

## Sacred Journey to a Nation: The Construction of a Shrine in Postwar Kosovo

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### Abstract

The site of an infamous Serb massacre of a militant Albanian extended family in March 1998 has become the most prominent sacred shrine in postwar Kosovo attracting thousands of Albanian visitors. Inspired by Smith's (2003) 'territorialization of memory' as a sacred source of national identity and MacCannell's (1999 [1976]) five-stage model of 'sight sacralization', this article traces the site's sacred memorial topography, its construction process, its social and material reproductions, and adds a sixth stage to the interpretation – the 'political reproduction'. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, the commemorative literature emanating from this shrine and on numerous interviews with core protagonists (including former guerrilla) and visitors, the article explores the ways in which the religious themes of martyrdom and sacrifice, as well as traditionalist ideals of solidarity and militancy, are embodied at the site and give sense to a nation-wide celebration of ethno-national resistance, solidarity and independence.

Overlooking the hamlet of Prekaz, in the central valley of Drenica where the Kosovo war was fought most intensely, the burned ruins of the Jashari family's compound stands as a reminder of a tragic event, rich

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with symbolic significance. On March 1998, twenty members of this extended Albanian family were killed by Serb troops during a siege that lasted three days and resulted in many more casualties in the surrounding area. The Jasharis were among the founders of the clandestine Albanian guerrilla forces, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).<sup>1</sup> Since these events the Jashari family, labelled 'terrorist' in all official Serb proclamations (Tanjug 1998), have been celebrated by the Albanians as 'glorious martyrs' and their deaths as 'sublime sacrifice' to their nation. Indeed, the Jasharis' death forfeits ready-made categories of 'victims' versus 'perpetrators'. According to the commemorative literature, all members of the family freely chose to stay in their 'wounded tower-house' (Halimi and Shala 2000: 24) and they fought back defying fear of death.

Today, the ruins of the family compound have been opened to visitors, a formerly private space turned public by the events and now serving as a sacred shrine to the Albanian nation. The family deaths and their self-determination embodied at this site promise the Albanian visitors that it is possible to become master of their own, national destiny.

From 2000 to 2005 each of us often visited Prekaz. At the site, we observed and interviewed various Albanian individuals, families and participants on organized tour groups from across Kosovo, the region and the Diaspora. We also interviewed numerous visitors to the shrine off site, in neighbouring Albania, Pristina, the US and the UK. Our interlocutors on site, visitors and officials alike, never expressed discontent but rather only compliance with the site's ideology. In contrast to the diversity of experience and attitude described for other shrines in Kosovo (see Duijzings 2000), if discontent exists, it is silent at Prekaz. Only off site, in private and on rare occasions some of the visitors expressed criticism to us;<sup>2</sup> for example, an Albanian student from Tirana felt appalled by 'the Kosovars' gruesome preoccupation with martyrs and death' after her group visit in 2004.

We argue that the site's appeal to its visitors relies on the fact that it serves as a 'frontstage' (Goffman 1959) for the expression of Pan-Albanian national concerns. As many hundreds of comments published in the site's Visitors' Books, as well as our ethnographic interviews and observations, suggest, on this stage ethnonational unity and conformity to the shared cause, liberation or independence, are performed as a salvation drama.

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This article explores the sacralization process of the Jasharis' former private family compound. We found Dean MacCannell's (1999 [1976] : 44 – 48) classic model of 'sight sacralisation',<sup>3</sup> with its five different stages – marking off as special or naming, framing or elevation, enshrinement, and mechanical and social reproduction of the site – useful for this purpose. At Prekaz, a process of sacralization has taken place in an exemplary fashion under the stewardship of 'memory entrepreneurs' (Jelin 2003: 34), Albanian interest groups empowered by the recent war. We suggest that these groups strive to make their concept of Albanian national identity morally unchallengeable, by symbolically encapsulating it in the very fabric of the monuments of Prekaz (cf. Verdery 1999: 26-7). Here, where memory has become 'territorialized' (Smith 2003: 134) through reference to particular cultural and historical scripts, we have identified a sixth stage of site sacralisation: political reproduction.

### **The sacralization on site**

There are numerous other sites of massacres in Kosovo, yet the death of the Jashari family marked Prekaz as a special place to the KLA. Until then, the KLA was a small, marginal group of armed resistance standing in opposition to the Albanian non-violent 'civil resistance' under President Rugova. The death of this family allowed the guerrilla movement to recruit large numbers of Albanian fighters from Kosovo, the wider region and the Diaspora.

The attraction of the Prekaz site can be traced back to the date of the massacre. After the bodies of the Jasharis had been released by Serb police in mid-March 1998, some hundreds of Albanians flocked to the funeral despite conspicuous Serb military surveillance.<sup>4</sup> The burials took place on the Jasharis' property, a field adjacent to the house that was known as 'field of peace', because in the early 1990s it had been the scene of mass rituals for the reconciliation of blood feuds among local families.<sup>5</sup> The Jashari houses still stood in the raw state of their destruction after three days of shell fire. There was 'a short speech and a minute of silence to honour those fallen for the freedom of the fatherland' (Çitaku 2003: 184). 'This was still quite romantic. The next year we organized it much better', said former KLA Shaban Hoxha, the Director of the Prekaz Memorial Foundation.<sup>6</sup>

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The site's construction as a memorial, including the Jashari houses and the graveyard, began after the 1999 NATO intervention, under the auspices of the municipal government of Skënderaj.<sup>7</sup> Immediately declared a landmark, the site was formally named 'Memorial Complex "Adem Jashari" – Prekaz'<sup>8</sup> after the military leader of the family, a KLA hero. At the time, municipal power was part of the victorious KLA-installed 'provisional government' of Kosovo, an illegal, self-appointed structure. Nothing much changed with the 2000 and 2002 municipal elections, when the former KLA's majority retained power. In 2000, the Skënderaj municipality appointed the 'Foundation for the Construction of the Commemoration Complex "Adem Jashari – Prekaz"', a not-for-profit organization, to manage the site. The Foundation is staffed by former KLA local leaders and the mayor of Skënderaj. With the surviving members of the extended Jashari family and their wider kin, friends and former KLA comrades, they are the 'memory entrepreneurs' of the site.



Figure 1: Memorial Complex 'Adem Jashari', May 2004

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The construction of the site included the framing and elevation of the damaged Jashari houses. Situated on a naturally elevated position, they were preserved in their state of destruction, secured, and expanded in size and height by scaffolding (Figure 1). Today, new roofs shelter the ruins and heighten the site; spotlights illuminate them at dark. In order to reach the houses, visitors must park their vehicles at the foot of a slightly sloping ascent and pass by two small, prefabricated cottages, the post office and the gift shop, which frame the entry.

Three monumental representations of the Jasharis as KLA saints enshrine this part of the site. On approach, the visitors first see a life-size photo-technique stone engraving<sup>9</sup> – typically used for modern gravestones in the region – elevated on concrete poles. The scene depicted on the stone is a collage: Adem Jashari, holding his gun and sporting bandoleers across his shoulders, is at the forefront; his older brother Hamzë, also armed, stands on his left; and in patriarchal iconography, their father, Shaban Jashari, is at the centre. They all tower over two KLA soldiers in combat pose. The emblem of the KLA, reminiscent of a halo, frames the picture. When the visitors enter the front yard of the main house they encounter a white stone bust of Adem Jashari in military gear. Finally, high on the scaffolding, a life-sized poster of Adem Jashari in casual camouflage and leather gear, heavily armed, superscripted in large letters, informs the visitors: ‘He is alive!’<sup>10</sup>

The construction of the wider commemorative landscape further enshrines the site. Albanian national flags on the roofs mark the houses and the bunker, high on the hill across the fields, as well as at the entrance to the cemetery below. The topography of veneration situates the houses where the Jasharis fought and died more prominently than the graveyard. The burial ground, permanently flanked by two honour guards of the Kosovo Protection Corps,<sup>11</sup> is also framed and marked out. Here too, as in all iconography of the Jasharis, a patriarchal pattern prevails: the rows of tombstones are following the generational and gendered social order of a typical extended Albanian family. The graves, most prominently the grave of Adem Jashari, are always adorned with numerous wreaths of plastic flowers.

In 2004, with the expansion of the site’s landscape, the Foundation began a stage of advanced framing. A promenade that directs the approach to the Memorial Complex from Skënderaj’s central square, named after

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Adem Jashari and hosting his monumental statue, was completed. Pending funding, the Foundation envisages further expansion, including a wider national park and a 'peace park' around the houses and the improved graveyard. The park will feature a museum, an alleyway of sculptures, a children's playground and a flower garden.<sup>12</sup>

The Foundation's call for state funding and support has not been successful to date, although the Kosovo Assembly formally acknowledged the monument's national significance. Currently, the foundation draws revenue from the site's gift shop and the publication of commemorative KLA literature (Figure 2). It initially also called for a one-off donation of



Figure 2: In the gift shop, March 2005

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one month's salary from each member of the local KLA's military successor organisations (First Operative Zone and Guard Corps of the KPC), which are headed by Prekaz survivors and relatives of the Jashari family. Apart from its political, Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) and military (KPC) support, the Foundation is further flanked by the KLA veterans' lobby groups such as the Organisation of the KLA's War Veterans, the Association of KLA War Invalids and the Association of the KLA Martyr's Families.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Pilgrim-Tourists**

Everyday at Prekaz a continuous stream of visitors arrives. During the commemorative festivities, the number of visitors rises to many thousands and includes all the political elites. On a normal day, private visitors come alone, with friends or with families, purposefully or by chance, if they happen to travel nearby and spot the street sign that directs them to the Complex. There are also many visits from organized Albanian tour groups from factories or other places of work, schools, colleges and universities; school field trips, at the end of the year, have become routine starting from fifth grade. Scores of entries in the Visitors' Books stand for school classes or entire schools, where a teacher or principal signs on behalf of dozens or even hundreds of students. Prekaz clearly has acquired a strong didactic role, in keeping with the site's official self-understanding (see, for example, Greiçevci 2005): it gives collective lessons in Albanian national identity and patriotism.

We have seen teachers introduce their students to the story of Prekaz, or fathers tell it to their children. But they are few. More commonly, there are three tour guides (*cicerons*), who are custodians of the site and gatekeepers of the Jashari storyline. Their narration of the Jashari 'sublime sacrifice' is based on the testimony of the only survivor of the Prekaz massacre, Adem Jashari's eleven-year-old niece, Besarta – the same story that can be found in all the site's publications, whether in interviews (Hamzaj and Hoti 2003) or straight storytelling (Halimi and Shala 2000: 9, 34). Because of these *cicerons'* private connection with, and devotion to, the Jashari family and the wider local history of resistance,<sup>14</sup> they see

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themselves as moral guardians more than tour guides. They believe that they provide 'spiritual nourishment' to the public by telling the 'true' story of the family's resistance, determination and death, which they recite 'a thousand times' (Gecaj 2004) with unchangeable precision that borders on the formulaic. As in the Late Antiquity cult of the Christian saints (Brown 1981: 82), it is precisely the public recitation of the Jasharis' 'martyrdom' that stimulates veneration. Even when the crowds are dense with many children present, one can hardly hear a sound (Figure 3).

After listening to the story and then touring the houses, the visitors usually proceed to take group pictures in front of the buildings or Adem Jashari's bust, sign the official Visitors' Book and buy books, postcards and other souvenirs in the shop. Most visit the nearby graveyard. A few locals from surrounding villages occasionally come to visit the cemetery only. At the graves, some lay standard, plastic-flower wreaths, usually sporting bands with particular messages of praise and the donator's



Figure 3: Albanian tour group, May 2004



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origin. At the grave of Adem Jashari, we observed people kneeling down and praying, or standing in silence, kissing the wreath nearest them and on occasions salute the heroes with the customary cry, '*lavdi!*' (glory!) (Figure 4).

In Prekaz, the 'tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist' (Turner and Turner 1978: 20); there are both sacred and profane aspects to their visits. The visitors whom we encountered on site are not much different from visitors who make pilgrimages to the homes of secular cultural icons – whether high-culture figures such as Mozart or Shakespeare, or popular culture ones such as Elvis Presley (Reader 1993). Almost all engage with the site in a secular manner, taking and posing for photographs and purchasing 'profane' souvenirs. For some individuals, this has become the site to which they must take guests from abroad, as we heard from a visitor: 'this is something to show them'. Many come to visit Prekaz from their new homes in Australia, the US and several



**Figure 4:** *Adem Jashari's grave, May 2004*

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European countries, when they also visit their relatives in Kosovo during the summer. Some visitor-tourists have scratched their names and places of origin or messages of praise into the walls.

Many visitors' responses to Prekaz suggest that they also experience an 'existential authenticity' (Wang 1999), when standing in awe at the place that embodies the religious themes of martyrdom and resurrection. Prekaz is the space where the Jashari family died an extraordinary death that is visibly inscribed in the preserved bodies of the houses, which 'too takes the wounds like people' [sic] (Memorial Complex 2004: n.p.). Some respondents on site had tears in their eyes and could not talk about their feelings; others told us, 'he stands for all our lost ones', or, 'Adem is really like Christ to me',<sup>15</sup> a notion that is consistent with other, private and public Biblical identifications of the site. For example, publisher Blerim Shala wrote: 'Adam, the first of men, he, like Abraham, was ready to sacrifice his family, he, like Jesus, was nailed in place for the salvation of others' (Hamzaj and Hoti 2003: 109). Equally, both the official literature and private visitors refer to Prekaz as 'the Albanian Mecca'<sup>16</sup> an explicit reference to the character of pilgrimage that their visit has taken and to the Albanian majority creed of Islam. As pilgrims, many visitors from Kosovo and abroad have made several trips to Prekaz.

In summary, these visits cannot be understood simply as being of a merely secular nature. They are constructed as and have become sacred journeys to the Albanian 'nation'. In the Albanian case, nationalism has always called on religious ecumenism (Maliqi 1997: 122) or 'syncretism' (Duijzings 2000: 2, 15) in order to overcome the nation's particular division into different creeds. But rather than producing a secularization of nationalism, syncretism has provided different religious

models and styles for acts of commemoration and celebration; sites of individual and mass reverence in the form of pilgrimage; ideas of self-sacrifice and martyrdom, and of everlasting renown; and ideals of sanctity and heroism embodied in exemplary individuals. (Smith 2003: 222–223)

It is the character of the site as an altar to the national martyrs that the memory entrepreneurs want to emphasize. Every year they publish an

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edited version of the Visitors Book, where entries are selected and arranged under evocative headings, such as 'Drenica – land of my blood', 'the only road to rest', or 'Prekaz: name of unity'. Many of these published entries highlight the sacred character of the site that, the visitors say, overwhelms them. They address the massacred Jashari family directly: 'You will be a lifelong symbol of freedom and of the road on which to fight and die and fight with honour at the altar of freedom. Kosovo's earth shall be light on you martyrs of the Jashari family, glory' (Visitors' Book 2002: 55); 'Here we are, facing the most important monument of Kosovo, and it is really impressive to be standing at a monument this sacred' (Visitors' Books 2002: 232). Often the visitors' own, personal, recent experience of war leads them to identify with the family and their fate. Many suggest that Adem Jashari, as the military head of the family and the main protagonist of the national salvation drama, is a common man's saint: 'the title of hero was given to Adem Jashari not by parliament, but by the people of Kosovo, on the day he was killed' (Visitors' Book 2001: 100).

### **The 'Territorialization of Memory'**

Visitors to Prekaz do not experience the authenticity of the 'exotic' as in the host and tourist encounters of modern and postmodern travel,<sup>17</sup> and they are no 'strangers' defined by their lack of shared claims to land (Simmel 1971: 144). At Prekaz, 'symbolic authenticity' (Wang 1999) is constructed to root both the locals and the visitors (cf. Coleman and Crang 2002: 5-7) in the metaphorical 'heartland', i.e. the essence of what it means to be Albanian. In Prekaz, Albanians are invited to come together physically, as a national community constructed through the tropes of both Albanian customary law and national historiography. This community shares claims and concerns such as national self-determination and territorial sovereignty. Imagined as a nationally extended family, for which the Jasharis provide the model, it is entitled to the land by patrilineal descent and is guided by traditional communitarian values, notions of peasant resistance and independence. These cultural tropes efficiently line up with the typical national myths of 'origins and priority', 'ethnic homogeneity and cultural purity', 'permanent national struggle' and

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'indifference to religion' that have long informed national Albanian historiography (Malcolm 2002).

The site's tour booklet, 'The Jasharis: The Story of a Resistance', available in different translations from the Albanian, exemplifies for all visitors, including the accidental foreigner, the metaphorical territorialization project that triangulates local with national and transnational concerns as follows:

Drenica was seated on [sic] the central part of the Illyrian Dardania, and is today situated in the center of Kosova. The first identified inhabitants of this area were Dardanians, known as the largest Illyrian tribe. Kosova's Albanians are their direct descendants. ... Drenica is a typical rural area. ... One of the most important villages of Drenica is Prekaz with 3,876 inhabitants – all of them Albanian. Most important events and wars of national liberation from the Turkish and Serbian occupation are connected with the name of Prekaz ... as a prelude to the most sublime sacrifice at the altar of freedom [the Jasharis' death] (Halimi and Shala 2000: 7–8).

Consistent with such territorialization of both national and local memory, Adem Jashari, best known as the Legendary Commander, is situated in the roster of both national and local Albanian hero-fighters in the entire site's literature, including, most prominently, the Albanian medieval hero Gjergji Kastriot Skanderbeg. Where miniature sculptures or pictures available as souvenirs, posters, calendars or postcards depict Skanderbeg on horseback, Adem Jashari is mounted on his motorcycle, the half-burned and rusty carcass of which can still be seen at the memorial site. In unchanging iconography, both men are always presented as proud and strong warriors, often in front of skies illuminated by fire or of their respective 'castles', from which they lead a liberation war against foreign oppressors and for national unity across existing borders. Through references to Skanderbeg, such as 'Gjergji of Kruja, Gjergji of Prekaz' (Greiçevci 2005: 65) or 'Gjergji on the soil of Gjergji, the sons of Gergji on their own land' (Visitors Book 2002: 166), particularly evoked when political or cultural Albanian prominence visits the site from outside Kosovo, every Albanian is metaphorically interlinked.

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## Scripts of Memory

Prekaz is rich in material and cultural signifiers. Reference to the house of the Jasharis in any form is always a reference to the family and vice versa, and by metaphoric extension, to Albanian land and the nation. Territorial and kinship principles overlap in the traditional customary culture of northern Albania, western Macedonia, southern Serbia and Kosovo, often subsumed as ‘Gheg culture’ (following a linguistic classification), the region from which most of the site’s visitors come (Visitors’ Books 2001–2003). This overlap provides the logic for territorialization and sacralization of the nation at Prekaz in the primordialist terms of patrilineal kinship, a highly familiar concept to the rural population of these regions. It was here that social and political exclusion, and the increasing need to mark out a distinct ethnic identity, led to processes of retraditionalization from the late 1980s (Reineck 1993).

Customarily, different and interchangeable terms for ‘house’ designate both the physical house and the typical extended family sharing the same courtyard (as in the Jashari compound) or living under one roof, with nuclear families, each headed by a different brother, occupying different floors. A ‘large/strong house’, *shpi e madhe*, stands for an extended family of considerable size including many sons. Such a ‘house’ or ‘family’ would also be considered ‘strong’ and of ‘strong blood’ (*gjak i fortë*). Respect for its ‘sanctity’ is supposed to pre-empt any transgressions of boundaries both of family integrity and of physical land. The wider patrilineage’s surname is commonly found to stand as a synonym for a hamlet, a village, or quarters of them. It is for this reason that nearly fifty people of the same surname, Jashari, died in the ‘Jashari’ *lagje* (quarter) of Prekaz. Although not of Adem Jashari’s immediate, extended family, they shared the same myth of origin, being descendants of ‘Jashar’, one of the three sons of the village’s founding father. Blood is perceived as the substance shared by the family, the patrilineage, and by extension, the nation.<sup>18</sup>

In the site’s literature we found the following cultural terms for a house and its members: *shpi* (literally, house), *oda* (men’s reception room), *kulm* (roof), *oxhaku* (hearth) and *kulla* (tower-house, castle). *Kulla* particularly indicates the defensive character of a house and its members’ military capacities, a legacy of historic blood feuds or war. *Oda* serves as

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a house's public 'frontstage', in which stories of heroism are told and retold. References to *oda* indicate the wider sociopolitical qualities of a 'house'. The houses are built on *toka*, or *troje* in more lyrical terms (the family's land), passed on through patrilineage only (Rrapi 2003).

Although Prekaz today is constructed as the nation's metaphorical *oda*, it is mostly referred to as the *Kulla* of the Jasharis, because it was the family's military resistance that set them apart from the everyday victimisation of ordinary Albanians in recent years. The caption of a picture of the Jashari house in the site's literature reads: '*Kulla* – where freedom was forged' (Memorial Complex 2004: n.p.). During the attacks '[t]hree days in a row the castle wouldn't fall', 'the *Kulla* was neither conquered nor crushed',<sup>19</sup> although 'tanks and heavy guns ... were spitting fire towards the *Kulla* of Adem Jashari'; but 'they had decided not to leave their home and land. They were born and raised in these lands. They shared so many memories in that house and *Kulla*. After all, the one that should leave was Serbia, and not they – all agreed to this' (Halimi and Shala 2000: 25, 27, 29).

Family, house, land and blood were concepts held sacred in Albanian historical, customary law (Durham 1909; Hasluck 1954). The appeal of these concepts today is their timeless character, metaphorically uniting the living with their ancestors and justifying land property rights.

### Customary Tropes in Shrine Literature

The Jashari family story suggests that blood in 'this old-rooted family ... ran thin for three generations', and when it 'was about to be cut entirely, it blossomed' (Halimi and Shala 2000: 10–11). After the war, three surviving men of the extended family, the older brother Rifat and the two direct descendants of Hamzë and Adem, became fathers to three sons: Shaban, Hamzë and Adem, named after the family's *dëshmore* (the Albanian *calque* for 'martyr', generally applied to fallen fighters). Today's Jashari infants are celebrated as the family's 'phoenixes', standing for all 'martyrs' symbolic resurrection and life. The KLA veterans' associations meticulously recorded all fallen KLA fighters as 'Phoenixes of Freedom' (*Feniksët* 2001), and their newspaper *Feniks* regularly features the Jashari

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infants. All KLA ‘martyrs’ are explicitly assigned ‘eternity’ (*përjetësi*) and ‘immortality’ (*pavdekshmëri*), and Adem Jashari is always listed in first place (*Feniksët* 2001). In summary, nationalized reference to the *Kulla* of the Jasharis’ signifies the possibility of immortality, resurrection and national renewal.

In the Jashari family story, there is no concept of coincidence, but incidents of prophecy and foreboding, the more metaphysical *fati* (destiny), because the cause can only be seen as just if destiny is in alliance with men’s will, actions and family obligations. Accordingly, from the day of his birth, Adem Jashari was predestined to become ‘the saviour of the nation’ (Hamzaj and Hoti 2003: 28, 109): born on 28 November 1955, Albanian National Day, he carried ‘the gift of the eagle’,<sup>20</sup> and on that day his father covered him with the Albanian flag and laid a gun in the cradle for the ‘great route of glory’ (Tahiri 2003[b]: 5).

According to the family testimony, Adem Jashari himself was fully aware of the sacred script he enacted as a great performance of battle and death. He saw himself as embodying the role of Çerçiz Topulli, a southern Albanian insurgent who fought both the Ottomans and the Montenegrins in the early 1900s (Hamzaj and Hoti 2003: 42, 44). Family pictures, available as postcards on site, and the official narrative suggest that he was ‘never parted from his gun’ and at the time of death he sang the song *besa-besë* until ‘it was cut in half just so that he would get himself in it [sic]’ (Halimi and Shala 2000: 14, 29). *Besa* implies the ‘faithfulness to the given word’; ‘honour of the house’; security guarantee in alliances between men or in the hospitality ritual (Schwandner-Sievers 1999).

The site’s commemorative literature highlights the communitarian commitment of the Jashari family, its intransigent determination, *vullneti* (free will) and independent agency in ‘sacrifice’: ‘all of them had become fighters and were fulfilling their appointed duties. All of those who were able to carry guns had taken positions. The others filled bullet rounds’, as all family members were ‘loyal co-fighters, and ... ready for sublime sacrifice’ (Halimi and Shala 2000: 25, 28). According to Rifat Jashari, today the family patriarch and the eldest survivor (as during the attacks he was abroad as *gastarbeiter* with his son as well as the two sons of his brothers), the family’s intransigence and determination to fight goes back to the *amanet* (pledge, testament) sworn by Shaban, Hamzë and Adem

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Jashari at the funeral of a village neighbour and relative. At his grave the Jashari men decided 'to continue the road on which [the neighbour] had embarked until death', because they understood, as Adem Jashari would have said, that 'this road had to be walked to the end', as otherwise the Albanians would be exterminated as a people (Hamzaj and Hoti 2003: 26, 50; cf. Tahiri 2001: 70). There is a family consensus regarding Adem Jashari's pledge and that 'no one should fall into the enemy's hands alive' (Halimi and Shala 2000: 29; Shala and Hamzaj 2003: 67).<sup>21</sup>

Today Adem Jashari's 'determination to fight until the final liberation of Kosovo' is presented as messianic as it 'imposed upon the North Atlantic forces the need to take action' (Abdyli 2000: 25) and led to the international military intervention which drove Milosevic's Serb troops out of Kosovo.

### Resonance and Identification

The Visitors' Book entries reproduce these tropes of historical and cultural identification and take on the survivors' obligation evoked by the Jasharis' 'sacrifice'. Typical entries read, 'Today, we the final-year students of the *Hevzi Nela* secondary school of Kukës [in northern Albania] visited the *Kulla* of the Jasharis and saw the traces of the war and Albanian heroism. Freedom has a high price, and we all are obliged by this duty.' (Visitors' Book 2002: 229); 'The blood of this family and our Legendary Commander Adem Jashari was the foundation stone of freedom which we enjoy today and will be enjoyed by generations to follow' (Visitors' Books 2002: 265); 'To every Albanian the *Kulla* of the Jasharis personifies the historic stand of Kosovo's Albanians against the Serbo-Slav forces' (Visitors' Books 2002: 228); 'Rest, O Adem, at the Altar of Freedom, together with Your entire family, because, of course, until the end we will follow Your *amanet*, as this is what You called upon' (Visitors' Books 2002: 133).

The visitors, furthermore, commonly respond to the site's celebration of militant agency and determination. Traces of empathy and personal emotions in response to the family's tragedy are embedded in a sense of recuperated pride: 'Everyone facing this *Kulla* feels much pain but also



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pride. Pain is felt because here a family was killed. Pride is felt because they all fell for the Freedom of Kosovo. Respect to the family Jashari!' (Visitors' Books 2002: 204); 'We thank You for having returned our dignity' (Visitors' Books 2003: 59); 'I felt the desire to come and see the *Kulla* of Adem Jashari and it filled my heart with pride' (Visitors' Books 2002: 172). Visitors to Prekaz have internalised this lesson: 'My blood shall be cursed if I should be killed without fighting' (Visitors' Book 2002: 261).

### **Mechanical, Social and Political Reproductions**

The Jashari epos and various material reproductions of the *Kulla* in, for example, souvenirs, booklets, postcards, calendars and web publications such as [www.ademjashari.com](http://www.ademjashari.com) have travelled far beyond its site, attracting thousands of Albanian visitors in search of the 'real thing'. The family name 'Jashari' is used to name and dedicate awards, social activities, pop songs, sports events, schools, barracks, squares and streets all over Kosovo. A folklore tournament, the 'national traditional festival of Albanian rhapsody' in Skënderaj, awarded the '*Kulla* of the Jasharis' prize (2004); a popular song is called '*Kulla* of the Jasharis'; the 'Adem Jashari football tournament' engaged the Albanians in the spring of 2005; the *Kulla* is at the centre of annual, nation-wide, commemorative festivities called the '*Epopeja* of the KLA'; and Adem Jashari's picture embellishes most public offices and school corridors.

The material and social reproductions have strong political connotations. Prekaz has become an important reference point in politics, giving way to what we, expanding on MacCannell (1999 [1976]), call its 'political reproductions'. The site's significance is growing while the Albanians still aspire to an independent Kosovo and political parties and social groups struggle for power under international tutelage. The popular appeal of the *Kulla* of the Jasharis as the frontstage for Albanian national identity effectively situates Albanian territorial claims in opposition to Serb nationalism. In Yugoslav times, Serb Orthodox monuments, monasteries and churches claimed 'Kosovo for Serbia and communicat[ed] to Albanians "this is not your place"' (Clark 2002: 6); they territorialized memory and marked the boundaries of Greater Serbia

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according to ‘the principle “Serbian land is where Serbian bones are”’ (Verdery 1999: 18).<sup>22</sup> The Prekaz memorial sets an exclusively Albanian counterpoint in terms of ‘blood’. It reminds that the ‘blood of the martyrs’ will not be forgotten and that it ‘remains in every realm of freedom that we enjoy today’, teaching the survivors ‘how to live and how to die’ (*Feniksët* 2001: 5-6).

Albanian political actors aim to generate legitimacy and credibility from association with the Jashari *Kulla*. Accordingly, even politicians known for their adamant rejection of armed insurrection cannot avoid reference to the *Kulla* of the Jasharis. Even the Kosovo President, Ibrahim Rugova, before his death in January 2006, was constantly challenged on this issue. An example is provided by a previous parliamentarian, with a prominent KLA background, who asked Rugova to demonstrate his devotion to the shrine – and thus his patriotism – in concrete ways:

I only trust those who before going to Vienna, or doing anything important, will make a pledge in front of the grave of Adem Jashari ... the Kosova delegation should go to Prekaz (sorry, I forgot that Rugova does not like to go to Prekaz) to show the Serbs and the EU in Vienna that they are coming from the blood of martyrs and the liberation war that was helped by NATO.<sup>23</sup>

After the elections of 2004, the most prominent ex-KLA leaders of two rival political parties, the PDK and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK),<sup>24</sup> negotiated whether they should ‘jointly go for a visit to the *Kulla* of the Jasharis in Prekaz of Drenica’ to demonstrate unity. However, Ramush Haradinaj (AAK), originating from outside Drenica, rejected the idea: ‘For me, the *Kulla* of the Jasharis does not carry as much weight as for you. I fought more on this side of Drenica than you’. Through this metaphorical reference, Hasim Thaçi (PDK) ‘understood that Ramush Haradinaj would form a government without the PDK’.<sup>25</sup> As soon as he was appointed Prime Minister, Haradinaj went to pay his respect at the *Kulla* of Prekaz on his own.<sup>26</sup>

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## Conclusion

The site of Prekaz, the *Kulla* of the Jasharis, symbolically condenses strong political messages: of the legitimacy of militant agency, sacrifice and martyrdom (death as fighters rather than victims) in pursuing the cause of national independence. The political reproductions of this site cannot be ignored in interpreting its sacralization process. Such reproduction is carried by the site's memory entrepreneurs and reproduced by the Albanian visitors, wider society and the politicians in postwar Kosovo. They all have constructed the *Kulla* as their frontstage for expressing this cause, culturally and historically scripted to provide a distinct identity and to make it morally unchallengeable. The Jashari family's death, embodied in the 'wounded tower-house', stands as an icon comprehensively appealing to many Albanian families and has engendered collective veneration. In postwar Kosovo, the *Kulla* of the Jasharis has become the most significant landmark on the road of the Albanian journeys to their nation.

## Notes

1. In Albanian, the KLA is the *Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës (UÇK)*; when Milosevic disenfranchised the Albanians from state participation in Kosovo in the late 1980s, a few splinter groups, based on rural families with a history of both resistance and oppression such as the Jasharis as well as the so-called 'illegal movement' in the Diasporas, organized and engaged in militant resistance to the Serb regime (Judah 2000: 40, 102-120).
2. These discordant voices off site are the subject of another article exploring the wider political context (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006).
3. MacCannell's (1999) term 'sight' often relates to a site, a place, but it also refers to seeing as the primary mode of engagement between visitors and the visited. In order to emphasize the place of concern here, we will use the term 'site sacralization', even though our use of *site* as a place attracting members of the public is often close to MacCannell's *sight*. We will, however, use 'sight' when we wish to convey the popular sense of a 'tourist sight' – something that ought to be seen by tourists.
4. Çitaku (2003: 184); and interview with Dean Anastasjevic, reporter for the Serb-language weekly *Vreme*, 12 September 2005 (Belgrade).
5. According to the site's literature, patriarch Shaban Jashari was the 'right hand in Drenica' (Tahiri 2003 [a]: 47) of the folklore professor Anton Çetta, who headed the campaign for mass reconciliation of blood feuds from 1990 to 1992 across Kosovo.
6. Interview with, Shaban Hoxha, 6 March 2005 (Prekaz/Pristina). According to him,

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- in March 1999 the commemorative event attracted twenty thousand mourners, despite ongoing confrontations with Serb troops.
7. Formerly 'Srbica', the regional centre situated within walking distance of the village of Prekaz.
  8. '*Kompleksi Perkujtimor "Adem Jashari" - Prekaz*'. All translations from the Albanian are the authors' if not otherwise indicated.
  9. This comparatively expensive engraving is based on the CAD (Computer Aided Design) of photographs that are transferred to stone via automated micro-hammer work.
  10. *Ai është i gjallë!*, This was also the title of a play performed at the first organized commemorative event on site in March 1999.
  11. The KPC is the civil defence organization founded in September 1999 in a negotiation between the KLA and NATO to facilitate the demobilization and the reintegration of former KLA combatants. The organization intends to become the army of a future independent state.
  12. See the site's website [www.ademjashari.com/gazetari.html](http://www.ademjashari.com/gazetari.html), especially 'Kuvendi miratoj Ligjin për Kompleksin memorial "Adem Jashari" dhe 9 ligje tjera', accessed 15 June 2005 and interviews with Shaban Hoxha, 11 November 2004 and 5 March 2005.
  13. Interviews with Shaban Hoxha, November 2004 and February–March 2005.
  14. For example, Rifat Bejta, a former local teacher and, today, city councillor in Skënderaj, personally knew the Jasharis well and acted as a member of the committee who dealt with their burial – 'there is no part of these fifty-two bodies I don't know'. A private recollection of the massacre still provokes strong emotion in him; interviewed 23 August 2002 and 6 November 2004; similar, Xhevat Imeri in Gecaj (2004).
  15. An Albanian Diaspora visitor of local, Muslim origin with whom we travelled to the site in March 2005.
  16. For example, Forumi Shqiptar – 'Epopeja e UÇK-së', [www.forumishqiptar.com](http://www.forumishqiptar.com), entry of 5 March 2003, accessed 8 June 2005. Interlocutor during fieldwork to the site, 5 March 2005; Various Visitors' Book entries (for example, 2002: 173, 291).
  17. See Cohen (2002), MacCannell (1999), Selwyn (1996), Wang (1999) etc.
  18. Çabej (1966: 336); Gjeçov (1989: 14, 60, 130-140); Rrapi (2003); Reineck (1993); Schwandner-Sievers (1999). The Albanians in Kosovo traditionally trace their origins to twelve major clans.
  19. In Albanian the epic character of these events is commonly emphasised through poetic language: *Për tri ditë Kulla nuk po merrej as po mposhtej*, here in a reproduction of the story available at a discussion forum, *Epopeja of the KLA*, <http://www.forumishqiptar.com/archive/index.php/t-13408-p-2>, accessed 4 July 2005.
  20. Folk etymology holds the Albanian word for eagle, *shqiponje*, to be at the roots of the terms 'Albania', *shqiperia*, and 'Albanians', *shqiptare*, and the Albanian flag.
  21. Milosevic used the opposite view when diverting responsibility for civilian deaths at the Prekaz attacks from the Serbs during his trial at the Den Hague Tribunal from early 2002 until his death in March 2006. We discuss these contradicting views and the corresponding, international perspective in more detail in Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers, 2006.

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22. In June 1989, for the sixcentenary of the Kosovo battle on the 'Field of Blackbirds' (*Kosovo Polje*) against the invading Ottomans in 1389, the bones of the defeated Serb leader Prince Lazar were dug up in Belgrade and transported from monastery to monastery across Serb-claimed territories, until set to rest at the Gracanica monastery in Kosovo. Prince Lazar is at the core of the Serb national myth (an early twentieth-century construct), and himself a Christ figure to nationalist Serbs. The celebration of his reburial culminated in the infamous speech of Milosevic at the Field of Blackbirds (near Pristina). Milosevic styled himself as 'liberator', in line with Prince Lazar, and revoked the autonomous status of Kosovo. Several excellent ethnographic case studies (for example, Bax 1997; Bringa 2004; Denich 1994; Hayden 1994) explore the ethnonational transformations of the politics of memory in Yugoslavia, following Marshall Tito's death and the denunciation of his doctrine of 'brotherhood and unity'.
23. Nait Hasani in interview with Leonora Makolli, *Fokusi*, 17 October 2003.
24. *Aleanca per Ardhmerinë e Kosovës* (Alliance for the Future of Kosovo), headed by Ramush Haradinaj. *The Partia Demokratike e Kosovës* (Democratic Party of Kosovo) is headed by Hasim Thaçi.
25. 'Rrëfimi per takimin e Hashim Thaçit me Ramush Haradinajn: Thaçi shkriu akullin në Glogjan', *Java*, 20 January 2005, p. 3.
26. 'Haradinaj visits Jashari family in Prekaz', *Lajim*, 21 January 2005 (in translation and summary available at UNMIK media monitoring, 21 January 2005, [www.unmikonline.org](http://www.unmikonline.org), accessed 4 August 2005).

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