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“KOSOVIZATION” OF SERBIAN MONUMENTAL CULTURE AND CREATION OF NEW IDENTITIES***

Abstract: Starting from the sociological understanding of culture as a set of determinants that channel social movements, the authors analyze the complex Kosovo-Metohija reality with a focus on material monumental heritage and its destruction with the aim of political revision of the past and falsification of Albanian identity. The vandalism of ethnic-religious instrumentalized Albanian groups is concealed by the construction of a media memory of collective memories, which aims at a manipulative strategy of gradually gaining the political support of world opinion. The analysis of characteristic case studies proved the destructiveness of the devastation of the monumental heritage for the Serbian identity, because without the symbolic bearers of the past, the national community that created also disappears. Demolished cemeteries, burned monasteries and churches, with expelled Serbs as bearers of symbolic meaning, opened up space for Albanian nationalists who, by “Kosovizing” Serbian cultural heritage, create their own identity, with the intention of showing that they have always lived in these areas. The theoretical framework is based on British cultural studies that use numerous forms of memorial culture to replace identity and change the culture of memory.

Keywords: Monumental heritage, media memory, “Kosovization” of identity, tradition, memory culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper, through an interdisciplinary study of the state of the Serbian monumental heritage in Kosovo and Metohija, we specifically investigate the process of its physical destruction and symbolic appropriation by the Albanian community, in order to prove through the prism of British cultural studies that a false cultural identity is being created in these areas with the help of the media and pseudoscience with

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*** The paper was created within the scientific research work of scientific-research organization (NIO) under the contract with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Republic of Serbia number: 451-03-66/2024-03 oA 26.01.2024.

a long-term change in the culture of memory. The basic starting point is the assumption that the permanent destruction and devastation of the Serbian cultural heritage suppresses the Serbian collective identity, whereby changing the nature, form and degree of cultural, religious and political integration adapts and reshapes the idea of the Albanian community. Observing identity as a dynamic whole in which different elements merge into a coherent picture of the entire nation, we investigate how the Albanian minority, tacitly supported by the international community (first of all the USA, but also Germany, Great Britain and Turkey) by creating new patterns of memory, culture and belief artificially creates image of oneself and the nation-state. Despotović and Glišin, considering the geopolitical characteristics of Serbia and the Serbian people, single out: “contact, bordering, knottiness and fragmentation.¹ Origin (blood), language, religion and history are the connective tissue of the change of cultural patterns as structural elements of ethnicity, with the aspiration to be institutionally presented as part of the cultural processes that have lasted for centuries in these areas and which belong to them analogously. The violent change in the relationship of political power after the NATO aggression and the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army and police from these areas (1999) enabled a symbolic change in the concepts of communication between the two opposing communities, but also in the flow of international communication. With visions focused on common family and tribal origins, Kosovo Albanians avoid acknowledging the existence of different cultures and nations, trying to build their own paths to the future. Their strategy can best be understood in Lewin’s theory of groups based on the principles of form theory: the whole is something other than its parts and is characterized by the way the parts fit and shape each other, not by their intrinsic characteristics (Lewin 1948). In practice, this means that individuals and groups commit crimes against Others, ethnically cleansing space and destroying material traces of their existence, while at the same time shaping a new identity, history and value system.

British cultural studies were the first in the world to deal with the problems of creating national identities within the framework of social production and reproduction, analyzing how forms of culture are used to promote dominance in the community or to fight against that dominance, and this is the main reason for our decision to compare it with the phenomena observed here. David Chaney (Chaney, D.) wrote about the invention of tradition, underlining that the process of transforming institutional symbolism takes place within space and time by “using ceremonial repetition to dramatize and formalize the necessarily nebulous and abstract values and identities of imagined new communities.” (Chaney1993: 18). Changes in cultural forms in the example of the British monarchy are demonstrated through three phases, with the last one fully relying on the support of the mass media, which impresses the global audience with a fictional tradition. In the case of the Serbian heritage in Kosovo and Metohija, we also observe three characteristic phases, where it is no longer enough to destroy the Serbian traces of existence, but also that the remains that survive despite the vandalism of the demolishers

1 “Contact is a consequence of the intersection of three traditional religions (Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Islam) and three civilizational and cultural circles (Western, Orthodox and Islamic civilizations) in the Balkans”. See more in: Despotović, Lj. and Glišin, V.: Geopolitički identitet Republike Srbije i Strategija nacionalne bezbednosti, Politika nacionalne bezbednosti, No 1/2021. p 21-35.

must be renamed and socially recognized as part of the "Kosovo" legacy that rests on Albanian tradition. Then there is the formation of pseudo-churches, the appropriation of cultural heritage, the growth of ethnic radicalism, the creation of a new identity and the strengthening of contradictions within society. Religious extremism is gradually turning into political extremism, with all the unpredictable consequences for society. Marija Đorić especially emphasizes the problem of "cultural-religious differences" and violence as a method of action, which is why "a political extremist always strives for a group because it is a confirmation of his identity (Đorić 2012: 45-62).

2. RECOMPOSING OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

The French mediologist Régis Debray was one of the first to single out the importance of stone as a carrier of a message in a certain space and time. Communication is impossible without words, but without stone there is no transmission, material records of the existence of the culture of which it is an integral part. "Our earliest memory belongs to architecture, and the earliest architecture is created for memory" because the material carriers of transmission "enable the transition of what belongs to sound and time to what is visual and spatial and thus deliver the message to the archive" (Debre, 2000: 37). By physically erasing the traces of Serbian existence in these areas, the physical evidence of the right of a people to live there disappears, while the complete and irreversible destruction of the monumental heritage opens up space for different interpretations of history and identity. Thus, in the first demolition phase (the period from the summer of 1999 to 2004 and the March pogrom) in Kosovo and Metohija, monuments of Serbian culture, especially churches and monasteries as bearers of religious representation, were intensively and continuously demolished. For Albanians, they are a symbol of ethnic gathering that are characteristic cultural forms that reflect the national spirit and protect Serbian identity. The changes we point to are not only of an ideological nature, because media narratives that show violence against the entire ethnic community demonstrate a new power relationship in the public space. The Serbian Orthodox Church reports that in less than five months (June-October 1999) 76 holy places² were destroyed or desecrated, while some were permanently erased from the map of existence. We singled out the example of the burning of the Church of St. Petka in the cemetery in Drsnik when the church was filled with branches, and while it was still burning, gasoline was added so that the fire would turn everything into an incinerator. The thoroughness of the "cleaning" of cultural traces is also evidenced by the example of the destruction of the church of St. Nicholas in Čabići, where today we have a pit covered with garbage in the place of its former existence (Radovanović, Đekić, 2017: 393). The churches of St. George in Rudnik, St. Nicholas in Banja Rudnička, St. Elijah in Pomazatin, the Kiev church of St. Nicholas, the church of St. Ilije in Cernica, the church of the same name in Žegra, the church in Mušutište, the monastery in Zočište. "The remains of the church with the old cemetery in Belica, the church in Gojbulja,

2 Catalog of Destroyed and Desecrated Churches in Kosovo and Metohia (June-October 1999), <http://rastko.rs/kosovo/crucified/default.htm>, accessed: 23.12.2023.

the church in Kruševo, the hermitage caves in the Rugovska gorge, the church of St. Nicholas in the village of Popovljane, three churches in the Nerodimlje monument complex, the church of the Presentation of the Virgin in Doljevac were burned and then mined. ... (*Spomenička baština*, 2002). A significant fund of movable material - more than tens of thousands of icons, vessels, clothes, books and archives - disappeared (was looted) during the burnings and demolition of religious buildings, which is an irreparable loss not only for Orthodox sanctuaries, but also for Christian cultural monuments. The image of an Albanian extremist breaking a cross on the roof of a church and throwing it into an exalted crowd has gone around the world. Because of this, Albanian propagandists realized that visible physical destruction is harmful to the image of the new society, so they switched to a more sophisticated strategy of dealing with the heritage of Serbian citizens.

The second phase coincides with the unilateral declaration of independence of Kosovo* in 2008, and since then the methods and actions of Albanian extremists have become more subtle, but also more radical. Losing its institutionalized status, Serbian heritage becomes the target of a transformed discourse shaped by a media-political narrative in which it is claimed that they are part of the Albanian tradition. Rituals and ceremonies are given new clothes, and by stimulating interest through social networks and mainstream media, the audience anticipates new meanings, quickly accepting them. So on November 28, 2023, in the church of St. Archangel Mihailo in the village of Rakitnici, Podujevo municipality, was broken into by a group of people led by the fake priest Nikola Džufka, a citizen of the Republic of Albania, in order to allegedly perform a sacred rite.³ The aim of the group was to rename the building to the “Church of Fan Noli” as part of the self-proclaimed Albanian National Orthodox Church from Elbasan. Emphasis on media deception would lead to the conclusion that a “food technologist” dressed as a priest in the competition for clicks and likes deceives the public, but the presence of political officials shows that the actors are sending ideologically much more serious messages.

That the theft of the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Serbian Orthodox Church, i.e. the “Albanization” or “Kosovization” of our monumental heritage is being carried out systematically and organized is shown by the silent renaming in media coverage, as well as political rhetoric. For example, *Radio Free Europe* (June 6, 2022) reporting on the Visoki Dečani monastery speaks of it as part of *Kosovo’s heritage*; German diplomat Jern Rode wrote on social media after visiting the monastery: “We ended the conference of German ambassadors from the region with an unforgettable visit to the *Kosovo monastery*, which is on the UNESCO list.” “Kosovo’s monumental heritage” does not exist for a simple reason - it is not created by the state, but people, rulers, dynasties, benefactors, elite... The territorialization of the cultural heritage obscures the historical essence, while the ideologized mediatization temporarily

3 For many centuries, Rakitnica was a Serbian village from which the last Serbian families moved out after the Serbian-Turkish war in 1878. The old church dedicated to the Summer St. Archangel Michael. Albanians who settled in the meantime call it “Kiša Lazarit”. Representatives of the municipality of Podujevo also participated in the burglary and desecration of the Orthodox church, which dates back to the 15th century, as reported by the website kosovapost.net, accessed: 23.12.2023.

satisfies the needs of the simulated state-building identity of the Albanians. The imposed narratives create the effect of canceling the Serbian identity, with all historical meanings, values and traces, while the pseudoscientific discourse mythologizes the ancient past of the Illyrians, Dardanians and related proto-Albanians to whom this area is supposedly their ancestral home.

The media memory of “Kosovization” is created by a series of planned texts that establish a new identity with pseudo-scientific evidence.⁴ It is no longer based only on the geographical characteristics of a national or religious group, but implies a certain cultural-civilizational code, which, in the absence of material evidence, should be constructed by the media. Thus, on Christmas 2024, Pristina’s *Koha* publishes a text with the title: “The Church of Saint Petka in Prizren, the universal cultural heritage of Kosovo,” by Agon Rrezja. To the general public, an anonymous student of medieval history claims that the church was not built in Serbian or Byzantine times, but “on the foundations of the pagan Dardanian sanctuary” - for which he offers no evidence. In order to give the story a scientific foundation, the author begins with the apostle Paul and the spread of Christianity, as well as “the acceptance of religion by the Dardanians” who build a church in Prizren.⁵ The center of interest is the church of the Virgin of Ljeviška, with claims that it was the seat of the high orthodox church representatives that “developed religious activity” from the 5th to the 13th century - “when Kosovo was finally conquered by Stefan Milutin.” The historical sources are rich and precise - the church of the Virgin of Ljeviška, originally a late Eastern Roman, Byzantine church from the 11th century, it was built in honor of the Mother of God of Mercy. It was reconstructed in the 14th century by the Serbian king Stefan Milutin, who added the current structure with five domes. During the Middle Ages, the church served as the main episcopal seat for high orthodox representatives, who spoke the Serbian language and were connected to the Nemanjić dynasty, which had its capital in Prizren. During the period of Ottoman rule in the 17th century, it was turned into a mosque, and since it was used for prayers on Fridays for the needs of Muslim believers, it got the name - *Petka mosque* (Church of Saint Petka among the Orthodox or Shentje Prempte in Albanian). This confirms that the name has nothing to do with the first name of the church, but with the period when it was used as a mosque. The Albanian pseudo-historian’s point is simple: the Serbs were the invaders who arrived in these areas and are still carrying out the “political and cultural instrumentalization of the churches in Kosovo”.⁶

4 Albanian media, scientists, politicians, but also European diplomats avoid the phrase Kosovo and Metohija, since the word Metoh (Greek: μετοχή [metokhé] = community; common property, which means the land or property of a church or monastery, whether it is a gift or In other words, even in medieval Serbia, this land belonged to the Serbs.

5 Dardania, later Mesia, which are mentioned in Roman Christian sources, were administrative regions of the Empire and have no relation to the local religious heritage.

6 In the tourist guide *Prizren, Kosovo - Visitor* from 2012, there is the following explanation: “Church of Holy Friday” (VI-VIX century). For a long time before the arrival of the Slavs in Prizren, this church served as a sanctuary for its citizens, the Dardans. This pagan sanctuary was dedicated to the Illyrian god Prem, i.e. the God of fertility. Later, the Christian-Slavic-Orthodox occupiers renamed the church ‘Shën Premta’ to ‘Sveti petak’, which in translation means the same as ‘Holy Friday’. In the second half of the 18th century, when Prizren was occupied by the Ottomans, the church was converted into

In the light of recent events, we can assume that the Banjska monastery, the endowment of King Milutin, which was first turned into a mosque, then into a military fortress, is also threatened, so that at a time when the Serbian cultural identity is threatened, it would revive again and continue to testify to the continuity of the Serbian culture in Kosovo and Metohija (Jevtović, Perić 2023), which is one of the few, i.e. isolated examples of the process we are describing.

In efforts to encode the geopolitical identity of the Albanian population in Kosovo, the authorities locate the geographical position and emphasize the centuries-old intertwining of religions and cultures in order to more strongly present their own status. The term “Kosovo cultural heritage” cannot be found in professional and scientific literature, but the media and politicians deliberately abuse it in order to help create a new identity, because in these areas there is Serbian cultural heritage as the oldest, then with the Turkish conquests, Ottoman cultural heritage, so that only about 150 years ago the Albanian cultural heritage was created. It definitely cannot be marked as common. The idea is to use artificial and unfounded narratives of the past to shape a new statehood, a current identity that would be different from the Albanian one (from Albania) and that would prove how the Serbs stole the past from the local Albanians. Nemanjići are marked by this paradigm as conquerors who built cultural monuments of universal value and which today are the centers of Christian life on the foundations of previously existing Albanian churches?!

Even in British cultural studies, the importance of knowledge about the past is understood, which is preserved, transmitted, changed and used to draw lessons in relation to the state. In the case of the identity transformation that takes place in the Albanian community in Kosovo and Metohija, memory turns into an institutionalized memory, which makes it the result of the action of culture and politics and a conscious attitude towards the past that is interpreted according to the goals of the present. Communication professor John Korner sees television as a “knowledge machine” that centrifugally “projects its own mixture of original and reworked cultural experience (attitudes, jokes, styles, characters, looks, situations, types, ways of speaking) to the widest limits.” (2003: 262). Even more important is its centripetal effect, thanks to which it selectively appropriates the ingredients of the spread of culture, transforming it into a social appearance that changes the audience. In Britain, the Liverpool University professor claims, “only a few weeks are enough for some “new” people, programs, language twists, great success and complete failure to find a reflection in a large part of national life...”.

With digitization processes, collective memory increasingly turns to the media as locations for the creation of new memories (Kitch, 2008: 311-320), developing the concept of “media memory”. The term is ambiguous, so theorists usually consider it from several perspectives, namely: 1) multidirectional disposition - from the present to the past and vice versa; 2) concretization in media contents; 3) the functionality of the role it has towards his community; 4) socio-political aspects; 5) technological qualities

a mosque (1756), adding a minaret and calling it ‘Juma Jami’, which translates as ‘Friday Mosque’. Later, with the change of occupier, the minaret was removed from the ‘Juma Mosque’ and a church bell was installed in its place, and it was again renamed to ‘Holy Friday’...” (according to Pavličić, 2017: 500).

of the mediatization process and 6) its narratological characteristics (Neiger, 2020). Each of the mentioned perspectives in the ideological-propaganda interpretation enables a different view of reality, highlighting the importance of the media's role in building cultural memory and shared memories in the digital environment. In combination with the political-ideological agenda, the third, most dangerous phase is emerging, which we are currently witnessing. Temporarily, the question of the origin of cultural monuments is moved to the margins, and the concern for the entire cultural heritage of the "state of Kosovo" is placed in the center. The goal is to demonstrate the readiness of the new authorities to restore the monumental heritage at the level of modern civilizational values, which should produce a strong propaganda effect on world public opinion.

We show how the concept of media memory is realized in practice through the example of "the restoration of a church near Kosovska Mitrovica, in the village of Gornje Vinarce, north of the Ibar", which the Albanian authorities presented as a model that should demonstrate the readiness of the new society and the will to coexist with Others. However, with a shrewd revision of the past, the Serbian Orthodox temple, which according to preserved records dates back to the 15th century, and which was damaged by Albanian extremists in the 1970s and permanently destroyed in 1999, is being restored by the interim authorities in Pristina, but now as a Catholic temple, albeit of Catholic believers there is none in the village and its surroundings. The strategy of the new authorities has been recognized because it relies on unfounded theses in historical sources according to which the Albanian population in Kosovo in the distant past, before the Turkish conquests, professed Catholicism, which would empirically prove the continuous Albanian majority presence in these areas.⁷ The territorialization of the church heritage and the »Kosovization« of the monumental heritage in the area of Kosovo and Metohija speaks of the direct intention of the strategist of seizing this territory to create the impression in the world public that the so-called Kosovo is something special, because it has not only its own history but also an autonomous cultural heritage. This further means that with the confirmation of Kosovo's statehood and membership in UNESCO, the status of the Serbian Orthodox Church and its cultural heritage would be called into question.

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF CEMETERIES IN THE CULTURE OF NEW MEANINGS

In the mediological conceptual matrix, cemeteries can be equated with the oldest archives, they are the first bearers of memory, while "funerals represent the first mnemonic experiences" and overcoming the physical existence of man (Debre, 2000: 35). Tradition, memory, artifacts and organized social matter constitute transmission,

7 In the vicinity of Kosovska Mitrovica (in the Middle Ages) there were Catholic temples around the mines where there were colonies of Saxon miners and traders from Dubrovnik and Kotor. The Latin or Saska church in the village of Stari Trg is known, which was studied and protected as a cultural monument since 1958, but it was not subject to restoration, which clearly shows that the goal of the Albanian authorities is not to preserve historical cultural monuments and protect the Christian spiritual heritage, as the media portrays, but revisionism and the policy of provoking Orthodox Serbs.

without which there is no cultural identity. Albanian strategists know that three key elements of the culture of memory are: 1) the dynamics of the process - selection and changes in the content of memory; 2) narration - the way in which the selected contents are designed, and 3) social conditions that determine the entire process (Kuljić, 2006). Cultural identity is created by preserving and transmitting content significant for the survival of the community, whereby evidence of the existence of Others is denied and physically destroyed or taken over. Then the demolition of Orthodox cemeteries in the areas of Kosovo and Metohija becomes clearer to us, including their plowing and conversion of land. Grave sites are the oldest evidence of Serbian monumental heritage, keepers of memories of real events and times with inestimable symbolic value. A cemetery is a message in space and time about a people, era, religion and culture, a testimony about the society and relationships that existed in it.

The memorial place of cemeteries in the identities of peoples is also confirmed by the etymology of the word monument (lat. monumentum, from the verb monere - to remind) or the Serbian word spomenik - in the meaning of memory. In Serbian heritage, cemeteries are considered sacred places, and the grave is the last material evidence of existence and a guarantee of duration (in the memories of others). Out of about 400 Orthodox cemeteries in the researched period (1999 to the present), more than 350 were targeted by vandals, and their systematic destruction takes place every day. First, the cemeteries in the cities from which the Serbs were expelled were demolished, so in Đakovica the cemetery was turned into a garbage dump, and then it was paved over, erasing traces of their existence forever. The cemetery in Rečani was plowed over, and in Velika Reka near Vučitrn it was filled with sand. Professor Mitra Reljić in her book "Serbian Cemeteries in Kosovo and Metohija" claims that more than fifty cemeteries have been "covered up and their location cannot be established".⁸ The cemeteries in the villages of Siga and Brestovik also had a terrible fate, where the population who returned to their homes found unearthened graves and scattered bones of their ancestors. Similar scenes were registered in other Serbian villages (Žakovo, Belo Polje, Vrnica). It was confirmed in 2010 that these were not individual acts of violence or short-term mass outbursts of hatred (June 1999 and March 2004) when for the first time after the war a Serb buried in the cemetery in Gnjilan. The very next day, the grave was desecrated, the coffin dug up and damaged. The second cemetery in the same city, in addition to most of the destroyed monuments, also serves as a garbage dump, and the local population also uses it as a shortcut - passing and transporting through the cemetery (for these and other examples, see: Reljić, 2020; Katalog, 2011). A new road and a roundabout were built on the area of the former cemetery in the village of Koriša.

The organized erasure of the Serbian cultural, historical and spiritual heritage was intensified with the process of building a self-proclaimed Albanian state. It is an illusion that the beginning of this treatment towards Serbs and the Serbian Orthodox Church dates back to the nineties of the last century. It is a silent and invisible process

8 The monograph itself is a monument to the suffering of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija because it provides evidence (with photos and documents) about the disappearance of memorial inscriptions - specific and valuable linguistic material about religion and customs, values and moral principles, but also social position, cultural habits, in a word, mentality and identity of the Serbian people.

that lasted the entire previous century, but was intensified by the constitution of the FNRJ of Yugoslavia, which, by the Parliamentary decision of March 6, 1945, officially forbade the return of Kosovo-Metohija Serbs exiled by Shqiptars during the occupation. The damaged ethnic relations were skillfully hidden from the public, and few individuals dared to speak about the emigration of the non-Albanian population, which was becoming more and more noticeable, only to explode after the NATO bombing with over 250,000 refugees of Serbian origin. The bishop Raško-Prizrenski Pavle (later the patriarch) pointed out even then the "problem concerning the renaming of church properties, for example a mosque was written on the site of a church, a house or building was written on another site, no church site remained behind the ruins after the Second World War, registered as ecclesiastical, but as universal, and some restored or new churches are not registered in the cadastral books at all" (Patriarch Pavle 2013: 428-429).⁹

There are numerous forms and techniques of destruction, from physical breaking and knocking down of tombstones, demolition with explosives, burning of cemetery churches, theft of marble parts of monuments to cattle grazing and throwing garbage. International observers in charge of monitoring the situation in this region, not knowing enough about the religious context and spiritual heritage of the local people, overlook the depth of the problem, lightly concluding that the emphasis is on economic motives. Thus, the OEBS Report for the period from January 2014 to December 2020 states that a total of 247 incidents of cultural heritage and religious objects were reported, of which "112 were thefts of money or property." This category includes the theft of donations and contribution boxes, the theft of movable objects, such as speakers, cables and microphones, from religious sites and the theft of fences at cemeteries. This means that less than half of all recorded incidents indicate an economic motive for the perpetrator. Thefts of art and heritage items were reported in 17 cases. However, even purely monetary thefts can cause collateral damage to religious and secular sites. For example, a sharp increase in this type of crime was observed in the period from 2016 (five cases) to 2017 (15 cases)" (OEBS, 2022: 62).

Tombstones and mounds sometimes tell historians and culturologists about what the official policy has kept silent, so many social processes can be analyzed by their reconstruction. In addition to Serbs, Allied soldiers from the First and Second World Wars were also buried in some cemeteries, but even when they are dead, they do not have the same status. Thus, on November 11, 2023, on the eve of the First World War Armistice Day, at the initiative of the French and German embassies in Pristina, the monument to the fighters from the Balkans and the First World War was moved, which caused fierce reactions and condemnations from the Serbian public and institutions. At the place of the monument to the Serbian soldiers, a plaque was placed with an inscription

9 "It doesn't take a lot of imagination to conclude that these actions belong to the plan of the representatives of the principle of ethnically pure Kosovo, to show with official acts that there are neither Serbs nor their churches in Kosovo, and what they hold are the mosques that the government in the old Yugoslavia took away violently from the Muslims and gave to the Serbian Church. Or that mosques were built here as early as the 14th century, when the Turks had not even crossed over to the Balkans." (Patriarch Pavle 2013: 429).

in French, Serbian and Albanian: “To the French soldiers who fell in Kosovo”. Unlike the anonymous and phantom-masked extremists who usually demolish cemeteries at night, this time the high diplomats of the European countries allowed the gravestone to be moved from the place where it stood for decades, so that after fierce reactions and condemnations from different sides, everything was returned to its original state.

There are many examples of vandalism, so due to the limitation of the scope of this paper we cannot list them all, but as an illustration, here is an example from Kosovska Mitrovica, a city that is divided into two ethnically opposed communities. The preserved Muslim (Albanian) cemetery “testifies to the current Serbian community that inhabits the northern part of that city, just as the ruined and devastated Serbian cemetery in its southern part testifies to the current generation of Kosovo Albanians and their intentions” (Vučković 2021). The position of ideological power is important for determining in relation to the past in order to determine the present social, cultural and even affective identity. Forgetting has a central place in the conversation with the past, because this is how it builds its own existence. That is why the Albanian self-proclaimed elite destroys every trace of the existence of the Others, developing a new kind of collective heritage whose owner wants to become in the absence of its own heritage.

The information that the old Serbian cemetery near the temple of St. Dimitrije in Kosovska Mitrovica was excavated in the places where the monuments were located, which is why even the remains of the buried deceased can be seen in some parts, shocked the public. Although it is a cemetery that dates back to the period from 1912 to 1945, the surprise of the Serbian locals was great because there were several other solutions that were more financially acceptable. The symbolic and material heritage of the Serbs is being canceled because, demonstrating political strength and voluntarism, the self-proclaimed authorities are establishing permanent forms of social and political organization.

In transmission, the monument is a medium that prolongs man’s life, which means that without cemeteries there are no testimonies of the existence of Others. The changed cultural memory spreads further through the education system, and is popularized through media images that enable national revival. The process of “Kosovization” of cultural heritage changes with the emergence of a national principle that establishes a higher right of an ethnic group to re-qualify ownership of artifacts by revising the past and interpreting traditions. The Albanian “struggle for freedom” is systematically glorified, the memory of the fighters of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) who contributed to it is promoted, memorials are built throughout the province, new monuments are erected in mausoleums in cities and in busy places. In the collisions of old identity markers incompatible with the new reality of the Albanian strategists, space is opened for the construction of the Kosovar identity, which Petrović and Kamčevski (2019) call post-historical and for which they need to be filled with some content. The process of creating a new history, the construction of a new memory and remembrance cannot end with the destruction of the existing Serbian one, but requires artifacts, material carriers, symbolic coding and institutional support that must be created, even at the cost of falsifying the past. The new memory is communicative and cultural, which is why it is scarce in terms of time, so recent historical events are

placed in the context of myths about the Illyrian origin of Albanians and the sacrifices they made in order to reach their state with the help of "democratic countries".

Bernard Debarbieux perceived the territory as a social construct that combines a physical/material/geographical space with a specific order/system of values, in a way that attributes multiple and combined meanings to each of its elements (places) or discontinuities (Del Biaggio 2015: 40). The Albanian community applies exactly that at every step of establishing a new statehood. The world theory of memory culture has long been dominated by Halbwachs' (Halbwachs, 1992: 183) concept of "collective memory" as selective memory, according to which different groups of people have different collective memories, which in practice results in different patterns of behavior. "Memory is a collective function," he argued, describing collective memory as "a reconstruction of the past that adapts the image of ancient facts to the beliefs and spiritual needs of the present." The lack of this kind of vision lies in the misunderstanding of the separation of communicative and cultural memory, because everyone has their own way of interpreting. Media cultural memory is more powerful and durable in terms of propaganda, with long-term consequences promoting new memories and images of the past.

Numerous theoreticians pointed to the dialectical connection between collective memory and remembrance, as well as their dependence on the media (Kansteiner, 2002: 179–197; Zelizer, 2008: 75–83). By analyzing the change of the cultural matrix in the areas of Kosovo and Metohija, we see how the bearers of memory are changing, not only through physical destruction, but also through the use of digital photo and film processing techniques to form a romanticized image of the past, which proves the persistence of the Albanian population on this land. This is very important to the British theorists of the culture of memory, because the media are not ordinary storages of memory, but are increasingly bearers of meaning, thus also interpreters of cultural, historical and communicative memory. Online communication is becoming more and more important for public opinion, because with the growth of technological possibilities, we can more easily indicate the identity of actors, without worrying that by popularizing them, we are changing the wider environment.¹⁰

Albanian falsification of the past is spreading to other nations. A characteristic example was registered on the Macedonian website *denesen.mk* (accessed: 19.11.2023). In the authentic video, which was created on Šar Mountain back in 1930, reality was replaced by photoshop: the bottom video is original and shows the children's game of Macedonian and Serbian shepherds, but the meaning of the photo was changed by manipulation and adding white mittens. With a symbolic message, it is »proved« that Albanians are natives of this area, so fake pictures of the past have started to be shared and liked on social networks and digital platforms. Albanian propaganda addresses young generations who do not want to delve into the depth of the problem. That is why by spreading fake news (disinformation) they are creating a history of memory, but at

10 Ernesto Laclau warns us: "...at the core of the process of representation is that those who represent contribute to the identity of those they represent." Ernesto Laclau. *Emancipation(s)*, Verso, London, 1996, p. 87

the same time shaping a new political and social reality.¹¹ “Narratives that are based on the mythology of a nation become a medium for “telling stories” and promoting national culture,” the researchers claim, warning that the hybridization of narrative and visual iconography creates new identities that are gullibly accepted by people around the world (Baltezarević and Baltezarević 2023). The polarization of the population is absolute: ethnic differences become insurmountable barriers, religious affiliations become fortresses of intolerance towards Others, and the cultural past that had common points of convergence is revised so much that the mobilization of the public is carried out on the basis of newly produced identities, which are based on political passion and national revanchism.

4. CONCLUSION

In Kosovo and Metohija today there are three dominant cultural heritages - Serbian, Albanian and Ottoman, but the Albanian administrative authority in Prishtina wants to artificially create “Kosovo cultural heritage” through the “idea of creating a state nation”. Hence the reckoning with the monumental heritage of the Serbs, the assets of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the roots of the Serbian state, because with their destruction or appropriation, the evidence of Serbian existence in these areas disappears. New forms of public communication are changing the position of Serbian cultural heritage, whereby the competition for social and symbolic authority is increasingly moving to social networks and global mainstream media. Our results confirm the conclusions of a similar study by Milena Šljivić that “in the specific Kosovo-Metohija context, it is important to keep in mind that religion is precisely the element that has maintained the Serbs as a national group in this territory”, so it is no coincidence that the attacks of Albanian fundamentalists are mostly directed towards church heritage as an important part of cultural heritage (Šljivić, 2021: 339).

The basis of every democratic society is respect for different religious and cultural identities, which in their universal meaning belong to all peoples of Kosovo and Metohija, Europe and the whole world. In a virtual space where different cultures, religions and ethnic groups mix there is not enough interaction, which is used for numerous attempts to falsify and manipulate the past. The construction of national and cultural identity is most successful when it relies on traditions, so communities that do not have them endeavour to construct them by simulating them. Narratives of different stories collide, intertwine, continue, deconstruct and are being built on, determining the character of the community, but also of each individual who makes it up. In artificially constructed communities there is no place for Others, cultural heritage moves from the periphery to the center of development priorities, but instead of cooperation it leads to further divisions and differences.

The growing interest of the social sciences in memory studies is significant for us because of the current and observable processes of change in action in practice.

11 Research by the Oxford Internet Institute shows that, during the US mid-term elections in November 2018, the number of links to “fake news” exceeded the number of links to professional media for the first time. (See more in: Surčulija; Kulić: „Lažne vesti ili dezinformacije – (samo) regulatorni okvir i izazovi u praksi, *Srpska politička misao*, 2020: 177-204.

For example, the so-called Pristina authorities no longer insist on the speed of admission to UNESCO as a form of recognition of statehood. Now the emphasis is on the media image of the "state" which covers the entire cultural heritage in the territory, so by "Kosovization" they are trying to change the identity status of Serbian monuments in order to nationalize valuable cultural assets. The monasteries of Visoki Dečani, Gračanica and Peć Patriarchate and the Church of Bogorodica Ljeviška are on the list of endangered cultural heritage of UNESCO, but with the media image of »common heritage« and lobbying, Pristina is doing everything to politically promote a new identity and affirm its own statehood. At the same time, with the creation of a new national history, new monuments to Albanian liberators are being created as an autochthonous form of cultural heritage. The six stars on the flag of Kosovo* symbolically indicate six ethnic groups (Albanians, Serbs, Turks, Roma, Gorani and Bosniaks), but the impression is that only one is important.

Serbia must fight against the mentioned process with all its forces, political, diplomatic and cultural, because the erasure of the Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija is a significant step towards the destruction of the Serbs on a general level, because »every kind of cultural property, movable or immovable, is the treasure of a country and all its inhabitants. Therefore, its preservation represents the highest state interest« (Janković, Perić, 2019: 381)

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„КОСОВИЗАЦИЈА“ СРПСКЕ СПОМЕНИЧНЕ КУЛТУРЕ И КРЕИРАЊЕ НОВИХ ИДЕНТИТЕТА

РЕЗИМЕ

Полазећи од социолошког поимања културе као скупа детерминанти које каналишу друштвена кретања, аутори анализирају сложену косовско-метохијску стварност са фокусом на материјално споменично наслеђе и његово уништавање са циљем политичке ревизије прошлости и фалсификовања албанског идентитета. Вандалско деловање етничко-религијски инструментализованих албанских група прикривено је изградњом медијске меморије колективних сећања која за циљ има манипулативну стратегију постепеног придобијања политичке подршке светског мњења.

Анализа карактеристичних студија случаја доказала је погубност девастирања споменичне баштине за српски идентитет јер без симболичких носилаца прошлости нестаје и национална заједница која га је стварала. Срушена гробља, запаљени манастири и цркве, са протераним Србима као носиоцима симболичког значења отворили су простор албанским националистима који „косовизацијом“ српског културног наслеђа креирају сопствени идентитет, с намером да прикажу како су одувек живели на овим просторима. Теоријски оквир заснован је британским студијама културе које бројне облике споменичне културе користе за замену идентитета и промену културе сећања.

Кључне речи: споменично наслеђе, насиље, медијска меморија, политичка ревизија прошлости, „косовизација“ идентитета, измишљена традиција, култура сећања.

