

## **The Field of the Blackbirds and the Battle for Europe**

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International Affairs Working Paper 2011-08  
September 2011

Forthcoming chapter in Bill Niven, Ruth Wittlinger and Eric Langenbacher, editors.  
*Dynamics of Memory in the New Europe*, Bergham Books 2011

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Graduate Program in International Affairs  
The New School  
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[www.gpia.info/publications](http://www.gpia.info/publications)

## ABSTRACT

Serbia, Kosovo, and Turkey, all European Union applicants, recognize that the possibility of European belonging as historical reality is a crucial attribute for acceptance. These countries have all built national stories rooted in the Medieval Ottoman conquest of the Western Balkans and distanced themselves from the “Orient” and from Islam. By doing so, they have engaged in a debate with a “thick,” rather than a “thin” conception of Europe; they have tried to measure up to Europe as a traditional community of values defined by its Christian character, rather than the dynamic cosmopolitan Europe of law and standards which is officially embodied by the Union. Paradoxically, the revival of these national memories not only anchors a particular configuration of national time and space for Serbs, Albanians, and Turks. It mirrors a concern with identity, very present at the core of Europe, which is often resolved through the affirmation of an allegedly authentic and coherent European Christian tradition.

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## **The Field of the Blackbirds and the Battle for Europe**

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**Figure 1: Turbe of Sultan Murat I in Mazgit (photo by Joan de Boer)**

Historical memory is highly performative at the field of the blackbirds, a rolling Kosovo flatland six kilometers to the northwest of the capital Prishtina. At this site, in June 1389, a coalition of regional forces led by the Serbian Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović faced the Ottoman army of Sultan Murat. Both leaders were killed in a battle that apparently ended with no decisive victory on the day, but led to the submission of the local nobility shortly thereafter. The Ottomans then ruled over the Balkans until the twentieth century.

Monuments marking the battlefield are placed a few kilometers apart: a memorial to the fallen Christian heroes and the turbe (mausoleum) of the Sultan's standard-bearer in the

locality known as Gazimestan, and the Sultan's turbe to the west, at Mazgit. They are archeological and political signifiers of opposing camps, physical symbols of discourses and practices that "memory entrepreneurs" have adopted to plot national stories.<sup>i</sup> Most notable and best known among them is the Serbian narrative of the battle, constructed as a unique tale of Christian martyrdom granting Serbia historical rights over Kosovo. Less obvious, plotlines built on the memorialization of the battle and its mythical protagonists are also relevant to Albanian and Turkish national discourses. In the contemporary political context, the old battlefield has become a highly resonant political symbol of European identity for all.

Facing the loss of Kosovo,<sup>ii</sup> Serbia maintains a dominant story line that clings to tales of Christian enmity with Albanian Muslims from 1389 up to current times. These tales confirm Serbia's, and its old province Kosovo's, primordial belonging to the "western," "European" camp, against an alleged "Asiatic" and "jihadist" Albanian essence.

Albanians, who are the overwhelming majority in modern Kosovo and seek recognition of the new state, in turn assign priority to freeing their past from a condition of "Oriental alterity," or foreignness. Folktales that represent the mythical Serb hero-assassin of the Sultan Miloš Obilić as the Albanian-Christian champion Millosh Kopiliq signify a more "authentic" history by establishing autochthony, excising a centuries-old Ottoman past, and sharing in a broader contestation of Albanians' identification with the Ottomans and Islam. To the Turkish government, striving for membership in the European Union (EU) against the opposition of core member states, the newly restored turbe at Mazgit provides archeological foundations to the official narrative of a tolerant, civilizing variant of Islam that is born by Turkish history in the West.

The possibility of European belonging as historical reality—offered by the Kosovo battlefield through memory—is a crucial attribute for Serbia, Kosovo, and Turkey, all European Union applicants. Serbia has been accepted into the EU Stabilization and Association Process and is fast approaching EU candidate status. The newly independent Kosovo is a NATO/ EU ward, aspiring to access. Turkey, a EU candidate since 1999, has seen its bid to join the EU virtually stalled. Although their circumstances are very different, all three countries have been asked to prove not only their economic and institutional viability, but also their “Europeanness.” This generally means adherence to a “modern community” that defines itself most clearly in opposition to the old particularisms of nation-states and national histories, while lacking in substantive coherence.<sup>iii</sup> As a response, they have tried to bridge the apparent symbolic deficit characteristic of this understanding of community, by evoking instinctive memories of earlier representations: in particular a classic notion of Europe as a tradition of deep cultural differences vis-à-vis the Oriental Muslim “other.”

By distancing themselves from the “Orient,” and from Islam as its distinct signifier, the national stories rooted in Kosovo have engaged in a debate with a “thick,” rather than a “thin” conception of Europe. This means that they have tried to measure up to Europe as a traditional community of values, rather than the dynamic cosmopolitan Europe of law and standards, which is officially embodied by the Union. The revival of these national memories not only anchors a particular configuration of national time and space for Serbs, Albanians, and Turks. It tries to configure a time and space for Europe, which the European Union, an indeterminate, deterritorialized and ever incomplete process, denies. Outmoded and peripheral only on the surface, this dynamic of memory mirrors a

concern with identity that is very present at the core of Europe, where it is frequently used as a wedge issue by populist and anti-immigrant movements in defense of an allegedly authentic and coherent European tradition. Whether the question is of individual liberties versus religious values, or multiculturalism versus assimilation, Europe's Christian character and its relationship with Islam are central themes in the effort to give positive content to the idea of Europe. The narratives outlined in this chapter both reflect and nourish the debate.

### **Serbian Memory and the "True West"**

When in October 2006 the excavators of an Albanian company started to dig at Gazimestan, they got dangerously near the state memorial to the fallen Serbian knights, the faux medieval tower that since 1953 stands twenty-five meters high over the site of the 1389 battlefield.<sup>iv</sup> The United Nations intervened to stop their work, responding to a complaint from outraged Serb leaders and Orthodox clergy, for whom the issue was not one of mere preservation. Albanians fear and loathe the site, from which Slobodan Milošević rallied large crowds to the reconquista of Kosovo in 1989, and see in the tower another socialist-style building, void of historical value. For Serbs, authenticity cannot be an architectural concern. Gazimestan is a campo santo, a holy field that belongs to Serbia like all other Serbian burial grounds, because "the meadows around the tower still hide the bones of Lazar's brave knights."<sup>v</sup>



**Figure 2: Serbian tower at Gazimestan (photo by Joan de Boer)**

This particular designation of Gazimestan cannot be understood without considering the role of dead bodies in former Yugoslavia—the famous and the unnamed—in reorienting “people’s relations to the past,”<sup>vi</sup> and establishing a nexus between nationalism and “kinship rooted in particular soils.”<sup>vii</sup> Gazimestan, the graveyard of thousands of Christian heroes, is also the place where the historical figure of Prince Lazar and the mythical knight Miloš Obilić, the assassin of the Sultan, found death, providing the main plot for a Serbian national narrative. By opting for a Heavenly Kingdom rather than submitting to the Sultan, Lazar made both a spiritual and a political choice. His “Kosovo option” reflects an unwavering loyalty to Orthodox Christianity, but also includes a belligerent pledge to never be defeated again, and Obilić most prominently embodies the spirit of active resistance and heroic patriotism. This Serbian story line of the battle was built on two traditions: the oral transmission of epic songs flourishing in

the western Balkans in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and the parallel myth that was uniquely institutionalized in liturgical forms by the Orthodox Church since the aftermath of the battle. Nineteenth-century poet and folklorist Vuk Karadžić wove this narrative into a literary canon of foundational national epic, constituting it as a rallying cry for national unification.<sup>viii</sup> Although it is only one among several Serb ethno-nationalist myths, the battle of Kosovo exceptionally pervades both high and low culture through its representation in popular culture, folk songs, literary texts, scholarly essays, textbooks, and political speeches.<sup>ix</sup> It becomes a mobilizing idea when, at particular junctions of Serb history, memory entrepreneurs politically appropriate the Kosovo plot and turn it into the indispensable background for Serbia's political choices.

In the past two decades the Kosovo myth has occupied center stage, thanks to the convergence of Belgrade intellectual elite, Church theologians and political insurgents within the Communist nomenclature. When Slobodan Milošević came to Gazimestan on 28 June 1989 to celebrate the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle, he assumed the mantle of the avenger of Kosovo. More than one million people showed up to hear him, after rallies of thousands had marked a season of protest against the alleged Kosovo genocide of Serbs -- a national populist mobilization that conferred democratic legitimacy upon his particular strand of authoritarian nationalism.<sup>x</sup>

At Gazimestan, Milošević used the Kosovo legacy to place Serbia squarely within Europe, but on its own terms:

Six centuries ago, Serbia heroically defended itself in the field of Kosovo, but it also defended Europe. Serbia was at that time the bastion that defended the European culture, religion, and European society in general. Therefore, today, it appears not only unjust but even unhistorical and completely absurd to talk about Serbia's belonging to Europe, Serbia is in



Europe now just as much as it was in the past, of course, in its own way, but in a way that in the historical sense never deprived it of dignity.<sup>xi</sup>

Contrary to this pro-European rhetoric, the Kosovo option translated into an anti-European choice for centralization and against party pluralism, human rights, freedom of the press, and the market economy. The rest is known, through the bloody history of the wars that accompanied the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

The anti-Muslim/anti-Albanian campaign which was pivotal in the resurgence of Serbian nationalism does not seem to have abated twenty years after Milošević's epochal rally. On the contrary, as Serbia lost control of Kosovo, the connection Albanians-Muslims-Jihadists has become the staple of a wide-ranging propaganda campaign that is waged most energetically, but not only, by the Orthodox clergy.<sup>xii</sup> Commemorations of the battle at Gazimestan are reminders that the battle continues. They are partly religious ceremonies and partly mass rallies. The highest authorities of the church and the state jointly preside both at Gazimestan and the monastery of Gračanica, a "tradition" that dates back only to the death of Tito and effectively took off only with Milošević. Today, there is an evident split in the Serb political leadership between the winning pro-Western, pro-European forces and the Euro-skeptics. The first camp includes the Democrats of President Tadić, the small groups of the technocratic G17 + and the Liberal Democrats and, after the 2008 elections, Milošević's Socialists and the Progressive Party of former Radical Tomislav Nikolić. The second camp is constituted by the Serbian Democrats of Vojislav Koštunica and the Radical Party. This distinction is clearer in political terms than it is intellectually. Koštunica, the longest-lived prime minister after Milošević, has shown in his rhetoric and practice that he can be democratic and authoritarian, pro-European, and against Europe.<sup>xiii</sup> The current Serb political

establishment, including Koštunica's pro-European successors, maintains a defiant and uncompromising position on Kosovo and an inconsistent stance on compliance with international justice. Both the failure to deliver indicted war criminal General Ratko Mladić to The Hague and the unwillingness to recognize Kosovo's independence indicate a refusal to come to terms with Serbia's wartime legacy, which contradicts the embrace of Europe and democracy.

Being better Europeans than the Europeans themselves has often been an explicit theme in intellectual, political, and clerical discourses in the post-Tito period. "Serbia never adopted an overtly hostile position to the Western Europe's civilization"—noted historian Latinka Perović—but has "determined her links to Europe in relation to a unique need: persuade Western Europe of her truth."<sup>xiv</sup> Its truth resides in Kosovo, but especially at Gazimestan. Gazimestan anchors the Serbian ethnos to a physical landscape both historically and ontologically: from this field the call originates for all Serbs to remain true to the Kosovo heroes, and thus to themselves and the nation. It legitimates the ethno-nation as a repository of fundamental Christian and European values, uncorrupted by secularism and its twin, liberal democracy. Gazimestan territorializes the opposition between the cross and the crescent, where the Christian Serbian nation stands unequivocally against the Islamic Orient in its Albanian-Turk version. From this derives the homogenizing belief that renouncing the wartime legacy and compromising over Kosovo means trading Serbia's spirit for material gain. Gazimestan is thus constructed as a Serbian and European battlefield, where Serbia can either win or lose her sacred ground, but cannot lose her soul, which is the same as the soul of Europe.

## **The Headless Horseman as an Albanian Christian Hero**

There is no physical reminder of an Albanian presence at Gazimestan or Mazgit. Yet, in 1389 Albanians fought alongside other local forces against the Ottoman army, under the command of Prince Lazar. The memory of the battle has lived among Albanians not through monuments or literature, but in the epic oral tradition that celebrates Millosh Kopiliq as the assassin of the Sultan and an Albanian.

Kopiliq's fantastic story—here a synopsis based on the longest variant<sup>xv</sup>—is the geste of a Christian Albanian warrior who decided to fight to his death, against the better judgment of cautious and ready-to-compromise unnamed leaders. No Prince Lazar partakes in this story, with the exception of a mention in one variant.<sup>xvi</sup> Kopiliq killed the Sultan, refusing to bow to his request for submission. He was subsequently decapitated by Turkish soldiers, after being betrayed by an old Slav woman who revealed the secret place where he was hiding the key to his armor: his whiskers. Carrying his head under his arm, Kopiliq walked away, but died when two women saw him and caused him to drop his head.

The Albanian version of the battle of Kosovo is largely unknown because, until recently, like most of the Albanian epic, it has been relegated to the oral tradition and not translated.<sup>xvii</sup> The Serbian version is better known for two reasons. Widely translated, it has acquired literary fame in Europe since the nineteenth century. It has simultaneously played a central role in building Serbia's national identity, but also provided a unifying identity for the South Slavs.<sup>xviii</sup> Elsewhere I deal extensively with the vicissitudes of both the mythical Serb hero Obilić and the Albanian hero Kopiliq.<sup>xix</sup> Here it will suffice to

note that no historical evidence confirms the existence of either. What is important for our purposes is to recognize that Kopiliq, for a long time considered no more than a folk hero and a figure of local knowledge, has acquired a new life in postwar Kosovo. He found a place in official history and in the unique production and diffusion of historical memory sponsored by local intellectuals—veterans, journalists, teachers, politicians, and historians—who are engaged in re-appropriating and rewriting the past. Their goal is to produce a coherent story line for the nation: a pan-Albanian master narrative centered on the hero's resistance unto death against foreign oppression.<sup>xx</sup>

Kopiliq is believed to hail from a village by the same name in Drenica, a central and rural area of Kosovo famous for its rebelliousness. He plays the role, together with historical characters from the same region, of establishing an uninterrupted genealogy of heroes through history. Not accidentally, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) insurgent Adem Jashari, whose 1998 martyrdom in a massacre that killed his whole family has become a national foundational myth, is from Drenica. Jashari is the last of a long line of patriots; Kopiliq the first. As a Christian figure, Kopiliq also reinforces the formulation of a collective religious identity that downplays the Albanians' overwhelming conversion to Islam vis-à-vis their pre-Ottoman culture. He never played or will play the same role as Gjergj Kastrioti, also known as Skanderbeg. This 15th century leader's resistance against the Ottomans in the heart of what is now Albania earned him the papal commendation of *Atleta Christianitatis*, and remains the most eminent story in the Albanian national narrative. Kopiliq is a local Kosovo hero and a Christian, and thus confirms the historical roots of Albanians in Kosovo, a place which emerged in the European consciousness of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century as "Old Serbia." Kopiliq's presence at

Gazimestan proves that Albanians are autochthonous people in a land that is both Christian and European.

The emphasis that Albanians put on European identity is one strong indication of their anxieties about historical discontinuity and perceived backwardness. At different times in modern history, they have expressed these very feelings through the embrace of an “Orientalist” rejection of the Islamic East. There is no apparent contradiction between this attitude and an overwhelming Muslim identification of Albanians, especially in Kosovo. Islam is generally and consistently absent from the other dominant national discourses that have coexisted with the adoption of an identity as originally Christian—whether a propensity to outright discount the role of religion, or the image of a tolerant and ecumenical nation.

The revival - both in Albanian and in Kosovo - of a Manichean vision of Islam and the East (bad) versus Christianity and the West (good), coincides today with the possibility of European Union membership. In Kosovo, the issue already presented itself in the 1990s, when Albanians started to conceptualize more decisively an independent state. A small but capable local Catholic clergy amplified the suggestion made openly in intellectual circles to convert en masse to Catholicism, “the faith of the ancestors,” to correct the “error” of mass conversion to Islam.<sup>xxi</sup> Then self-styled President Ibrahim Rugova fully embraced the idea and his legacy is the new Catholic cathedral in the center of Prishtina, the capital, where there are only a handful of Catholics. The Christian origin and identity of the Albanian nation continues to be a hot debate. In the spring of 2008, the public conversion to Catholicism by an extended family was a sensation.<sup>xxii</sup> Discussions among intellectuals—from the renowned Albanian novelist Ismail Kadare and the Kosovo writer

Rexhep Qosja to bestseller writer/politician Ben Blushi—keep in the spotlight the issue of the “true” Christian religious identity of the nation.<sup>xxiii</sup>

In this context, *Kopiliq* helps to rescue Kosovo history from the hijacking by Serbian nationalist circles, to correct the depiction of Albanians as foreign to the land and the whole of Western civilization. The price is a rejection of the Ottoman experience. Why has an “imposing and extraordinarily important figure of the history of the Balkans and Europe” such as *Kopiliq* from Drenica, been up to now confined to folklore, rhetorically asks one local writer?<sup>xxiv</sup> Post-memory memory entrepreneurs point out that Albanians’ religious affiliation, overwhelmingly although not exclusively Muslim, obfuscated the truth about the Christian and European origins of Albanians. Their focus is sharp and selective. It highlights *Kopiliq*’s rebelliousness, discarding altogether the story of the saintly Ottoman Sultan who, with his assassin, occupies a central role in the epic. Fallen at Mazgit as a *shahid* (Muslim martyr), and described as *baba* (father) in the songs of rhapsodists, he has been erased from the Kosovo family album and with him, centuries of adaptation and integration in the Empire.

### **Secularization of Islamic Saints**

In June 2006, the Kosovo Government received with concerned amusement the news that a delegation of 300 Turkish officials, led by the Islamic Welfare Party Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, would arrive in Prishtina on three chartered planes. Would this be another Ottoman invasion? was the joke prompted by the announcement, where humor covered the anxiety over closer proximity to eastern friends. The occasion of the visit was the inauguration of the newly restored *turbe* of Sultan Murat I, a monument that in

modern times has been repaired twice by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism, but that has never before been the object of state commemoration. The visit never happened, because Turkey subsequently canceled it, without providing detailed public explanations.

Murat's turbe at Mazgit is not a symbol of occupation for Turkey, but most likely the reminder of a time that is depicted as a relatively peaceful one for the Balkans, thanks to the civilizing Ottoman presence. Former Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hikmet Çetin, recounts that in 1992, during a meeting on Bosnia-Herzegovina where Milošević and Karadžić were also present, U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger turned to him and said: "How come you succeeded to remain in these terrible territories for 500 years?"<sup>xxv</sup> Conventional wisdom on the Ottoman experience in the Balkans explains this success with "Pax Ottomana," or the stability that the Ottoman supranational identity provided. The empire's tolerance of an unruly Balkan society is also a distinct idea that is propagated by official discourse and history textbooks in Turkey; it is evidence of belonging to Europe through a shared, positive past.

Yet, a common European interpretation of the Ottoman legacy has negative connotations and sees it as a rupture in the Balkans' course toward modernity. A large part of the region shares this interpretation and a feeling of resentment. For this reason, Turkey has been extremely cautious in managing both its image and its foreign policy, especially in the Balkans.<sup>xxvi</sup> For decades, its national interest has been to gain EU membership as a modern and secular state, whose good relationship with other Muslim countries has political, not religious meanings. During the Yugoslav conflict, it worked closely with the EU and the United States and calls for solidarity with fellow Muslims in

Bosnia and Kosovo stayed mostly within the confines of domestic politics. Since 1999, Turkey is back in Europe after almost a century, but only in a supporting role, with contributing forces to the NATO mission responsible for Kosovo security. In this role Turkey found the opportunity to reestablish its Western credentials after the EU refusal, two years earlier, to consider its candidacy.

The recent interest in Sultan Murat's turbe is officially dictated merely by cultural heritage concerns. Renovation started in 2004, but already in 2001 the NATO Turkish battalion had published a brochure for visitors, laconically explaining how the "Sultan's internal organs have been buried in the place where he was martyr," while his body lies in Bursa, Turkey. The battle naturally was important for Ottoman history, if not decisive for the conquest of the Balkans, for the simple fact that the Sultan was killed in Kosovo. Sultan Murat I is represented in early chronicles, which are also the first and most exhaustive accounts of the event, as a shaid (Islamic martyr). However, he has never become a cult figure that amplifies the meaning of the battle; his mausoleum has been both the center of pilgrimage and the object of neglect. It is significant that in 1660 Turkish visitors found it filthy and abandoned. Evliya Çelebi believed that the condition of the turbe was an insult and compared it unfavorably with Lazar's saintly burial place:

My Lord ... the inauspicious infidel who slew this sultan lies in a monastery on yonder mountain in a fine mausoleum, lit with jewelled lamps and scented with ambergris and musk. It is supported by wealthy endowments and ministered by priests who every day and night play host to passing visitors, infidel and Moslem alike. The mausoleum of our victorious sultan, on the other hand, has no such institution or keeper to tend to it, and thus all the infidels come and treacherously deposit their excrement in it.<sup>xxvii</sup>

If there is ample evidence confirming the sacredness of the place, it is more due to local popular devotion imbued with syncretism than to Muslim spirituality. For ordinary



people in the Balkans, the religious affiliation of saints does not matter much, as long as they are believed to carry extraordinary powers. Equally important is the character of the site where celebrations happen: it must be a sanctuary, a place where miracles can be delivered.<sup>xxviii</sup> According to a Roma tradition, local celebrations of the Orthodox holiday of Djurdjevan (Saint George's day) on 6 May, take place at the turbe. Saint George is celebrated in many Orthodox Eastern European countries, and in Kosovo his day is a major religious holiday for "Albanians, Gypsies, and the Slavic population."<sup>xxix</sup> On 6 May 2007 the field of Mazgit was full of a celebrating crowd very much in the spirit of a country fair. For one EURO, visitors could enter the turbe and walk three times around Murat's coffin in the hope of having their secret wish fulfilled.

Although different from tolerance, this syncretism follows the Turkish official discourse of Ottoman particular brand of Islam, with its capacity for respect of cultural and religious diversity.<sup>xxx</sup> Thus, the Sultan's mausoleum reminds one of the Ottoman heritage as enlightened, as well as sharing local roots. It testifies, to paraphrase former Minister of Foreign Affairs İsmail Cem, that the history and culture of Turkey, the successor to the Ottoman Empire, was molded in Kosovo and Bosnia as much as in Istanbul or Damascus: this is why "we consider ourselves both European (since seven Centuries [sic]) and Asian, and view this diversity to be an asset."<sup>xxxi</sup>

### **The Kosovo Battlefield as a Mirror for Europe**

Historical memories constructed around the Kosovo battlefield only appear to compete, because a striking commonality characterizes them. In the Serb and Albanian versions, images of the nations developed in interaction with an ideal vision of a Christian,

enlightened European civilization. A constant reproach to their alleged backwardness, this imaginary world makes them feel lagging behind as heirs to the “Ottoman legacy,” and does not recognize their contribution to its history. Serbs and Albanians have answered the charge by constructing national memories proving the authenticity of their European past. Both regard themselves as “guardians at the gate,” a feeling based on the political mythology of *antemurale christianitatis*, or outer battlement of Western European civilization. Turkey, the old enemy, also refuses its otherness, by emphasizing both Islam’s contribution to human values in the practices of a tolerant Ottoman empire and the modern Republic’s secularism.

Fighting the last crusade in Kosovo, an important part of the Serb leadership would rather lose the chance to be part of the EU, the political offspring of a “soulless” continent, than give up the “cradle of Serb civilization.” Keeping the focus on the intellectual tenets of such ideas, I argue that what they are engaged in is an exercise of “Occidentalism.” Occidentalists oppose the two main principles on which modern Europe was founded in the seventeenth century: scientific rationality and liberal democracy.<sup>xxxii</sup> Like the Jihadists, the people they mostly abhor, Serbia’s memory entrepreneurs reject those principles in the name of their superior spirituality. Here the influence of the Orthodox leadership cannot be understated.<sup>xxxiii</sup> It provides tireless criticism of humanism, but also of Western civilization and materialism on behalf of a pan-Slavist, intransigent and anti-modern idea of society and culture.

In Albanian intellectual and political discourse as well as public opinion, a mimetic Orientalism divides and labels East and West as the fundamental historical categories of backwardness and modernity. This is a recurrent and prominent trend in debates on

Albanian religious identity, though not the only one.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Indifference to religion, based on what was an exhortation to unity, poet Vasa Efendi's line "the religion of Albanians is Albanianism," is very often largely presented as a factual statement. Another common trend is the interpretation of the religious affiliations' variety as religious tolerance, in which a westernized, thus "civilized," version of Islam also appears. In postwar Kosovo, as well as postcommunist Albania, the way to European integration is often constructed as a combination of all the above, but rests in the end on the representation of national identity as originally Christian.

In the discussion on mass conversions to Catholicism as a return to the fold, Islam becomes a historical parenthesis, secondary to the Christian—read European and modern - essence of Albanians, and identification with Europe is elaborated through the recognition of an existing "lateness" that needs to be overcome. This mode of self-representation is mimetic. It expresses the "desire for a recognizable, reformed Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite."<sup>xxxv</sup>

There are analogies to be observed in the case of Turkey. By bracketing and repackaging its Ottoman past, Turkey has presented itself as a paradigm of modernization—an experiment in progressive Islam's ability to catch up with the West that has been lauded by outside observers as well. One version of this notion is that liberation from its Ottoman past makes it possible for Turkey to take its deserved place in Europe.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Its embrace of radical secularism makes a most decisive claim of European universality, and its old roots in Europe are an important historical precedent. It is also an exercise in mimicry. To paraphrase

Talal Asad, it implies that once Turks are separated from their inadequate religious beliefs, they can be fully modern, thus European.<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Almost one hundred years ago, mockery, a common colonial response to mimicry, was the reaction of the Victorian observer Edith Durham to the Turks' modernizing efforts that had been required by the Great Powers. While visiting Murat's turbe, she relentlessly denounced the failure of these efforts: the new constitution, the architectural renovation and the clothes attempted to be modern, but looked like cheap imitations.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Rebecca West also focused not only on "the difference that is almost nothing but not quite," but also on "the difference that is almost total but not quite."<sup>xxxix</sup> The people she met at Gazimestan were "to human beings what a ship inside a glass bottle is to a real boat."<sup>xl</sup>

Mockery is not—if it ever was—the right response to the efforts of asserting a European belonging sketched above. In fact the joke is on the Western observers. A closer look at Serb Occidentalism, Albanian mimetic Orientalism, and Turk radical secularism reveals intransigent notions that should be incompatible with the idea of cosmopolitan Europe. On the contrary, they are debated not only outside the EU borders, but at its core. Let us take the idea of Christendom's irreconcilability with, and superiority to, "others" --whether Islam or the modern secular order, or the potentially exclusive character of a secularist universalism, which is incapable of accommodating those distinctive cultural or religious claims that often define minorities. In Europe, as a community based on human rights, respect, and protection of minorities, exclusionary modes of self-representations should not have much credence. Yet, the heightened anxiety of European Union member states with regard to its growing Muslim population,

especially after 9/11 and the bombings of Madrid and London, has rendered them surprisingly relevant. In Amsterdam, director Theo Van Gogh's murder in 2006 at the hands of a Moroccan immigrant professing loyalty to radical Islam, nearly destroyed a long prized tradition of multiculturalism.<sup>xli</sup> Anti-immigrant movements, represented by far Right or fringe parties, are on the rise almost everywhere. They made substantial electoral gains not only domestically, but also, in recent European ballots, in the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Slovakia, Italy and Finland. Nobody believes that the uphill struggle facing Turkey on its path to EU membership is only due to noncompliance with technical required standards.<sup>xlii</sup>

While popular feelings of fear and loathing of Muslim immigrants run high, the elite intellectual and political debates are equally energized against Islam. In his very controversial 2006 Regensburg address,<sup>xliii</sup> the newly elected Pope Benedict XVI used Islam as a negative illustration of what was accomplished by Catholic Christianity: a successful synthesis of biblical faith and reason, the traditions of Jewish obedience to God, and Greek inquiry. His speech was both a declaration of the universal truth of Catholicism and a reaffirmation of its defining role of European identity. Despite repeated assertions that he intended to invite other faiths to a dialogue, he established the superiority of one religion, the only universal religion, towards which all others must converge. Benedict XVI's citation from the medieval Byzantine emperor Paleologus is not accidental—it is taken from a discussion of the emperor with his Muslim host on the rational evidence of the superiority of Christianity over Islam.<sup>xliiv</sup>

Attempts to inject Christianity into political debates and institutions have been on the rise in Europe, as religion continues to face the challenges of secularization. One example

is the heated discussion of the draft European Union Constitution, which in the end omitted to mention God and Europe's Christian roots, despite strong pressure from German, Italian, Polish and Slovakian delegates among others, as well as Pope John Paul II. Nativist politicians, acclaimed intellectuals and the clergy propagate the superiority of a "Christian civilization" in crude forms and elevate ethnic discrimination to a normative defense of democracy.<sup>xlv</sup>

As the battle for Europe concerns identity and religion in Kosovo too, it might be useful to take it seriously as further reflection on the hotly contested meaning of Europeanness. Serb Occidentalism, for example, criticizes the loss of spirituality in exchange for the shallow cosmopolitanism of modern democracies, but points more clearly, in its intransigence, to a dissenting tradition within Europe itself: the reaction against what Max Weber called "the disenchantment of the world."<sup>xlvi</sup> If secular philosophers and politicians paid more attention to the moral and existential yearnings created by modernity, they would respond better to the resurgence of religious conservatism and exclusionary identity construction in contemporary Europe. Similarly, the failings of Turkish secularism highlight the possibility for discrimination that is embedded, for example, in the universalistic message of French *laïcité* (secularism). The French system of law, established to ensure inclusion, faces serious problems in integrating its large Muslim minority, because it is firmly grounded in cultural and political norms that are strictly French. Turkish secularism also presents itself as universal, and finds its evident limitation in past and present treatment of minorities, corruption of freedom of speech, and a resurgence of religious forms of political

mobilization: a purportedly inclusive Turkishness defines the outer boundaries of what the state permits one to say, think and be.

While it is right and fair to demand countries aspiring to join the EU for compliance with its cosmopolitan laws and standards, Europeans should recognize that their shortcomings and struggles are not so alien or outdated as they seem. On the contrary, by virtue of being outside its borders, they afford Europe a clearer view of its own failings: most notably the resort to essentialist nationalist identities—whether religious or secular—as a defense against the challenges of secularization and the diversity that the very rhetoric of cosmopolitanism extols.

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<sup>i</sup> “Memory entrepreneurs” are those actors who struggle over memories and “seek social recognition and political legitimacy of one (their own) interpretation or narrative of the past,” E. Jelin, *State Repression and the Struggles for Memory* (New York, 2003), 33-34. I consistently use this term in my research on the construction of a Kosovo national narrative: see A. Di Lellio, *The Battle of Kosovo 1389. An Albanian Epic* (London, 2009) and A. Di Lellio and S. Schwandner-Sievers, “The Legendary Commander: the Construction of an Albanian Master-Narrative in Post-War Kosovo,” *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no 3 (2006): 513-529. For narrative and emplotment, I follow Hayden Whyte’s focus on “invention” and on the role of “epic emplotment” in historical works: *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore and London, 1973). Among the various treatments of the distinction between narratives of the battle and its “real history” see Noel Malcolm’s *Kosovo. A Short History* (New York, 1998), 58-80 and Di Lellio (see above), 3-48.

<sup>ii</sup> On 17 February 2008, Kosovo became independent under an arrangement providing for international supervision. The new state has been recognized so far by seventy-five countries, but not by Serbia.

<sup>iii</sup> M. Abélès, “Identity and Borders: An Anthropological Approach to EU Institutions,” *Twenty-First Century Papers: On-Line Working Papers from The Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Studies*, no. 4 (Madison, 2004): 13.

<sup>iv</sup> “Gazimestan Monument Protected from Nearby Construction?” *Koha Ditore*, 8 October 2006.

<sup>v</sup> “Digging up Gazimestan Hill, Sacrilege near the Memorial of the Kosovo Battle Knights,” *KiM Info Newsletter*, 3 October 2006. On the occasion of the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gazimestan in 1939, the recently canonized Bishop of Orhid and Zica Nikolaj Velimirović reminded how as repository of the bodies of the Serbian knights, “Kosovo became the campo santo, the holy field.” See N. Velimirović, “Kosovo 1389,” in *Kosovo*, ed. W. Dorich (Alhambra, CA, 1992).

<sup>vi</sup> K. Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York, 1999), 112.

<sup>vii</sup> Verdery, 105.

<sup>viii</sup> An excellent critical discussion of the Kosovo myth in Serbian is M. Popović, *Vivodan i Casni Krst. Oglad iz Knjizevne Arheologije* (Beograd, [1974] 1998); the most comprehensive treatment of the myth in English is T. Emmert, *Serbian Golgotha. Kosovo, 1389* (New York, 1990).

<sup>ix</sup> Ivan Čolović extensively discusses the different aspects of the myth, its diffusion and meaning in *The Politics of Symbol in Serbia* (London, 2002).

<sup>x</sup> Important to notice the popular support to Milošević’s authoritarianism and the opportunity given to his manipulation of this support by the socialist structure of the state. On this see N. Vlasidavljević, “Serbia’s Antibureaucratic Revolution. The Fall of Communism and Nationalist Mobilization in Comparative Perspective.” Paper Prepared for Delivery at the Association for the Study of Nationalities (ASN) Annual World Convention (New York, 10-12 April 2008) and J. Dragović-Soso, ‘Saviours of the Nation.’ *Serbia’s Intellectual Opposition and the Revival of Nationalism* (Montreal and Kingston, 2003), 132-161.

<sup>xi</sup> S. Milošević, *Od Gazimestan do Sevenignena* (Beograd, 2001), 10.



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- <sup>xii</sup> I have dealt more extensively with this in “The Missing Revolution in Serbia: 1989-2008,” *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* 22, no 3 (2009): 373-384.
- <sup>xiii</sup> His performative speeches are all collected in volumes. See V. Koštunica, *Odbrana Kosova* (Beograd, 2008) and *Entre la Force et le Droit* (Lausanne, 1999).
- <sup>xiv</sup> L. Perović, “Le Dos Tourné à la Modernisation,” in *Radiographie d’un Nationalisme. Les Racines Serbes du Conflit Yugoslave*, ed. N. Popov (Paris, 1998), 123-136, 130.
- <sup>xv</sup> Di Lellio (see note 1), 35-38.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Di Lellio (see note 1), ft. 179.
- <sup>xvii</sup> The first English translation of the Albanian heroic songs is by R. Elsie and J. Mathie-Heck in 2004: *Songs of the Frontier Warriors*. Këngë Kreshnikësh (Wauconda, IL, 2004). The Kosovo epic has appeared in English only in 2009, also in Elsie’s translation, in Di Lellio (see note 1).
- <sup>xviii</sup> In particular Obilić legitimized Serbia as the Piedmont of the South Slavs in the early twentieth century. On the use of Kosovo symbolism to generate enthusiasm and support for South Slavs unitarism, see Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia. Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca, 1984), 202-207.
- <sup>xix</sup> Di Lellio (see note 1), 18-30.
- <sup>xx</sup> On the pan-Albanian master narrative and its construction see Di Lellio and Schwandner-Sievers (see note 1).
- <sup>xxi</sup> D. L. Gjergji, “Would an Independent Kosova be an Islamist State?” in *The Case for Kosova. Passage to Independence*, ed. A. Di Lellio (London, 2006), 159-163.
- <sup>xxii</sup> A. Di Lellio, “Kosovan and Catholic,” *The Guardian*, 21 May 2008.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> I. Kadare, *Identiteti Europian i Shqiptarëve* (Tiranë, 2006) and *Pro & Kundër Blushit* (Tiranë, 2008).
- <sup>xxiv</sup> A. Qeriqi, *Milush Kopiliqi, serb apo shqiptar?* (Prishtinë, 2003), 24.
- <sup>xxv</sup> As quoted in Can Karpat, “Kosovo Turks: Those Who Live in the Most Critical Region of Balkans,” *Axis Information and Analysis (AIA)*, Balkan Section (December 15, 2005).
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Sylvie Gangloff explains clearly and succinctly this development in “The Impact of Ottoman Legacy on Turkish Policy in the Balkans (1991-1999)” in *La Perception de l’Héritage Ottoman dans les Balkans. The Perception of the Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans*, ed. S. Gangloff (Paris, 2005), 169-196.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> R. Dankoff and R. Elsie, trans. and eds, *Evliya Çelebi in Albania and Adjacent Regions (Kosovo, Montenegro, Ohrid)* (Leiden, Boston, Koln, [1660] 2000), 21. A keeper was subsequently appointed, a man from Bukhara in modern Uzbekistan, and his family has tended the complex until now. The widow of one of his ancestors, Sanija Turbedari, a Sandjak Moslem, is the current guardian.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> G. Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo* (London, 2000), 79 and F. W. Hasluck, *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans*, ed. M. Hasluck, (London, 1929), 68-69.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Duijzings, 81. St. George is also known as Herdeljez, the combination of the names of two Moslem prophets, Hizir and Ilyas, who meet every 5 May to welcome the end of winter. The holiday has a special significance as the end of winter, and Roma sacrifice a sheep for luck in the coming year, and a record of such celebration is kept in the Kosovo

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Roma Oral History Project: “Roma Culture: Holidays,” Who We Were, Who We Are: Kosovar Roma Oral Histories.

<sup>xxx</sup> A. Bardakoglu, “Culture of Co-existence in Islam: The Turkish Case” (30 May, 2008). Professor Ali Bardakoglu is President of Turkish Religious Affairs of the Republic of Turkey.

<sup>xxxi</sup> İ. Cem, “Turkey and Europe: Looking to the Future from a Historical Perspective.” (September 16, 2005).

<sup>xxxii</sup> I. Buruma and A. Margalit, *Occidentalism: the West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (New York and London, 2004).

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Di Lellio (see note 12); Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, *The Serbian Orthodox Church and the New Serbian Identity* (Belgrade, 2006); R. Radić, “L’Église et la ‘Question Serbe’” in ed. N. Popov (see note 14), 137-177 and Dragović-Soso (see note 10), 124-125.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the phenomenon see E. Sulstarova, *Arratisje nga Lindja. Orientalizmi Shqiptar nga Naimi te Kadareja* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006). On the relationship between religion and national identity among Albanians, both N. Clayer, *Aux Origines du Nationalisme Albanais. La Naissance d’une Nation Majoritairement Musulmane en Europe* (Paris, 2007) and B. Iseni, *La Question Nationale en Europe du Sud-Est. Genèse, Èmergence et Développement de l’Identité Nationale Albanaise au Kosovo et en Macedoine* (Lausanne, 2008), offer ample material for discussion.

<sup>xxxv</sup> H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), 86.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London and New York, 1968).

<sup>xxxvii</sup> T. Asad, “Moslems and European Identity: Can Europe Represent Islam?” in *The Idea of Europe. From Antiquity to the European Union*, ed. A. Pagden (New York, 2002), 218.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> E. Durham, *High Albania* (London, [1909] 1987), 288-89.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Bhabha (see note 35), 91.

<sup>xl</sup> R. West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon. A Journey through Yugoslavia* (London and New York [1940] 1994), 903.

<sup>xli</sup> I. Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (London and New York, 2006).

<sup>xlii</sup> An Independent Commission on Turkey, composed of diplomats, recently concluded as much in Turkey in Europe. *Breaking the Vicious Circle* (2009).

<sup>xliii</sup> Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason and the University. Memories and Reflections,” (Regensburg, September 12, 2006).

<sup>xliv</sup> M. II Paleologo, *Dialoghi con un Musulmano. VII Discussione* (Bologna, 2007).

<sup>xlv</sup> See the international sensation created by Oriana Fallaci’s racist bestsellers, expounding on the inferiority of Islam: *La Rabbia e L’Orgoglio* (Milano, 2001) and *La Forza della Ragione* (Milano, 2004). To stay in Italy, Marcello Pera, President of the Italian Senate, made Benedict XVI’s thought a manifesto for the European neo-conservatives: “Italia-Europa. Identita’ Cristiana a Rischio?” Speech delivered in Bologna (13 November 2006); the right-wing government formed in 2008 proposed to register and fingerprint all Roma residents, including minors, as a security measure. Finally, In Poland, the peculiar contemporary mix of Catholic fundamentalism populism and nationalism is discussed by Adam Michnik, “Was Pontius Pilate a Liberal

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Democrat? Democracy between Relativism and the Absolute, (Reading Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Part I)." Transitional Center for Democratic Studies Bulletin 16/2 Issue 51 (2006).

<sup>xlvi</sup> A. Bilgrami, "Occidentalism, the Very Idea: An Essay on Enlightenment and Enchantment," *Critical Inquiry* 3 (2006): 381-411, 402.