Political myth: the political uses of history, tradition and memory

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Chapter 2

The Kosovo Myth
1. Introduction.

I will take up Cassirer’s concern about the ease with which a mythic consciousness can be deliberately created to structure a political program and mobilise a population to support it through an analysis of Serbia’s Kosovo Myth. I argue that the emergence of the Kosovo Myth as an authoritative source of legitimation in Serbia during the last decade of the twentieth century bears out Cassirer’s warning that although myth was militarily defeated in Germany in 1945, the technique of modern political myths has been largely untouched. Cassirer’s concern had been that the cultural catastrophe that overwhelmed Germany during the Nazi period was partly due to the fact that the myths of National Socialism were dismissed by the majority of German intellectuals as ‘absurd and incongruous’; were not taken seriously and therefore never confronted. The raison d’être of Cassirer’s *The Myth of the State* was that political myths had to be treated seriously if they were to be effectively confronted and defeated. Cassirer’s concern was that “we should not commit the same error a second time”¹ by underestimating and not taking seriously the legitimating potential of a political myth.

I contend that the catastrophe that overwhelmed Kosovo during NATO’s air war against Serbia in 1999 was exacerbated by the failure of western leaders to anticipate that the Milosevic regime would accept war rather than surrender.

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¹ Cassirer, E. *The Myth of The State* op cit, p. 296.
sovereignty over Kosovo. To fully comprehend Serbia's decision not to accept the Draft Rambouillet Agreement it is necessary to undertake an analysis of Serbia's Kosovo Myth as an important source of Serbian identity, values and ideals. Michael Ignatieff comes close to understanding why Serbia went to war over Kosovo when he writes:

Milosevic could abandon the Serbs outside Serbia. But Kosovo was home ground: the location of the ‘holy places,’ the most ancient monasteries and churches of the Serbian Orthodox faith, the site of that infamous defeat by the Turks in 1389, and above all a place where Serbs felt that they were losing their homeland to the inexorable demographic increase of a population increasingly set on separation and independence. Milosevic had built his political career in Serbia on an intransigent defense of the Serbian minority in the province. To lose Kosovo, therefore, would be to lose all remaining legitimacy with his core support. In deciding to go to war he knew exactly where his ultimate interests lay, unlike Western leaders who believed, until far too late, that interests could be dissociated from values.

Ignatieff’s statement does not identify why or how Kosovo is considered the Serbian ‘homeland’ or how and why Milosevic was able to legitimate his regime by espousing the cause of the Kosovo Serbs. I argue that the reason Kosovo became such an important source of legitimacy for the Milosevic regime can be found in the Kosovo Myth.

The Kosovo Myth has been chosen to introduce an analysis of modern political myth for two broad reasons. First, the violent and destructive breakup of

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2 A detailed account of the diplomatic manoeuvring that accompanied the Rambouillet meeting can be found in Beaumont, P & Wintour, P. 'Rambouillet: The last Throw of the Dice', July 18, 1999, http://www.newsunlimited.co.uk/Kosovo/Story/0,2763,66553,00.html. The theme of this article is fairly typical of what was written about the 'Kosovo Crisis': the credibility of NATO and the "dysfunction of imagination on both sides" (ibid) rather than an analysis of Serbia's historic position on Kosovo. For the full text of the Draft Rambouillet Agreement see, http://www.newsunlimited.co.uk/Kosovo/0,2759,00.html

3 Ignatieff, M. Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond, Chatto & Windus, London, 2000, p. 50-51.
The Kosovo Myth is inescapably bound up with the Kosovo Myth. Choosing the Kosovo Myth is therefore partly a response to Cassirer’s challenge to describe, confront and defeat political myths when they emerge. Unfortunately, the emergence of the Kosovo Myth as an authoritative source of legitimation in the late 1980’s was not confronted. Cassirer’s anxiety that “we should not commit the same error a second time”⁴ has not been headed by either policy-makers, political leaders or intellectuals. Second, an analysis of the Kosovo Myth and its manifestation in Serbia during the 1990’s can be used to reveal a number of characteristics of modern political myths that were not apparent to Cassirer at the time he wrote The Myth of The State.

The past, as represented and communicated through the Kosovo Myth was constructed from Serbia’s collective memory, given meaning by tradition and sacralised by ritual commemorative ceremony. These three interrelated components of modern political myth; memory, tradition and commemoration, will be analysed in greater depth in Chapters 3 to 6. The Balkan Wars of the 1990’s accentuated the role of the past as a key factor in the struggle to control memory. Dubravka Ugresic notes in The Culture of Lies that “what is being annihilated with guns, grenades, murders, rape, the displacement of peoples, ‘ethnic cleansing’, the new ideology supported by the media, is memory.”⁵ Memory was being ‘annihilated’ so that old memories could

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⁴ Cassirer, E. The Myth of The State, op cit, p. 296.
be resurrected and new memories constructed. As Ugresic expressed it, “in the name of the present, a war was waged for the past; in the name of the future, a war against the present.” It was largely through the Kosovo Myth that the ‘war for the past’ was waged. A close analysis of how the Kosovo Myth emerged as a powerful source of legitimacy in late twentieth century Serbia serves as both a reminder of Cassirer’s concern about the uses and abuses of political myth; and as an introduction to the most salient characteristics of modern political myth.

The Kosovo Myth is also an excellent example of the ‘life-cycle’ of a political myth that has slowly developed through a long gestation period; been consciously evoked during a period of crisis as a compensatory source of legitimating authority, and become dormant once its mobilising ‘pouvoir moteur’ has been exhausted. The high point for the Kosovo Myth was 1989. In what was perhaps the “greatest celebration of Serbian nationalism in recent memory,” Serbia’s State President, Slobodan Milosevic addressed a crowd of approximately one million Serbs commemorating the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo with the words: “through the play of history and life, it seems as if Serbia has, precisely in this year, in 1989, regained its state and its dignity and thus has celebrated an event of the distant past which has a great historical and symbolic significance for its future.”

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6 ibid, p.6.
The event of such ‘symbolic significance’ to Serbs was the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 which marked the end of the medieval Serbian state and the beginning of five hundred years of Ottoman rule. Out of defeat emerged the myth of Kosovo which developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries into a powerful political myth of Serbian identity. With the collapse of communism in Serbia, the Kosovo Myth re-emerged as a compensatory source of political legitimacy, through which, Milosevic claimed, Serbia “regained its state, national and spiritual integrity.”

However, exactly ten years after Milosevic’s celebratory address about the symbolic significance of Kosovo to Serbia’s future, the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle announced on the 610th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo that “there will be no hypocrisy. The Godless leaders will take no part.” Not only did the Serbian leadership not take part in what ten years before had been Serbia’s greatest celebration, but neither did the Serbian population. As the ‘Guardian’ reported:

Yesterday, escorted by two British Land-Rovers from the occupying NATO army, Patriarch Pavle of the Serbian Orthodox church made the pilgrimage to the official monument (at Kosovo Polje) .... As he climbed the steps, he was flanked by half-a-dozen priests and one local politician, but not a single ordinary citizen had bothered to come.”

In ten years the Kosovo Myth had degenerated from the mobilising ‘pouvoir moteur’ of Serbian politics to a symbol of the cultural disaster that had engulfed Serbia by mid-1999. In this chapter I will analyse the Kosovo Myth in terms of its emergence as a source of legitimating authority in Serbia and the consequences this was to have on

9 ibid.
Balkan politics. An analysis of the Kosovo Myth provides a current context for a more theoretical examination of modern political myth.

2. The Battle of Kosovo: The 600th Anniversary.

An analysis of the development of the Serbian myth of Kosovo is begun best with its most overt manifestation as a political myth: the 600th anniversary commemorations of 1989. On Vidovdan (St Vitus Day), 28th June 1989, a crowd of approximately one million Serbs gathered on the ancient battleground of Kosovo Polje and commemorated "an event that had no equal in the collective memory of the Serbs", the annihilation of the Serbian feudal army led by Prince Lazar in 1389. Lazar's army had represented the last hope of independent Serbia and his death ushered in a five hundred year period of Ottoman rule. The Battle of Kosovo represented not only "an essential ingredient in the historical consciousness of the Serbian people", but according to Thomas Emmert "the essence of the Kosovo ethic and cult is the basic attitude of the Serb towards the state and life itself." Therefore,

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12 This is the figure most quoted, although some authors such as Thompson, put the crowd as low as half a million. Thompson, M. A Paper House : The Ending of Yugoslavia. Vintage, London, 1992, p. 146.


14 A description of the Battle of Kosovo and the immediate historical and political context of the time is not important to this study. This period of Serbian history has been extensively researched, but many accounts have a tendency to mix myth with history. The most reliable accounts of the battle are to be found in : Emmert, T.A. Serbian Golgotha Kosovo. 1389, East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990; Malcolm, N. Kosovo : A Short History, Papermac, London, 1998; Mihaljcic, R. The Battle of Kosovo in History and in Popular Tradition, Beogradski Izdavacko-Graficki Zavod, Belgrade, 1989; Vucinich, W.S. & Emmert, T.A. (Eds.) Kosovo : Legacy of a Medieval Battle, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1991.


16 ibid, p. 61.
on June 28th, it was not only the six hundredth anniversary of the battle that was being commemorated, but a cluster of cultural attributes that taken collectively make up the Kosovo Myth.

Serbs from all over the world had travelled "to take part in the ceremonial union of all Serbs under one leader" in what Noel Malcolm considered to be "a symbolic turning point in the history of the Yugoslav lands." The 'one leader' orchestrating the commemorative ceremonies was Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic. Milosevic had exploited the Kosovo Myth in his own rise to power and it was this myth that he now used at Kosovo Polje to challenge the Yugoslav State itself. Robert Thomas argues that the commemorative ritual presided over by Milosevic should be seen "as a victory celebration for the coalition which Milosevic had assembled around him." While other Yugoslav leaders waited on a stage set up at Gazimestan on the actual battlefield site, Milosevic descended into the emotionally charged atmosphere by helicopter. His arrival, like every aspect of the

19 Robert Thomas makes the point that although the celebrations were "nominally organised as a federal Yugoslav event it effectively acted as a symbolic repudiation of the Titoist legacy." Thomas, R. Serbia Under Milosevic: Politics in The 1990's. Hurst & Co., London, 1999. p. 50.
20 ibid., p. 49.
21 Or as John Lampe puts it, "all of the other republic party leaderships were obliged to attend" (my italics) Lampe, J.R. Yugoslavia as History: Twice The was a Country. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 345. Julie Mertus notes that, "it would be the last time the entire federal leadership would stand on the same stage in unity with Milosevic," Mertus, J.A. Kosovo: How Myths and Truths Started a War. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1999, p. 185. The United States ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmermann also states that there was considerable pressure for the diplomatic corps to attend the commemoration. "Despite strong efforts by Milosovic's staff to get the diplomatic corps to attend the speech ... only one Western diplomat made the trip - the Turkish ambassador, who had a special reason since his ancestors had won the battle. My other NATO colleagues and I decided not to be props in Milosevic's nationalist theatre. It was the first concerted Western
official commemorations, was planned as a media event; a TV spectacular which Milan Milosevic refers to as President Milosevic's adroit "political use of visual kitch." During the broadcast of the commemorative ceremonies, the commentator placed Slobodan Milosevic at the centre of the Serbian ancestral myth of Prince Lazar, the hero of the Kosovo battle. Exactly six hundred years before, the voice-over told the viewers, on this very soil, Prince Lazar had chosen the kingdom of heaven over his earthly kingdom, the glory of death over survival in defeat.

All this was said in the context of Milosevic mentioning the possibility of war for the first time, and he was quite explicit. In a prophetic warning Milosevic stated; "today, six centuries later, we are again fighting a battle and facing battles. They are not armed battles, although such things cannot yet be excluded." Milosevic also used the commemorative speech to warn his opponents.

If we lost the battle, it was not only due to Turkish military supremacy but also to the tragic disregard at the top of the Serbian leadership. This discord ... has followed the Serbian people throughout their history, including both world wars and later in socialist Yugoslavia when the Serbian leadership remained divided and prone to compromises at the expense of the people.

Serbian unity was the main theme of Milosevic's speech. The compromise Milosevic was referring to in his speech was Tito's Constitution of 1974 which had
reduced’ Serbia to absolute parity with the other republics and had elevated Serbia’s autonomous republics of Kosovo and Vojvodina to virtual republic status. Kosovo always had been considered the cradle of Serbian faith and culture despite the fact that only 200,000 Serbs in 1989 actually lived in Kosovo compared to 1.7 million Muslim Albanians. However, Milosevic’s ability to articulate the Kosovo Myth to the Serbian people enabled him to create a mass movement to confront the so-called ‘Albanian Crisis’. As Thomas Butler points out, it was a case of the “abuse of cultural memory, the manipulation of long-invalid past grievances to obtain present day advantage.” Milosevic was legitimating his own power by identifying his policies in terms of Serbia’s national interests, expressed in the form of the Kosovo Myth. In such a sense, “the TV spectacular was designed to promote the myth of Kosovo as the cradle of Serbian medieval culture, and hence, the commemoration of every Serb’s national identity.”

3. Kosovo and the Culture of Fear

Milosevic’s successful commemoration of the Kosovo anniversary must be understood in the context of the Serbian reaction to the deterioration of political,
social and economic conditions in Kosovo during the 1980’s. It is beyond the purpose and scope of this study to analyse Serbian policy in Kosovo, but two examples are sufficient to illustrate the way Serbian passions were aroused by Kosovo incidents involving Serbs. The first example is the Martinovic case that shows how an alleged ‘assault’ on a Serb became entangled in Serbian myths of victimisation. The reaction to the Martinovic case must be seen in the context of what Ger Duijzings refers to as, “the cultivation of the theme of Serbian suffering ... in the second half of the 1980’s ... (which) became a leitmotif in politics and academia as well as the mass media.”

The emotion generated by the Martinovic incident set the tone for the second example: Milosevic’s impassioned speech on behalf of Serb nationals at the symbolically significant Kosovo Polje. In the background of both incidents was the reality of a declining Serbian population in Kosovo that was portrayed in terms of a ‘genocide’ perpetrated against the Serbian people.

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32 It was alleged in the Serbian press that 400,000 Serbs had fled Kosovo during the 1970s and 80’s. However, as Noel Malcolm points out, “more realistic figures could be obtained from the official censuses, which recorded the number of Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo as follows: 264,604 (1961); 259,819 (1971); 236,526 (1981); 215,346 (1991). A pattern of demographic decline was clearly present, but not on the scale alleged by Serbian publicists.” Malcolm, N. op cit, p. 329.
The case of the Kosovo Serb, Djordje Martinovic, who was taken to hospital in Prishtina in May 1985 after allegedly having a beer bottle inserted in his anus by Albanians, is instructive of the way Serbian myths were used to inflame public opinion. A petition, signed by 200 Belgrade intellectuals in January 1986, elevated the Martinovic case to a metaphor for the whole Serbian nation. "The case of Djordje Martinovic has become that of the whole Serb nation in Kosovo." The 'attack' on Martinovic was equated to the historical 'victimisation' of Serbs for over three hundred years.

As is known from historical science, from still unextinguished memory, the expulsion of the Serb people from Kosovo and Metohija has already been going on for three centuries. Only the protectors of the tyrants have changed: the Ottoman Empire, the Hapsburg Monarchy, Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany have been replaced by the Albanian state and the ruling institutions of Kosovo. In place of forced Islamisation and Fascism there is Stalinised chauvinism. The only novelty is the fusion of tribal hatred and genocide masked by Marxism.

In response to what the petition referred to as 'a politics of national treason', the Serbian intellectuals demanded fundamental changes to the Yugoslav federation.

Everyone in this country who is not indifferent has long ago realised that the genocide in Kosovo cannot be combated without deep social and political changes in the whole country. These changes are unimaginable without changes likewise in the relationship between the Autonomous Provinces and the Republic of Serbia, hence also of Yugoslavia. Genocide cannot be prevented by the politics that had led to it in the first place: the politics of gradual

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33 It was generally believed by hospital staff and public investigators that Martinovic's injuries were self-inflicted in that he "had had an accident while engaging in an act of self-gratification." *ibid*, p. 338. See Mertus, J.A 'op cit, Part 2, 'Impaled with a Bottle': The Martinovic Case, 1985, for a detailed account of the politics of this incident.

34 Petition To the Assembly of SFRL and To the Assembly of SR Serbia, Quoted by Magas, B. *The Destruction of Yugoslavia: Tracking the Break-Up 1980-92*, *op cit*, 1993 p. 51.

35 *ibid*, p. 50. My italics.
surrender of Kosovo and Metohija – to Albania: the unsigned capitulation which leads to a politics of national treason.36

The demands for constitutional change were backed by a media campaign where “impalement by a beer bottle became a metaphor for five centuries of real, but also mythical Turkish acts of impalement.”37 As Julie Mertus notes, “every Serbian school child knows about the horror of impalement from national folk ballads, national novels, national plays and other national traditions.”38 Mertus also notes that evoking impalement as a metaphor for perceived Serbian victimisation fed a desire for historical revenge.

Equating the Martinovic case with an impalement and Kosovo Albanians with the Ottoman Turks had an enormous impact on Serbian consciousness. Worsening economic conditions in Serbia and the political and social uncertainty created by Tito’s death had already made many Serbs feel victimised. The impalement metaphor worked well to further feelings of endangerment and to propel the desire for historical revenge39.

The desire for historical revenge was accentuated by evoking another potent symbol of Serbian suffering: Jasenovac. “The Martinovic case was compared as well to another of the main symbols of Serbian victimisation, the Jasenovac death camp. ‘Martinovic was a Jasenovac for one man’, academic Brana Crncevic said in a comment that was printed in the Belgrade press.40 Mertus writes that,

36 ibid, p. 51.
38 ibid. For a popular and graphic account of impalement see Andric, I. The Bridge Over the Drina ( Edwards, L.F. Trans.) Harvill, London, 1994, pp. 46-52. The impalement metaphor was also reinforced by Serbian accounts of the Martinovic case. For example, Zivorad Mihajlovic who wrote a book on the Martinovic case, states; “here we are dealing with the remains of the Ottoman Empire. (Albanians) stuck him to a stake, this time just wrapped in a bottle. In the time of the Turks, Serbs were being impaled too, though even the Turks were not the ones who did it, but rather their servants – Arnauts (an old Serbian term for Muslim Albanians). This, what is going on in Kosovo today, is a unique method of cruelty.” Quoted by Mertus, J.A. ibid.
39 ibid, p. 109-110.
40 Crncevic, quoted by ibid, p. 110.
Tying Martinovic to Ustase cruelty revitalised collective prejudices, not only towards Albanians but to Croats as well. As with the impalement analogy, the use of Jasenovac as a metaphor generated feelings of victimisation among Serbs and fostered the desire for historical revenge.41

The Martinovic case not only re-activated Serbian collective memories of victimisation at the hands of the Ottoman Turks and the Croatian Ustase, but mobilised Serbs behind demands for a redefinition of the Serb nation within the Yugoslav federation.

The second incident that is illustrative of the mobilising potential of the Serbian myth of Kosovo is Milosevic’s impassioned speech to Serbs at the symbolically significant Kosovo Polje on April 24th, 1987. In a carefully orchestrated response to a pre-planned demonstration by Serbs at Kosovo Polje, Milosevic addressed the crowd with “the words on which his entire political future would be built: ‘no one should dare to beat you!’”42 Milosevic, “spoke of the injustice and humiliation they were suffering; of their ancestral land; of the proud warrior spirit of their forefathers; of their duty to their descendants.”43 On hearing the speech, the Serbian party president Dragisa Pavlovic noted with dismay; “an idea turned into a

41 ibid.
42 Malcolm, N. Kosovo: A Short History, op cit. p. 341. Milosevic’s statement had all the appearances of spontaneity, but Silber and Little argue that “Milosevic’s ‘conversion’ to nationalism was not a chance affair. He had been to Kosovo four days earlier to meet communist officials. The visit was conveniently forgotten, giving the impression that Friday’s events were entirely spontaneous.” Silber, L. & Little, A. The Death of Yugoslavia, op cit., p. 38.
dogma, the Kosovo myth becoming a reality."\(^{44}\) In a direct challenge to the Yugoslav federation Milosevic offered political support for all Serbs irrespective of where they lived. Milosevic was in fact endorsing the xenophobic nationalist principles outlined in a secret but leaked Memorandum produced by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1986.\(^{45}\) The Memorandum had called for "the establishment of the full national and cultural integrity of the Serb nation, irrespective of the republic and province in which it finds itself in its historic and democratic right."\(^{46}\) In a later address to party members and the nation Milosevic stated, "only determination and belief in the future could have transformed the defeat of a nation such as happened at Kosovo into a brilliant clasp linking all future generations of Serbs - an eternal symbol of its national essence."\(^{47}\) Two years before the 600\(^{th}\) anniversary commemorations, Milosevic's adroit manipulation of the Serbian myth of Kosovo laid the groundwork for his bid for power within the ruling League of Communists and his subsequent program of restoring Serbian hegemony within the federation.

In linking Serbia's 'historic destiny' with Serbian fears about Kosovo, Milosevic had skillfully marginalised the Communist opposition. The Serbian Party President, Pavlovic had warned journalists and editors in mid 1987 about "permitting

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\(^{44}\) Quoted by \textit{ibid}, p. 17.

\(^{45}\) In line with the Kosovo Myth the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences presented the situation in Kosovo as "Serbia's biggest defeat since 1804" (\textit{ibid.}, p. 18) when the Serb uprising against the Turks was put down. The Memorandum was also reminiscent of Chetnik plans during World War II. For a discussion of these plans for a homogeneous Serbia see, Hartmann, F. \textit{The Sinister Ideology of Ethnic Cleansing}, Guardian Weekly, 13/9/92.

\(^{46}\) Quoted by Magas, B. \textit{op.cit.}, p. 20.

\(^{47}\) Quoted by \textit{ibid.}.
inflammatory nationalism to infuse their publications and arouse suspicions in the rest of Yugoslavia."\(^{48}\) Pavlovic specifically attacked the press for discussing Kosovo, "in words reeking of lead and gunpowder, revenge and revanchism, the renewal of the suicidal Vidovdan (Kosovo) myth."\(^{49}\) However, by September 1987 Pavlovic and his supporters had been removed and through the skilful use of mass 'meetings of solidarity' Milosevic had not only consolidated his support over Serbia, but also Kosovo, Vojvodina and Montenegro.

By playing the Kosovo card, Milosevic was able to place himself at the head of the emergent nationalist-conservative coalition, crush the liberal opposition and - by forging 'unity' within the party - satisfy also the morbid fear of the central apparatus that the party was losing control over political life in the republic. \(^{50}\) Milosevic had used the Serbian myth of Kosovo as a legitimating rationale\(^{51}\) in his own rise to power, and in the time leading up to the 600th anniversary commemorations he demonstrated both the mobilisation capacity, and the pouvoir moteur of the Kosovo Myth. "With the blessing of the Serbian state, Serbian populism in 1988 moved from a marginal phenomenon to a dominant one. From July to mid-October 1988 alone, three million people would attend Milosevic-sponsored 'popular forums' about Kosovo – the so-called 'meetings of truth.'"\(^{52}\) At a 1988 rally in Belgrade attended by at least 350,000 people Milosevic stated, "every nation has a


\(^{49}\) Quoted by Magas, B. *op cit*, p. 27.

\(^{50}\) Ibid, p. 19.

\(^{51}\) Miller observed that, there "has been the transfer of the basis of ideological legitimacy from Marxism-Leninism to the Serbian national interest." *Miller op. cit.*, P. 99.

\(^{52}\) Mertus, J.A. *op cit*, p. 177.
love which eternally warms its heart. For Serbia it is Kosovo.”53 Milosevic’s ‘love affair’ with Kosovo should be seen as a faustian pact54 based more on fear than sentiment. Once again the Serbs were made to feel isolated55 between an awakened Catholic Croatia56 and a revivalist Muslim movement in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina.57 Banac claims that Milosevic “legitimised and popularised the Serbian culture of fear.”58 Specific memories of World War II were added to the more general fears embodied in the Kosovo Myth, with the reopening of the mass graves of people massacred by the Ustase during World War II.59 The graves had been sealed after the war in the name of ‘brotherhood and unity’. Milosevic also sought to mobilise support by reviving Serbian memories of the concentration camp at Jasenovac. Now, “Serbian nationalist historiography, aligned to Milosevic’s movement, set out to prove that every resistance to Belgrade, not just among the Croats, necessarily tended in the direction of Ustasism and genocide.60

53 Quoted by Malcolm, N. op cit, p. 338.
54 This observation was made during NATO’s war with Serbia over Kosovo in 1999 by Walter Zimmermann quoting an unnamed Slovenian politician. “He’s made a Faustian pact with the devil over Kosovo. Now he’s stuck with it. He can’t make even a minor concession or he’ll lose the nationalist support that brought him to power.” Zimmermann, W. op cit.
55 In the minds of some Serbs there are historical parallels to this isolation. In response to Ralph Johnson of the United States State Department in Belgrade to warn Serbia over becoming involved in the Bosnian conflict following an air attack on Mostar, the Serbian General Zivota Panic is reported to have replied : “Serbia put up with 500 years of the Turkish yoke, so it can take a little international isolation.” Guardian Weekly. 3/5/92.
56 The recognition of Croatia and Slovenia at Germany’s behest, “awakened a political paranoia which existed in the haunted memories and resentments of the Serbian people since they were defeated by the Turks in the Battle of Kosovo Field in 1389.” Pfaff, W. Guardian Weekly. 9/8/92.

The situation in Kosovo and Milosevic’s manipulation of deep-seated Serb fears does not fully answer the question of why the Kosovo Myth emerged as a prominent legitimating symbol during the late 1980’s and 1990’s. I argue that the emergence of Kosovo as a legitimating myth must be understood within a broader political and social context. First, Milosevic and the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) successfully neutralised the emergence of alternative centres of power. Second, the Milosevic regime successfully appropriated national legitimating symbols based on Serbian collective memories and traditions. Third, with the collapse of communism, Milosevic and the SPS legitimated themselves by utilising the past and tapping powerful currents of ethno-nationalism. Taken together, and in the context of Serbian reactions to the deteriorating situation in Kosovo during the 1980’s, such factors partially explain the emergence of the Kosovo Myth as a powerful source of legitimation.

The first reason that the Kosovo myth became a supplementary source of legitimation for the Milosevic regime was the absence of a viable opposition articulating alternate legitimating rationales. Eric Gordy begins his analysis of The Culture of Power in Serbia with a question: “how does the regime of Slobodan

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Milosevic’s SPS (Socijalisticka Partija Srbije [Socialist Party of Serbia]) remain in power in Serbia?” Gordy makes the point that, since legitimizing its power as the successor of Serbia’s League of Communist in December 1990, it has engaged in three (now four) losing military conflicts, produced over 500,000 refugees whose interests it had come to power promising to protect, presided over the hugest hyperinflation in modern times, and turned back on its original dangerous and defining promise to see “all Serbs in one state.” Aside from its long list of failures, the party in power has not once received a majority of votes in an election, and each election after 1990 has seen its support declining further.

Gordy maintains that Milosevic’s resilience is not to be found in traditional legitimating rationales, but in his ability to neutralise alternative centres of power. As Gordy states,

The regime maintains itself not by mobilizing opinion or feeling in its favor, but by making alternatives to its rule unavailable. The story of everyday life in contemporary Belgrade, then, is that of a regime attempting to close off avenues of information, expression, and sociability.

The destruction of alternatives was achieved most notably by the outbreak of war that enabled the regime “to categorically disqualify political opponents as treasonous, unpatriotic, and fomenting division when unity is needed.” Gordy argues that, war was not engaged until the Serbian regime was seriously threatened by its own internal

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62 ibid, p. 1.
63 “The ruling party does not enjoy majority support, has no record of successes to which it can point, and has never successfully addressed the problem of legitimacy from which governments in the former Yugoslavia have suffered since the death of Josip Broz Tito. These flaws would be fatal to any government in a normally functioning parliamentary system. The Serbian regime has survived by systematically destroying the crucial elements of a normal parliamentary system – autonomous and viable alternative centers of power – while ostensibly maintaining, and even claiming the credit for introducing, the formal aspects of a plural political system. Deprived of alternatives, people opposed to the regime are condemned to political resignation and escape into private life, while the lack of enthusiasm of regime supporters hardly matters.” ibid, pp. 21-22
64 ibid, p. 2.
65 ibid, p. 24.
opposition. The ideological dimension of this move is clear enough; war made it possible to mobilize, around a sense of imminent danger, people who might not have been mobilized in favor of the regime’s politics. There is a more drastic dimension as well: war enhanced the dominance of the pro-regime parts of the population by changing its structure. The exodus of young men, the urban, and the educated made the regime’s reliance on the old, the rural, and the less educated more secure. At the same time, war conditions made it possible for those anti-war people who remained to be isolated from their anti-war counterparts at home and in other republics and cut off the rest of the population from alternative sources of information. In this regard, war can be seen as one of the elements, perhaps the most important, of what regime critics have labeled ‘the destruction of society.’”

The neutralisation of alternative centres of power and the absence of viable alternative legitimating rationales enabled the Milosevic regime to exploit the mobilising potential of the Kosovo Myth to its fullest.

The second reason that the Kosovo Myth became a supplementary source of legitimation is that the Milosevic regime was able to appropriate the Kosovo Myth as the principal national legitimating symbol. The role of legitimating symbols in the politics of post-communist Serbia was accentuated by unresolved cultural divisions in Serbian society. Robert Thomas’ detailed analysis of Serbia Under Milosevic highlights the weakness of Serbian political culture as an explanation for the prominence of symbols and myths in Serbian politics during the 1990’s. Thomas argues that Serbian ideological divisions are cultural rather than based on policies.

66 ibid, p. 59.

67 Thomas acknowledges the existence of symbols and myths in all societies, but argues that their prevalence in Serbia is a characteristic of a society in transition, “All political institutions, including nations, states and parties are dependent on symbols and myths in order to define themselves. In Western political societies, however, the power of myths and symbols is ‘curtailed by the existence of communities of reflexive communication, the rational organisation of political structures, and the universality of legal arrangement.’” In Serbia and other countries in ‘transition’ public life is less stable and the political rules are less clear, and ‘with no understanding of
In Serbia ideological divisions are not necessarily connected with the pursuit of different policies; rather it is a matter of their adherence to or connection with different political traditions or cultures. These cultures may not only have a differing political content but also a radically different understanding of history and vision of the nation underpinned by familial and collective memory. In Serbia this cultural schism particularly relates the Partisan/Cetnik and Socialist/anti-communist divide. This cultural and political chasm in the body politic is manifest in the use by contending parties of different national symbols, anthems and insignia. In practical terms this existence of alternative national political visions, which draw on the unresolved memories of civil war, means that there is no readily accepted ‘legitimacy’ for the dominance of either side.

The existence of competing national legitimating symbols based on unresolved Serbian collective memories of World War II meant that Milosevic had to reach further back into the Serbian past for unifying national symbols. The most powerful mobilising symbol available to Milosevic was the Serbian Myth of Kosovo. In explaining the primacy of symbolic politics in Serbia, Thomas identifies three different categories of symbols used during the 1990's. “The first of these consisted of national symbols/myths relating to beliefs held by the whole Serbian ethnic national community. These symbols and myths were used by the rival political forces to rhetorically outbid each other as guardians of the national interest.” Such national symbols were evoked by most political groups and focussed on the cluster of Serbian myths associated with Kosovo. The second category of “symbolic mobilisation also revolved around historic/political symbols which had particular cultural/historical
associations along the lines of ‘left/right’ and ‘communist/anti-communist.’” The symbols were associated with the perceived suppression of Serbian national aspirations under Titoism. Later in the 1990’s the symbols also focussed on the rehabilitation of Mihailovic and the so-called Rasna Gora Movement.

The third category of symbolic mobilisation relates to what can be described as historical/developmental symbols. In this category there are those symbols and myths which form part of a neo-traditional world view which stresses the role of past historical institutions as a source of legitimacy. This neo-traditional world-view can also be described as a national romantic way of thinking because it projects on to contemporary politics an idealised image of past political life.

The emergence of neo-traditional legitimating symbols was especially important to Milosevic’s Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS)

The third reason for the emergence of the Kosovo Myth as a legitimating rationale was the conscious use made of the past by the Milosevic regime. Tismaneanu identifies “legitimation from the past” as one of the characteristics of post-communist societies. He notes that,

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70 ibid.
71 The role of counter-commemorations will be analysed in more detail in part 8.5 of this chapter.
72 ibid.
73 Silber and Little make the observation in the conclusion of their study on the break-up of Yugoslavia that neo-traditional and national-romantic legitimating symbols were even more important to Karadzic’s Bosnian Serbs. “By 1995 there existed two Serbian states, one to the east, the other to the west of the Drina River, which, in Serb mythology, is the spine of the Serbian nation and not, as was the case now, a border dividing it. These two states are led by men who represent wholly different traditions within the Serb national identity: Milosevic the authoritarian strong man willing to use nationalism when it suits him, and Karadzic the true believer, the romantic, national hero of the Serb epic. Karadzic was the first Serb leader to challenge Milosevic’s supremacy and survive. The two were, by mid-1995, locked in a battle for the loyalty – the very identity – of the Serb nation.” Silber, I. & Little, A. op cit, p. 388.
74 Tismaneanu, V. op cit, p. 64.
75 However, Tismaneanu does not limit his observations about the legitimating potential of the past to Eastern Europe alone. He takes a similar moralistic approach to mythologies based on the past as Cassirer. “One cannot see the eastern part of Europe as the only candidate for embracing mythological fallacies. Instead, we should
In the former communist societies the shock of modernity, the difficult adjustment of individuals to the collapse of traditional communities and solidarities, and the inner tensions of the still fragile democracies have engendered popular and some intellectual interest in "recovered" history and myth instead of liberal ideas and institutions. Among the most forceful myths have been the myth of the nation, of the heroic past, and of the victimised community. However, it is not the actual past that is represented in 'recovered history', but the present and future. "The past matters, ... but the need to use it for purposes of legitimation, is linked to the uncertain status of the new elites, still devoid of enough legal-procedural authority and reluctant to accept political compromises with their opponents." As a transitional source of legitimation, a powerful nationalist myth such as Kosovo, was also substituted for the collapse of the Marxist ideal. Tismaneanu argues the psychological need for unifying myths and that this was apparent with the collapse of communism, for at "the very core of Marxism one finds a millenarianist mythology, a social dream about a perfect world where the ancient conflict between man and society, between essence and existence, would have been transcended." Political mythology was one substitute for the collapse of the Marxist ideal, no matter how flawed this ideal was in the reality of practice.

As a substitute for the collapsed Marxist ideal, the Kosovo Myth was neither an ideal nor benign. Vladimir Tismaneanu places the re-emergence of myths such as

\[\text{admit that we deal with a resilient, persistent form of barbarism that is situated in the very heart of modernity.}\]

\[\text{ibid.}\]

\[\text{ibid. p. 28.}\]

\[\text{ibid. p. 20.}\]

\[\text{ibid. p. 29.}\]

\[\text{"The deep needs to which Marxism tried to give an answer have not come to an end. Now that the Leninist order has been overthrown, the moral landscape of post-communism is marred with moral confusion, venomous}\]
Kosovo in the broader context of post-communist East European and former Soviet Union politics. One strand of nationalist mythology that was awakened gave rise to a vindictive, xenophobic, ethno-nationalist rhetoric that Tismaneanu refers to as ethnic fundamentalism. “Ethnic fundamentalism is the reification of difference, the rejection of the claim to common humanity and proclamation of the national distinction as the primordial fact of human existence.”

Ethnic fundamentalism was based on difference, on excluding, marginalising and stigmatising the ‘other’. “Under these conditions, the easiest way to find the scapegoat is to look for those who do not belong (ethnically or religiously), the inner enemy, the potential traitors, the intruders, the ‘cosmopolitans’. Cassirer had identified race worship as a characteristic of modern political myths, especially when race is proclaimed as a single, simple supreme value. Cassirer’s concern was that such a value substituted for critical thought. Tismaneanu makes a similar observation about the rise of myths of ethnic exclusivity. “The exclusionary mythologies operate on the semantic sterilization of the discourse and the anesthetisation of critical faculties. They are obsessed with homogeneity, unity and purity.” Tismaneanu also notes how identity is turned into an absolute. “The new exclusionary mythologies, in addition, attack any expression of doubt about the predestined mission of the nation. The normal and

hatreds, unsatisfied desires, and endless bickerings. This is the bewildering, often terrifying territory on which political mythologies make a return.” *ibid*

80 *ibid*, p. 64.
81 *ibid*, V p. 31.
82 *ibid.*
understandable need for identity and belonging is turned into an absolute." By turning ethnic identity into an absolute, the ‘other’ could be reduced to generic ethnic stereotypes.

Vladimir Tismaneanu also argues that post-communist nationalism, such as emerged in Serbia, is a transient source of ideological legitimation that is characterised by two trends. First, post-communist nationalism represented long repressed national memories. Second, it was characterised as authoritarian.

Laura Silber and Allan Little emphasise the first characteristic of post-communist nationalism. “The emergence of nationalism was vaunted as the rebirth of dignity. Serbs believed that, after fifty years under the enforced slogan of ‘brotherhood and unity’, Milosevic had once again given them back their national identity, the right to say they were Serbs.” Eric Gordy emphasises the second characteristic: “the Serbian regime embodies nationalist authoritarianism both in its inheritance from the

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83 ibid.

84 “Dehumanising labels were ... important in motivating genocide. In Serb-occupied areas, Bosnian Croats were invariably called Ustashe, in reference to the fascist units of World War II, Muslims were called Turks (a term of alienation and abuse when used by Serb and Croat militants), Ustashe, and “balije.” The origin of the term “balija” (plural “balije”) is obscure. Some believe it is related to the South Slavic term for spit or mucus (bala); others suggest different etymologies. Bosnian Muslim survivors of the “ethnic cleansing” reported that nationalist Serbs would “spit” the term out at them. A popular song in Belgrade was based on the rhyme “Alija” (the first name of Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic) and “balija”. Sells, M.A. op cit, pp. 75-77.

85 Tismaneanu notes that; “post-communist nationalism is thus a political and ideological phenomenon with a dual nature; as an expression of an historical cleavage, it rejects the spurious internationalism of communist propaganda and emphasises long repressed national values; on the other hand, it is a nationalism rooted in and marked by Leninist-authoritarian mentalities and habits, directed against any principle of difference and primarily against those groups and forces that champion pro-Western, pluralist orientations. The first direction is related to the global tendency toward rediscovery of ancestry, roots, and autochthonous values. The second perpetuates and enhances collectivistic communist and pre-communist traditions by denying the individual the right to dissent, sanctifying the national community and its allegedly providential leader, and scapegoating or demonising minorities for imaginary plots and betrayals.” Tismaneanu, V. op cit, p. 7.

86 Silber, L. & Little, A. op cit, p. 60.
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communist era and in the contemporary nationalist basis of its justifying rhetoric.”

Gordy discards the term post-communist in favour of nationalist – authoritarian to characterise the Serbian regime of the 1990’s. Gordy states that

The term I have chosen to describe the regime is nationalist – authoritarian, a term meant to be more precise than nationalism and more generalizable than the currently fashionable post communism. Nationalist – authoritarian refers to a specific set of circumstances in which an authoritarian regime seeks to justify its continuation in power by means of nationalist rhetoric or to secure its future by appealing to nationalist movements. It especially describes the late Communist regimes of East-Central Europe and some of their successor states. The use of nationalist rhetoric couched in terms of Serbia’s Myth of Kosovo is one of the defining characteristics of the Milosevic regime.

Characterising the Serbian regime as nationalist-authoritarian is not to suggest that Milosevic himself was a nationalist. As Silber and Little comment, “Milosevic, like many other rulers in history, had used nationalism for his own ends. He was never a nationalist. He had fanned the fires of nationalism when it suited him.”

There is a certain obscurcation in such a position as Gordy explains. “Slobadan Milosevic can rightly claim that he never advocated nationalist or any other positions, in fact, every major political move of his regime has been announced, defended, and removed from the agenda by surrogates.” However, this in no way negates the fact that nationalist mobilisation was a hallmark of the Serbian regime. As Thomas states,

87 Gordy, E.D. op cit, p. 8.
88 ibid.
89 Silber, I & Little A. op cit, p. xxiv.
90 Gordy, E.D. op cit, p. 17.
Milosevic and his supporters from within the regime apparatus were not only able to use nationalism to cling to power at the end of the 1980s, but would continue throughout the 1990s to use 'nationalist mobilisation' as a means by which Serbian society could be kept in a state of 'permanent revolution'. The fact that the Serbian people were faced by a series of 'threats' and 'crises' meant that an ideological vacuum developed in political life where, in the eyes of a section of the electorate, the government was not held responsible for its failings and political suitability was assessed on the basis of dedication to the national cause. Nationalist mobilisation to protect or advance Serbian national interests was therefore an important feature of Milosevic's regime. However, even though his regime outwardly resembled the old communist government, there was an important cultural difference. The source of Milosevic's nationalism was derived from non-urban areas of Serbia. As Gordy notes:

The nationalist authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milosevic thus represents both a continuation of and a departure from the old Communist regime. In its authoritarian use of false collectives as legitimating principles and in its reliance on structures of power dating to the old regime, it strongly resembles its communist predecessor. Emblematic of this lack of transformation is the regime's continued use of laws and documents, including passports, from the old regime; its insistence on retaining the name of the defunct state of Yugoslavia and the right to succession from it; and the ruling party's retention of everything but the name of the old League of Communists. The principal distinction between the old regime and the new is cultural. Whereas Tito's Yugoslavia relied on the acquiescence, if not necessarily the support, of urban and intellectual elites, Milosevic early understood that he could not expect their support and turned instead to rural Serbia and the areas around the "southern railway" (južna pruga). In turning to the peasantry and the "small towns" (palake), the regime adopted in part many of the attitudes of these groups, particularly opposition to urban life, urban culture, and the supposed contamination and artificiality of cities. These attitudes form a vital part of the nationalist side of the regime's rhetoric.

One reason for the Milosevic regime's success in holding power has been its ability

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91 Thomas, R. *op cit*, p. 5.
to 'preserve' the outward trappings of the former Yugoslavian Government, while appealing to the traditions embodied in the Kosovo Myth with the non-urban population.

5. Kosovo and Serbian Collective Memory

I have shown how the Kosovo Myth was used as a vehicle of nationalist mobilisation, and how the Milosevic regime was able to use the myth as a source of legitimating authority. The question I will address now is how the Kosovo Myth came to play such a prominent role in late twentieth century Serbian politics and in the Balkan Wars that accompanied the break up of Yugoslavia. The rationale of Cassirer's *The Myth of the State*, was that to counter the use of political myth as a legitimating rationale it was first necessary that, "we should carefully study the origin, the structure, the methods, and the technique of the political myths."\(^{93}\) The remainder of this chapter will offer an analysis of the development of the Kosovo myth to the point of providing the Milosevic regime with a supplementary source of legitimating authority.

The political meaning of the Kosovo Myth in the late twentieth century can be understood best by examining the myth in four aspects: as a vital component of Serbian collective memory; as encompassing Kosovo as a 'sacred site'; as a source of

traditions and meanings; and the development of the Kosovo Myth through commemoration. This section of my chapter focuses on Serbian collective memory and I argue that the Kosovo narrative is largely the result of Serbian epic and oral tradition framed by the Serbian Orthodox Church. I argue also that Serbian collective memory is closely tied to the existence of historic relics that were used conspicuously during the period of nationalist mobilisation. The Kosovo Myth is essentially collective memory given meaning by tradition.

5.1 Serbian Epic and Oral Tradition.

The development of the Serbian Myth of Kosovo had its origins in medieval epic poetry that created an image of an idealised Serbian state. The Kosovo Myth, embedded in epic poetry, can be understood best as a compensatory response for “Serbian folk imagination ...[that] transformed the temporal defeat at the Field of Kosovo into a source of spiritual strength.” The resilience and widespread dissemination of the myth can be explained not only through the custodial role of the church, but to the fact that the Kosovo epics belonged to the Serbian oral tradition. Anzulovic notes that,

96 The resilience of the oral/epic tradition is noted by many authors on Serbian culture. For example, following a trip to the South Slav provinces in the 1870's Arthur Evans [discoverer of ancient Knossos in Crete] somewhat romantically wrote, “epic lays of the fatal days of Kosovo are still sung every day to the throngs of peasant
folk singers played a very important role in the illiterate and eliteless Serbian society following the Turkish conquest. Accompanying their chanting with a one-stringed fiddle called the *gusle*, they were not merely entertainers but bards who transmitted to their audiences a vision of the nation’s past and future.\textsuperscript{97}

As a result the myth belonged to the whole people and not just the cultural elites. As Michael Petrovich states, “the oral literature of the Serbian people provided a common base for their ethnic and cultural unity.”\textsuperscript{98} Misha Glenny further argues that, “stories about the Serbian defeat at the battle of Kosovo Polje of 1389 and other events from the medieval period became the cornerstone of modern Serbia’s national mythology.”\textsuperscript{99} However, these stories only became part of Serbia’s national mythology after they were presented as a coherent story by Vuk Karadzic\textsuperscript{100} in the first half of the nineteenth century. Duijzings comments that in their original form, these songs focus on the principal characters of the Kosovo legend (such as Prince Lazar and Milos Obilic), their martyrdom and the downfall of the Serbian kingdom and feudal society rather than the destiny of the Serbs as a nation. This shift in meaning occurred only in the nineteenth century, when the Kosovo theme evolved into a national myth, providing a source

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listeners by minstrels of the people. The battle of Kosovo has grown on the imagination of oppressed peoples who only realise its full significance long afterwards.” Quoted by Dedijer, V. *The Road to Sarajevo*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1966, pp. 258 - 259. A similar comment was made by the Austrian statesman Baernreither who reported to Archduke Franz Ferdinand early this century that “in the country there are minstrels with their guslas, putting pictures of the glories of the Serbian past into folks’ heads.” *ibid* p. 259. The oral/epic tradition was resurrected in a more current form during the 1990’s on internet sites, see Sells, M.A. *op cit*, p. 79, and as ‘Turbofolk’, see Gordy, E.D. *op cit.*


\textsuperscript{100} “Vuk Stefanovic was instrumental in retrieving the Kosovo songs from Serbian popular tradition and standardising them into a coherent story. Between 1814 and his death in 1864, he collected numerous epic songs, of which the songs about the Kosovo battle formed a major part. By collecting and compiling them into a whole he ‘canonised’ the Kosovo myth and this provided Serbian national ideology with its mythical cornerstone.” Duijzings, *G. op cit*, p.184.
\end{quote}
of inspiration to avenge its loss, to resurrect the nation and to recover the national homeland.\footnote{101}

A further aspect of the Kosovo theme, especially during the nationalist movement of the nineteenth century, was that “Serbian epic poetry was revolutionary in spirit by teaching armed opposition to all oppressive authority.”\footnote{102} By framing the nineteenth century uprisings in terms of the Kosovo Myth, Serbian nationalism was given an epic quality that linked past, present and future. As Glenny notes,\footnote{Glenny, M. \textit{op cit}, p. 11.}

\begin{quote}
The uprisings at the beginning of the nineteenth century were represented as the revival of the Serbs’ struggle against the all-conquering Ottomans at the end of the fourteenth century. Through these poems and songs, modern Serbia claimed a vital continuity with a romanticized past as a means of underscoring its claims to disputed territory.\footnote{Emmert, T.A. \textit{Kosovo : Development and Impact of a National Epic}, \textit{op cit}, p.67.}

The epic served a double purpose: it preserved an idealised memory of the past as well as “[inspiring] the Serbs to countless struggles and sacrifices in the course of liberation.”\footnote{Emmert, T.A. \textit{Serbian Golgotha Kosovo, 1389}, \textit{op cit}, p. 121.}

The church added legitimacy to the popular epics, for it “romanticized the Nemanjic\footnote{The Nemanjic dynasty had in fact died out in 1371 and Prince Lazar only governed the lands of what are today northern and central Serbia.} tradition for the masses and, removing any negative feudal connotations, helped to create the image of a once glorious state.”\footnote{Emmert, T.A. \textit{Serbian Golgotha Kosovo, 1389}, \textit{op cit}, p. 121.}

The myth portrayed Serbians as the chosen people of the New Testament, enslaved by the Muslims and waiting to be led out of their ‘Babylonian captivity’ to freedom.\footnote{The importance of the religious interpretation of the battle is discussed by Petrov, K.V. \textit{‘Memory and Oral Tradition’}, in Butler, T. [Ed.] \textit{Memory : History, Culture and the Mind}, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, pp.82-84. See also Sells, \textit{op cit}, and Anzulovic, B. \textit{op cit}.}

Prince Lazar of the epics was depicted as a martyr who “sacrificed himself so that

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{101}{\textit{ibid.}}
\footnotetext{102}{Petrovic, M.B. \textit{op cit}, p.16.}
\footnotetext{103}{Glenny, M. \textit{op cit}, p. 11.}
\footnotetext{104}{Emmert, T.A. \textit{Kosovo : Development and Impact of a National Epic}, \textit{op cit}, p.67.}
\footnotetext{105}{The Nemanjic dynasty had in fact died out in 1371 and Prince Lazar only governed the lands of what are today northern and central Serbia.}
\footnotetext{106}{Emmert, T.A. \textit{Serbian Golgotha Kosovo, 1389}, \textit{op cit}, p. 121.}
\footnotetext{107}{The importance of the religious interpretation of the battle is discussed by Petrov, K.V. \textit{‘Memory and Oral Tradition’}, in Butler, T. [Ed.] \textit{Memory : History, Culture and the Mind}, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, pp.82-84. See also Sells, \textit{op cit}, and Anzulovic, B. \textit{op cit}.}
\end{footnotes}
Serbia might live.”

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Serbia itself became the martyred nation and Kosovo became “the symbol of the moral apotheosis of the Serbian people, chosen by God as ‘the new Israel’.”

A redemptive feature of the myth was Milos Obilic who had pretended to surrender to the Sultan Murad during the battle and then assassinated him. Obilic became the ideal hero in sacrificing himself for his faith and for Serbia.

The meaning of Kosovo, as exemplified by the revenge of Milos Obilic, was given a sense of emotional intensity by the Montenegrin ruler and poet, Petar Petrovic Njegos [1793 - 1851]. Njegos “helped create the image of Obilic as the pure, Christian hero - the symbol of freedom” in his great epic poem, The Mountain Wreath. In continuing the oral tradition of the Kosovo Myth, Njegos combined the traditional symbol of heroic self-sacrifice with the idea of nationalism.

Ger Duijzings adds, “I would argue that Njegos’s Mountain Wreath is the first major

110 Emmert, T.A. 'Kosovo : Development and Impact of a National Epic,' op cit, p.69.
111 Njegos is still seen as the greatest interpreter of the Kosovo Myth. As Vasa Mihailovich states in an introduction to The Mountain Wreath, “it epitomizes the spirit of the Serbian people kept alive for centuries; indeed, there is no other literary work with which the Serbs identify more.” Njegos, P.P. [ Mihailovich, V.D. Trans. & Ed. ] 'The Mountain Wreath', Southeastern Europe, Vol. 14, Nos. 1-2, 1987, p. vii. The theme of the epic poem is based on a late seventeenth century historical event in Montenegro known as ‘the extermination of the Turkish converts’ is reminiscent of the ‘ethnic purification’ of the Muslim inhabitants of Bosnian villages in 1992.

112 Njegos’ epic had a great influence on the Serbian national movement of the 19th century. As Vladimir Djijer points out in The Road to Sarajevo, the Young Bosnian Movement was brought up on the tradition of tyrannicide and martyrdom, personified by the act of Milos Obilic. In fact Gavrilo Princip, the assassin of Franz Ferdinand during his provocative visit to Sarajevo on June 28th 1914, knew Njegos’ The Mountain Wreath by heart. (op cit, pp. 259 - 260 ) Sells also points out that Njegos’ work was memorised in Republica Srpska and links the passions aroused in the poem to the attempted genocide of Muslims during the 1990’s Bosnian War. “Supporters of the Republika Srpska memorized and quoted Njegos’s Mountain Wreath and even more violent religious epics as they planned and carried out their genocide. Verses from these epics glorifying the extermination of Muslim civilians were being posted on the Internet even as various villages and cities in Bosnia-Herzegovina were being “cleansed” of Muslims and all evidence of Muslim civilisation was eradicated. Militiamen involved in the
example of ... using the myth to trigger revolutionary (political) action and avenge Kosovo.” The meaning Njegos gave to the Kosovo myth was resurrected during the resurgence of Serbian nationalism during the late 1980’s and 1990’s. Pictures and posters of Njegos and his verses were widely circulated throughout Serbia and were to be seen at the six hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo alongside pictures of Milosevic and the martyred Lazar. It can be argued that it was Njegos who provided the pouvoir moteur for the Kosovo Myth. As Judah states,

It is hard to underestimate the influence of The Mountain Wreath. Today it is still celebrated as one of the pinnacles of Serbian literary achievement. But, in the wake of another Balkan war, its significance is that of a missing link. It helps explain how the Serbian national consciousness has been molded and how ideas of national liberation became inextricably intertwined with the act of killing your neighbor and burning his village. More bluntly, Branimor Anzulovic states that, “the rejoicing over the massacres and their depiction as a baptism in blood that leads to the nation’s rebirth make the poem a hymn to genocide.”

A further aspect of the oral transmission of the Kosovo Myth was the communication of Serbian folklore and traditions through pop-folk that was given a commercial face as ‘Turbofolk.’ Ugresic refers to the Milosevic regime’s fostering of a folk revival as “the bared ‘soul of the nation’; ...collective remembrance reduced to atrocities wore patches depicting the battle of Kosovo and received medals with the name of Milos Obilic, the assassin of Sultan Murat: Sells, M.A. op cit, p.79.
113 Duijzings, G. op cit, p.188.
115 Anzulovic, B op cit, p. 54.
sound." Folk replaced rock and performed the same mobilising role that more traditional forms of Serbian oral epics did during the nineteenth century. As Gordy argues, "musical taste became an important signifier, not only of the distinction between urban and peasant culture, but also of orientation toward the regime, the war, and the environment created by the regime and the war." "Turbofolk" thus drove a wedge between the urban and non-urban population and marginalised potential opposition to Serbian nationalist mobilisation that was identified with rock culture.

5.2 Church and Nation

The Kosovo Myth is essentially the sacred story of the Serbian people; a story of betrayal, sacrifice, suffering, salvation and promised resurrection. It is the blending of Orthodoxy with Serbian nationalism that gives the Kosovo Myth its particular potency. "The entwining of church, state, and nation, with a resulting secularization of the first and deification of the last two entities" gave rise to the notion of Serbia as a 'heavenly nation' whose history could be reframed as a biblical allegory. To understand how church, state and nation became 'entwined' it is necessary to go back to Medieval Serbia and the Ottoman conquest. It was during the long period of Turkish occupation that the Serbian Orthodox Church not only provided leadership, but became "the custodian of medieval statehood." The church became custodian

117 Gordy, E.D. *op cit*, p. 105.
118 Anzulovic, B. *op cit*, p.4. See also Duijzings, G. *op cit*, pp.176-180.
of the state because "there was no Serbian state at all and the principal mark of Serbian national identity was membership in the Serbian Orthodox Church." The close relationship between the orthodox church and national identity can be traced back to the foundation of both the church and state. St. Sava, the founder of the church, was also the youngest son of the founder of the Nemanjic dynasty. George Tomachevich observes that, "thus linked in their very foundations by a member of the nation's ruling house, the two principal and coequal institutions of medieval Serbia represented for a long time an example of remarkable structural unity and functional harmony." With the destruction of the Serbian state in 1389, unity was broken with the church undertaking the role as custodian of Serbian culture and historical memory, especially the meaning of Kosovo.

The Turks fully understood the essential link between the church and the persistence of Serbian culture and used the occasion of a failed church conspiracy in the late sixteenth century to publicly burn St. Sava's mummy in Belgrade. This carefully calculated symbolic act had a profound impact on the Serbian people, for

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church as custodian of Serbian national identity see Misha Glenny. "Above all, the zadruga preserved the social and cultural traditions of the Serbs and did so more effectively than the Orthodox Church. The Church is often erroneously assumed to have been the sole bearer of Serbian identity during the three and a half centuries of Ottoman rule that separated the collapse of the medieval Serbian empire and the First Serbian Uprising of 1804. In fact, its role was limited, especially since it did not use the vernacular but Slaveno-Serbian, a variation of Old Church Slavonic that none of the illiterate peasantry understood." Glenny, M. op cit, p.10. (Zadruga refers to the extended Serbian family unit)

120 Anzulovic, B. op cit, p.79
121 Tomashevich, G.V. 'The Battle of Kosovo and the Serbian Church' in Vucinich, W.S. & Emmert, T.A. (Eds.) op cit, p. 204.
"after Kosovo ... St Sava was regarded as a protector of his people in this world as well as in the next; and the burning of his remains by the Turks caused a psychological shock which was powerfully echoed in the oral tradition."\textsuperscript{123} The day of St. Sava, January 27\textsuperscript{th} (Savindan), together with Vidovdan became the principal anniversaries sustaining the Kosovo Myth. The spot where St. Sava's remains had been burned is the site of St. Sava Cathedral. The cathedral had been begun in 1935 but had been halted with the German invasion of 1941. Because St. Sava Cathedral rightly was perceived as a symbol of Serbian nationalism, Tito had not permitted rebuilding to begin after World War II. It was therefore a politically adroit move for Milosevic to try not only to have this monument to Serb 'pride and renewal' finished on time for the 600\textsuperscript{th} commemoration, but to begin the official commemoration of Kosovo at this symbolically significant sacred site.

5.3 The relics of Lazar

The meaning of Kosovo is communicated also through the symbolic and quasi-religious use of 'sacred' relics. The Kosovo Myth acquired tangible reality through the existence of the bones of both Prince Lazar and the first crowned king of Serbia, King Stefan.\textsuperscript{124} Bones also figure prominently in keeping alive the memories of atrocities committed against Serbs during World War II. The importance of such

\textsuperscript{123} Tomashevich, G.V. \textit{op cit}, p.218.

\textsuperscript{124} Stefan II (1196 - 1227) known as the 'first crowned' because he assumed the title of king and consolidated the medieval kingdom founded by his father Stefan Nemanja (c.1168 - 1196) See Jelavich, B \textit{op cit}, p. 18.
relics in commemorating the meaning of Kosovo can be seen most clearly in the way Lazar's bones were used to mobilise support for Serbia's national aspirations during the late 1980's. The symbolic significance of the return of Lazar's bones to the monastery of Gracanica must be seen within the context of a 600 year journey. Following his death at the battle of Kosovo, Lazar was first buried where he fell. The site was marked by the monastery of Gracanica which acquired the status of a sacred shrine.\textsuperscript{125} As the Turkish occupation intensified, the Serbs migrated to the north taking Lazar's bones with them. It can be argued that the subsequent history of "Prince Lazar's remains symbolised the Serbian Exodus."\textsuperscript{126} In 1690 his remains were transferred to Szent Ender near Budapest before being reinterred at the Vrdnik Monastery in Srem in 1697. For Dimitrije Djordjevic, the most important aspect of the migration of the bones was that, "together with these holy bones Serbian migrants carried two important items: the legacy of Kosovo and the idea of an integral national identity."\textsuperscript{127}

The importance of bringing 'home' Lazar's bones as a catalyst for revitalising the Kosovo Myth, had been recognised in the early 1870's by Serbia's foreign minister, Cedomil Mijatovic. Mijatovic wanted Lazar's bones returned to Gracanica

\textsuperscript{125} The significance of this site to Serbian soldiers was observed by Leon Trotsky who accompanied the victorious Serbian army as a war correspondent in 1912. "When the soldiers entered the plain of Kosovo they became very excited. I was even surprised at the way they reacted. Kosovo, Gracanica - these names are handed down from generation to generation, repeated over and over in folksongs." Trotsky L. (Pearce, B. Tr.) \textit{The Balkan Wars 1912 - 13}, Pathfinder Press, Australia, 1980, p.112.

\textsuperscript{126} Djordjevic, D. \textit{op cit}, p. 312.

\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid.}
in time for the commemorations planned for the 500th anniversary of Lazar’s death. Prince Milan blocked Mijatovic’s attempts to effect a symbolic transfer of bones in 1874 in order to placate both the monks at Vrdnik and the Hungarian government. Mijatovic came closer to securing Lazar’s bones in 1880 when the Hungarian government signalled that it had no opposition to such a transfer as long as agreement was reached with the guardian monks of Vrdnik. This time opposition came from the Russian subsidised press of Belgrade who argued that the presence of Lazar’s bones provided a focus around which the Vojvodina Serbs would crystallise their Serbian identity. Mijatovic made a final attempt in 1891 to ‘bring home’ Lazar’s bones, this time to serve as a focus for establishing Serbian unity. Mijatovic argued that,

If the interests of our people are what is in question, then it is far more important that thousands of Serbs from Montenegro, Dalmatia, Hercegovina, Bosnia, Old Serbia, and Macedonia come to the centre of Serbia on Vidovdan than go to the Kingdom of Hungary…. Gathered around the body of the Kosovo martyr, we might be ashamed of our political disorder. We might feel that the ties which bind us together as one and the same people are older, more important, and more sacred than the ties of party.¹²⁸

There was to be no transfer of Lazar’s bones during the nineteenth century and it was not until World War II, when there was a danger that his bones would be destroyed by the Ustashe, that Lazar’s remains were finally transferred to Belgrade. However, Lazar had to wait another 40 years to complete his journey and be reintered at Gracanica.

¹²⁸ Quoted by Emmert, T.A. op cit, p. 74.
In 1986 Lazar's bones began a symbolic journey and were "carried in procession through the cities and villages of Serbia, where they were waited upon by Communist functionaries." The ritual journey was a appropriation of the Orthodox tradition of transporting the remains of a dead king around all the monasteries of Serbia. Robert Kaplan likened the emotional scenes surrounding Lazar's coffin to ritualistic Shiite mourning at the bier of the Iman Hussain, for the passage of Lazar's coffin through the towns and villages of Serbia "drew huge, black-clad crowds of wailing mourners at every step." The bones "became an object of pilgrimage wherever they went." The symbolic significance of this ritual journey was that, "the remains would be passed round monasteries in Yugoslavia, places which would be claimed as Serbian lands when war broke out in 1991." The bones therefore not only marked out the extent of Serbia's territorial aspirations, but were a confirmation of Serbian identity itself. Salecl argues that the ritual journey also "designated the new birth of the Serbian symbolic community." Lazar's bones thus formed a physical link that drew together six hundred years of perceived persecution, a sense of persecution that could present the plight of Serbs in Kosovo in the same light as Lazar's defeat by the Turks. The return of Lazar's bones to the monastery of

129 Magas, B. op cit, p. 9
131 Malcolm, N. op cit p. 213.
132 Silber, L. & Little, A., op cit, p. 76.
133 Milan Milosevic makes a similar observation for the procession of bones was "accompanied by unprecedented media pomp, through virtually all Serb-populated regions where war would later break out." Milosevic, M. op cit, p. 107.
The Kosovo Myth

Gracanica must be seen in terms of Serbia 'recovering' Kosovo, the symbolic centre of the Kosovo Myth. In such a manner, the Kosovo Myth was given a sense of closure by the symbolic return of these displaced bones after an absence of six hundred years. As Salecl remarks "Lazar's return to Kosovo constitutes symbolic confirmation of the 'fact' that Kosovo has always been the cradle to 'that which is Serbian'.”

5.4 The relics of Stefan

Just as the ritual journey of Lazar's remains from 1986 to 1989 symbolised the rebirth of Serbian national identity within the paradigm of the Kosovo Myth, the bones of King Stefan came to represent the integrity of the Serbian state itself. The memory of Stefan and the medieval Serbian empire had been used skillfully by Karageorge during the 1804 - 15 uprisings, so it was symbolically significant that Stefan's bones were brought 'home' to the first Serbian territory 'liberated' in 1806. Ritual visits to Stefan's bones in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had

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135 The politics of the ritual 'homecoming' of Lazar's bones must not be seen in terms of a rational / irrational dichotomy for the bones symbolise a powerful representation of the Kosovo Myth. As Salecl states, "on the factual level, what we have here amounts to no more than a pile of trivial bones, which may or may not be the king's, which may have some archaeological or anthropological value; yet within the Serbian ideological discourse, these bones also represent that which 'the enemy has always wanted to deprive us of, that which we must guard with special care'" Salecl, R. *op cit* p. 214.

136 *ibid* p. 213.

137 Karageorge's flag had the image of King Stefan on one side and Lazar's cross with four "s's" on the reverse side. See Djordjevic, D. *op cit*, p. 313. The four Cyrillic S's stand for *samo, sloga srbina spasava*. This is usually translated as "only unity saves the Serbs .... Symbolically, it was only through gathering around the cross in solidarity that the Serbs would be able to survive." Gow, J. 'Serbian Nationalism and the Hissssing Ssssnake in the International Order : Whose Sovereignty ? Which Nation ?', The Slavonic and East European Review, Vol. 72, No. 3, July 1994, pp. 457 - 458. See footnote 26 for Milosevic's use of the Serbian Orthodox Cross at the 600th anniversary commemoration at Kosovo Polje.
been used to legitimate both the Karadjodjevic and Obrenovic dynasties. Stefan’s bones played a far more symbolically significant role in 1915, when the preservation of his bones came to represent the continued existence of the Serbian nation when the Serbian state had temporarily ceased to exist. Outnumbered by the combined forces of Austria, Germany and Bulgaria, the Serbian army had retreated to Kosovo and it was “an irony of fate (not lost on some Serbian commanders) that the last fierce battles of 1915 took place on the historic soil of Kosovo Polje, The Field of Blackbirds.” As the Serbian army retreated from the last Serbian territory and made its way towards the Adriatic it was led by King Stefan’s sarcophagus; a symbolic relic signifying the continuity of Serbian sovereignty.

5.5 The relics of Genocide

The bones of King Stefan and Prince Lazar are associated most closely with Serbian national identity, but bones have also been used to represent the suffering and sacrifices of the Serbian people as a whole. Suffering and sacrifice is one of the most

138 The actual dynastic politics of providing Stefan with a coffin is well described in an English travellers book first published in 1906. John Fraser also gives and interesting, but quaint and somewhat condescending, account of peasant reaction to Stefan’s bones. Fraser, J.F. Pictures From the Balkans, Cassell and Company, Ltd, London, 1912, pp. 48 - 54.


140 Peball, K. op cit, p. 1118.

141 Stefan’s bones are now guarded by Orthodox monks at the monastery of Decani in Western Kosovo. Judah reports that “every Thursday the monks open the sarcophagus of their patron saint, King Stefan Decanski, to ask for his help in times of trouble. They say that when the sarcophagus is open, the church fills with the smell of roses. When Serbs say that Kosovo is the spiritual heart of their nation, they have such symbols in mind.” Judah, T. ‘Will There be a War in Kosovo?’, The New York Review of Books, May 14, 1998, http://www.nybooks.com/nyrev/WWW/archdisplay.cgi?19980514045R However, the continuity of Serbian sovereignty in Kosovo is now in question and the safety of Stefan’s bones is in the hands of NATO soldiers.
important motifs of the Kosovo myth, a motif given more recent relevance by the ritual exhumation of Serbian victims of atrocities during World War II. During the early 1990's the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of these atrocities coincided with the breakup of Yugoslavia and reawakened long repressed memories of atrocities committed by the Ustashe. The symbolic significance of the bones to Serbians must be understood within the context of the collective memories focused on World War II. As Misha Glenny notes, nationalist and racist propaganda,

swamped the public arena with instrumentalized historical memories. In Serbia, most of these symbols, myths and martyrdoms recalled the Second World War, quite the most violent period of Yugoslav history. The identification of 'Croat' and 'Ustase' was too often taken for granted in them.\(^\text{142}\)

The result was to equate all Croatians with the Ustashe so that Croatians could be accused of a generic responsibility for the atrocities against Serbs during World War II.\(^\text{143}\)

In the interests of national unity following World War II, commemoration of the atrocities had been suppressed,\(^\text{144}\) but with the election of Franjo Tudjman as

\(^\text{142}\) Glenny, M. *op cit*, p. 629.

\(^\text{143}\) Michael Sells likens the media creation of a generic Croatian responsibility for attempted genocide against the Serbs to a similar campaign against the Kosovo Albanians. "Parallel to their construction of an alleged genocide in Kosovo, Serb nationalists began alleging the imminent repetition of the Ustashe genocide of World War II, which was all too real and all too recent. The atrocities of World War II were relived continually in the Belgrade media along with the standard use of generic blame familiar from Kosovo. Just as Kosovo Albanians were, as a group, held responsible for German collaborators in World War II, all Croats came under suspicion for Ustashe activities in World War II." Sells, M.A. *op cit*, p. 61.

\(^\text{144}\) Tim Judah makes the observation that the suppression of memories associated with World War II left wounds unhealed. "For the sake of balance, Chetniks and Ustashas were condemned equally by the new regime as the evil twins of the Serbs and Croats. Jasenovac was commemorated as a memorial to 'victims of fascism' rather than a shrine for its principal victims, the Serbs. Pits down which bodies had been tossed were sealed up and academic work on how many people of which nationality had died was not encouraged. The effect of this was not to make people forget, as was the intention, but to leave the wounds unhealed. Milorad Ekmećic, the historian whose family died at Prebilovci in 1941, says that the memory of what had happened there never faded during the
President of Croatia in April 1990 the memories were reawoken. At a party rally on February 24th, 1990, Tudjman was reported to have stated that "the NDH was not simply a quisling creation and a fascist crime, it was also an expression of the historical aspirations of the Croatian people." Significantly for the Serbs, the NDH had been responsible for the Jasenovac death camp in which thousands of Serbs had been executed. Tudjman had already published a book Bespuca (Wilderness) which downplayed the number of Serbs executed at Jasenovac and had vowed to free Croatia of its 'Jasenovac complex.' By commemorating Ustashi officials, who Tudjman claimed had been forgotten and unmourned; by adopting the white and

145 The Nazi Ustashi puppet state.
147 See ibid, p. 149.
148 There is considerable controversy over the actual number of Serbian deaths at Jasenovac. The number of Yugoslav dead in the war as a whole was exaggerated for political purposes including the legitimation of the Partisans. "Because Tito himself had made the original statement, '1,700,000 dead' became an article of faith in communist Yugoslavia. To deny this figure was to question Tito's omnipotence, and so historical research into the issue was distorted for several decades." Glenny, M. op cit, p. 500-501. Anzulovic also states that these figures "provided a fertile ground for various Yugoslav ethnic and political factions who took advantage of the phantom victims and the lack of documentation to produce inflated figures of their own losses. Thus Croats spoke of at least 300,000 Croatian casualties of the "Bleiburg massacre" by the Yugoslav army, while the real number is probably under 50,000. The Muslims also spoke of a loss of 300,000 lives in their community. But the Serbs were most extreme in the numbers game: they accused Croats of having massacred 700,000 or more Serbs in one concentration camp alone." Anzulovic, B. op cit, p. 80-81 For a balanced estimate see Magas, B. The Destruction of Yugoslavia : Tracking the Break-Up 1980-92. op cit, pp. 314 - 315. See also Cohen, P.J. Serbia's Secret War : Propaganda and the Decret of History. Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 1996, p. 125. Lampe also deals with these estimates in terms of Serbian and Croatian pseudo-history that formed part of the propaganda war that proceeded the breakup of Yugoslavia. See Lampe, J.R. op cit, p. 207.
149 "One of Tudjman's campaign promises and a fundamental of his party's electoral platform was to free Croats from the 'Jasenovac complex', and from their guilt associated with the Croatian fascist party, the Ustashi." Stiticovac, E. op cit, p. 149.
red checkerboard emblem associated with the Ustashi as the Croatian flag; and by adopting the Kuna, which was the official currency of the wartime Pavelic regime, Tudjman reinforced the worst nightmares of Serbia’s collective memory. Misha Glenny states that “one of the cardinal errors committed by Franjo Tudjman after his election was to ignore this memory.”

Serbian collective memories of World War II were also reawakened through television.

In its effort to augment the sense of grievance in the population at large, television especially exploited World War II history. The goal was to plant the idea that the official history of World War II did not tell the complete story: there had been a cover-up of the full extent of Croatian atrocities, official television now suggested. The media played on deep-seated Serbian anxieties, especially amongst those Serbs living in the Krajina region of Croatia.

Serbian television played its part by the constant screening of documentaries about the Ustashas and Jasenovac, implying all along that President Tudjman was the heir of Ante Pavelic. The effect of all of this was profound and did much to terrify and soften up the Serbs, especially those in the rural Krajina regions. These programmes made them

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151 The Croatian government defended the use of the symbol as a historically ancient symbol, however as David Rieff points out this was both “factually correct and morally obtuse at the same time.” Rieff, D. Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West, Vintage, London, 1995, p. 64.
152 The Kuna was also defended as having been first used in 1256, but “no learned references to medieval numismatics could mitigate the impression that in opting for the Kuna, the Croatian authorities were also opting for a symbolic continuity between themselves and the Pavelic regime.” ibid.
153 Glenny, M. The Fall of Yugoslavia: The Third Balkan War, Penguin Books, London, 1992, p. 81. It was also within this context that television was most effectively used. “To prove Tudjman wrong, the Serbian side, in the glare of Serbian television, began systematically unearthing mass graves of Serbs killed by the Ustashi. Bone-counting was supposed to revise the number of victims upwards of the seven hundred thousand claimed by the Serbs. ... After funeral services at the site, the remains were reburied and the graves resealed, with TV cameras eagerly recording”. Milosevic, M. ‘The Media Wars’ op cit., p. 109.
154 ibid.
susceptible to the suggestion that their only course of action was to take up arms and so to be prepared – unlike 1941.\(^{155}\)

By presenting Tudjman as the heir of Pavelic the media reinforced Serbian collective memories of Ustashe massacres. As Eric Gordy notes,

> the regime massively engaged the media under its control to encourage fears, to develop and to revive memories of atrocities committed by the Independent State of Croatia (*Nezavisna drzava Hrvatska – NDH*) during the Second World War, and to associate HDZ with the puppet regime of that period.\(^{156}\)

These fears were especially pertinent to the Krajina Serbs.

The method by which Pavelic sought to create his ethnically-pure territory was the annihilation of the Serbs as a people. In a phrase which, even in 1990, carried a deep and abiding sense of terror among the Serbs, he sought to ‘kill a third, expel a third, convert a third (to Catholicism)’. It was easy for nationalist leaders to evoke the horror of 1941, and to awaken, in the Serbs a desire to avenge the sufferings of the past. The last time there was an independent Croatia, they argued, the Serbs had only saved themselves from extinction by taking up arms. The Krajina people were the descendants of those who survived by fighting back.\(^{157}\)

It was within the context of the revival of the Ustashe symbolism and the mounting tension between Serbia and Croatia that mass exhumations began. As a Times journalist observed at the time:

> All over Bosnia-Herzegovina and southern Croatia, the skeletons of victims are being exhumed in gruesome rituals, the bones laid out for public inspections and the recitation of grim liturgies of revenge before they are returned to the earth in consecrated tombs. It is an ambivalent process in which a genuine grief is inextricably mingled with calculated political usefulness."\(^{158}\)

Serbian collective memory of World War II atrocities was therefore not only revived

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\(^{155}\) Judah, T. *op cit*, p. 171.

\(^{156}\) Gordy, E.D. *op cit*, p. 31.

\(^{157}\) Silber, L. & Little, A. *op cit* p. 99.

through ritual exhumations, but the emotional intensity of these memories was rekindled.

The exhumations were politically useful to Milosevic, who Banac claimed had "legitimised and popularised the Serbian culture of fear." The bones therefore acquired an added symbolic significance and as Renata Salecl noted, "once again the rituals of transferring bones and ceremonial reburials with ideological speeches started to appear." One such ceremony was centred on Prebilvici where Serbian authorities previously had opened fifty year old mass graves. The massacres at Prebilvici and Medjugorje significantly had begun on Vidovdan (St Vitus Day), 28th June 1941 and then spread throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina. For the fiftieth anniversary of the massacre the bones of Serbian victims were exhumed ritualistically, placed in boxes and blessed by the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle before they were re-buried. Twenty thousand Serbs attended a commemoration in August 1991 and heard the Serb leader in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Radovan Karadzic, tap into the Serbian culture of fear. "We're the only people in the world burying our dead 50 years late. We should learn the lesson. This happened because we lived not in our state. Never again will our fate depend on the whims of others."
Karadzic's use of a ritual reburial to evoke collective memory should not be thought of as a uniquely Balkan phenomenon. The political potential of relics, bones and reburials, with specific reference to Imre Nagy, Frederick the Great, Lenin and Tsar Nicolas II will be examined in more detail in chapter 4 on memory sites. In all cases it is not so much the preservation of the remains of historic figures that is important, as the political uses these relics can be made to serve. By mirroring Serbian religious traditions, the ritual journey and reburial of Lazar added another more sacred, even mystical, dimension to the otherwise overtly political orientation of the 600th commemorative ceremonies. In a similar sense the unearthing of the bodies of World War II massacre victims and their ritual reburial gave a more tangible sense of reality to Serbian collective memories of suffering and martyrdom as the legitimacy crisis deepened in 1991. As Sells notes,

Lazar's bones were paraded around Bosnia, tying the bones of the victims of the Ustashe to the bones of the Christ-Prince. The pain and anger of living memory (most Serbs had family members who perished in World War II) combined with the pain and anger of mythic time; Jasenovac and 1389 were brought into a single moment in the present.164

Serbian collective memory of the suffering brought about by World War II was reframed within the paradigm of the Kosovo myth: the betrayal, sacrifice and suffering wrought by defeat in 1389 is one and the same as that wrought by the disaster of World War II.

164 Sells, M.A. op cit, p. 63.
6. Kosovo as Sacred Site

There is a symbiotic relationship between symbolically significant memory sites and the reaffirmation and maintenance of collective memory. The importance of such symbiosis is understood fully by Serb leaders. They not only ordered the systematic destruction of Muslim heritage sites during the Bosnian War, but interpreted 'collateral damage' to Serbian cultural heritage sites in Kosovo during NATO’s 1999 bombing campaign, as “a flagrant attack ... committed on our collective memory.” All political communities struggling for legitimacy in the former Yugoslavia were acutely aware of the importance of collective memory to their legitimacy claims. In her response to the manipulation of memory in The Culture of Lies: Antipolitical Essays, Dubravka Ugresic writes,

For collective memory can be erased and rewritten, deconstructed, constructed and reconstructed, confiscated and reconfiscated, proclaimed politically correct or incorrect (in the communist language: suitable or unsuitable). The political battle is a battle for the territory of collective memory.

165 See last section of this chapter for a detailed analysis of the destruction of memory.

166 Serbian Ministry of Information, June 11, 1999, http://www.serbia-info.com My italics. According to Serb sources, the attack on Serbian memory sites was continued by 'Ethnic Albanians'. For example, the Serbian Ministry of Information published an extensive catalogue of destruction in January 2000. The following extract is a good example of the tone in this battle over collective memory. "At the end of last year, the creators of new Islamic culture based on the foundations of old Christian and Medieval heritage and the forgers of history blew up a series of churches and monasteries near Urosevac, as well as the cathedral in this town. At the foothill of Mt. Nerodim ska Planina in the same village, in the area of the municipality of Urosevac, the terrorists blew up the oldest Serbian monuments and resorts of Emperors Dusan and Uros, and cut the pine tree planted by Emperor Dusan. St. Archangel's church built in the 14th century was also destroyed. According to historical data, King Milutin died in this churchyard in 1321 and his remains were later moved to Banjska Monastery.


167 Ugresic, D. op cit, pp.227-228.
It is Ugresic's characterisation of collective memory as fought over 'territory', that is useful to understanding the significance of Kosovo to Serbian collective memory.

I have shown how Milosevic used the 'sacred site' of the battlefield of Kosovo Polje during the six hundredth anniversary commemorations. The ancient battlefield became a 'theatre of memory', a site for reaffirming Serbian collective memory and identity. Kosovo Polje can be said to 'contain' Serbian collective memories of the battle and its contemporary meaning. Of equal significance, Kosovo is claimed as the spiritual and historic heartland of the Serbian people. One of the justifications the Serbian government made for incorporating Kosovo within Serbia following its liberation from the Turks in 1912 was "the historic right to an area which contained the patriarchate buildings of the Serbian Orthodox Church and had once been part of the medieval Serbian empire."168 The existence of significant Serbian heritage sites in Kosovo, such as Gracanica monastery, provides Serbs with stable reference points where collective memory is externalised and given concrete form. However, medieval monasteries are more than reminders of Serbian cultural heritage and must be considered part of the political landscape. As a Serbian writer Dimitrije Bogdanovic states, "these monuments ... concentrated and deployed over one territory, are national boundary stones."169 As 'national boundary stones, Serbian

169 Bogdanovic, D. _The Kosovo Question – Past and Present_ in Dorich, W. _Kosovo_, Kosovo Charity Fund, 1992, Adapted for the Internet by: Srpska Mreza, webmaster@srpska-mreza.com
cultural sites are therefore considered legitimate targets in the battle over the ‘territory’ of collective memory.

From a purely historical point of view it is relatively easy to undermine the so-called significance of Serbian memory sites in Kosovo. For example, in the most recent authoritative study on Kosovo, Noel Malcolm attacks the importance Serbs place on Pec as the home of the Patriarchate.

The seat of the Serbian Orthodox Church was not founded in Kosovo; it merely moved there after its original foundation (in central Serbia) was burnt down. Nor does the Patriarchate have any continuous history as an institution: it was re-created by the modern Yugoslav state in 1920 (having been defunct for 154 years), and since that date the Patriarch has tended to reside mainly in Belgrade. Malcolm also disputes whether medieval Kosovo can, strictly speaking, be considered the ‘cradle of the Serbs.’ Malcolm argues that the original nucleus of the medieval Serbian state was Rascia which lies to the north and north-west of Kosovo and that Kosovo was not incorporated into the medieval Serbian state until around 1208, or 250 years before the Ottoman Conquest. Malcolm also argues that the first three generations of Nemanjид rule focussed their monastery-building programs in Rascia and that, it was only later, with the development of the Patriarchate buildings at Pec, and the fourteenth-century foundations of Gracanica, Decani and the monastery of the Holy

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170 Malcolm, N. *op cit.* p. xxxi. Following Serbia’s withdrawal from Kosovo and the subsequent exodus of Serbs from the region, Patriarch Pavle used June 28th (Vidovdan) 1999 to announce that he would relocate from Belgrade to Pec as a symbolic gesture. Little, J. *Serbia’s Church: Changing Times*, BBC Online Network, June 28 1999. [http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid%5F380000/380268.stm](http://news2.thls.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/europe/newsid%5F380000/380268.stm)
Malcolm’s argument is that the central role Kosovo plays in Serbia’s national consciousness is exaggerated and can be refuted with historical facts. However, as the previous chapter argued, political myths are particularly resistant to rational refutation.

The historical relevance of sites and artefacts is less important than the symbolic significance given to them. For example, the following statement made by Archpriest Bozidar Mijac in 1983 sums up the idea of Kosovo as a metaphysical entity.

Kosovo is not simply a physical dwelling place rather it is metaphysical creation. This Serbian homeland situated between the land and the sky translates a spiritual phenomenon into one of time and space. That is the greatest demonstration that ownership of a land cannot simply be reckoned in terms of numbers, or the composition of the mass of its inhabitants, but rather it is a spiritual concept which had come into being in an existential way. The process of ideogenesis is in this case the most important form of ethnogenesis. As a spiritual concept the defeat of 1389 was Serbia’s ‘Golgotha’ and parallels the crucifixion; the Great Exodus of 1690 parallels Christ’s death and burial; and the triumphant liberation of Kosovo in 1912 parallels the resurrection. Kosovo is therefore an important memory site as both a physical entity and as a spiritual concept for Serbian collective memory.

171 Malcolm, N. op cit, p. 46.
172 Quoted by Thomas, R. op cit, p. 38.
7. The Kosovo Tradition

Serbian collective memory is given normative meaning by the Kosovo tradition. The Battle of Kosovo divides Serbian collective memory into two broad historical periods. Prior to the battle there was a Serbian ‘golden age’ centred on their spiritual home in Kosovo and exemplified by the medieval empire of Tsar Dusan. Defeated by the Ottoman Turks, the Serbs entered a ‘dark age’ of subjugation that only ended with the liberation of Kosovo in 1912. However, there was no return to a ‘golden age’ as Serbia was crushed by two World Wars and assimilated within a multi-ethnic federation. The Kosovo tradition, or Kosovo spirit as it is commonly referred to, gives meaning to the collective suffering and sacrifice of the Serbian people in their struggle to recapture a mythical ‘golden age’ where the Serb nation and Serb state is once more unified. I will illustrate the importance of understanding the Kosovo tradition by beginning with a Vidovdan statement by Ratko Mladic.

On June 28th 1995 the Bosnian-Serb leadership gathered at the town of Bileljina to commemorate the 606th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. In an address on the meaning of Kosovo, Ratko Mladic, the commanding officer of the Bosnian-Serb Republic stated that,

many theoreticians have attempted to arrive at a point where they were able to understand Serb history, culture, politics, and hence our people. There are few of them who have succeeded in grasping this essence. That is why even today there are great mistakes made in the evaluation of how the Serb nation will act at the present historically significant juncture.\cite{note174}

According to Mladic, the failure to understand the significance of the Kosovo tradition has led to a failure to comprehend Serbia’s will to resist ‘subjugation.’ As Mladic comments, “it seems that only we Serbs understand the origins of the importance of St Vitus Day in our history.”\cite{note175} However, as Cassirer argued, political myth must be studied carefully in order to know how to combat it. Therefore one of the purposes of my chapter is to offer an explanation of both the origins and importance of the Kosovo myth in order to understand how a political myth emerged as an authoritative source of legitimation in post-communist Serbia.

Mladic’s defiant Kosovo address was aimed at the international community that had failed to understand the meaning of the Kosovo tradition. The underlying theme of Mladic’s speech was that “the Serbs are being denied their right to self-determination and everything is being done to annihilate them.”\cite{note176}

As any other nation in the world, we have the right to live on our own land and in a single state. This right is being denied only to us, the Serbs. It is only in the case of the Serbs that they want to cut our state territory up into pieces and make us an ethnic minority in these new statelets. It is clear to us that this is done only to nations meant to be exterminated. In 1941 Germany achieved what they want to achieve today, along the same lines but in a different

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\cite{note174}] BBC Monitoring Summary of World Broadcasts. Source: Bosnian Serb news agency SRNA in Serbo-Croat 0930 gmt 28 Jun 95.
\item[\cite{note175}] ibid.
\item[\cite{note176}] ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Mladic is highlighting two important aspects of the Kosovo tradition: the Serbian fear of extermination that can be traced back to the Battle of Kosovo in 1389, and the right of all Serbs to live in the one state.

The first aspect of the Kosovo tradition is the Serb conception of themselves as the 'remnant of a slaughtered people'. The meaning of suffering and sacrifice originated from the eve of the Battle of Kosovo when Prince Lazar was offered a choice between a 'heavenly kingdom' and an 'earthly kingdom'

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

Lazar took the moral high ground and chose the 'heavenly kingdom' over military victory. The Battle of Kosovo was thus transformed from a military defeat into a moral victory. As Judah states, Lazar's choice,

177 ibid.
178 This popular phrase had been coined by the Serbian nationalisit poet Matija Beckovic. See Silber and Little, fn p. 111.
179 Quoted by Anzulovic, B op cit, pp. 11-12
provided for the Serbs an explanation for their oppression by the Ottomans. It also identified the whole nation with the central guiding *raison d'être* of Christianity: resurrection. In other words Lazar opted for the empire of heaven, that is to say truth and justice, so that the state would one day be resurrected. An earthly kingdom was rejected in favour of nobler ideals — victimhood and sacrifice — and this choice is to be compared with the temptations of Christ.\(^{180}\)

The motif of 'resurrection' and the rebirth of the Serbian state following Lazar's sacrifice stands at the core of the Kosovo tradition. A further dimension to the portrayal of Lazar as a Christ-like figure is the stories of Vuk Brankovic and Milos Obilic. Just as Christ was betrayed by Judas, Lazar was betrayed by Vuk Brankovic who transferred allegiance to the Ottoman Turks. Vuk Brankovic is not only the traitor who betrays his people, but came to represent those Slavs who converted to Islam. Brankovic personified Serbian disunity; the traitor within who, throughout Serbian history had thwarted Serbian national aspirations. The resurrection of Lazar and therefore of Serbia would not occur until Lazar had been avenged and the descendents of Lazar's killers; the Turks and by inference all Muslims, had been exterminated. This is one of the seeds of genocide within the Kosovo Myth. The other side of the story of Lazar's betrayal is the false accusation of Milos Obilic. To prove his loyalty to Lazar, Milos Obilic assassinated the Turkish sultan to avenge the death of Lazar. Milos Obilic thus became the archetypal Serbian hero who sacrificed himself for the Serbian nation.

The Christian meaning given to Serbian suffering and sacrifice was overlain with the belief that the Serbs had been reduced to the remnants of a slaughtered

people. Branimor Anzulovic claims that the Kosovo Myth reflects an ‘intense fear’ that Serbia would disappear. “This fear reflected the insecurity of a people dominated by a foreign civilization for five centuries, who enjoyed their own fully sovereign nation-state for only forty years between the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and the entry into the ill-fated Yugoslav union in 1918.”181 Serbian fears of extermination were compounded by experiences during World War II. I have shown how such fears were manipulated in the early 1990’s to mobilise nationalist support for the Milosevic regime. Silber and Little refer to this process as “consciously-fostered paranoia fed at least as much by ... myth as by historical reality.”182 The idea of an ongoing genocide against Serbs can be seen in the 1997 ‘Declaration Against the Genocide of the Serbian People’ signed by church hierarchy and prominent intellectuals.

The history of Serbian lands ... is full of instances of genocide against the Serbs and of exoduses to which they were exposed. Processes of annihilation of Serbs in the most diverse and brutal ways have been continuous. Throughout their history they have faced the fiercest forms of genocides and exoduses that have jeopardized their existence, yet they have always been self-defenders of their own existence, spirituality, culture, and democratic convictions.183

The Kosovo tradition emphasises the plight of Serbs as victims, but exalts the heroic defence of Serbian identity.

The image of Serbs as the ‘remnants of a slaughtered people’ first was expressed openly in the Draft Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and

181 Anzulovic, B. *op cit*, p. 109.
182 Silber, L & Little, A. *op cit*, p. 98.
183 Quoted by Anzulovic, B. *op cit*, p. 124.
Arts in September 1986. The Memorandum suggested that Serbs living in Croatia and Kosovo were facing genocide. In respect of Kosovo, the Memorandum claimed that “it is not just that the last remnants of the Serbian nation are leaving their homes at an unabated rate, but according to all evidence, faced with a physical, moral and psychological reign of terror, they seem to be preparing for their final exodus.” The final exodus evokes Serbian collective memory of the ‘Great Migration of 1690 led by Patriarch Arsenije. The situation in Kosovo also was placed within the broader context of the last two hundred years of Serbian history. The Memorandum also claimed that, “the physical, political, legal and cultural genocide of the Serbian population in Kosovo and Metohija is a worse historical defeat than any experienced in the liberation wars waged by Serbia from the First Serbian Uprising in 1804 to the uprisings of 1941.” Serbian collective memory thus was used as an interpretative framework to legitimate the political program of Serbian nationalists.

Mladic’s Vidovdan speech also referred to the second important aspect of the Kosovo tradition, the right of Serbs to live in their own state. The demand that all Serbs be united in one state had also been the theme of the Memorandum that framed its demands within the context of Serbian suffering during two world wars.

A nation which after a long and bloody struggle regained its own state, which fought for and achieved a civil democracy, and which in the last two wars lost 2.5 million of its members, has lived to see the day when a Party committee of apparatchiks decrees that after four

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184 Memorandum quoted by Judah, T. op cit, pp. 158-59 My italics.
185 Ibid, p. 159.
decades in the new Yugoslavia it alone is not allowed to have its own state. A worse historical
defeat in peacetime cannot be imagined.186
As well as playing on Serbian fears of extermination, the Memorandum drew heavily
on nineteenth century Serbian nationalism. The idea of Great Serbia had originated
with the influential nineteenth century Serbian politician Ilija Garasanin who drew up
the Plan, or Nacertanije, which combined the dream of restoring the Serbian
medieval empire of Tsar Dusan with the Romanticist idea that modern Serbian
identity was defined by language.187 Judah states that the Nacertanije, “is the
document that synthesises centuries of Serbian dreams as preserved by the church and
epic poetry and formulates them into a statement of modern nationalism.”188
Garasanin’s ideas were based on Vuk Karadzic’s early nineteenth century collection
of Serbian songs, epics and folk literature that were seen as embodying the Serbian
‘national spirit.’ To Vuk Karadzic,
all speakers of the South Slavic dialects, whether Catholic, Muslim, or Orthodox, were
considered Serbs; Serb nationality was a function of the language for Vuk Karadzic and
many of his admirers down to the present day, Serbia exists wherever the Serbian language
(what was later called Serbo-Croation) is spoken.189
However the national mythology, as popularised by Vuk Karadzic and Njegos’ The
Mountain Wreath, placed Slavic Muslims in an invidious situation.

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186 ibid, p. 160.
187 Glenny identifies Garasanin’s Plan and its revival in the form of the Draft Memorandum of the Serbian
Academy of Sciences and Arts, as a basic contradiction that has bedevilled Yugoslav politics this century. “Those
assumptions contained some devilish contradictions. Garasanin sought both south Slav unity and Serbian
hegemony. The Plan was simultaneously federalist and centralist in conception. Serbia’s geography and the
spread of the Serbian community in neighbouring areas made this contradiction inevitable.” Glenny, M. The
188 Judah, T. op cit, p.59.
189 Sells, M.A. op cit, p.38.
By the standards of *The Mountain Wreath*, all Serbs had to be Christian, and any conversion to Islam was a betrayal of Serb blood. Slavic Muslims could not escape being considered Serb because of the Vuk Karadžić linguistic criteria, but as Serbs they had to be considered traitors according the Njegos mythology. They were delegitimized as a group and dehumanized as individuals.¹⁹⁰

The seeds of 'ethnic cleansing' were implicit within a Kosovo tradition that combined a linguistic definition of Serbian identity with 'betrayal of Serb blood' as criteria for establishing a Serbian homeland. This 'dark side' of the Kosovo tradition or Kosovo ethics is well summed up by the Serbian Patriarch Gavrilo in a text celebrating the 1941 Belgrade coup.

> [T]he Kosovo ethics ... has elevated our past and exalted the spirit of Obilic, who became an ideal and a model of heroism, as well as the scope of Prince Marko, a protector of justice and a hero who defeated the enemy. All of this is best formulated in the characters of Bishop Danilo and his heroes as presented in *The Mountain Wreath*, where Njegos’s genius vividly and accurately describes the drama of the Serbian people in their fall and eventual rise in full victory over the enemy. The same Kosovo spirit inspired Karadorde and Milos (Obrenovic) to build a new foundation for the Serbian state, which rose ever higher, and this clearly proves that the entire ascent of the Serbian people in history was won only and exclusively by the sword, in a sea of spilled blood and countless victims, which means that without all of this there is no victory, as there is no resurrection without death. ¹⁹¹

The overwhelming image of such a statement is the acceptance that the Kosovo tradition will only be achieved 'in a sea of spilled blood'. When interpreted in this light, the following statement made in the 1986 Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts is a chilling prophesy for the 1990's.

> The establishment of full national and cultural integrity of the Serbian people, regardless of which republic or province they live in, is their historic right. The achievement of equal status and independent development has a deeper sense for the Serbian people. In less than fifty


¹⁹¹ Quoted by Anzulovic, B. *op cit*, p.17.
years, during two successive generations, (it was) twice exposed to physical annihilation, forced assimilation, conversion, cultural genocide, ideological indoctrination, devaluation and rejection of its own tradition under an imposed guilt complex, (and) intellectually and politically disarmed. 192

This statement captures well the meaning of the Kosovo Myth: the collective suffering and sacrifice experienced by the Serbian people in their struggle to reunify the Serb state with the Serb nation.

8. The Commemoration of Kosovo

8.1 Early Commemorative Developments.

To understand how the predominantly oral and literary memories of Kosovo were transformed into an authoritative source of legitimation in post-communist Serbia it is necessary to examine the development of the commemorative process in some detail. I have shown how the Kosovo Myth had long survived as an oral tradition and that throughout the nineteenth century “the Kosovo theme (had) dominated literature, drama, poetry, and the arts.” 193 The Battle of Kosovo had occurred on Vidovdan but it was not until the nineteenth century that St Vitus Day (Vidovdan) 194, 28th June, emerged as the principal political holiday of the Serbs. Milorad Ekmecic argues that the emergence of Vidovdan as a major festival followed a European trend where days of remembrance were used to stimulate a sense of national identity.

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192 Memorandum quoted by ibid, p. 116.
193 Djordjevic, D. op cit p. 320.
194 St Vitus day had been celebrated as an optional Saint’s Day from the founding of the Serbian Orthodox Church, but did not gain in popularity until after the Napoleonic Wars. See Ekmecic, M. op cit.
Such a trend had begun with Rousseau’s 'Considerations on the Government of Poland' where he recommended that national consciousness was not natural but must be learned through participation in festivals, games and public ceremonies. Civic festivals had been used extensively during the French Revolution and in 1815 Prussia had instituted the “Day of Fallen Heroes” following victory over Napoleon. It was this ceremony that probably most influenced the development of Vidovdan among the South Slavs. Ljudevit Gaj, a Croatian nationalist addressed the problem of a South Slav ('Greater Illyria') national consciousness by following Rousseau’s advice on setting up student mini-governments in universities and founded a student government at the University of Graz in 1827. Uros Milankovic, an early South Slav nationalist, “speculated that the national spirit among Southern Slavs was rather dormant, and that attempts to awaken it had been confined at that time to the ‘realm of literature and spiritual resurrection only, but not to actual practice’. Milankovic’s insight that national myths had to be removed from the passive ‘realm

195 See Rousseau, J-J. (Watkins, F. Ed., Trans.) Rousseau: Political Writings. Nelson, Edinburgh, 1953, pp. 171 - 174, 179. For example in offering advice on the Polish Constitution Rousseau stated: “Be sure not to neglect the need for a certain amount of public display; let it be noble, imposing, with a magnificence which resides rather in men than in things. It is hard to believe to what an extent the heart of the people follows its eyes, and how much it is impressed by majestic ceremonial. This lends authority an air of law and order which inspires confidence, and divorces it from ideas of caprice and whimsicality associated with arbitrary power.” Ibid, p. 173 (my italics)


197 For an excellent discussion on festivals in nineteenth century Germany see Mosse, G.L. The Nationalisation of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich. Howard Fertig, New York, 1975.

198 See Ekmecic, M. op cit, p. 331.

199 See Lampe, J.R. op cit, pp. 43 – 45.


201 Ekmecic, M. op cit, p. 323.
of literature’ to the active realm of commemorative ritual pinpoints one of the essential characteristics of political myth. Memory alone was not sufficient to mobilise a sense of Serbian identity; what was needed was a day of national commemoration.

The process of converting Kosovo from a passive to an active political myth began modestly with liberal high school students in 1845. The students participated in military exercises as the Dusan regiment202 and later expanded their organisation into The Society of Serbian Youth whose aim was to unite “all Serbs from the ancient empire.”203 The Society of Serbian Youth was founded symbolically on Vidovdan, for 28th June was the day “when our heroic forefathers sacrificed themselves for freedom and showed to their posterity the path to follow.”204 The society was launched with the ringing appeal “do we will, are we able, do we dare to go to Kosovo?”205 Vidovdan, as a memory of Kosovo, was commemorated first by students, but the conversion of this myth into an instrument for forming the political consciousness of the Serbs rested with the educated middle class.206 The Serbian historian Miodraga Popovic argued that, “it was the intelligentsia who turned the

202 Named after Tsar Dusan ( crowned 1346 ) who extended Serbian territory to its greatest extent. See Lampe, J.R. op cit, p. 18.
203 Quoted by Djordjevic, D. op cit, p. 315.
204 Quoted by ibid.
205 Quoted by ibid.
206 See Ekmecic, M. op cit, p. 333 for literacy levels.
Kosovo myth - the promise of avenging the defeat and resurrecting the Serbian empire – into the core of modern Serbian national ideology." Popovic wrote that,

The Kosovo myth acquired the central position in the spiritual life of the Serbian intelligentsia in the nineteenth century. It lived outside poetry, too: among politicians, the military, scientists, professors, artists, clergy, physicians, merchants, tradesmen, and especially among college and high school students. It gradually became an integral part of their national ideology. Gradually, the Kosovo myth became the spiritual bridge between the bourgeois intelligentsia and the still present followers of the god Vid in our patriarchal-heroic world.

The Kosovo Myth provided a spiritual bridge between the educated urban middle classes and the rest of the population, but the generally low literacy levels of the Serbs during the nineteenth century also meant that the commemoration of Vidovdan could not be left to books and articles. However, it was from the modest, and somewhat restricted, early commemorations of Kosovo that the foundations for the 500th anniversary commemorations were laid.

8.2 The 500th Anniversary

Commemorative ritual associated with the Kosovo Myth was not sufficiently established at the time of the 500th anniversary for Kosovo to realise its legitimating potential. The politics of commemorating the 500th anniversary thus provides a context for understanding the development of the Kosovo Myth to the point where its commemoration did provide a valuable supplementary source of legitimacy one century later. The first official attempt to communicate the meaning of Kosovo

207 Anzulovic, B op cit, p.80.
208 Quoted by ibid, p.81.
through commemorative ceremonies was the celebration of the Quincentennial in 1889. Commemorative ceremonies were used to symbolise the need for Serbian unity, to keep the crusade against the Turks alive, to directly challenge Austro-Hungarian authority in Croatia and Vojvodina and most importantly to legitimise the shaky Obrenovic Dynasty. The commemoration of the five hundredth anniversary must be seen within the broader political context. The ineffectual\(^{209}\) King Milan had tried to link the Obrenovic Dynasty both to Kosovo and the Old Kingdom of the Nemanjici.\(^{210}\) Regular ritual visits were made to Ravanica monastery to symbolically connect Milan to the Kosovo Myth and as Dimitrije Djordjevic comments, "the more the dynasty was in crisis, the more the references to Kosovo and the Old Kingdom were utilised."\(^{211}\) References to Kosovo were made also in support of conservative and liberal political agendas as each side sought to appropriate the myth for their own needs. The conservatives, supported by the army,

called for a centralized, authoritarian establishment capable of concentrating national energies to fulfill the 'Kosovo message'. Domestic dissent was equated with the treason of Vuk Brankovic.\(^{212}\) The conservatives heralded the slogan, "Internal schism provoked the downfall of the medieval state.\(^{213}\)

\(^{209}\) The dynastic politics of the late eighteenth century is not relevant to this study except to note that Milan was unpopular with all factions, had brutally repressed a peasant uprising in 1883, had presided over a humiliating defeat by the Bulgarians in 1885 and had been forced to accept a liberal constitution in 1888. See Jelavich, B. \textit{op cit.}, pp. 370 - 371.

\(^{210}\) In response to the October 1888 demand for a new constitution, King Milan stated, "on the restored throne of the glorious Nemanjici now sit the scions of the people's dynasty of the Obrenovici." Quoted by Djordjevic, D. \textit{op cit.}, p. 323.

\(^{211}\) \textit{Ibid.}

\(^{212}\) Vuk Brankovic was the archetypal Serb traitor who had betrayed Prince Lazar at Kosovo. See p. 130.

\(^{213}\) Djordjevic, D. \textit{op cit.}, p. 323.
The liberals rejected this ‘reading’ of Kosovo and stressed that, “only democracy could accomplish the Kosovo legacy.” When Milan was forced to accept a liberal constitution in 1888 he abdicated in 1889 in favour of Alexander (a minor) and a Regency.

Official plans for the Quincentennial were therefore made in the context of an existing dynasty’s struggle to sustain its legitimacy. As Djordjevic states, “the shaken dynasty ... needed a consolidation of the monarchy. The five hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo in 1889 offered such an opportunity which would serve the purposes of the monarchy as well as general national politics.”

Commemorations could not be held in Kosovo as it was still under Turkish control, so ceremonies were focussed on Vrdnik where Prince Lazar's bones were preserved and at his medieval capital at Krusevac. As part of the commemorations young King Alexander and members of the regency and government travelled to Lazar’s medieval capital of Krusevac to attend a requiem for the Kosovo martyrs. Alexander was also linked to the medieval past by travelling to the Zica monastery where he went through the same traditional ritual as Serbia’s medieval kings. Despite attempts made by the Austro-Hungarian government to stop the commemorations the

214 Ibid.
215 “The official 1889 commemoration in Serbia was organised and carried out by the Regency, the Royal Academy of Sciences, religious and cultural; institutions, and the military. Ibid, p. 318.
216 Ibid.
217 Attempts to recover the bones from Vrdnik which was under Hungarian administration, failed during the 1880’s and 1890’s.
The Kosovo Myth

quintcentennial was seen as a success. Cedomil Mijatovic, Serbia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, summed up the ‘official’ meaning of Kosovo as;

An inexhaustible source of national pride was discovered on Kosovo. More important than language and stronger than the Church, this pride unites all Serbs in a single nation....The glory of the Kosovo heroes shone like a radiant star in that dark night of almost five hundred years....Our people continued the battle in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when they tried to recover their freedom through countless uprisings. There was never a war for freedom – and when was there no war? – in which the spirit of the Kosovo heroes did not participate. The new history of Serbia begins with Kosovo - a history of valiant efforts, long suffering, endless wars, and unquenchable glory....Karadjordje breathed with the breath of Kosovo, and the Obrenovici placed Kosovo in the coat of arms in their dynasty. We bless Kosovo because the memory of the Kosovo heroes upheld us, encouraged us, taught us, and guided us.

As Mijatovic recognised, the Kosovo Myth had been passed down the generations through the Serbian language and the Serbian Orthodox church, but Mijatovic also understood that it was only through the active commemoration of Kosovo that Serbian national consciousness would be stimulated. It was the conscious use of the Kosovo Myth to ‘unite all Serbs in a single nation’ as well as justifying the legitimacy claims of an existing dynasty that transformed Kosovo into a political myth. It should be noted that there is continuity between the objectives Mijatovic stated for the 500th anniversary and Milosevic’s use of the 600th anniversary commemorations to revive Serbian national pride. Both Mijatovic and Milosevic used the Kosovo Myth to underpin the legitimacy claims of his own regime.

218 For a full description of the 500th anniversary celebrations see Emmert T.A. op cit, pp. 70 - 74.
219 Quoted by Judah, T op cit, p.68.
8.3 Twentieth Century Commemorations

The 'meaning' given to Kosovo during the 500th anniversary commemorations was reinforced during the next fifty years by Serbian successes in the Balkan Wars, the disastrous defeat of World War I and the emergence of a Serb dominated Kingdom of Yugoslavia between the wars. Vidovdan commemorations at the beginning of the twentieth century took the form of mass festivals held outdoors, the main focus for commemorative activities being associated with sport and music. The Serbian gymnastic organisations were called Sokol (the falcon) after similar German organisations where "the partnership between nationalism and music and gymnastics began with the German 'rugendbund' festivals in the early nineteenth century." However, as late as 1913, one critic of St.Vitus Day observed the lack of a consistent commemorative ritual. "Celebration of St Sava Day has the appearance of an ordinary custom throughout Serbdom. It has a traditional schedule and program. Celebration of St Vitus still is missing permanent rules." The form commemorative ritual was to take was still fluid at the time but the symbolic significance of June 28th was to become more acute during the next thirty years.

Official and popular commemoration of the Kosovo anniversary was given greater impetus as a consequence of Serbian victories in the Balkan Wars of 1912.

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220 Ekmecic, M. op cit. p. 338.
221 Quoted by ibid, p. 339.
1913. The outbreak of war in 1912 took on the character of a holy crusade to avenge not only a 523 year old defeat, but to rejuvenate Serbia itself by recovering her 'sacred' heartland. For example, in the formal declaration of war, the province of Kosovo was referred to as "...the glorious and saddened mother of our Kingdom where lies the historical kernel of the Old Serbian State.... Here live our brothers by blood, customs, national consciousness, and aspirations." The 'sacred nature' of such a mission was not lost on Serb soldiers who, upon arriving at the Kosovo battle site, "(knelt) down to kiss the ground of the sacred battlefield" and later attended a memorial service on the spot where Prince Lazar and Milos Obilic had been killed in 1389. The recovery of Kosovo fulfilled the need to avenge the defeat of 1389 as well as rekindling the nineteenth century romantic nationalist ideal of refounding Serbia upon its medieval foundations. The 'avenger of Kosovo' was King Petar Karadjordjevic who came to personify for the Serbs the ideals and aspirations of the Kosovo Myth. Unfortunately for Serbia during the disastrous retreat of 1915-16, Petar was also seen as the 'new Lazar.'

Serbian victories in the Balkan Wars stimulated both official and unofficial commemorative activities for 1914 that included extensive plans to commemorate the

222 Quoted by Djordjevic, D. op cit, P. 320.
223 West, R. op cit, p. 36.
224 He had fought the Turks under a pseudonym during the Bosnian Insurrection of 1875-1876. King Petar had also been symbolically linked to the legacy of the first insurrection of 1804 by being crowned in 1903 with a bronze crown cast from a piece of Karadjordje's first canon.
225 He saw himself in this way. His son reported later that "the old man got it into his head to die and become a saint like Lazar at Kosovo. He put on the soldiers' cap, took up a rifle, and joined the men in the trenches." Quoted by Banac, I, op cit p. 143.
June 28th Vidovdan anniversary in Kosovo itself. Pilgrimages were organised to the ‘Holy Land’ to coincide with the anniversary and throughout Serbia black flags were flown to mark the day. Remembrance services were held in orthodox churches to commemorate those who had fallen at Kosovo. It is within an atmosphere of raised Serbian consciousness following the Balkan Wars that the visit of Archduke Ferdinand to Sarajevo on June 28th must be understood. It was the dramatic marking of the anniversary with Ferdinand’s assassination that overshadowed all other commemorative activities.

The recovery of Kosovo in the Balkan Wars had revitalised the Kosovo Myth to the extent that it was able to help sustain Serbia in defeat and take on added symbolic significance through association with the post-war ideals of self-determination. In defeat Serbia was once again the martyr nation and Serbia’s plight during the war was projected as an expression of the Kosovo spirit, but this time on behalf of all South Slavs. In 1916 Britain officially commemorated Kosovo Day as

226 See Djordjevic, D. op cit, p. 321. The political significance of such a commemoration was noted by Austrian military intelligence. In response to a memo dated January 22, 1914, “that the Sokol, organisations of Serbs in Croatia, were preparing to visit the Kosovo Polje on June 28, 1914, and to take part in a festival with the Sokols from Serbia and the Sokols ‘of the not yet liberated parts’” Dedijer, V. op cit, p.205. Archduke Ferdinand noted that “they should be observed very carefully”. Quoted by Dedijer, V. ibid.

227 ibid, p. 323.

228 That the visit was taken as an affront to Serbian sensibilities can be seen in the records of court proceedings following the assassination. For example, one conspirator, Cabrinovic, shows how deeply he had internalised the meaning of the Kosovo myth as Vidovdan “for us, Serbs, the greatest national day - this fact fired me with zeal to carry out the attempt. Our folklore tradition tells how the hero Milos Obilic was accused before Vidovdan that he was a traitor, and how he answered: ‘On Vidovdan we shall see who is are who is not a traitor.’ And Obilic became the first assassin who went into the enemy camp and murdered Sultan Murad. Quoted by Dedijer, V. ibid, p. 320.

229 Tihomir Djordjevic, a Serbian professor of ethnology, successfully sold the idea that Kosovo had halted the ultimate goal of unity being pursued by the medieval Serbian Kingdom. “Kosovo was therefore a tragedy for all
a tribute to Serbia. Serbia had additional diplomatic success when the United States
government commemorated Kosovo Day in 1918 and extended the meaning of the
day to include all other oppressed people fighting for self-determination. Remarks
typical of Allied attitudes came from James A Beck, a former United States Assistant
Attorney General.

It is true that we commemorate a defeat, but military defeats are ... often moral victories. If Serbia
is now temporally defeated, she has triumphed at the great bar of public opinion, and she stands in
the eye of the nations as justified in her quarrel. Serbia was not only the innocent, precipitating
cause of this world war, but it is the, greatest martyr and I am inclined to think in many respects
its greatest hero. 230

The central tenets of the Kosovo Myth, moral victory and heroic martyrdom, were
emphasised in Beck’s commemorative address. He also managed to link the Kosovo
Myth with the Great War. Beck stated, “the war is a great expiation for the failure of
civilized nations for centuries to recognise the duty that ... Lazar assumed on the eve
of Kossovo (sic).” 231

As martyr nation and symbol of self-determination Serbia emerged from
World War I as the dominant force behind the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The
myth of Kosovo now was extended by Serbian centralists to embrace all other
Yugoslavs. This trend found its greatest expression in the official approach to the
550th anniversary commemorations held in 1939. The official commission overseeing

the South Slavs and necessarily became a symbol for freedom of them all as well.” Quoted by Emmert,T.A. op. cit. p. 77.
230 Quoted by ibid, p. 78. my italics.
231 Quoted by ibid, p. 79 my italics.
The elaborate ceremonies clearly stated that,

Kosovo gave us Vidovdan from whose faith, ethic and symbols we remained alive ... until this very day. The Vidovdan mystique was that magical lever for all our unprecedented undertakings and accomplishments in history. It was the foundation of our national, spiritual image, our heroism, and our Christian view of man. It was the greatest and most difficult test of the Serbian people, and it remained as an example not only to them but to all Yugoslavs. 232

As well as summing up the meaning of Kosovo to Serbs and extending the lessons of Kosovo to all Yugoslavs, the Commission made the Kosovo myth directly applicable to the Croatians.

Prince Lazar integrated the national and religious ideals. The Kosovo myth gave the Serbian people strength and created a collective consciousness. This should be a lesson to the Croatian public. On the crossroads of the world where so many interests are in conflict, collective consciousness is necessary. Without it there is no strength, no self-sacrifice, no future. 233

This is probably one of the clearest statements, before the time of Slobodan Milosevic, of the conscious political use of the Kosovo Myth to create a sense of collective consciousness in the Serbian people. By identifying the Kosovo Myth with Serbian collective consciousness it was possible to denigrate opposition in terms of betrayal. Because Kosovo had been "proclaimed a symbol of Yugoslav unity, opponents of Great Serbian centralism were labeled betrayers of the Kosovo ideal."234

However, the 550th anniversary commemorations proved to be a watershed in the development of Serbian national consciousness based on the Kosovo Myth. In just fifty years from the first official commemorative ceremonies to mark the

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232 Quoted by *ibid*, my italics.
233 Quoted by *ibid*, p. 80.
234 *ibid.*
quincentennial, the Kosovo Myth had become the medium through which Serbian national aspirations were expressed and around which Serbian collective consciousness coalesced. However, such development came to an abrupt end when the Yugoslav government capitulated to the Axis Powers and signed the Tripartite Pact in March 1941. The Orthodox Church portrayed the act as a betrayal of everything Kosovo stood for and in the Officers' Coup that followed, General Simovic evoked the spirit of Kosovo for the coming struggle against Germany.235 From this time for approximately forty-five years the Kosovo Myth was actively repressed either by the German occupation or by Tito, for in Tito’s post-war Yugoslavia, Serbia was reduced to equal status with the other republics. Because the Kosovo Myth had been so closely associated with Serbian centralists for the first half of the twentieth century, the anniversary was no longer officially commemorated.236 The commemorative process had transformed the memory and traditions of Kosovo into a political myth with enough legitimating potential to challenge Tito’s vision of a post-war Yugoslavia. It was for this reason that commemoration of Vidovdan officially ceased, although the reframed collective memories of Kosovo continued to be communicated by the Serbian Orthodox Church.

With the outbreak of war in 1991 in the former Yugoslavia, Vidovdan

235 The 50th anniversary of the coup on 27th March 1991 was turned into an anti-communist rally by Vuk Draskovic who drew parallels between the situation in Yugoslavia in 1941 and in 1991. Sydney Morning Herald, 29 March 1991.
236 Commemorations were left to church services.
The Kosovo Myth commemorations were approached with a heightened sense of consciousness, especially by Serbs living in the regions of the self-proclaimed Republic Srpska (Bosnia) and the Republic of Serb Krajina (Croatia). The 1995 Vidovdan commemorations, from which I have taken Ratko Mladic’s speech to discuss the Kosovo tradition, can be taken as fairly typical of the form these ceremonies took. The day was marked by the Bosnian Serbs with an Orthodox church service at Bijeljina which was attended by the Serb political and military hierarchy. At a special Vidovdan assembly Colonel-General Ratko Mladic used the Kosovo Myth to defy international pressure as well as detailing Serbia’s historic mission in terms of her current war aims. Vidovdan was also marked with an artillery bombardment of Sarajevo in defiance of United Nations directives and included a deliberate attack on what the Serbs considered to be a hostile international press corps. In the Republic of Serb Krajina, Vidovdan was marked by a military parade attended by members of the Serbian Orthodox Church and a special session of the Supreme

239 For a full transcript see, BBC Monitoring Summary of World Broadcasts (Source: Bosnian Serb News Agency, 28th June 1995)
240 BBC Monitoring Service: Central Europe & Balkans (Source: Radio Bosnia-Hercegovina, Sarajevo, 28th June 1995) 30th June 1995. In response to this attack Bosnian radio evoked another aspect of Serbian collective memory when it referred to Vidovdan as “the central symbol of the mythological consciousness and the religious holiday of Chetnik terrorists.” ibid.
Defence Council of the republic of Serb Krajina. What was common to each of the commemorative ceremonies was the bringing together of the civilian, military and church hierarchies to officially mark the day with a ritualistic recitation of the meaning of Kosovo, delivered in a church, on a parade ground or at a specially convened assembly. The commemorative ceremonies were used to communicate the 'meaning' of Kosovo, but most significantly the 'meaning' was expressed in terms of the current legitimacy needs of the political elite. With the defeat of Serbia by NATO in 1999 the church used Vidovdan to attack the Milosevic regime for betraying the Kosovo ideal.

8.4 Vidovdan – 28th June.

As well as the religious overlay that structures the commemoration of Kosovo is the way June 28th has acquired further layers of 'meaning' since the last century. As has been established, the most symbolic and emotionally charged historic event that created and recreated Serbian collective memory was Serbia's defeat by the Turks at Kosovo on St. Vitus Day (Vidovdan), June 28th 1389. The commemorative ceremonies associated with the June 28th anniversary both structure and communicate Serbian beliefs about themselves as a political community but over time, Vidovdan

247 I have focussed on the Christian imagery associated with Vidovdan, but at another level Vidovdan refers to the old pagan sun and war god Vid. As Anzulovic comments, "The elevation of an old pagan war god to the patron saint of the nation is the most conspicuous manifestation of the reaffirmation of tribal attitudes in the era of Westernization. Anzulovic, B op cit, p.61.
has acquired multiple layers of meaning through association with other symbolically significant events that have clustered around the date. However, Vidovdan did not appear on Serbian calendars until the 1860's. As Anzulovic comments,

Since Vid's Day commemorates a pagan god, the holiday was not celebrated in the Serbian Orthodox Church, nor was it marked in old Serbian calendars (all of which were church calendars). Those calendars assigned June 15 (the date of Vid's Day in the Julian calendar) to the Old Testament prophet Amos and to Saint Lazar, the prince who perished in the Battle of Kosovo. Vid's Day appeared in calendars for the first time in the 1860s, the time of the triumph of Vuk Karadzic's ideas and nationalist exuberance caused by progressive liberation from Turkish rule.\textsuperscript{248}

Since the 1860's Vidovdan has represented the 'sacred core' of the Serbian commemorative narrative. Control over commemoration is essential to the legitimacy claims of any group.

The significance of Vidovan to Serbs can be gauged by briefly summarising the events that have marked its anniversary. In the context of nineteenth century Serbian nationalism, Vidovdan was commemorated first by students in 1845\textsuperscript{249} and used in the first of the national wars against Turkey by declaring war on 28\textsuperscript{th} June 1876.\textsuperscript{250} The first large scale official commemoration marked the 500\textsuperscript{th} anniversary in 1889 and from that time commemorative ceremonies were used to communicate the legitimacy claims of both the Obrenovic and Karadjodjevic Dynasties. The 525\textsuperscript{th} anniversary was marked by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in

\textsuperscript{248} ibid, pp.83-84.
\textsuperscript{249} See Djordjevic, D. op cit, p. 315.
\textsuperscript{250} See Ekmecic, M. 'The Emergence of St. Vitus Day as the Principal National Holiday of the Serbs' in Vucinich, W.S. & Emmert, T.A. (Eds) op cit, p. 337.
Sarajevo; an event that led to Serbia’s ‘second Kosovo’ when she was overrun by the Central powers in 1915. Ironically, it was through the destruction of the Serbian state that Vidovdan acquired another dimension of meaning. Vidovdan was commemorated as Kosovo Day in Britain in 1916 and the United States in 1918, and was used to symbolise the principle of self-determination for the ‘submerged nations’ of Europe. Such a ‘reading’ of Vidovdan was given added impetus when the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia was officially recognised with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28th 1919. Despite considerable opposition, Serbian centralists pushed through a new constitution on Vidovdan in 1921 which closely tied the new Yugoslavia to Serbian aspirations. The expansion of Vidovdan to give meaning to all South Slavs reached its fullest expression with the official commemorative ceremonies that marked the 550th anniversary. For approximately the next fifty years commemoration of Vidovdan was officially ignored, although the day continued to accrue another layer of symbolic significance. Significant World War II massacres of Serbians by the Ustashe began on June 28th 1941 and ushered in a period of history that continues to haunt Serbian collective memory. In a carefully calculated symbolic move, Stalin issued “The Resolution on the Situation in the Communist Party of

251 As Anzulovic somewhat sarcastically notes, “By choosing to sign the Versailles Peace Treaty on the same day in 1919, the victorious Western Allies provided the war with a symmetry; the same war god that sponsored its beginning became the patron of the flawed peace treaty that would provide fertile ground for new wars.” Anzulovic, B. op cit, p.84.

252 The symbolic oath of allegiance to the new constitution was taken by Alexander Karadjordjevic on this day. See Jelavich, B. op cit, p. 151.

253 See ibid, pp. 150 - 151 for details. Also, as Thompson points out, the attempt to secure the legitimacy of the constitution through association with Vidovdan actually had the opposite effect. “Royal Yugoslavia never recovered from the rift and bitterness caused by foisting the Vidovdan Constitution ... on the anti-centralists.” Thompson, M. op cit, p.265.

254 See West, R. op cit, pp. 94 - 95, 389 - 90.
Yugoslavia,” which expelled Yugoslavia from the Cominform on June 28th 1948. Mark Thompson describes how news of the expulsion came as a profound shock, for in addition to an open split with Stalin “the date of expulsion presaged catastrophe: 28 June - anniversary of the battle of Kosovo in 1389, and of Franz Ferdinand’s death in Sarajevo in 1914.” Finally, Milosevic’s ‘call-to-arms’ on the 600th anniversary presaged another catastrophe, the destruction of the Yugoslav state itself. June 28th is therefore a date that is not only resonant with the collective memories of the Serbs, but has acquired multiple layers of symbolic meaning over time. Miodrag Popovic warns that continued adherence to Vidovdan will lead to an ‘intellectual and ethical defeat’ for Serbia. “The cult was historically necessary as a specific phase in the development of national thought. But as a permanent state of mind, the Vid’s Day cult can be fatal to the people unable to extricate themselves from its pseudo mythical and pseudo historical webs.” The Serbian government’s surrender of Milosevic to the War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague on 28th June 2001 may finally break Vidovdan’s grip on the Serbian psyche.

8.5 Counter – Commemorations.

Slobodan Milosevic and Serb leaders in the breakaway republics of Serb Krajina and Republica Srpska effectively used the Kosovo Myth during the early 1990’s to advance their own legitimacy claims, but this is not to suggest that these

255 Thompson, M. op cit, p. 172.
256 Quoted by Anzulovic, B. op cit, p.85.
claims went unchallenged. The importance of Kosovo in framing Serbian identity has not been challenged seriously by any opposition group, although control over the myth has been contested. Milosevic’s virtual elevation of the Kosovo Myth to the status of a legitimating ideology raised the possibility of the myth being used by opposition groups to delegitimate his regime. Because the Orthodox Church had been the custodian of the Kosovo Myth for much of Serbian history, opposition groups used the church in their attempts to wrest control over the myth from Milosevic. For example, in March 1992 the opposition used a rally of over 20,000 in St. Sava Cathedral to denounce Milosevic and followed it with a direct challenge to Milosevic by staging a counter-commemoration of Vidovdan in Belgrade. In a statement supporting the rally the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) stated:

“There is no more appropriate day than St Vitus Day for Serbia to ask in a democratic way to be freed from (the) fatal yoke of national-socialism and fascism, and for it to embark firmly on the road of its tradition, culture and radical revival.”

The Orthodox Church, which had supported Milosevic during the 1989 commemorations, openly supported the opposition. The Vidovdan rally, which drew a crowd of 100,000, took place in front of the Yugoslav Federal Assembly Building. By contesting the Vidovdan anniversary the opposition also hoped to weaken the legitimating authority of the Kosovo Myth for the Milosevic regime. The

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257 Montgomery, M. (Belgrade) Daily Telegraph (London), 10th March 1992. It is interesting to note how even a rally can be the source of follow-up commemorative rallies. For example in 1996 the opposition Democratic Party of Serbia “suggested holding demonstrations to mark the anniversary of the mass opposition rally in Belgrade on 9th March 1991.” BBC Monitoring Summary of World Broadcasts (Source: ‘Nasa Borba’, Belgrade, 5th March 1996) Party leaflets stated that “until the tyranny in Serbia tumbles, let every day be 9th March.” ibid.

258 BBC Monitoring Service: Central Europe & Balkans, 18th June 1992 (source Tanjug, 16th June 1992)

259 The rally was “blessed by the country’s Orthodox patriarch. The Church, a traditional ally of the government in Serbia, has made its opposition to Mr Milosevic’s government explicit over the past two months, and yesterday
1992 anniversary was also symbolically challenged from outside Serbia with the French President, Francois Mitterrand’s \textit{coup d’eclat diplomatique}\textsuperscript{260} to besieged Sarajevo. The Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic appealed personally to Mitterrand for help in lifting the Serbian blockade. Izetbegovic’s appeal to another painful historical memory: “We have no food left, no arms, no hope. We are the Warsaw Ghetto. Is the Warsaw Ghetto going to be allowed to die one more time”\textsuperscript{261}, determined Mitterrand to make his dramatic visit on June 28th 1992.

The church’s willingness to support the opposition was also demonstrated during the winter-long demonstrations over 1996 - 1997. The church had remained silent on the protest movement during November and December 1996, but issued a detailed statement on the eve of the church-led Orthodox Christmas Eve demonstration on January 6\textsuperscript{th} / 7\textsuperscript{th} 1997. It is worth quoting part of the statement in full, for the church was reasserting its traditional role as custodian of the Serb nation.

The Serbian Orthodox Church most vehemently condemns the falsifying of the popular vote, the suppression of political and religious freedom, the prevention of religious education, the eviction of St Sava [Serbia’s patron saint] from Serbian schools, failure to give back to the church its property, the selling off of property donated to the church several centuries ago - which was not done even by foreign occupiers, the failure to return registers of births and deaths which preserve the roots of the Serbian nation, the maltreatment of the clergy and believers who have been raising their voice against trampling on people’s freedom, particularly against the beating and killing of the people in the streets of the erstwhile freedom-loving Belgrade and Serbia. The Holy Bishops Synod condemns the authorities which not only ignored the electoral will of the people, but

\textsuperscript{260} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{261} Lancellier, J-P. 'Mitterrand Initiative Breaks Sarajevo Logjam', \textit{Guardian Weekly}, 5/7/92.
primarily trampled on our glorious history full of hardship, centuries of the people's memories, national reputation, dignity, name, the Cyrillic alphabet, the spiritual and national values and all things sacred, betrayed western Serb areas [in Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina], led the nation and the state into a situation of complete collapse and the people to the brink of subsistence, made enemies with the entire world and are now trying to sow discord and shed blood in our midst just in order to stay in power.262

In the statement, the Serbian Orthodox Church is reclaiming its traditional role as custodian of Serbian culture and identity. The church is claiming the right to define identity through control over official registers, which to the church, represented the 'roots of the Serbian nation'. The justification for asserting such a right against the secular state is that the state had 'trampled' on 'people's memories' and Serbia's 'glorious history'. The fundamental 'meaning' of Serbian collective memory was not being challenged; what was being challenged was the right to control and interpret the 'meaning'. Such a stance taken by the Serbian Orthodox church gives it the potential to either weaken or strengthen the claims of any political group to be the dominant interpreter of the Kosovo Myth; a role that the church had traditionally fulfilled throughout most of Serbia's history. It is therefore significant that the church's restatement of its traditional role was published to coincide with its open support for the anti-Milosevic opposition. The long-running pro-democracy demonstrations led by the Zajedno (Together) coalition of opposition groups made use of the Orthodox Christmas Eve procession to St. Sava Cathedral on January 7th.

262 BBC Monitoring Service: Central Europe & Balkans, 4 January 1997. (my italics)
1997 to stage its biggest rally\textsuperscript{263} for the fifty first consecutive days of political demonstrations. Later in

\textsuperscript{263} Griffiths, T (Belgrade) \textit{Reuters News Service}, January 7\textsuperscript{th} 1997.
the month on January 27th the traditional St. Sava religious procession was used to stage what was probably "the biggest procession in the Serbian capital since the Second World War." In leading the march, Patriarch Pavle threw "the church's considerable authority as a symbol of the Serbian nation squarely behind the opposition."

Another strand of the Kosovo Myth that has been challenged are those Serbian collective memories clustered around the experiences of World War II. Again, it is the right to interpret the 'meaning' of these memories rather than the memories themselves that are challenged. For example, Vuk Draskovic contested that part of the Kosovo myth that equated the sacrifices of World War II with Tito and the Partisans only. The 50th anniversary of the death of the Serbian World War II Chetnik leader, Dragoslav Draza Mihajlovic was commemorated at his old wartime headquarters at Ravna Gora in western Serbia. The commemorative ceremony, which included the consecration of the foundations of an Orthodox church, was used by Vuk Draskovic to legitimate his opposition party (Serbian Renewal Movement) in terms of all the "warriors who have lost their lives for the homeland and freedom."

265 This is not to suggest that Pavle necessarily supported the political objectives of the Zajedno opposition movement. Rather, his opposition stemmed from Milosevic's perceived betrayal of the nationalist aspirations for a Greater Serbia. Pavle had supported Milosevic during the 1992-1995 Bosnian war but had withdrawn that support after the Dayton peace accords seemed to put an end the dream of a Greater Serbia. See Dinmore, G. & Silber, L. (Belgrade) London Financial Times, 28th January 1997.
266 Barber, T. Independent, 28th January 1997.
church at Ravna Gora was dedicated to "the souls of all men from Ravna Gora, and
above all General Draza and all the Serb warriors who have laid down their lives for
the homeland since (the Battle of) Kosovo." The direct linking of the Battle of
Kosovo with the sacrifices of World War II is an essential element of the Kosovo
Myth as expressed by Milosevic. By staging counter-commemorative ceremonies
Draskovic was seeking to wrest control of the link between World War II experiences
and memory of the Battle of Kosovo away from Milosevic so that it became
accessible to underpin the legitimacy claims of the opposition Serbian Revival
Movement. The same site at Ravna Gora had been used by Vuk Draskovic to
commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. The occasion was
used more directly to link Croatia with Ustashe fascism and to conjure up Serbia's
collective memories of Jasenovac. Draskovic stated that,

"we are living in sad days, because we are celebrating victory over fascism and Nazism while
Jasenovac, the largest Serb graveyard, is being trampled on by an army that does not hide its
spiritual and programme links to the Nazis who created Jasenovac."

Official Serb sensitivity to counter-World War II memories can be seen also in the
reaction to non-official commemorative ceremonies held in Vujvodina. Attempts by
the town of Subotica in Vujvodina to commemorate the deaths of some 40,000 ethnic
Hungarians on the 50th anniversary of their massacre by Yugoslav Partisans in
October - November 1944, did not gain official approval from Serbian authorities.

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269 Quoted by ibid.

270 BBC Monitoring Service: Central Europe & Balkans (Source: Tanjug News Agency, Belgrade, 15th May

271 BBC Monitoring Service: Central Europe & Balkans (Source: Hungarian TV1, Budapest, 2nd November
1994) 3rd November 1994. Serbian authorities "ordered the memorial to be destroyed within 24 hours, for ... the
appropriate building permission had not been obtained." ibid.
9. The Destruction of Memory

I have argued throughout my chapter that the Serbian past, as represented and communicated through the Kosovo Myth is an authoritative source of legitimation. The Serbian past is an image; a symbolic construct created by collective memory and given normative meaning by tradition. It is through the Vidovdan commemorative process that the Serbian past is sacralised and it is such a symbolic sacralised past that is communicated through the Kosovo Myth. The legitimating authority of the past, as communicated through the Kosovo Myth, rests on collective memory. Control over collective memory is therefore an important criteria for the legitimating claims of any political community. I argue that the importance of controlling collective memory and hence, the past, can be gauged by the level of destruction of cultural heritage sites during the Bosnian War. The Bosnian War was a cultural war fought over the ‘territory’ of collective memory. As Chapman states,

in a cultural war, the conquest of territories and the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of settlements is insufficient. Nothing less than the destruction of past historical identities is needed. If the identities between past nations and their landscapes are best symbolised by their monuments, it is these monuments which have been prime targets in this cultural war.272

The level of destruction of memory sites is an indicator of how important control over collective memory was for rival communities battling to impose their own memories on the political landscape.

Although significant cultural heritage sites were targeted deliberately in past wars such as the Louvain Library\textsuperscript{273} and Old Warsaw\textsuperscript{274}, the systematic destruction of a people's cultural heritage is a relatively recent phenomenon. A characteristic feature of the Bosnian war of 1992-1995 was the destruction of cultural heritage which was a primary aim for ethnoreligious nationalists. Heritage was a target because a "people's identity is inextricably linked with the visible symbols of their culture. Once those anchors are gone, the past, like the future, can be recreated by the victors."\textsuperscript{275} Thus, the Bosnian war was "a conflict about cultural identity and traditions,"\textsuperscript{276} a conflict that aimed to sever the link between identity and heritage.

The war was a 'cultural catastrophe'\textsuperscript{277} for "what the Serb and Croat armies were destroying...was the graphic and palpable evidence of over 500 years of interreligious life in Bosnia."\textsuperscript{278} The war was a war on collective memory and the significant sites that gave meaning to that memory. Part of that memory is the reality

\textsuperscript{273} Louvain was burnt as an act of reprisal in both World Wars I and II. Over 30,000 books and thousands of rare manuscripts were destroyed. Restoring the library was incorporated into the terms of the Versailles Peace Treaty. Riedlmayer, A. \textit{It Has Been Done Before! Reconstituting War-Ravaged Libraries – The Louvain Library in Belgium}, http://www.applicom.com/manu/preced.htm

\textsuperscript{274} Hitler ordered the destruction of Warsaw following the Warsaw uprising, including all monuments of culture and the Royal Castle. An exact replica of the old centre of Warsaw was reconstructed and in 1971 the castle was reopened. See Lowenthal, D. \textit{The Past is a Foreign Country}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988.


\textsuperscript{277} "Damage and destruction to more than 2,000 culturally significant works of architecture during the war: 1,115 mosques, 309 Catholic churches, 36 Serbian Orthodox churches, and 1,079 other public buildings." Herscher, A. \textit{‘Remembering and Rebuilding in Bosnia’}, \textit{Transitions}, Vol. 5 no. 3, 1998, http://www.haverford.edu/relg/sells/mostar/Mostartransition.html

\textsuperscript{278} Sells, M.A. \textit{op cit}, 1998, p. 4.
of a multicultural society. "The history that is being erased, both buildings and
documents, speak eloquently of centuries of pluralism and tolerance in Bosnia. It is
this evidence of a successfully – shared past that the nationalists seek to destroy."279

John Chapman points out that,

the physical and social landscape of a region is more than a palimpsest of long-term
settlement features; it is an imprint of community action, structure and power on place. The
significance of place in the landscape is related to place-value created by individuals and
groups through associations with deeds of the past- whether heroic and transient or
commonplace and repeated.280

It is no accident that entire historic districts were targeted for destruction in cities
throughout Bosnia Herzegovina, for these cities provided visual evidence of the
multi-ethnic reality of Bosnian society. As Riedlmayer states, "the siting of
architecture is an intentional, thoughtful, political act. People who cannot abide the
sight of each other will not build the houses and monuments of their religious life in
the shadows of those of the others."281 The destruction of such a symbolic landscape
thus becomes a priority for ethnoreligious nationalists. As well as destroying historic
monuments in cities, entire areas were ‘cleansed’ of people and any cultural traces of
prior historical ownership.

Thus, Bosnian Serbs and Croats attempted not only to conquer territory by vanquishing the
Bosnian Muslim army that defended it, but also to legitimise their conquests by eliminating
the evidence that called their claims into question: indigenous Muslim communities and the
architectural environments they inhabited.282

279 Riedlmayer, A. op cit.
280 Chapman, J. ‘op cit, p. 120.
281 Riedlmayer, A. ‘Killing Memory: The Targeting of Bosnia’s Cultural Heritage’ op cit.
282 Herscher, A. op cit.
The war was a war against the past, a past that had to be completely eradicated in order to legitimate the present.

Before inventing a new past, the old must be erased. The destruction of a community’s past, of its institutions and records is, in the first instance, part of a strategy of intimidation aimed at driving out members of the targeted group. But it also serves another long-term goal. These buildings and records were proof that non-Serbs once resided and owned property in that place, that they had historical roots there. By burning the documents, by razing mosques and Catholic churches and bulldozing the graveyards, the nationalist forces who have now taken over these towns and villages are trying to insure themselves against any future claims by the people they have driven out and dispossessed.

To achieve such an aim cultural heritage sites throughout Bosnia Herzegovina became targets for destruction.

I will use three examples of the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage sites to illustrate the nature of the war against collective memory. First, Stari Most (Mostar Bridge) and the Old Town of Mostar were destroyed because they symbolised the common heritage of a multi ethnic people that ethnoreligious nationalists wished to eradicate. Second, the libraries and museums of Sarajevo were targeted because they contained the published memory of a multi ethnic people. The third example is the ethnic and ‘cultural cleansing’ of Pocitelj to remove all traces of a previous people. Together, these three examples demonstrate the extent of the attack on collective memory.

\[283\] Riedlmayer, A. _op cit._
Mostar’s long-standing multi-ethnic heritage was reflected in a rich variety of churches, mosques, monuments and architectural styles. Because of its cultural significance, the destruction of the Old Town of Mostar became a primary war aim of the besieging Croatian forces. Stari Most, Mostar’s famous bridge spanning the Neretva River was the centrepiece of the city’s cultural heritage. Built by the Ottomans between 1557 and 1566, Stari Most was classified as an “exemplary achievement of sixteenth century technology and aesthetics.”[^284] More importantly, Stari Most bridge embodied the very concept of a ‘bridge’. It not only connected the two sides of a river bounded by steep cliffs. It also merged two neighborhoods into a single town and brought two groups together into one community. It had done so for more than four hundred years.^[285] Stari Most transcended its functional role as a bridge to become a symbol of the mixed but common heritage of the people of Mostar. Beyond Mostar, Stari Most “had stood since 1561 as a symbol of Bosnia’s role in bridging cultures.”[^286] As a heritage site of considerable cultural and symbolic significance, Stari Most became a target for destruction by Croatian militia. “When it finally fell, after being shelled by a tank at point-blank range, militiamen cheered and fired their guns in the air, celebrating the destruction of a span that had come to symbolise the idea of a multicultural Bosnia.”[^287] The symbolic significance of Stari Most was also noted by Silber and Little.

[^285]: ibid.
[^286]: Sells, op cit, p.278
[^287]: Quoted by Dodds, J.D. ‘Bridge Over the Neretva’, Archaeological Institute of America, Vol.51, No.1, 1998, http://www.archaeology.org/9801/abstracts/bosnia.html “By eerie coincidence it was the 55th anniversary of
In a war in which multi-ethnicity was itself the enemy, the destruction of the bridge appeared to mirror that of the multi-ethnic ideal of Bosnia – a place almost defined by bridge-building – between communities, between nationalities, between faiths. For Bosnians there was no stronger image of the country they were trying to build. The Bosnian Government declared a day of mourning.288

To Glenny, “this single act seemed to represent the utter senselessness and misery of the entire conflict.”289 In trying to understand the outpouring of grief for the destruction of Stari Most Slavenka Drakulic concluded that, “with all of its beauty and grace, [it] was built to outlive us. Because it was a product of both individual creativity and collective experience, it transcended our individual destiny.”290

Just as the multi-ethnic architectural heritage of Mostar was an affront to Croatian forces, so was Sarajevo’s old district to Serbian nationalists in the surrounding hills. The concentration of mosques, Catholic and Orthodox churches, a Synagogue and other buildings of cultural significance into an area of one fifth of a square kilometre291 made the district an ideal target for destruction. The destruction of Sarajevo’s architectural heritage was compounded by the deliberate destruction of libraries and museums. It was an attack on the collective memory of both the city and Bosnia. As the chief librarian, Kujundzic stated, “the written records in various languages and scripts were witnesses to the multiethnic, multicultural, and multi-

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288 Silber, L. & Little, A. op cit, p.323.
289 Glenny, M. op cit, p.646.
290 Quoted by Dodds, J.D. op cit.
religious character of Bosnia and Herzegovina.”

The destruction of the National Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina was well summed up by Riedlmayer at a ‘Hearing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe’ in April 1995.

In August 1992, it was shelled and burned. Bombarded for three days with incendiary grenades from Serb nationalist positions across the river, it was reduced to ashes along with most of its irreplaceable contents. Before the fire, the library held 1.5 million volumes, including 155,000 rare books and manuscripts, 100 years of Bosnian newspapers and periodicals, and the collections of the University of Sarajevo. 90% of the library’s collection went up in flames in this, the largest single act of book-burning in modern history.

Also targeted for destruction was Sarajevo’s Oriental Institute. Once again Riedlmayer’s description sums up the level of destruction.

Losses included 5,263 bound manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Hebrew, and Adzamijski (Bosnian Slavic written in Arabic script); an archive of 7,000 Ottoman documents, primary source material for five centuries of Bosnia’s history; a collection of 19th-century cadastral registers; and 200,000 other documents of the Ottoman era, including microfilm copies of originals in private hands or obtained on exchange from foreign institutions. The Institute’s collection of printed books, the most comprehensive library on its subject in the region, was also destroyed as was its catalogue and all work in progress.

It is for the destruction of Sarajevo’s libraries that there is once more a call to include ‘cultural genocide’ as an indictable war crime. There have been attempts to counter the calculated destruction of memory in Sarajevo. For example, a plan called ‘Fighting the Destruction of Memory’ aims to create a ‘virtual’ manuscript

293 Riedlmayer, A. op cit.
collection. The reassembling of the destroyed collections of the Bosnian National Library and the Oriental Institute of Sarajevo is of critical cultural significance as these libraries had contained the historical memory of Bosnia as a multiethnic society. The project is already well under way, although like Mostar, Sarajevo no longer actually represents the multiethnic society that its library will attempt to represent.

The small picturesque settlement of Pocitelj is but one example of the destruction of cultural monuments that accompanied ‘ethnic cleansing’ and the subsequent denial that the town ever had a multi-ethnic history. Pocitelj has a high profile as an endangered heritage site of international significance because it is seen as a unique example of Ottoman layout and architecture. Pocitelj had had a mixed population of Muslims and Christians for over 500 years. During the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of Muslims from this area in 1993, Croatian troops “blew up the ancient mosque, the Islamic theological school, the Turkish baths, (and) the elegant houses built by eighteenth-century Muslim notables.”296 By removing all traces of Pocitelj’s Muslim past along with its Muslim population, authorities could claim that there never was a Muslim presence in the area. In Orwellian fashion, “the Herceg-Bosna authorities are now attempting to rewrite the history of Pocitelj. In spring 1996, a

296 Riedlmayer, A. ‘Killing Memory: The Targeting of Bosnia’s Cultural Heritage’ op cit.
conference was organised in nearby Capljina on the ‘Historical development of Croat Pocitelj.’”

Important memory sites in places such as Mostar, Sarajevo and Pocitelj were attacked and destroyed in an attempt to sever the link between a community’s identity and its heritage. Cultural heritage sites are important to the maintenance and renewal of a community’s collective memory and hence its identity. In a cultural war fought to control the past, the physical evidence of that past became a ‘legitimate’ military target. The war on collective memory therefore included those symbolically significant cultural sites in the political landscape that gave meaning to a community’s collective memory.

10. Conclusion

I have used a detailed analysis of the Kosovo Myth to provide a current context for an examination of modern political myth. Cassirer’s The Myth of The State was written as a response to political myth-making in Nazi Germany. Cassirer’s rational analysis of political myth was written to forewarn the next generation of political leaders, policy-makers and intellectuals of the danger of underestimating and not taking seriously the legitimating potential of political myth. Cassirer’s concern was that unless political myth was treated seriously its re-emergence in times of

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297 Sells, M.A. *op cit.* p.104. Sells also uses the destruction of heritage sites in Zvornik as an example of ‘cultural cleansing’. See *ibid.*, p. 4.
social stress could lead to a repeat of the cultural catastrophe that engulfed Germany under National Socialism. I argue that the emergence of the Kosovo Myth as an authoritative source of legitimation was a contributing factor in the cultural catastrophe that overwhelmed Serbia during the last decade of the twentieth century. I contend that Cassirer's warning about the inherent dangers of political myth for modern societies still stands at the beginning of the twenty first century.

I therefore intend to extend Cassirer's original study of political myth to include a number of characteristics of modern political myth highlighted by the Kosovo Myth, but not analysed in *The Myth of The State*. The Kosovo Myth highlighted three characteristics of modern political myths that need to be given a theoretical foundation. First, the important role played by collective memory in a community's representation of the past. Closely associated with collective memory are memory sites, cultural artifacts and relics that 'contain' the memory of a community. Second, the role played by tradition in giving collective memory normative meaning. Third, the importance of commemoration to the process of sacralising the past. Each of these characteristics; memory, tradition and commemoration will be extensively analysed in the remaining chapters of this study of political myth.

By extending Cassirer's original study to include memory, tradition and commemoration I provide the theoretical basis towards a reconceptualisation of
political myth. My objective is essentially that of Cassirer: to provide a theoretical framework for understanding modern political myth so that myth may be successfully confronted wherever it emerges as a source of legitimation. I argue that a consciously ‘constructed’ symbolic past communicated through political myth is both spurious and illusory and is contrived by political and cultural elites to mask unresolved legitimacy deficits in modern societies.

The Kosovo Myth is an extreme example, but I agree with Cassirer that political myth lies dormant in every society and can emerge to provide a simulated, ersatz form of legitimacy in times of social stress. Not all communities face the social stress engendered by ethno-religious conflict, but all communities must face social stresses arising out of globalisation. I argue that the temptation for elites to turn to political myth to compensate for deep-seated legitimacy problems is to great for even the most politically sophisticated community to be complacent about the emergence of political myths in modern societies.