of the legend of Prince Lazar’s choice of the heavenly kingdom was to

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<sup>50</sup> Cohen, *History and Popular Memory*, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Branimir Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia: From Myth to Genocide*, (New York, NYU Press, 1999), 11-12

transform an alleged military defeat into a moral victory.” Later, as the story was re-told throughout different moments in the people of Serbia’s history, the epic “was gradually expanded to portray people who at every decisive turn in their history opt for the heavenly kingdom by taking the moral high ground.” <sup>52</sup>

The positive choice of the heavenly kingdom comes with the promise that Lazar’s “entire army will perish.” The component of ultimate sacrifice, and also of the Christ like element of the myth is clear here in Lazar’s choice to sacrifice himself and his army. While the direction for the earthly kingdom is to prepare for war, the direction for the heavenly kingdom is to “build a church at Kosovo” and prepare for death, evidenced by the cue to “take the Communion and prepare,” presumably for death. The direction to build a church at Kosovo, instead of physically fighting for the land is meaningful in that it conveys a sense of spiritual, and thus transcendental ownership and belonging.

The following heroic song is called “Banquet on the Eve of the Battle,”

*Milosh Obilitch, I drink to thee now,  
To thy health, oh Milosh, friend and traitor!  
Friend at first, but at the last a traitor.  
When the battle rages fierce to-morrow  
Thou wilt then betray me on Kossovo,  
And wilt join the Turkish Sultan, Murad!  
Drink with me, and pledge me deep, oh Milosh,  
Drain the cup; I give it thee in token!*

*To his feet leaps Milosh, that great warrior,  
To the black earth bows himself, and answers:*

....  
*“Never, Tsar Lazar, was I unfaithful,  
Never have I been, and never will I be.  
And to-morrow I go to Kossovo  
For the Christian faith to fight and perish.  
At thy very knees there sits the traitor,*

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<sup>52</sup> Anzulovic , *Heavenly Serbia*, 12.

*Covered by thy robes he drains the wine-cup,  
'Tis Vuk Brankovitch, th'accurséd traitor!  
And when dawns the pleasant day to-morrow  
We shall see upon the field, Kossovo,*

*Who to thee is faithful, and who is faithless,  
And I call Almighty God to witness  
I will go to-morrow to Kossovo,  
I will slay the Turkish Sultan, Murad,  
And I'll plant my foot upon his false throat....*<sup>53</sup>

This epic poem is vital to understand the Kosovo cycle as it portrays the element of betrayal, furthering the comparisons between Lazar and Christ. Milosh, sometimes spelled Milos, is the Judas to Lazar's Jesus. As in the telling of the last supper, just as Jesus predicts the betrayal of Judas, Lazar predicts the betrayal of Milosh when he says "when the battle rages fierce to-morrow thou wilt then betray me on Kossovo" When Lazar offers Milosh wine, this is also mirrored in the story of the last supper, when Jesus offers Judas bread. In Christianity, this symbolizes the sacrifice of Jesus' body. In this poem, the wine may represent the sacrifice and the blood of Lazar, as Lazar says to Milosh "I give it thee in token!" Milosh responds to Lazar's prediction of his betrayal by claiming that he is prepared to "go to Kossovo for the Christian faith to fight and perish." This response furthers the connection to the Christian meaning in the Kosovo myth. Milosh does not believe he is just fighting for Lazar, but understands the importance of the battle as a fight for Christianity. In questioning who is loyal to Lazar and who is not, Milosh questions "Who to thee is faithful, and who is faithless." The importance of faith, and not a military or political nature of loyalty is a crucial aspect in understanding the betrayal of Milosh and its significance in the Christian elements of the Kosovo myth. Kossovo is the key place where his loyalty is decided. The betrayal of Milosh is even more significant in that he

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<sup>53</sup> Helen Rootham, *Heroic Songs of the Serbs*, (Oxford, BHBlackwell, 1920), 49.

betrayed Lazar, standing for Christianity and Serbian freedom, in favor of a foreign, Muslim power. The betrayal of Milosh then becomes the original sin of the Slavic people who accept Islam.

As is clear from the epics, Lazar as Christ is a powerful motif connecting the Serbian people to the chosen people of God. Both the Christian themes as well as the organization of the Orthodox Church worked to develop the myth of Lazar into the nation-building force that it became. As Cohen finds, “The national church... was an energetic proponent of the idea that Serbia—like Christ--- would be resurrected.”<sup>54</sup> Pavolic claims that Kosovo, for centuries, “functioned as a religious-ethical ideal and much less, if at all, as a national or territorial symbol.”<sup>55</sup> The importance of religion is found within the Christian themes of the myth and the portrayal of Lazar as Christ, but also in the influence of the Orthodox tradition in particular.

For Kotur, the importance of religion can also be seen in the writing of poetry itself, and as a way of achieving a powerful, sacred truth. Kotur sees the mission of art as introducing a “higher order,” and the mission of poetry, the highest form of art, as both revelation and salvation.<sup>56</sup> At the essence of the folk poet’s worldview, Kotur observes a “lies a parallelism of the microcosm with the macrocosm, the coinciding of mankind with God, the union of the finite with the infinite.”<sup>57</sup> This parallelism is related to the discussion of myth as both connected to the particular and the personal, as well as the universal. While individuals connect to the myth on a personal level, the myth also tells a moral story about an everlasting nation.

Mylonas also contributes to the connection between the moral of Kosovo and the divine. Mylonas writes how “the sacrificial act of Lazar’s murder provided a primordial link with the

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<sup>54</sup> Cohen, *History and Popular Memory*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Pavlović, *Rereading the Kosovo Epic*, 96.

<sup>56</sup> Kotur, *The Serbian Folk Epic*, 27, 31.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.



cosmic–divine reality, an axis mundi, that guaranteed a permanent connection between the sacred and transcendent ground on which the nation had its origins...”<sup>58</sup> The connection of Lazar’s sacrifice where “the nation had its origins” sets the beginning of the nation in parallel with the beginnings of Christianity, at the moment when Jesus was sacrificed on the cross. Not only does this motif portray the Serbians as the chosen people, but it aligns a national leader, Lazar, with Christ. The connection between state and the “sacred and transcendent” is vital to understand the later movements of religious nationalism, which are validated by the connection to Christianity in the Kosovo myth.

The connection between Christianity and the Serbian people is substantial in analyzing the myths of the Kosovo cycle. While the loss of the battle was seen as devastation for the Serbian people, it was also seen as a loss for Christianity. Writing of the Kosovo myth, Kotur sees the perceived loss being regarded not by depression, but as “consciously and intentionally rendered for the preservation of both Christianity and the national honor.”<sup>59</sup> The promise of Kosovo, as with the promise of Christianity, revolves around “suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension...” While the Serbian Christians lost the battle of Kosovo, the implied moral, past the acceptance of suffering is that there will be redemption. In the suffering and victimhood of the Serbian people as portrayed in the Kosovo myth, it becomes clear that “the Serbian people have drunk of the water of life.”<sup>60</sup>

The “thematical and stylistic influence” of Orthodoxy had an impact on the transformation of the Kosovo myth. As Mylonas describes, the Orthodoxy “exalted the human agent in the narrative and illustrated a “sacred” perception of conduct, on which social realities

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<sup>58</sup> Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals*, 157.

<sup>59</sup> Kotur, *The Serbian Folk Epic*, 131.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 149.

and attitudes were constructed culminating in the inception of a Serbian national being.”<sup>61</sup> As Mylonas continues, “the ecclesiastical patronage of the epic tradition provided a moralistic and lucid awareness which inspired the re-enactment of “lasting” political, military and spiritual references from the past.”<sup>62</sup> Tsar Lazar dying for freedom, “in the spiritual sense, attributed in the Orthodox faith—and for a collectively shared desire of self-rule” is connected to the history of the autocephalous nature of the church and self-rule is an important tradition in the history of the orthodox tradition.<sup>63</sup> The goals of the Orthodox Church were strongly connected to the goals of the Serbian nation, and the yearning for freedom from outside rulers.

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<sup>61</sup> Mylonas, *Serbian Orthodox Fundamentals*, 157.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 160-161.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 166.

## Chapter II: Public Memory and Politics

French philosopher and historian Ernest Renan stated that, “a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are but one... One lies in the past, one in the present.”<sup>64</sup> Renan’s observation of a nation as something spiritual connects to the fundamental idea of myth being integral to identity, and myth as transcendental. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans, as Serbia emerged as an independent state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Kosovo myth “regained its vigor because it carried the promise that Serbia would resurrect as a mighty empire.” Myth creates a national purpose, a promise, which is passed down through generations and also incorporated into political memory.<sup>65</sup> Myth becomes nationhood through the process of its constant re-creation during key moments in a nation’s history. As Zanic describes, “The replacement of old myths with new ones is spontaneously experienced as demythologization, or is represented as such by the new political elites.”<sup>66</sup> This is seen vividly in the Kosovo cycle, as myth offers a simplified and storied version of history, a continual purpose for the nation. As Anzulovic describes, though the violent nationalism in the Balkans may have seemed irrational, “These ideas are often produced and propagated by relatively normal people who may be unaware of the consequences of their escape from reality into myths.”<sup>67</sup> The confluence of reality and myth is not insignificant, and the Kosovo myth was effective in mobilizing people because it spoke to a truth that they felt.

The history of religious institutions in Kosovo is important in understanding how myth transferred to political reality. Through the church, there has been a long history of activism and

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<sup>64</sup> Renan quoted in Mylonas, 162.

<sup>65</sup> Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Zanic, *New Myths for Old*, 157.

<sup>67</sup> Anzulovic, *Heavenly Serbia*, 4.

involvement in national affairs. While the Muslim community in Kosovo has not been as organized on a public, national level, such as the Serbian Orthodox community, religious identity is a public one, historically linked to the Ottomans, and a distinguishing factor from the Serbian religious public dialogue. Although the Albanians living in Kosovo had converted to Islam, “The Church “preserved the memory of the Serbian state with Kosovo as its major sacred center. Kosovo is the central myth and symbol of Serbian Orthodoxy.”<sup>68</sup> The Serbian Orthodox Church, which was founded in 1346 by Serbian Emperor Stefan Dusan (1331-55) the Mighty, was founded in Pec, in what is now Kosovo. Emperor Stefan Dusan created “anti-heresy clauses” which demanded “all subjects of the Serbian kingdom and members of foreign communities be baptized into the Serbian church.”<sup>69</sup> The church became autocephalous in 1219 under the leadership of Emperor Stefan Nemanja’s son, Rastko, who went by his monastic name, Sava. The church, led by a group of clerics, has had a long history of activism, especially regarding sacred sites.

The Serbian church, which was especially prominent in the medieval period, played a key role in the creation of the modern Serbian nation. As Banac observes, the Serbs, “because of the patriotic traditions of Serbian orthodoxy, naturally looked upon their church as a national institution.”<sup>70</sup> The role of the church as not only a propagator of religion, but as a major key institution, is essential to understanding the nature of Serbian nationalism, and the concept of Christoslavism. According to Milorad Ekmecic, since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, “the Church turned ethnic nationalism into a religion and fused *pravoslavlje* (the Orthodox faith) with the ideology of the

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<sup>68</sup> Vjekoslav Perica, *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*, (Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>69</sup> Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian*, 10.

<sup>70</sup> Banac *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 107.

restored nationhood.”<sup>71</sup> The phenomenon of “Christoslavism” is apt to describe Serbian nationalism. Christoslavism is a mix of “religious and ethnocentric interpretations of Serbian nationalism.”<sup>72</sup> It is important to note that the concept of Christoslavism “has a history, that is, is a product of historical and social religious forces...”<sup>73</sup>

At the end of Ottoman rule in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, though the Serbian Orthodox church “lost its preeminence as the representative of the national cause... it became in some ways an auxiliary of the new Serbian state.”<sup>74</sup> During the era of communist Yugoslavia, the church remained intact. Even as early as 1969, the Serbian Orthodox Church celebrated the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of being autocephalous. It was “the first such massive religious event publicly celebrated in the communist country since 1945.”<sup>75</sup> The Serbians dominated key positions in the government, the army and bureaucracy and “...for reasons more to do with nationalism than religion, during the communist era the Orthodox Church has remained a thorn in Tito’s side.”<sup>76</sup>

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as Slobodan Milosevic rose to power, the church became increasingly active in public life and in the news, especially in Kosovo. Tim Judah argues that Milosevic’s brand of nationalism inspired nationalisms in other parts of Yugoslavia, so in a sense, the end of Yugoslavia began in Kosovo.<sup>77</sup> In 1982 on Good Friday, clerics led by the Archimandrite Atanasje Jevtic, “released a document entitled “Appeal for the Protection of the Serbian Population and Their Sacred Monuments in Kosovo” (also known as the Appeal of

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<sup>71</sup> Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 8.

<sup>72</sup> Atalia Omer and Jason A. Springs, *Religious Nationalism: A Reference Handbook*, (ABC-CLIO, 2013), 19.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>74</sup> Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Religion, Ethnicity, and Self-Identity : Nations in Turmoil*, (Hanover, NH, University Press of New England, 1997), 91.

<sup>75</sup> Perica, *Balkan Idols*, xxiv.

<sup>76</sup> Marty and Appleby, *Religion, Ethnicity, and Self-Identity*, 96.

<sup>77</sup> Judah, *Kosovo*, 61.

21 Serbian Priests).’’<sup>78</sup> In 1985 the church restarted the “1935–41 construction of memorial church of Saint Sava, located atop the Vracar hill, where, as legend has it, the Turks burned the relics of Saint Sava in 1594.’’<sup>79</sup> This was done while also simultaneously calling on people to respond to the attacks on shrines in Kosovo.

For Serbs living in Kosovo, where they are a minority, there has been tension and a history of petitioning their government for better treatment and protection. In January of 1986, over 200 Serbian intellectuals submitted a petition to Yugoslav and Serbian assemblies charging various things against Kosovar Albanians, ranging from the rape of old women and nuns to the roughing up of young people, the blinding of cattle, and the desecration of churches.’’<sup>80</sup> At the time, there was a great deal of outcry from the public, but government officials were not as outspoken, even though there was quiet support from politicians including Slobodan Milosevic.

In another important event that showed the feelings of Serbs in Kosovo, Milosevic spoke to the humiliation, sacrifice, and promised redemption that Serbs in Kosovo felt, the same themes evoked by the Battle of Kosovo. On April 25, 1987 Milosevic went to Kosovo Polje to go to meeting with Kosovar Serbs complaining to Albanian leaders. There were Serb and Montenegrins demonstrating outside, and although Milosevic was rushed into the building he came out to speak to protestors:

Comrades...you should stay here. This is your country, these are your houses, your fields and gardens, your memories. You are not going to abandon your lands because life is hard, because you are oppressed by injustice and humiliation... You should stay here, both for your ancestors and your descendants. Otherwise you would shame your ancestors and disappoint your descendants. But I do not suggest you stay here suffering and enduring a situation in which you are not satisfied. On the contrary! It should be changed.... Yugoslavia does not exist

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<sup>78</sup> Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 124.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>80</sup> Cohen *History and Popular Memory*, 22.

without Kosovo! Yugoslavia would disintegrate without Kosovo! Yugoslavia and Serbia are not going to give up Kosovo.<sup>81</sup>

In this speech, Milosevic makes it clear to the Serbian protestors that he is with them and that he thinks their cause is just. He recognizes their long history of suffering, which is a main theme that comes out of the Kosovo story, and he connects their struggle to the historic struggle of their ancestors and also their descendants. He tells them that they even have a duty to stay in Kosovo for the sake of the Serbian nation. In speaking to their “injustice and humiliation” he emboldens them to more strongly identify with this narrative of unjust suffering. He identified Kosovo as the origin of their suffering, and the place of the nation, home, and memories. This speech is significant because it places Kosovo at the heart of the Serbian individual’s struggle for redemption and liberation and also connects the present suffering of people to the long, and ethnically specific, history of their ancestors and their descendants being tied to the land.

The church played a major political role in the reinvigoration of the Kosovo battle in the late 1980s, along with political leaders such as Milosevic. In 1988 and 1989, the Church led “a dynamic program of pilgrimages, jubilees, and church-national festivals in preparation for the 600th anniversary of the battle of Kosovo... “ During these festivities, members of the church went on a tour through Serbia and Bosnia and brought “the relics of the saintly prince Lazar.”<sup>82</sup> During times of national uncertainty “the Church kept faith in the capacity of the Kosovo shrines and the myth to heal wounds and to give new impetus for the nation’s rebirth.”<sup>83</sup> In its inception and for most of its development, in the Serbian faith, religion was not only a personal faith, but also one that was shared with country and countrymen. The Church played a major role in

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<sup>81</sup> Milosevic quoted in Cohen, 59.

<sup>82</sup> Perica, *Balkan Idols*, 128.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 205.

reinvigorating the public interest, as in 1989, “Nationalist hysteria peaked in the early summer as the country was deluged with books, films, and plays commemorating the Battle of Kosovo...”<sup>84</sup>

While the myth had survived the Ottoman period through poetry and the church, it did not become divisively significant until resurgence in Serbian nationalism in the 1980s in the hands of Milosevic. At the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo Milosevic painted the Serbians as not only victims to years of suffering but also addresses the loss as indicative of Serbian disunity, calling for Serbian unity and activism in determining own fate. Not only did Milosevic give a narrative and an explanation to Serbian suffering, but he used words such as “crisis” and “threat,” posed by a multiethnic community, setting the presumed solution as unification under his own leadership, as “unity brings back dignity.”<sup>85</sup> In 1989, the heroism of the myth became not just sacrifice or courage for the sake of heavenly glory or Euro-Christian civilization, but the greater good to sacrifice for and to fight for a united and uniquely Serbian identity and mission.

One of the most famous and prolific moments of the Kosovo saga is Slobodan Milosevic’s speech at the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, marking the holiday of Vidovdan, or St. Vitus Day, to mark the battle of Kosovo and the Serbian nation. The following excerpts from his short speech exemplify the power of the Kosovo myth and the past in national politics:

...it is not difficult for us to answer today the old question: how are we going to face Milos [Milos Obilic, legendary hero of the Battle of Kosovo]. Through the play of history and life, it seems as if Serbia has, precisely in this year, in 1989, regained its state and its dignity and thus has celebrated an event of the distant past which has a great historical and symbolic significance

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<sup>84</sup> Cohen *History and Popular Memory*, 23.

<sup>85</sup> Milosevic, 1989.



for its future.<sup>86</sup>

At the beginning of the speech, Milosevic describes a problem that Serbs are facing by referring to Milos, the warrior who is said to have been a traitor to Prince Lazar. Milos is the Slav who has converted to Islam, and represents the traitor among the great Serb nation, which leads to its downfall in the Battle of Kosovo. Later in the speech, Milosevic calls for “unity, solidarity, and cooperation among people” which, he claims, “have no greater significance anywhere on the soil of our motherland than they have here in the field of Kosovo, which is a symbol of disunity and treason” The betrayal of Milos represents the original sin of all Slavic Muslims, who present a challenge to the Orthodox nation.

According to Milosevic, Kosovo is remembered because it is the cause of the historic Serbian victimhood. Later in the speech he states that, “*In the memory of the Serbian people, this disunity was decisive in causing the loss of the battle and in bringing about the fate which Serbia suffered for a full 6 centuries.*” Milosevic does not only point to the past, but brings the past into the present by stating that Kosovo ought to be remembered, and that the themes, or “symbolic significance” in Kosovo will help to rebuild the Serb nation for the future. At the end of the speech he makes this connection between the past, the present, and the future of the Serbian nation, all tied back to the Battle at Kosovo Polje:

Six centuries later, now, we are being again engaged in battles and are facing battles. They are not armed battles, although such things cannot be excluded yet. However, regardless of what kind of battles they are, they cannot be won without resolve, bravery, and sacrifice, without the noble qualities that were present here in the field of Kosovo in the days past.

Six centuries ago, Serbia heroically defended itself in the field of Kosovo, but it also defended Europe. Serbia was at that time the bastion that defended the European culture, religion, and European society in general.

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<sup>86</sup> Milosevic, 1989.

Let the memory of Kosovo heroism live forever! Long live Serbia! Long live Yugoslavia! Long live peace and brotherhood among peoples!<sup>87</sup>

Milosevic constructs the national history and the national purpose of Serbia by pointing to the Kosovo myth the key moment for the Serbian people, whose identity is also built by turning to the past. Milosevic defines the battle of Kosovo as being related to the identity of the Serbian people as European and western, and thus positions the Serbian people as of the same western and Christian culture and religion, as opposed to the Muslim East. He ends the speech by exclaiming that the memory of Kosovo and Serb heroism “live forever.”

The transition of the Kosovo myth from a religious story of resurrection to one of national triumph has to do with the use of language and motifs which originated in the Kosovo cycle in political speech. As Zanic points out, in first Balkan war, “the Kosovo myth was used to construct above all an ethics of duty and sacrifice,” where as in the First World War, “the stress shifted more forcefully to sacrifice and victimhood.” In 1989, on the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle, “the myth then acquired the sense of moral triumph of the victim who refuses to submit...”<sup>88</sup> As the myth as been re-created over time, its emphasis changes to fit the historical circumstance.

The political use of history has not always been used to mobilize people in the Balkans. During the communist era of Yugoslavia under Tito, nationalist differences were minimized and “...it was the present and not the past that was important...” However, the breakup of

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<sup>87</sup> Milosevic, 1989.

<sup>88</sup> Zanic, *New Myths for Old*, 158.

Yugoslavia and the prevailing nationalisms “proved the ultimate resilience of those past national myths.”<sup>89</sup>

Though this thesis mostly focuses on the role of myth in the development of Serbian nationalism, the political events of the 1980s and 1990s did not develop within Serbia alone, but within a greater context of the breakdown of Yugoslavia, the master narrative in Kosovo, and Kosovar activism, which in some cases involved military resistance. In Kosovo, an important communal aspiration was the inclusion of the Albanian language in learning institutions. The University of Prishtina was founded in 1969, and at the time, during a period of autonomy for Kosovars, between 1974 and 1989, Kosovar Albanians “began to identify with Tito’s Yugoslavia and to focus on Kosovo as a territorial political entity in its own right”<sup>90</sup> While they identified with the Albanian language and with Illyrian, not Slav, origin, they were committed to an autonomous state within Yugoslavia.

This began to change with the revocation of Albanian autonomy in 1989 by Serbia under Milošević. At this point, Kosovar Albanians began to see statehood as the goal of their resistance. In 1990, the Kosovo Assembly declared the independence of Kosovo, and voted for the “the creation of the parallel governmental and educational system.”<sup>91</sup> The Kosovo Liberation Army (the KLA) emerged to fight the repression of Serb military occupation. They were an armed group, and admitted to committing various attacks on Serbian police. The violent, though defensive, action of the KLA ended the détente between Serbia proper and Albanian Kosovars. The KLA could have been labeled a terrorist organization for its tactics of

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<sup>89</sup> Kyril Drezov, Bulent Gokay, and Michael Waller, eds. *Kosovo: The Politics of Delusion*, (Portland, OR, Routledge, 2001), 5.

<sup>90</sup> Valur Ingimundarson, “The Politics of Memory and the Reconstruction of Albanian National Identity in Postwar Kosovo” in *History and Memory*, (2007), 99.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

insurgency, though Milosevic's policies of ethnic cleansing "drove not only a critical mass of the Albanian population but also the international community into the KLA's arms."<sup>92</sup>

While Kosovar Albanians identify with a long history of suffering and oppression at the hands of the Serbs, the main moment of the master-narrative of Albanian resistance is the massacre of Adem Jeshari, a leader of the KLA, in early March of 1998. Serbian special police killed Jeshari. He was killed with fifty others, twentyeight of whom were women or children.<sup>93</sup> The massacre became mythologized for the Albanian Kosovars, just like the killing of Lazar became mythologized for the Serbs. In Kosovo, "local teachers and journalists...became national historians overnight, and quickly articulated the themes of the myth--- resistance unto death, sacrifice for the love of country and immortality..."<sup>94</sup> While the myth of Adem Jeshari is an important marker of the national narrative, each act of repression from Serbian authority "potentially converted another member of the Kosovar Albanian population into a resister motivated by a defiant impulse."<sup>95</sup> Just as Vidovan marks the Battle of Kosovo and represents the national holiday of Serbia, for Albanians, the November 28 date of Flag Day represents both the Albanian national holiday and Jeshari's birthday.

For Albanians and Serbs, the national celebration is "not only a metanarrative serving the purpose of legitimizing a new state; it is also a cult that is enacted, fixed and performed."<sup>96</sup> For both Serbs and Albanians, Myth is key to understanding the ideology of religious nationalism. But ordinary people do not necessarily live by the ideologies that dictate the

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<sup>92</sup> Henry H Perrit, *Kosovo Liberation Army: The inside story of an insurgency*, (2008) 47.

<sup>93</sup> Ingimundarson, 54.

<sup>94</sup> Anna di Lellio and Stephanie Schwandner-Wievers, "The Legendary Commander: the construction of an Albanian master-narrative in post-war Kosovo" in *Nations and Nationalism*, (2006), 516.

<sup>95</sup> Perrit, 55.

<sup>96</sup> Ingimundarson, 104.

actions of nations. It is necessary to examine how the theory of narrative and public memory translates into the lived experiences of individuals. Danilo Mandic examines how

“...the uses of history in understandings of nationalism are sharply polarized, leading either to dehistoricized micro-level explanations of nationalism or emphases on the importance of history that obscure the precise ways that individuals instrumentalize history for different ends (nationalist or not). (Mandic 107-108)

Mandic argues that history is both lived and abstract. He emphasizes that in looking at how historical memory interacts with nationalism, it is not useful to only examine individual accounts or theoretical explanations, as only one approach to understanding how historical memory interacts with nationalism leads to either “dehistoricized micro-level explanations” or a lack of understanding of the different ways in which history is used.

In a study with individuals from the Kosovo/ Serbian region, Mandic finds that this idea of lived history “tends to reject ‘official’ nationalist narrative and popular belief, to ignore the ethnic out-group, and to produce lessons of history at the individual, personal level.” For instance, Mandic quotes one of the respondents, a person from Belgrade, who claimed that “history has hit me, I mean me personally [points to his chest], so many times that I basically can’t ignore it.” Simultaneously, the concept of abstract history “tends to embrace ‘official’ nationalist narrative...” and produces “lessons of history for collectivities.”<sup>97</sup> Mandic recorded that in half of the cases where the respondents felt negative effects of history, respondents took care to “contrast between personal experience and the incorrect or simplified elite-level

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<sup>97</sup> Danilo Mandic. “What Kind of Burden Is the Burden of History? How Young Adults in Serbia and Kosovo Use History to Understand and Experience Nationalism.” *Ethnopolitics* 16, no. 2 (March 15, 2017): 112

narrative: the ‘official history’, ‘official story’, ‘popular story’, ‘leaders’ fairy tale’, or ‘what everyone was brainwashed to believe.’”<sup>98</sup>

For the respondents who discussed history as a “public story” with actors which are nations, or other terms for collective identities, respondents described history on a “a highly impersonal, almost mythological level” As opposed to the respondents who viewed history as personal and private, these respondents felt history “as a collective force affecting one’s entire in-group.” In this way, history became not “one’s own, but ‘ours’.”<sup>99</sup> Helena Zdravković-Zonta acknowledges this phenomenon, that history is not limited to the sphere of “...academic debates—it is a live and wild creature that is both shaped according to present realities and influences their interpretations.”<sup>100</sup> It is important to understand that history is not only created in academic spaces, but it is also lived.

How academics and politicians describe and use history sometimes impacts public memory or national narrative, but individuals also have their own narratives and experiences of history. Ultimately, the narrative used to propel nationalist ideology is a master narrative, manipulated and privileged by people in positions for the master plan of the state. The master narrative is disseminated as truth, though it does not always coincide with the lived experiences of individuals, because the master narrative only exists through the lens that the state creates. The next chapter of this thesis will look at the Serbian national myth from a less privileged lens.

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<sup>98</sup> Mandić, *What Kind of Burden*, 113.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>100</sup> Helena Zdravković-Zonta, *Narratives of Victims and Villains in Kosovo*, (Nationalities Papers, 2009), 669.

### Chapter III: Women and Alternative Narrative

Throughout this analysis so far, something has been missing: the historical presence and perspectives of women. The national narrative is presented as a singular, masculine perspective on Serbian nationhood. Women, while not presented as the face of Serbian nationalism or Serbian Orthodoxy, play a major role, though not always through self-agency, in shaping the predominant ideologies of religious or ethnic nationalism that have been explored so far in this thesis. In the discourse of myth and nationhood, which Papic describes as “militantly masculinist,” women are “nearly invisible, unless they become much publicized victims of the enemy nation.”<sup>101</sup> The way women are talked about, or ignored, shapes the gendered divisions of nationalism and ethnic violence. As Papic explains, the gendering of the nation genders the separate spheres of History and reproduction, Nation and survival, battlefield and shelter, public glory and private survival, and so forth.”<sup>102</sup> The gendered divides go beyond metaphor, as they control the presence of women’s voices in the public sphere and in public memory, and they represent the control over women’s bodies as the symbolic future of the nation.

Women, though not absent from the making of history, are largely left out of the privileged narratives that become collective memory and national dogma. Women did leave behind records of their wartime accounts, though “their voices have been largely omitted from official histories.”<sup>103</sup> This shows that their experiences were not as highly valued as the perspectives of men, and thus not privileged as men’s narratives in becoming collective memory,

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<sup>101</sup> Zarana Papic in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans: Women and Society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav Successor States*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet, (Central European University Press, 2015), 160.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>103</sup> Nancy Meriwether Wingfield and Maria Bucur, eds. *Gender and War in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006), 10.

something worthy of building a nation off of. Not only does this mean that women's voices were valued less than those of men, but it also says something about the resulting national narratives if these narratives are only formed from the perspectives of men. The absence of women's voices from the dominant national narrative results in the perception of women as a-historical, meaning that they did not shape history and that women do not shape history. As Celia Hawkesworth reflects, women in this context are seen as being "...slopped out of history, living somehow outside the world of masculine achievements."<sup>104</sup> It also means that the national narrative is also a masculine one, one that upholds stereotypes of masculinity and power, and of the importance of male agency and experience. The absence of women from the collective historical memory of the nation results in another sort of myth, a "myth of all-pervasive patriarchy," which Croatian feminist Lydia Sklovicky discusses in her book, *More Horses than Women*.<sup>105</sup>

This "myth of all-pervasive patriarchy" is contrasted by the historical importance that women played in the song tradition and in their duty to remember historic tragedy. As [author of gender and war] claims, "women were the principal transmitters of the song tradition" as women often had to do work involving their hands, so singing was one form of entertainment and expression.<sup>106</sup> Even though women have been involved in the creation of important folk epics, such as many of those documented by Karadzic, there is still a division of folk songs into feminine or masculine. The epics, which are stories of the nation and heroism, are associated with men, while the lyric style is associated with women. As Hawkesworth says of this lyric mode, associated with the creativity of women, "it is inevitable that it too should continue to be

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<sup>104</sup> Celia Hawkesworth, *Voices in the Shadows: Women and Verbal Art in Serbia and Bosnia*, (Budapest, Central European University Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>105</sup> Sklevicky, Lydia. "More Horses Than Women: On the Difficulties of Founding Women's History in Yugoslavia." *Gender & History* 1, no. 1 (March 1, 1989): 68–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.1989.tb00235.x>.

<sup>106</sup> Wingfield and Bucur, *Gender and War*, 160.



marginalized....”<sup>107</sup> The privileging of men’s perspectives is relevant even in poetic form. These masculine narratives define the national cause as they also define the gendered roles within the cause.

One of the first poems written in the Kosovo cycle of poems was written by Tsaritsa Milicia, the wife of Tsar Lazar. While women were not seen as intellectual writers, their creativity fell in line with the traditional roles and responsibilities of Serb womanhood: to serve and then remember the men they existed in relation to. These poems “reminded Serbian households of their duty—men to fight and women to remember.”<sup>108</sup> There is even a word, *narikaca*, in Serbian, which means a woman who “through her laments, she tells the glorious story of the deceased and expresses the grave loss felt by the family.”<sup>109</sup> This tradition is longstanding, especially in the Kosovo cycle of lyric and epic poetry. This following poem is an excerpt from Milicia’s lament over the death of her husband, the famed Prince Lazar.

*Rejoice, O lily which sprang from the thorn bush,  
Perfect armament for soldiers.  
Rejoice, O teacher to the hermits.  
Rejoice, O Lazar,  
O rudder and calm port for sailors.  
Rejoice, avenger of the wronged,  
O reprimander of liars.  
Rejoice, O comforter of mourners,  
The poor’s defendant, the naked’s raiment.  
Rejoice, O beauty of the strong ones,  
O firm protector of the widows...  
There is no praise of which you are unworthy.*<sup>110</sup>

This poem, honoring Lazar, shows the power that the women survivors had over the legacy of their husbands, even if their words followed what was expected of them, as mourners. Her voice

<sup>107</sup> Hawkesworth, *Voices in the Shadows*, 14.

<sup>108</sup> Wingfield and Bucur, *Gender and War*, 162.

<sup>109</sup> Dubravka Zarkov, *The Body of War: Media, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Break-up of Yugoslavia*, (Durham, Duke University Press Books, 2007), 29.

<sup>110</sup> Cohen, *History and Popular Memory* 10.

is one of morality, justice, and joy in his service. With the refrain “Rejoice” the words read like a religious hymn, not dissimilar from a melody that might be sung at Easter in a religious setting, celebrating the resurrection of Christ. Even in death, Lazar’s widow depicts him as a “comforter of mourners” and a “protector of the widows.”

While Tsaritsa Milicia’s poem is a voice from a widow, another main poem in the Kosovo cycle, “The Death of the Mother of the Jugovices” represents a woman’s voice not as a wife, but as a mother and spectator to the death of her sons.

The Death of the Mother of the Jugovices

*That which she asks, God grants her readily:  
God gives to her the eyes of an eagle  
And the wide wings of the white-feathered swan  
And so she flies o’er Kosovo’s flat field.  
There she finds them, nine Jugovices dead,  
As well as the tenth, old man, Jug Bogdan.*

....  
*Then from afar her dauhters-in-law see her,  
And so toward her they come ever closer.  
The nine widows thereon begin to wail,  
The nine orphans thereon begin to cry,  
And nine fine steeds thereon begin to neigh,  
And nine fierce hounds thereon begin to bay,  
Nine gray falcons, thereon begin to shriek,  
But even then the mother’s heart is firm;  
And her heart won’t break; she sheds no tears at all.*

....  
*The mother’s heart then is swollen with grief,  
As her heart swells and at the last it breaks  
For her nine sons, the nine Jugovices,  
And for the tenth, the old man, Jug Bogdan.*<sup>111</sup>

In this poem, God gives the mother “eyes of an eagle/ and the wide wings of the white-feathered swan” in order to witness the death of her sons, as well as an old man. It seems that her duty, and the duty of her daughters-in-law, is to witness the lives and deaths of their husbands or sons, and

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<sup>111</sup> Holton and Mihailovich, *Songs of the Serbian People*, 150.

to lament them. The title of the poem, “The Death of the Mother of the Jugovices” is not only about the death of her sons, but about her heart breaking and her own death, not being able to bear life after they have died. In this piece, the mother as well as the daughters in law are depicted as the orphans and the animals are, hopelessly “wailing”, a particular womanly cry.

The painting below depicts the story of the Kosovo Maiden, which is excerpted below the painting.



Uroš Predić, *Kosovo Maiden*, 1919, oil on canvas.

While the poem by Tsaritsa Milicia was of the lyric style, this piece is an epic. Even though the poem tells a story about a young woman, it is not written by her, and speaks to themes particular to the nation, and not to universal values associated with the lyric style.

#### The Kosovo Maiden

*She wakes early,            the Kosovo maiden;*

*Rises early, on a Sunday morning,  
 On a Sunday, before a warm, bright sun.  
 Both her white sleeves thereon upon her fair arms,  
 Both her white sleeves are rolled to her elbows,  
 And upon her back she carries her white bread.  
 And in her hands there are two golden vessels;  
 The one of them is filled with cold water,  
 And the other is filled with rosy wine.  
 And she sets out for Kosovo's flat plain.*

*The maiden walks over all the war field,  
 O'er the war field of the prince of honor.  
 She turns over every bloody warrior,  
 And when she finds a warrior still alive,  
 She washes him with the cooing water,  
 She offers him a cup of rosy wine,  
 And she feeds him with her well-baked bread<sup>112</sup>*

The maiden is portrayed as pure and innocent, with “white” or “fair” characteristics. She is represented as the good, moral force in the poem. Later in the epic, a warrior she finds asks if she is there for her brother or nephew or “old, revered father.” She replies that she is looking for three men who she is not related to, who she met before the battle at church, who she knew to be part of Prince Lazar’s army. One of the men promised to be the best man in her future wedding, one promised to be the first witness, and one to be the husband. All give her different personal items of theirs and said “you should keep me in remembrance by it.” Again, her significance is to be a witness and to remember these men, who she finds to be dead. The warrior who tells her this warns her to go home “lest the blood stain [her] skirt’s hem and [her] sleeves.” She is meant to remain innocent, though she is also meant to carry the message of sacrifice of the Kosovo warriors. As with the mother in the previous poem, as she exits the field, “she wails from her white throat.”

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 154.

In general, in terms of content and message, men and women's songs differ. While men's songs dominated the singing when the subject turned to narrating war and heroism..., women's songs "spoke of their love of homeland, family, home, children, and loss."<sup>113</sup> Hawkesworth describes how the heroic songs became more important for the political purposes of fighting the Turks, strengthening belief in the Orthodox Church, and in fostering the hope of "the inevitability of ultimate liberation." Meanwhile, women's songs have not been as politically expedient. Hawkesworth describes the values in women's songs to be universal, and not particular to nation or ethnicity.<sup>114</sup> Thus, it is the songs associated with masculinity and Serbian manhood that promote and define the national cause. It is these narratives that dominate the collective consciousness, and these masculine narratives that are used to promote politically driven violence, while the feminine narratives are simultaneously suppressed, and women silenced.

Women's bodies are depicted as not only physical bodies, but as symbols of the nation. There are two main symbolic interpretations of women in this case: women as mother and women as victim. Women are either a Serbian mother, committed to the national cause, or a victim of suffering, a call for the defense of the Serbian nation. Women's bodies are depicted as the nation, "the bearer of the nation's rejuvenating powers, protected and sacred, but she does not belong to the nation in the way that men do."<sup>115</sup> While women's bodies are recognized as powerful, as the site of rejuvenation for the nation, but also something that must be protected, and thus controlled to ensure the future of the nation. Zarkov recognizes the importance of this realization of women's bodies as birthing the nation, stating that "it is both vulnerable and

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<sup>113</sup> Wingfield and Bucur, *Gender and War*, 161.

<sup>114</sup> Hawkesworth, *Voices in the Shadows* 24.

<sup>115</sup> Tatjana Aleksic, *The Sacrificed Body: Balkan Community Building and the Fear of Freedom*, (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 27.

powerful, a potential target of attacks and a focus of protection, a fierce defender of its honor and its offspring” Zarkov rightly recognized the maternal body as “both symbolic and lived.”<sup>116</sup> This means that while women’s bodies stand as symbol for metaphoric mother, it is also a physical truth, with political and physical consequences.

Women are not just held up as the “*dignified* Mother of all Serbs,” representing the higher ethnic morality,” but they are also seen as the “*raped* Mother of all Serbs,” representing the narrative of ethnic suffering”<sup>117</sup> In this context, the body of woman becomes the victim, and the victim becomes feminine. The victimhood of women is associated with women’s bodies as both sex objects and as child-bearers, but not as citizens of the nation in the same, full and political role that men are. As Bjelic explores, “Women’s bodies, individually tortured and in pain, are transformed into national symbols and presented as symbolic battlefields that embody national values.”<sup>118</sup> Women are described not as fighters for the national cause, but only in terms of national pain and loss. Victimhood is feminized and masculinity, in [opposition?] becomes militarized.

The power that women’s bodies signify does not apply to women in Serbian society or in the war economy. As Aleksic asserts, “The symbolism attached to the female body is highly sexualized and linked to her reproductive function, to the point that woman has no other meaning but the one that is ascribed to her body.”<sup>119</sup> The power attached to women’s bodies makes it dangerous, especially as it is both seen as maternal and sexual, something that needs to be guarded, protected, controlled. Aleksic describes the female body as “the ultimate site of male

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<sup>116</sup> Zarkov, *The Body of War*, 19.

<sup>117</sup> Zarkov, *The Body of War*, 41

<sup>118</sup> Dusan Bjelic, *Balkan as Metaphor*, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002), 314.

<sup>119</sup> Aleksic, *The Sacrificed Body*, 27.

nationalist desire,”<sup>120</sup> as the nation and the land are feminized and women’s bodies become the site of the continuity of the nation. In the case of the breakup of Yugoslavia, women’s bodies become the center of ethnic nationalism and gendered violence. These two things are clearly not unrelated, given women’s dual position as both ethnic victims and sites of national rejuvenation.

Women’s bodies are at the center of the ethnic aspect of Serbian nationalism. Zarkov makes the vital recognition of the similarity of ethnicity and gender, “as a relation and a category of *power*, always concerned with living individuals or communities, but never reducible to them.”<sup>121</sup> This means that the way that society deals with gender and ethnicity represent social systems of power, and that individuals exist and live with the consequences of control associated with maintaining these systems of power. Papic discusses how this power system evolves when invoked in the “pure” nation-building process, that is, the nation-building process meant to result in purity of ethnicity. Papic states that this process “results in two interdependent forms of violence against [women]: highly restricted or no abortion for the insiders, and, in extreme (but consistent) cases, rape for the outsiders.”<sup>122</sup> Aleksic writes how “...the female body is also symbolic of the community or nation to the extent that its ‘boundaries’ are considered permeable to contamination by external groups.”<sup>123</sup> The relevance of reproduction and sexuality as part of nationalism and violence is not only real, as in actual restriction on reproductive rights or rape, but also acts as a metaphor of how women’s bodies exist in relation to nationhood.

In this context, violence against women is not necessarily about women, but about the ethnic nation their bodies represent. Zarkov recognizes that in this ideology, it is not Serbian woman, but Serbian man, who is most wronged by the rape of a Serbian woman by a man of

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<sup>120</sup> Aleksic, *The Sacrificed Body*, 54.

<sup>121</sup> Zarkov, *The Body of War*, 11.

<sup>122</sup> Papic in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, 155.

<sup>123</sup> Aleksic, *The Sacrificed Body*, 17.

another ethnicity. It is he who sees “his ethnic stock polluted and his ethnic lineage disrupted by Muslim men, he is the embodiment of the Serbhood.”<sup>124</sup> The raped female body does not belong to the individual women who experience the trauma of rape, but instead, the “raped ethnic-female body always belongs to one specific ethnic territory, symbolically expelled or separated from all the others.”<sup>125</sup> Thus, women’s bodies act as permeable borders that define one ethnic group and that must be protected and fortified against foreign invasion. Women’s bodies are not only symbols, but also essential parts in the ethno-nationalist aspirations of the state.

Zarkov examines the importance of recognizing ethnic nationalism as “always gendered and sexualized...” while a (female) rape victim is always female and ethnic at the same time, but her ethnicity and femininity may bear significant instance in different contexts...”<sup>126</sup> the dual identity of ethnicity and femaleness have particular significance within the Serbian nation. Ethnicity takes precedence in the national consciousness, but femaleness is also used for the cause of the ethnic nation. As such, female properties of procreation are controlled for the purposes of the ethnic state. Aleksic discusses how “the repressive sexual economy” controlling “the procreative female body in order to prevent the ‘contamination’ of communal ‘purity’ by other groups...”<sup>127</sup> If the nature of nationalism in Serbia is ethnic, then it is also gendered.

While women are central to the ethno-nationalist project, it is necessary to examine whether women actively participate in the state project of ethno-nationalism, and what discourses in feminism has to say about nationalism. Serbian women, in an environment of gendered violence and ethnic nationalism have to choose one identity over the other, even if they experience both identities simultaneously. For example, as Mertus identifies, “Serbian women

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<sup>124</sup> Zarkov, *The Body of War*, 123.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>126</sup> Zarkov, *The Body of War*, 11.

<sup>127</sup> Aleksic, *The Sacrificed Body*, 17.



who fight for the rights of women, refugees and ethno-national minorities are labeled as traitors by their own communities.”<sup>128</sup> It is common for people to choose the identity that privileges them more. Women’s emancipation in Serbia remains in this context of national/ethnic identity and the project of reclaiming Kosovo. There are many contradictions as women navigate this space. While women have sought to assert themselves in political and cultural spaces, women have also “sought political legitimacy through identification with nation, state, and citizenship.”

<sup>129</sup> Serbian women, disempowered by the re-traditionalization of society in the fall of Yugoslavia and patriarchal nature of ethno-nationalism, fought for the nationalist cause, and identified with their Serbian identity over their identity as women.

While feminist theorists should realize the significance of motherhood and ethnicity as identities in addition to womanhood, “feminists cannot afford to ignore the thousands of women on the streets, only because these women are nationalist.”<sup>130</sup> This is difficult, as feminist theory rejects war, while some women fight for the Serbian nationalist cause that produce war. A great deal of feminist theory categorizes war as “a male game in which women were incidental and temporary players.”<sup>131</sup> Men are normally the heads of state that make the decision to go into war, and men are primarily the violent participants in war. Examining violence and nationalism in a gendered context reveals how the “symbolic order” of war is “founded on the murder of woman/mother at the threshold of the explicitly patriarchal (and frequently chauvinist)

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<sup>128</sup> Julie Mertus, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, 172.

<sup>129</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, Ola Listhaug, and Albert Simkus. *Civic and Uncivic Values in Kosovo: History, Politics, and Value Transformation*, (Central European University Press, 2015), 218.

<sup>130</sup> Zarkov, *The Body of War*, 82.

<sup>131</sup> Zarkov, *The Body of War*, 80.

communal project).”<sup>132</sup> Women are central to the violence in state projects of violence against the other, such as the Serbian state project against Kosovars.

It is clear that women are central, and that gender itself is a major constructing principle in the symbolic order of nationalist ideology, though it is not yet clear what the nature of the relationship between Serbian women and the Serbian state is, and how the violent ethno-nationalist aims of gender affect gender relations within the Serbian state. While it is clear that some women actively supported the nationalist aims of the state, the gendered ideologies of nationalism created have had an effect of re-traditionalization and fortification of the patriarchal systems in government and in the Orthodox religious institutions.

The state project, based on “differentiation and the normalization of essentialized difference...” often lead to complex individual identities being “reduced to understandings of identity that follow patriarchal political and social dictates.”<sup>133</sup> The proliferation of the “essentialized difference” model of identity, either ethnic or gendered, strengthens the structural social and political powers that reinforce social power difference between different gendered and ethnic identities. As Papic explores, Milosevic and his reconstruction of society based on militarism against the ethnic other and patriarchy was based on an “ordered gender system.” She finds that, traditionally, “chauvinist and racist exclusion or marginalization of (old and new) minority groups are, as a rule, closely connected with patriarchal, discriminatory, and violent policies against women.”<sup>134</sup> While the nationalist fight was claimed to be about ethnic nationhood, it is the female body that is recognized as “the first and ultimate victim of a patriarchal social structure, whose true identity is always masked by other sacrificial boundaries.”

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<sup>132</sup> Aleksic, *The Sacrificed Body*, 22.

<sup>133</sup> Ramet, Listhaug, Simkus, *Civic and Uncivic Values*, 207.

<sup>134</sup> Papic in Ramet, *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, 154.

<sup>135</sup> Within the Serbian state, women and their bodies became more controlled as the new, nationalist order arose, whether women themselves agreed with the nationalist ideology or not.

In the fall of Yugoslavia and the rise of Serbian nationalism, the re-traditionalization that occurred was exemplified in the “nationalist revival of the patriarchal tradition” in a ““new” Serbian nationalist patriarchy.”<sup>136</sup> This was a re-traditionalization, as it was a change from the “disappearance of a communist ‘equality paradigm’”<sup>137</sup> As has been previously been discussed, this re-traditionalization affected the symbolic representation of women, their accepted roles in society, and heightened state concern over the control of women’s bodies. Although women’s bodies were symbolically venerated within Serbia, as mothers of Serbs, because their bodies could also be violated, those in state power, i.e. the members of the patriarchy, sought to control them.

The relationship between gender and ethnic identity is clearly connected to symbolism, ideology, and state power. As Mertus claims, “gender identity and national identity are formed not only in relationship to each other but also in response to state oppression of them.”<sup>138</sup> For Serbian women, this means that while they represent a symbol of the Serbian state for their Serb-ness, they are also excluded from full political rights based on their woman-ness. As Papić describes,

“The public sphere is the supreme, vertical level of Great History, Manhood, Nation, state, and world politics; it is the order of the despotic masculine power with the mysterious, silent, and invisible Great Master/Leader as the omnipotent Great Savior/Father/Provider/Controller of the totally subjugated female nation.”

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<sup>135</sup> Aleksic, *The Sacrificed Body*, 17.

<sup>136</sup> Papić in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, 166.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>138</sup> Mertus in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, 177.

Papic addresses how the public sphere, the arena of History, the idea of the nation, are all manifestations of “despotic masculine power,” while the subjugated is always female.

As the victim-other is defined as feminine, the feminine in the Serb state is victim. Even as women are upheld as dignified mothers, their identity as women is limited to this idea and thus to the bounds of the Serbian state. As Mertus discusses, women’s “accepted gender identity is limited to the bounds of national sainthood.”<sup>139</sup> Their value exists not in personhood but in relation to the state, that is, in relation to the men in power that run the state and determine which narratives are privileged and legitimized.

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<sup>139</sup> Mertus in *Gender Politics in the Western Balkans*, 178.

## Conclusion

Uncovering the “myth of the all-pervasive patriarchy” allows us to see the dimensions of the Kosovo myth that are recognized and legitimized, and the parts that are hidden and twisted for the sake of a coherent, simplistic national narrative. The urge to create a coherent and simplistic national narrative, one that promotes and maintains a certain power structure, is indeed compelling. It is not only in Kosovo that leaders of nations will draw on the past of a nation, a myth of previous greatness, to enforce singular identity and to reinforce existing power structures. Although the Kosovo myth might at first seem about the battle between two peoples, it is really about the inner consciousness behind the power structures in the Serbian state, and the oppressions, such as gender and ethnic oppression, that it reinforces and legitimizes.

In accepting the framework of the myth for the nation, operating within a framework of violence, sacrifice, and masculinity has not only affected inter-government relations between Serbs and Kosovars, but the implications of these frameworks have far reaching consequences within the Serbian state itself. Just like ethnicity and gender, the stories that society privileges represent a system of power. There are many stories from communities and experiences of individuals that are not represented in the myth of Kosovo. The myth is a master narrative. While powerful to mobilize a nation towards a national purpose, a national master narrative ignores the perspectives of many non-powerful people. A master narrative is not reflective of the experiences of ordinary people, but something that individuals in positions of power construct, disseminate, and manipulate over time to achieve a national purpose.

For the Kosovo Myth, one of the most potent aspects is the connection to the sacred. By connecting Lazar to Christ and the mission of the Serbian Orthodox Church with the Serbian state, the myth becomes more powerful, as both a religious metaphor and a political reality. By

continuing the remembrance of the myth, leaders such as Milosevic connect themselves to the former ruler of Serbia, Lazar, and connect the Serbian people of the past with the Serbian people of the present. This connection universalizes the feelings of Serbians, and gives their frustrations an added historical sense of legitimacy, and the nation a sense of eternity.

It is undeniable that humans have a great proclivity for stories, and stories are easy for many people to visualize and identify with. Using stories for political purposes is more meaningful than listing impersonalized political objectives. The Kosovo myth does not say directly to Serbs, annex Kosovo, but it does lie out a historical claim, a reason for anger, and a promise of redemption. It is implied that the Serbian people have a moral obligation to their people and to the apparatus of the nation to fulfill that promise. With the help of public remembrances and political urging, it is as if the idea for violence and redemption organically arose in the minds of ordinary Serbs. The power of stories to infiltrate the human heart and human consciousness goes beyond political impetus, which makes the political manipulation of history difficult to recognize in the present.

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