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Contested war remembrance and ethnopolitical identities in Kosovo

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This paper examines the relationship between political power and war remembrance by considering the way war remembrance occurs in a divided society. The purpose of this paper is to explore memory of the violent past and its uses as an ongoing arena of disputes between former adversaries and within ethnopolitical groups pushing their distinct versions of memory. Moreover, this paper examines three key aspects of the politics of remembrance: prevalent narratives, arenas of commemoration, and agencies of war remembrance, based on the case study of Kosovo. The postwar narrative and commemoration in Kosovo have evolved along ethnic lines, perpetuating antagonism and conflicting identities. Memorialization in Kosovo raises serious challenges for comprehensive transitional justice and reconciliation between these ethnic groups. The paper concludes that through appropriate civic education, critical inquiry of commemoration practices, and especially through evidence-based adaptation of the history curriculum, there is a chance to promote a culture of shared memory and to establish inclusive politics of remembrance in Kosovo, as crucial components of reconciliation and peace-building.

Keywords: Kosovo; war remembrance; memory; identity; ethnicity; political attitudes

Introduction

The dissolution of Yugoslavia began with drastic political changes and the rise of ethnonationalism in Serbia, espoused most famously by Slobodan Miloševič (Bieber 2005; Ramet 2002; Silber 1996, 63–69). The crucial periods for the formation of collective memory in Kosovo came during the former Yugoslav, later Serbian, state, in particular the last war. In Kosovo, reminders of wartime events, whether through national narratives or remembrances, are ubiquitous.

Collective memory and narratives of the past serve to commemorate, honor sacrifices, and mourn victims. They also provide lessons about the past in the form of monuments, museums, street and school names, commemoration days, and other ceremonies. Memorialization of the violent past serves to remember historical events, but it also may be used to gain power and promote a certain political order (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper 2000). Thus, the relationship between the past and present is shaped not only by power dynamics but also by interethnic relations and the regional political constellation. In our case study, this means that both domestic structures and external factors might influence collective memory and identity-building.

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War remembrance and traumatic experiences – loss of family members, witnessing atrocities, displacement, etc. – play an important role in the process of peace-building. These events extensively shape identity and political developments in postwar societies (Hunt 2010, 10). As McDowell and Braniff (2014) argue, in postwar and deeply divided societies, war remembrance and symbols of commemorations are not only reminders of the past or sites of mourning; they become means of identity formation and political affiliation. In this sense, formation of a collective identity depends on the political memory of the past and the way it is fostered to society and passed on to succeeding generations. Evolved from deep-rooted conflict between ethnic groups and transmitted across generations, contested memories are followed by divided commemoration spaces and practices. According to Cairns and Roe (2003, 3–8), these separate politics of remembrance shape present and future relations between former foes. The case in point here is in Kosovo, where nearly two decades after the end of the war, ethnocentric and contested memories persist. The conflicting cultures of remembrance hinder an inclusive approach to the violent past and transitional justice. Moreover, a lack of political will to deal with allegations, and even denial, of war crimes committed by each side is a crucial obstacle to reconciliation efforts (Burema 2012, 7–27; Strapacova 2015, 6–8). Although the constitution and existing power-sharing arrangements define Kosovo as a multiethnic state, the primary source of political affiliation and identification is based on ethnic belonging. In this sense, political attitude, electoral mobilization, voting behavior, the media landscape, and even civil society organizations are primarily based on ethnicity (Baliqi 2013, 43–63; Kostovicova 2005). Because of the long-divided education system between the Albanians and Serbs of Kosovo, and segregation in other domains of everyday life, the communities have few chances to meet, communicate, and cooperate across ethnic lines (Jović 2015, 216–271). This ethnic distance reinforces antagonisms and reaffirms mistrust between ethnic communities.

The methodology of research consists of a combination of qualitative methods, participant observation in commemoration activities and memorials, as well as a discourse analysis of historical narratives on war events and experiences. This article relies also on others' content analysis of textbooks. I consider disputes over the commemoration and narratives of war events not from the point of view of historical or objective "facts," but rather as a matter of how remembering these events is understood and articulated in the divided society.

Based on the case study of postwar Kosovo, this paper addresses the mapping of memory, as it shapes and is shaped by ethnic identity and political affiliation. In the first place, this research seeks to understand how war remembrance influences political attitudes among both ethnic groups. The article argues that ethnopolitical identities of Kosovo society are shaped by, among other factors, war remembrance in three interlinked ways. First, because of the ongoing disputes and lack of political settlement, political elites of both ethnicities foster distinct narratives of the past, consisting of self-victimization and mistrust toward the other ethnic group. Thus, war remembrance is used as a legitimizing tool to gain and keep political power. Second, by utilizing ethnocentric, public commemoration, the politics of remembrance aims to create political and ideological unity. Third, separate and antagonistic education systems based on one-sided interpretations of the violent past push younger generations to preserve contested memories and to reinforce ethnopolitical identities.

These assumptions inform this article's structure. The first section provides a theoretical discussion and analytical framework of the relationship between war remembrance and political power. The next section deals with narratives of war and their articulation for political purposes, particularly in postwar Kosovo. The following part examines how arenas or

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spaces of commemoration are particularly related to identity-building efforts. The subsequent section evaluates interpretations of wartime events in current Kosovo Albanian and Serbian history schoolbooks. The article concludes with a discussion of the relationship between war remembrance and political attitudes, and their mutual influence on ethnic relations and identity formation.

Theoretical debate: memory and identity

Collective memory reconstructs the past based on the current references and interests of the most influential and dominant political forces. The way people remember the past also reflects how they understand the present and likewise affects the way they build the future (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy 2011, 3–62). Just as memory helps to shape individual attitudes and belonging, collective memory serves to build and preserve a common identity. Hence, both types of memory are relational, and, in fact, individual memory is possible only in a social framework. The well-known memory scholar Assmann (2006) goes even further in distinguishing four levels of memory: individual, social, political, and cultural. While individual and social memories are grounded in lived experience, political and cultural memories, on the other hand, are founded on symbolic and material representations as well as education and collective participation (Assmann 2006, 215). However, in the case of war remembrance, forms of memory may overlap and intertwine.

The tendency of ethnic groups to foster competing beliefs, memories, and narratives about the past in postwar societies mean that enormous mutual efforts are needed to rebuild trust and peace between ethnic communities (Devine-Wright 2003, 9–33). That is possible only if the past is handled properly and a reconciliation process is achieved. Since this article deals basically with war remembrance, it is important to note that:

> [the] study of war memory is concerned with its official orchestration and embodiment in ceremonial and physical reminders, and with the patterns of inclusion and exclusion that determine which aspects of collective and individual experience are admitted to public recall and commemoration. (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper 2000, 10)

In the process of state-building, key political actors and other social agents are involved in reconstructing the past. They seek to articulate collective memory in a way that fosters identity formation. In this political process, Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper (2000, 16–32) distinguish three key aspects of the struggle to articulate war memories: narratives, arenas, and agencies. Whereas narratives of articulation refer to common formulations and discourses, arenas represent social–political spaces where actors claim recognition for their war memories. As a last dimension, agencies of articulation refer to institutions, organizations, or movements through which social actors seek and preserve recognition for their war memories. Certainly, these aspects are neither strictly separated nor static. On the contrary, as we might see in Kosovo, they are complementary and mutable in content and structure.

The nexus between collective memory and political power is usually constituted through legitimacy, achieved by evoking the past and promoting certain cultural and ideological manifestations for political aims (Müller 2004, 26–29). Public narrative and memorialization of the past are transmitted in different ways by various social actors, political parties, and other influential or pressure groups (such as war veterans' organizations or similar associations). They all attempt to achieve recognition and legitimacy and to gain power through representation of wartime events, be it instances of true or supposed sacrifices or heroism (Assmann and Shortt 2012, 1–12). Through articulation of war

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remembrance, political elites can influence significantly both identities and personal memories of their communities. Personal memory, understood more as "collected memory" in the phrase of Olick (1999), and collective memory, as the "frame" of national memory, are corresponding and work in tandem. Or as Ilana R. Bet-El, in her remarkable exploration of the relationship between memory and war events in the former Yugoslavia, noted:

> From nationalist leaders to village paupers, as of the mid-1980s memories seemingly poured out in an incessant stream: some personal, others personalised, some no more than a myth, others specific recollections – but all reflecting on pain and past ills. Large chunks of verbal agony, beginning with the words "I remember", and often ending with a sharp admonition: Remember! (Bet-El 2004, 206)

Thus, "remembering" for every ethnic group has different connotations. These conflicting views of the past affect a group's wider attitudes and perceptions, whereby both communities compete for the status of the "real" and only victim. They also perpetuate mistrust and exclusion, hindering transitional justice and reconciliation. Other authors have acknowledged the importance of transition from personal experiences to the collective war remembrance, both shaped by preexisting cultural memories and narratives. Memories of previous wars or important historical events could serve as a template to confer certain meanings on the later war experiences and remembrance (Ashplant, Dawson, and Roper 2000, 34; Müller 2004). They may even go back decades and centuries, as in commemoration and narratives of the Battle of Kosovo fought in 1389 (Di Lellio 2009; Zirojević 2000, 189–212). Distance from a given wartime event or the wartime experience becomes irrelevant in the later construction of historical narrative and memorialization. Referring to the Battle of Kosovo as a Serbian "chosen trauma," renowned peace and conflict studies scholar Vamik D. Volkan explains:

> Large groups do not intend to be victimized, but they "choose" to mythologize and psychologize the mental representation of the event. When this occurs the reality of the event no longer matters to societal movements. (Volkan 2004)

Therefore, it is important not only whose, but also what kind of, memories, commemoration symbols, or historical narratives are transmitted. What is remembered, and how, about the violent past at the collective level depends on the meaning it takes on for a shared identity (Müller 2004, 1–35). War remembrance is an ongoing struggle of opposing groups vying for widespread recognition of their version of the past, with an eye to gaining legitimacy and political power for themselves while delegitimizing opposing narratives. As Ramet (2013, 871–881) shows, by way of reviewing the role of traumatic memories in the former Yugoslavia, these events are continually being used and abused. Such narratives help to define group boundaries and shape a sense of "we," while also helping to establish and legitimize a certain political order.

War remembrance and narrative in postwar Kosovo

War remembrance formed and articulated through narrative, commemoration, and other ways is a crucial political and ideological tool of the state in constituting a common identity for its citizens. Therefore, acts of public remembrance of sacrifices, victims, and heroes have a decisive role in constructing the politics of remembrance in Kosovo. The commemoration activities of wartime events and experiences, and symbolic reminders of war in everyday life, have influenced significantly the actual ethnopolitical identities in Kosovo. At the same time, the glorification of heroism in the enduring struggle for liberty is a constituent aspect of the commemorative culture in Kosovo. But war remembrance also serves

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as an ideological and political foundation for the emergence and consolidation of the state. A typographic sculpture that says simply "NEWBORN" erected in the center of Pristina on the day that Kosovo declared its independence represents Kosovo's state-building. Based on interviews with Kosovar and Serbian young adults about historical narratives, Mandic (2015, 7) has noticed that past events are evoked by official nationalist narrative, as an "abstract history," by both groups in describing their experiences, recalling selected historical themes, and wielding history for nationalistic purposes. On the other hand, he identifies "lived history" narratives as personalized interpretations of events and experiences that tend to reject in certain ways "official" historical narratives. These historical narratives appear often in vernacular usage to reinterpret the past and to make sense of the present, but also to construct a dichotomy of the oppressor and oppressed (Zdravković-Zonta 2009, 681). In addition, symbolic representation of war remembrance, through memorials, street names, commemorative days, and historical narratives, are essential aspects in the memory-making of common suffering and sacrifices for the "national struggle," that is statehood. This prevalent war narrative is used as a means for state legitimacy and to establish political unity among citizens. Since the war, political representatives of the "armed resistance" have used extensively this war narrative as an ideological tool, not only to maintain national unity against Serbian rule but also to challenge political opponents from the "civil resistance" faction.

In a study of the culture of memory and commemoration practices in postwar Kosovo conducted by the anthropologist Gerold (2014), admiration of heroism, along with glorification of epic events, values, and figures of the "liberation war" (*lufta çlirimtare*) were emphasized as key components in the postwar narrative. The fallen fighters of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) are honored as national martyrs (*dëshmorët e kombit*) and commemorated in public as well as often in private memorials. The sacrifices of the KLA fighters are often glorified in folk songs, poems, and radio or film documentaries. This narrative of war is connected with the enduring struggle for independence. The new political elites, emerged mainly from among former KLA fighters, have broadly utilized the war narrative as the "KLA ethos," thus becoming "guardians" of national values and political struggle (Schneider and Schneider 2011, 116–117). According to Ingimundarson's research on postwar remembrance in Kosovo, there is an apparent link between national symbolic reinterpretation and state formation. The author illustrates this with an allegory of ceremony:

> The crucial recurring date in this mythic narrative is 28 November, Flag Day – the Albanian national holiday – and Jashari's supposed birthday. This is not only a meta-narrative serving the purpose of legitimizing a new state; it is also a cult that is enacted, fixed and performed. (Ingimundarson 2007, 104)

The memory of the past for Kosovo Serbs, especially war remembrance, is certainly different from that of the Kosovo's majority ethnic Albanian population. In contrast to the "heroism" and "sacrifice" narrative, Serbs' war remembrance is suffused with victimhood. According to Zdravković-Zonta (2009, 679), perceptions of Kosovo Serbs as historical victims were particularly reinforced after the NATO intervention. Apart from the NATO bombing and Belgrade's loss of political control over Kosovo, the narrative includes the fate of many local Serbs living south of the Ibar river, who were forced to leave or were internally displaced within Kosovo. Not surprisingly, Serbs remember the war in Kosovo as an act of "aggression" and "terrorism." Nevertheless, for both groups, victimhood narratives are used and abused by political parties, playing a decisive role in the reconstruction of ethnopolitical identities.

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Everywhere, war has been central to the emergence of national consciousness and the process of state formation. As the German historian Höpken (1999, 191) explains, the memory of World War II has crucial relevance for history and national identity in the Balkan region because "almost all Balkan nation-states were immediate products of the wars." In this sense, in the process of state formation and nation-building, war remembrance became, to use his phrase, "the grammar of nationalism" in political discourses and focal meta-narratives in the public sphere (Höpken 1999, 190). However, these memories are always selective and ambiguous, which is what makes them politically powerful. Similarly, narratives contain a variety of symbolic appeals, understandings, and connotations to different social groups, reaching a wide range of people. In the case of war experience, memories may be contested not only between former conflicting groups but also within a certain community as well. Moreover, individual and collective memories do not always correspond with the official version of collective memory. In some cases or aspects, they are widely evoked and in others are marginalized or even suppressed. For instance, victims of sexual violence or other wartime abuse are silenced or often stigmatized (Vulaj 2015). Only in recent years with the contribution of civil society has this issue become a political and public concern. Efforts to commemorate wartime rape survivors have included an art exhibition at the Pristina stadium titled "Thinking of You" (*Mendoj për ty*) in which women's dresses were hung on lines, and a memorial with a bas-relief portrait of a woman with the inscription "Heroines" was erected in Pristina. Women have only recently gained official recognition of their legal status as wartime victims for the purpose of receiving social benefits.

Also essential to identity formation is the legacy of war remembrance from the personal experience of survivors to the memory of their descendants. War remembrance has an excessive impact on the identity and political maturation of younger people (Barber 2009). Those born during the 1990s in Kosovo are shaped by war remembrance in various ways – from family or personal experiences, in the sense that their memory of war is lived through narratives of witnesses and survivors of war, as well as from history textbooks that have constructed and consolidated a particular version of war remembrance (Baliqi 2017). In this context, war experiences are a crucial part of narratives, both in the "private" domain (among family and friends) and in the public sphere (the education system and political discourse). These historical narratives, combined with public memorials and commemoration events, aim to enhance social cohesion and political legitimacy and to solidify the sense of belonging. In this way, state institutions play a central role in articulating and transmitting the memory of the past. Their ability to establish and shape certain memory is then key to forming a shared identity.

Politics of remembrance and arenas of articulation

Memorialization is a battlefield of political statements and ethnonational identification in divided societies. Different ethnic groups' memories of wartime events clash not only in their narratives but also through their commemoration sites and practices. As McDowell and Braniff write, "Commemoration remains highly contested in Kosovo, which is unsurprising given the relationship with its statehood and the brief interlude since war engulfed it at the close of the 20th century" (2014, 143).

In 2013, Kosovo established a state agency to manage memorials, cemeteries, and other commemoration sites related to the war. The agency's list includes 132 sites, of which 92 are monuments and 40 are martyrs' cemeteries commemorating heroes and victims of war (Law on Agency for Management of Memorial Complexes in Kosovo 2014). Like postwar

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narratives, commemoration practices and places in Kosovo are ethnically distinctive. As a result, public spaces are further separated through mono-ethnic monuments, cemeteries, street and school names, and other symbols, leading to diametrically contrasting war memorials. Through these symbolic tributes, almost all public memorialization of the Communist Yugoslav and Serbian state has been replaced with commemoration of KLA fighters and other Albanian national figures (Ermolin 2014, 161–167). Several streets, avenues, and schools in Kosovo are named in honor of fallen KLA soldiers, most notably Adem Jashari, who is celebrated as the army's founder and whose monument or square is present almost in every town, the international airport, and the main military barracks in Pristina. His destroyed house in the village of Prekaz, where in March 1998 he fought against Serbian police forces and later was murdered with other members of his extended family, is a museum. The graves of more than 50 of Jashari's relatives have been turned into a popular memorial complex and a powerful symbol of war remembrance (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006a). Jashari's iconic figure as a founding myth in a "liberation war" embodied a national master narrative and memorialization of sacrifices and endless national struggle against enemies, or as the guestbook in the Jashari memorial complex stated in 2002, "The blood of this family and our Legendary Commander Adem Jashari was the foundation stone of the freedom that we enjoy today and will be enjoyed by generations to follow" (Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers 2006b).

Another historic figure, portrayed as Kosovo's founding father, is the late nonviolent resistance leader and President Ibrahim Rugova, whose statue stands in a Pristina square named after him, close to parliament and the government building. Rugova's legacy is also glorified in other forms of remembrance, political discourse, and history textbooks. His followers "have created their own forms of commemoration; apart from celebrating the proclamation of independence in 1990, they sponsor commemorative events to honor those LDK intellectuals who were killed by the Serbs" (Ingimundarson 2007, 117). In the postwar era, political rivalries between the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) led by Rugova as a "peaceful resistance" movement and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) as a "militant faction" are also reflected in competition and differences over war narrative and commemoration (Schneider and Schneider 2011, 114–118). Both political parties have tried to create and articulate their own distinct commemoration, as McDowell and Braniff (2014, 16) describe: "As a highly politicised process, memorialisation often sees various parties typically struggle over their definitions to advance particular interests." The political competition soon became a fierce battle for domination over war remembrance. On the reintegration of former KLA soldiers, Ströhle (2010, 505) has observed: "The former KLA commanders that became politicians cultivate their proximity to fallen regional heroes, thereby transferring the 'glory of the dead' to themselves." The transformation from "prewar" political elites to "postwar" elites came gradually and runs parallel with the shift in the control of the war narrative and commemoration from one political force (around LDK) to another (the PDK as political successor of the KLA).

War commemoration is also transmitted in public space through the widespread presence of Western political figures and symbols (such as flags, street names, or monuments), aiming to honor NATO's contribution to ending the war and demonstrating Kosovo's political orientation. A few notable examples include the main boulevard and statue in Pristina named for former US President Bill Clinton and a monument dedicated to NATO in the town of Prizren (Ermolin 2014, 162).

In contrast, municipalities predominantly populated by Kosovo Serbs have monuments to and streets named after Serbian national heroes, including the recently erected statue of a medieval soldier Miloš Obilić in the small town of Gračanica and of the medieval Prince

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Lazar in northern Mitrovica. Several monuments related to wartime events in areas where the Serb community lives have plaques engraved with names of victims of "NATO aggression" and Albanian "terrorists" (written in pejorative form for Albanians, *šiptarski*). One is on the northern side of the bridge over the Ibar river in Mitrovica, and another is in the village of Staro Gracko in central Kosovo, where 14 Serb civilians were killed in July 1999 by unknown persons. In addition, a sculpture in Gračanica, similar to the "NEWBORN" composition in Pristina, forms the word "Missing" to commemorate Serbs who disappeared in the war (Ermolin 2014, 167). Contested war remembrance, therefore, feeds political resentment and ethnic estrangement, in that it not only emphasizes substantial and symbolical gaps but also results in spatial division between former conflicting sides, as the postwar emergence of ethnic enclaves clearly demonstrates (Dahlman and Williams 2010). The symbolic boundaries of memory and identity also became territorial markers.

Commemorative symbols and practices in Kosovo raise serious challenges for transitional justice, in particular dealing with war crimes, atrocities, and other violent acts. One effect of such one-sided war remembrance in recent ethnopolitical relations is the antagonistic debate in Kosovo regarding prosecutions and trials of war crimes. Arguments over responsibility for war crimes often lead to ethnic groups denying war crimes committed by their members. A study on victimization and acceptance of collective guilt, based on a representative survey conducted across the former Yugoslavia, found that this interrelation depends on the level and type of wartime experiences. In Kosovo, nearly 90% of respondents claimed to have "experienced at least one traumatic event during the war" (Penic, Elcheroth, and Spini 2016, 11). Such a high level of exposure to wartime events feeds a sense of collective victimization and discourages acceptance of collective guilt. In a study on the perception of transitional justice in Kosovo, most respondents identified their own ethnic group as the main victim of crimes and human rights violations during the war. Although the majority of all ethnic communities in the study said it is very important for justice and reconciliation that all war criminals are punished, the majority of Kosovo Albanians, more than 70%, and more than 40% of Kosovo Serbs do not believe that members of their ethnic group committed war crimes (UNDP Kosovo 2012). This kind of "competitive victimhood" and historical victimization narrative in Kosovo, by presenting one's own ethnic group as the victim and the other as the aggressor, is also obvious in other comparative studies (Andrighetto et al. 2012; Zdravković-Zonta 2009). A lack of inclusive politics of remembrance is a key driver of biased victimization.

However, a strong emphasis on ethnicity, opposing political attitudes, contested collective memories, and divided educations are further obstacles to establishing a politics of remembrance that does not see the past through an ethnocentric lens. The political scientist Visoka (2016) argues that a politics of remembrance in Kosovo is emerging primarily thanks to civil society organizations that aspire to liberate the past from ethnonationalist tendencies by including all sides of the conflict and by constructing a bottom-up and virtual memorialization. Virtual spaces like social media make it possible to engage across territorial borders and create innovative ways for young activists to seek alternative forms of addressing these contentious issues. In his study on the role of youth activism in the post-conflict societies of the former Yugoslavia, Kurze (2016) describes innovative ways and performances of younger generations in which they deal with the violent past, going beyond competing victimhood and rival narratives, aiming to promote public engagement, and an inclusive reconciliation effort. An attempt at inclusive commemoration by civil society organizations, a public performance in the center of Pristina to honor the missing, was roundly criticized by various organizations and the victims' community in

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Kosovo for including names of Serbs in addition to Albanian victims (Kurze 2016, 14). This case demonstrates how complex and challenging it is to overcome competitive victimization and to build an inclusive commemoration. Also, it remains uncertain whether dealing with the past is possible without the involvement of political decision-makers, in order to overcome existing ethnocentric war remembrance.

In the aftermath of the war, the role of international administration, represented by the UN Interim Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), was more about peace-building and political stability than dealing with the past and reconciliation (ÒNeill 2002, 30–31). Therefore, the international community has had limited impact in the most significant issues that affect dealing with the past, such as missing persons, transitional justice, and prosecution of war crimes (Burema 2012, 14–16). In the post-independence era, particularly after the beginning of Brussels negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina in 2011, the issues of contested collective memories and of dealing with the past seem to be even lower on the agenda of the international community.

As was pointed out in this article, postwar public memorialization in Kosovo focuses predominantly on the heroism of fallen soldiers and sacrifices for the "liberation war." On the other hand, some memories of war are less represented or to some extent marginalized, because they do not fit in the frame of official or master narrative. A typical example is the massive displacement and deportation during the war, when almost the entire civilian population was expelled from their homes and forced to migrate to neighboring Albania or Macedonia, or another foreign country. Despite so many victims of systematic and state-ordered action as part of the "ethnic cleansing" effort, there is not a single official memorial, commemorative day, ceremony, or museum dedicated to this tragic occurrence. This traumatic experience is treated in photography exhibitions, novels, memoirs of witness, and dozens of films, short films, and documentaries. Some of the internationally prominent films that deal with this issue from different perspectives include *Kukumi*, *Agnus Dei*, *Three Windows and a Hanging* and the shorts *Column* and *Shok*, which was nominated for an Oscar in 2015. Certainly as personal and collective experience, and as a war trauma, this event continues to influence the political attitudes and identity of the Kosovar society. Although less represented in public memorials and "official" commemoration ceremonies, memory of the expulsion is widely manifested in popular narratives and addressed occasionally by political actors.

Identity formation and agency of remembrance

Some of the basic functions of collective memory are to honor the victims by giving meaning to their trauma and to learn lessons about the past for upcoming generations (Arthur 2011, 291). As mentioned, the experience of wartime events, commemoration of trauma, and the frequent self-perception as victims play a crucial role in identity formation (Hunt 2010, 10). Punamäki (2009, 62–81) presents profound empirical evidence of the impact of exposure to war on young people's later political behavior and attitudes.

In addition to personal experiences, the education system affects their developing national and political affiliation by helping to institutionalize certain narratives of the past that might include glorification, victimization, and self-justification. The development of the education system in Kosovo offers a clear picture of the relationship between political purposes and ethnic mobilization. In their study on rebuilding the Kosovar education system, Sommers and Buckland (2004, 34) explain, "Kosovo lies at or near the core of the breakup of Yugoslavia, and education lies at the center of Kosovo's conflict." A critical challenge facing postwar societies is that conflicting identities stand in the way of various

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efforts to improve ethnic relations and rebuild a common education system. The division of society along ethnic lines is particularly evident in Kosovo's schools and universities (Kostovicova 2005), where, besides being separated in different schools, Kosovo Albanians and other ethnic communities are taught in the state curriculum, while the Serb community is taught in schools managed by Serbia.

A comparative analysis by Gashi (2016) found systematic and profound differences between the treatment of Kosovo's past in Serbian and Kosovo history textbooks. For instance, human rights abuses during the 1990s against Kosovo Albanians are presented as massacres by the Serbian state in Kosovo schoolbooks but are not even mentioned in Serbian textbooks (Gashi 2016, 259). As for the wartime period, the textbooks present only victims from "their side" and crimes of the "other side." In this regard, Serbian history textbooks make no mention of Kosovo Albanian victims executed by Serbian armed forces, whereas Kosovar textbooks say nothing about Serb civilian victims of war. The same pattern occurs with the issue of expulsion and displacement. While one Serbian textbook mentions only 220,000 displaced Serbs after the war, Kosovar textbooks say more than 1 million Kosovars were deported during the war. Likewise for the NATO military intervention, in Kosovar textbooks, NATO troops' entry into Kosovo in June 1999 is celebrated as "an act of liberation from Serbia," while Serbian textbooks treat it as "aggresion by Western countries" (Gashi 2016, 260–265). These distorted interpretations of the past in the history textbooks only reaffirm the current politics of memory and maintain ethnopolitical divisions in Kosovo. Educated in different and often conflicting curricula, ethnic groups continue to be divided not only about war remembrance but also about their future perspective. Since the education system is a significant agency of remembrance, the process of dealing with the past and reconciliation should begin with correcting these antagonistic historical narratives and textbooks. Education is a constitutive element in dealing critically with the past and in transforming biased and contested collective memories. Therefore, curriculum development of history textbooks could be the first and decisive step in creating a comprehensive and inclusive war memory that improves ethnic relations and acknowledges commemorations of the "other." A precondition for this, however, is a political settlement between ethnic groups about the politics of remembrance that bridges rather than deepens contested memories in postwar society.

Conclusion

Since ethnic conflicts are basically rooted in the past, collective memory might be the key to improving ethnic relations and reconciliation of former foes. As this article elaborates, wartime experiences are essential in forming collective memories and shaping identities. The memory of war is articulated primarily through narratives of witnesses and survivors, transmitted in various forms across generations. Furthermore, war remembrance occurs in varied symbolic forms and events of commemoration, often utilized to create a sense of belonging and solidarity among a community. War remembrance shapes political constellations and might be subject to contestation between ethnic groups. As a result, the politics of remembrance in divided societies is marked by contested interpretations and representations of war and is likely to remain a continuing ethnic and political battlefield. Kosovo is at an impasse between contested war remembrances, which hinders the emergence of a common identity that might enhance state legitimacy. As this article shows, recent ethnopolitical elites institutionalize and articulate a prevalent form of war remembrance that significantly affects society's identity and political attitudes. In this context, the existing politics of memory in Kosovo, characterized by its ethnopolitical

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instrumentalization and a partisan interpretation of the war, hinders any attempt to build a common state identity and a shared political community. Beside these ethnically based cleavages, commemoration of the war is an arena of contestation among Kosovo's main political factions, which claim that those who have done more for "liberation" are better able to build a state and lead the government.

The politics of war remembrance in Kosovo is examined here in its three crucial aspects: war narratives, arenas of commemoration, and agencies of memory. In all three aspects, memorialization is ethnically exclusive and mutually contested. Consequently "one-sided," triumphalist or victimization narratives are fostered by dominant political forces to mobilize masses and gain power. Memorials as arenas of commemoration reinforce distinct identity and ethnonational sentiment. Instead of being places of commemoration and reflection, they become mostly forms of ethnopolitical proclamation. In addition, ethnic groups are influenced by symbolic representations, through naming of public spaces, institutions, schools, and other war-related commemorations. As an agency of remembrance, the education system, especially via history teaching, has further fueled ethnocentric war memory. Comparative analysis of Kosovar and Serbian history textbooks has demonstrated distorted interpretations of the past and contradictory and nationalistic presentations of war events. These different perceptions of history are exacerbated by the fact that Kosovo Albanian and Serb pupils are taught in separate education systems with distinct curricula.

In Kosovo, contested war remembrance affects society in various ways: it strengthens ethnonational identity and division between ethnic groups: it reinforces political attitudes and maintains in power present ethnopolitical elites, thus challenging democratization and state formation. Moreover, a lack of will among political elites to promote a culture of remembrance beyond ethnic belonging and insufficient efforts to deal with the violent past, especially through transitional justice and civic education, help perpetuate contested war remembrance. Initiatives to start dialog between ethnic groups on interpreting the violent past are still missing. Postwar narratives, memorials, as well as history textbooks are important components in both escalating long-term conflict and in overcoming the legacy of political violence. It is very important that Kosovo citizens perceive memorialization in a critical and reflective manner. Particularly, young generations have the potential, through appropriate civic education, to deal with the past and to promote a culture of shared remembrance. To develop an inclusive politics of remembrance, memorial practices and sites, historical narratives, and textbooks must go beyond established ethnical articulations. This is also a matter of improving sociopolitical conditions and ethnic relations, and of peace-building in a postwar and deeply divided society.

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