

War Heritage: Different Perceptions of the Dominant Discourse among Visitors to the "Adem Jashari" Memorial Complex in Prekaz, Kosovo

Zana Llonçari Osmani, Nita Llonçari

Abstract—The paper delves into the significance of the Prekaz Memorial in Kosovo's national identity formation, particularly regarding the traumatic events of the 1998-99 War. The spatial layout and architectural features of the Memorial are analysed, focusing on its role as a place of remembrance and hope. Through qualitative surveys and critical discourse analysis, the essay explores visitor perceptions of the Memorial's narrative and design elements. Factors such as geographical, emotional, and temporal proximity to the war influence visitors' interpretations, with varying degrees of emphasis on loss, sacrifice, and patriotism. It highlights the Memorial's ability to evoke emotions of pride and sadness among visitors, underscoring the power of authentic artefacts in shaping collective memory. However, the paper also criticizes the Memorial's dominant discourse and advocates for a more inclusive approach to memorialization, one that acknowledges all facets of history and ensures that no story is left untold or forgotten. Despite its success in solidifying its place in society, the essay calls for the Memorial's evolution towards a more comprehensive and dynamic dialogue to resonate with future generations. The essay stresses the importance of memorialization efforts in honouring the past, fostering healing, and promoting inclusive dialogue. It argues for a broader narrative scope that encompasses diverse perspectives, thus ensuring the vitality and relevance of historical memory for generations to come.

Keywords—Critical discourse analysis, memorialisation, national discourse, public rhetoric, war tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

PUBLIC rhetoric and popular sentiment in Kosovo position the War of 1998-99 (the war) as central to the formation of contemporary Kosovo's national identity. Amongst, forced massive displacement of Kosovo Albanians, the destruction of entire settlements, the loss of family members and the immense emotional trauma of civilians and, most of all, those who, as members of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), played an active part in the war. The capping event that preceded the last struggles of 1999 and long-awaited independence is considered the Prekaz Massacre (The Massacre).

This research investigates the varying interpretations of the dominant discourse surrounding The Memorial among different visitors, and explores the factors that shape their perceptions. Due to the chosen survey dissemination mode and time constrains the research investigated only set of responses from the questionnaires disseminated only through social media, which might extend in various ways. Future research is

Zana Llonçari Osmani, a conservation architect, is currently a PhD student in Heritage Conservation at the University of Hertfordshire, UK (e-mail: zana.llonchari@hotmail.com)

encouraged to investigate a wider sample through employment of other dissemination strategies

A. The Historical Context of the Memorial

Kosovo is a tiny place with a small population, yet it was the reason that NATO fought its first war [1] in 1999. Divided between Serbia and Montenegro in 1912, Kosovo, as an ethnic Albanian territory, has spent half of its time since under the Apartheid-like regime [2], which culminated in ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The capping event was The Massacre, which preceded the first NATO war and Kosovo's long-awaited independence. It refers to the atrocity that took place between the 5th to 7th of March 1998 in Prekaz (Skenderaj, Kosovo), where Serbian Special Forces killed the KLA leader Adem Jashari and his brother Hamëz along with nearly 60 other family members, leaving behind the only survivor – Besarta a nine-year-old girl [3], [4].

B. The National Discourse and the Establishment of the Memorial

National identities can be strongly influenced by national stories that promote kinship, even as individuals within a nation carry dissimilar histories [5] Memory, on the other hand, will fight tenaciously to not always be defeated. Indeed, the lack of "institutional support" and "social frameworks of remembrance" contribute to the changing and forgetting of the past, which otherwise should support the reinforcement of collective memory [6]. Therefore, to create a social framework of remembrance for those who died in the Prekaz Massacre, to record this battle as the determinant of the future of Kosovo Albanians, which returned their dignity and inspired every patriot, the national institutions established the Memorial Complex "Adem Jashari" in Prekaz (The Memorial).

The national institutions' have judged the landscape to have ontological, anthropological, historical, and cultural significance for the citizens of Kosovo, subsequently designated it as being of a "special national interest" formalised as such by Law no. 2004/39 on the announcement of the Memorial Complex with a Special National Interest, "Adem Jashari," in Prekaz [7].

The adopted national discourse by law regards The Memorial as significant for Kosovo and Albania Nation. The

Nita Llonçari is a cultural heritage working at the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport in Kosovo (e-mail: nita@llonçari.com).

phenomenon that considers Kosovo Albanian and the vast Albanian Nation to have been equally affected by the war is not only encountered in common discussions but also in academic literature and even in legislative documents.

The national discourse on The Memorial is part of the collective memory of many Kosovo Albanians; even the majority of young generations and those raised abroad experience The Memorial as important to their national identity. The finding of this study indicates the geographical, emotional and time proximity of people to the war, such as being affected directly by it, by having lived, understood, had family connections with the KLA in wartime or survived a massacre, relates to stronger emotional link with The Memorial.

However, since the patriotic cause of the Jashari Family, who sacrificed themselves for freedom, is deeply embodied in the national discourse of The Memorial, therefore, is currently being perceived as a universal value for the entire Albanian Nation. Research into mass media and the book of impressions on The Memorial found that they were as likely to contain appreciation for the sacrifice and indication of an emotional link with patriotism and national cause followed by the Jashari Family as Kosovo Albanians who were directly affected by the war. This occurrence is epitomised in the words of Albanian journalist, Blendi Fevziu, "sOn the foundations of the state of

Kosovo and on the well-being of Albanians in Albania and Kosovo lies the sacrifice of the (Jashari) family who decided to resist... live free or die" [8].

C. The Spatial Concept and the Layout of the Memorial

The Memorial consists of 450 hectares and, according to the conceptual plan for the Memorial Complex "Adem Jashari" in Prekaz, comprises three main spaces:

- 1) The group of three houses used as a fortification.
- 2) The burial ground of the martyrs of the Jashari neighbourhood.
- 3) And the Museum.

The three houses where the Jashari family were sheltered during the operation were built for housing purposes and never thought of as defensive structures. Today in ruins, the compound of houses as the main crime scene and primary evidence of the war has been musealised as a physical re-creation of past atrocities. While the numerous shelling damages and bullet holes stand as wounds of remembrance, according to the Statement of the Significance (2021) of The Memorial, the open Museum on the other hand, proves the lifelong defence of the national cause, which expresses the unwavering will, desire and sacrifice for Human Rights and Freedoms and has therefore, been marked at the entrance by a white marble monument to dedicated to Adem Jashari, Fig. 1.



Fig. 1 The three houses and the white marble monument [9]

The burial ground of the victims of the Jashari neighbourhood symbolises the last witnesses of the war and demonstrates the senseless mass death and the violence of the Kosovo War. The gravestones contain a permanent label with the first and last name, birth date together with the date of death. Representing a place of mourning and remembrance, guarded by soldiers, it serves as a solemn reminder of the massacre, Fig. 2.

The Museum, a three-sided building, mimicking a pyramid, like a phoenix rising from the ashes, has been designed to symbolise hope and prosperity (see Fig. 3), which also serves a political purpose, producing an optimistic view of the Nation's future [11].

The implemented spatial and architectural project through specially designed contemporary architectural features intended to create:

- 1) A temple of peace, through honouring the martyrs,
- 2) A place of culture through enabling cultural activities,
- 3) A place of hope through the promotion of optimism and the meaning of life,
- 4) A place where the presence of the tragedy induces dignity for the newly independent Kosovo but also signals the end of tragedies through the affirmation of new urban culture.

The solution focuses on visually and functionally connecting two main points of the centre, the three houses and the burial ground. Placing an information point at the centre's entrance

directs attention to the burial ground and enables visitors to be guided towards it and then to the three houses.



Fig. 2 The burial ground [10]



Fig. 3 The museum [12]

The implemented project was conceptualised in such a way as to highlight elements of historical palimpsest of The Memorial landscape, which are not necessarily related to the event of the Prekaz Massacre, with a tendency to direct the narrative in favour of promoting national unity and fraternity. However, the interpretation related to the war is dominant according to the results of the questionnaires.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study examines how different local and foreign visitors perceive the national discourse of The Memorial and what factors influence their perception.

Firstly, desk-based research was conducted to define relevant surveying methods and adequate questions. As a result, a qualitative questionnaire was designed with questions mainly grouped into the three pre-defined proximity factors:

time, geographical and emotional proximity of the respondent to the Memorial.

The first factor refers to the age of the respondents during the war, the age when they first heard about the Massacre, and their age at their first visit to The Memorial. While geographical proximity refers to the respondents' current country of residency as well as the country of residency during the war including their proximity to a warzone within Kosovo; the emotional proximity refers to the personal and family connections with the war, and how they were affected by the visit to The Memorial and why and if this is related to the reason of the visit and accompanying visitors (especially children); time proximity refers mostly to the age of the respondents during war time. Respondents were divided in three age groups indicating their maturity and ability to remember war time. However, time proximity also refers to

when respondents had first heard of or first visited The Memorial Site.

13 open-ended questions were presented to local visitors via online survey tool, alongside eight quantitative survey questions. To widen the sample and generate comparable qualitative data, this research also made use of critical discourse analysis of recorded impressions of visitors in three Books of impressions on The Memorial. The sample was set based on likelihood of the data to fill the research gaps, for example: to widen the geographical reach, to increase the sample of people visiting with children and to include a wider range of different profiles that were unlikely to be reached by other research means. The survey generated 70 responses in two languages. The data generated from the online survey of The Memorial canvassed a range of issues, including their sense of being an Albanian, their relationship to The Memorial narration, the role of The Memorial and experiences with its existing layout

Finally, after having recognised that for the majority of the respondents, the most important sources of knowledge about The Massacre were the television, therefore to deepen the understanding on the effect that the national discourse of The Memorial has, mass media content analysis has been employed.

The gathered qualitative data were compared using cross-tabulation in qualitative data analysis software to discover patterns and relationships between visitor groups.

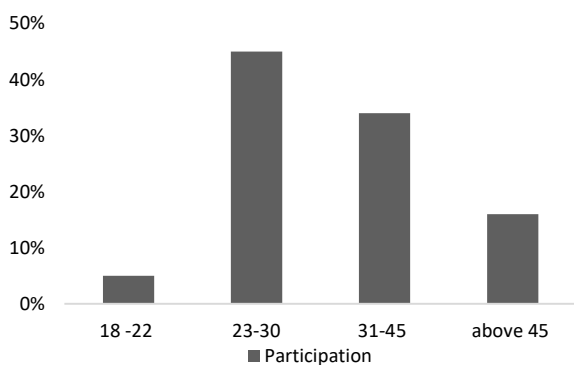


Fig. 4 Visitor impressions by visit type at the Prekaz massacre memorial

III. THE MEMORYSCAPE OF THE PREKAZ MASSACRE AFTER 22 YEARS

The place of residence during the war is the key indicator of the geographical proximity with the war, which combined with the age group sets out the bases for the emotional proximity. The questionnaire responses come from eight different municipalities in Kosovo and six other countries around the world. The mapping of the questionnaire respondents reflects the dispersion by age group: 18-22: have not experienced the war (~5%); 23-30: were too young to understand the war (~45%); 31-45: old enough to understand the war (~34%) and +45: more likely to have had a family of their own (~16%) (as in Fig. 4).

It is likely that the profile of social media users, through which the questionnaire was disseminated, is one explanation for a low response from +45 age group. Also low response from 18-22 age group is considered to come because of not having experienced the war. Consequently, the reach of the research was considered limited and therefore through extensive desk-based research more data, from at least 10 additional countries, were collected and analysed.

The Memorial has become part of historical memory; it is included in history textbooks and serves as a pedagogical venue for organised school visits. Therefore, the respondents were also asked about having visited The Memorial with children; and ~26% have visited with children and have given their view on how children have perceived The Memorial. While most of the respondents who have not visited The Memorial with children claim their interest in visiting the Memorial in the future when the children are old enough to understand its importance, a few feel that they should not expose the children to narratives of war sacrifice. However, children most often honour the fallen and in more than one case claim to feel grateful towards the Jashari family for the today's freedom. As indicated by the responses, this is because the children in most of the cases visit the Memorial as a part of an organised groups, such as school excursions (~36% of all visits), which are guided by The Memorial narrator whose interpretation is limited to the adopted narrative especially tailored to instil a sense of patriotism and pride (as in Fig. 5).

A cross analysis of the data related to what occasion have the respondents' visited The Memorial and which part of the Memorial impressed them the most, show similar results for cases of organised visits with an agenda.

Results of the data analysis reveals that, during group visits with professional tour guides, the KLA Epopee or during visits with political agenda on National Holidays, visitors are mostly affected by parts of The Memorial that represent loss (60% of the visitors mention the three houses followed by other approx. 22% mentioning the bullet holes). While in cases of visits on no particular event the visitors have been left with a stronger impression for The Memorial as a whole. However, given that such responses mainly lack further explanation it can be associated with lack of verbal narration and on site information or simply due to lack of interest to respond appropriately (as shown in Table I).

The former is not a surprising outcome considering the adopted narrative for The Memorial by the guides strongly focuses on the loss and sacrifice, especially that of women and children even claiming that "it was their choice not to leave the men die alone" [13].

Considering the outcomes, one can argue that the Three Houses as the only remaining architectural structures, where unspeakable things happened, are witness of the productive acts of a community, including conflict and violence. Bullet holes, on the other hand, could represent traces of faded lives but as in written language, voids between words, lines, paragraphs and chapters, enable the reader to fill in their own meanings.

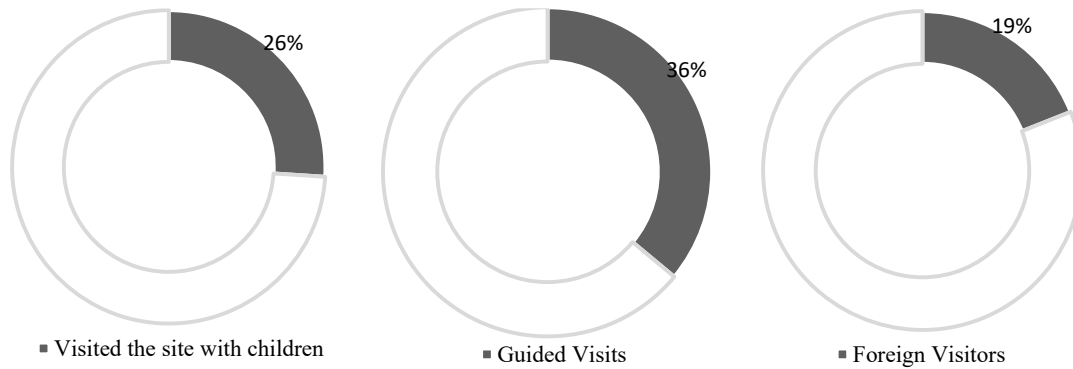


Fig. 5 Sample profile

TABLE I
 VISITOR IMPRESSIONS BY VISIT TYPE AT THE PREKAZ MASSACRE MEMORIAL

	Group Visits	Institutionalised commemoration	No particular event
Burial ground	11.76%	0%	15.38%
The belongings	5.88%	0%	7.69%
The bullet holes	11.76%	33.33%	0%
The Memorial as a whole	5.88%	0%	38.46%
The museum	5.88%	0%	0%
The room where Besarta hid	0%	0%	7.69%
The shelter	0%	0%	15.38%
The three houses	58.82%	66.67%	15.38%

Interestingly, though on the base of the adopted narrative for The Memorial stands the story of Besarta, the only survivor of the massacre, who also is a central figure of the mass media narratives seems not to have left much often impression on visitor. Even though the adopted verbal narrative on The Memorial puts much emphasis on Besarta's story, the research shows that the design has failed to integrate the story on its physical narrative. Despite much interest shown during the visit for the story of Besarta, in the end only ~8% of the respondents have claimed to have been left with an impression by parts of The Memorial that relate to it - which can be linked to the lack of the material incarnation of her story.

What the research data further reveal is that most commonly The Memorial triggers feelings of pride amongst visitors, on ~90% of all participants, closely followed by sadness, with ~80%, that is the most common impression with which the foreign visitors are left with. Unusually, it is not rare to encounter claims of appreciation for the sacrifice of Jashari Family and the peace that came after it, which proves that The Memorial has transcendent values, which help in achieving the public goals as a site of persuasion.

However, it is apparent that during institutionalised commemorations with a mnemonic scheme the focus turns towards remaining elements representing original signs connected to loss rather than purposefully designed elements to induce the adopted narrative of The Memorial. The institutionalised commemorations of the events of 1998 in Prekaz fall within a nationwide framework of social memory that transforms this particular event into a celebration of all other KLA heroes who sacrificed their lives for Kosovo. Remembering inevitably entails the concurrent act of forgetting

certain events and aspects associated with the remembered events that lie outside the 'social framework of memory.' [14] While considerable resources went into The Memorial for the memorialization of Adem Jashari, the other fallen, and the celebration of freedom, Besarta, the only survivor of the Prekaz Massacre, remains without material representation, despite symbolizing the experiences of all other war veterans and victims. While apparent that mnemonic schemes as the driving force behind the collective memory, focus on fallen heroes, while those who have survived risk to be forgotten.

If the visitor's perception of the memoryscape of the Prekaz Massacre is shaped mainly by the original material remains, which seems to better manifest the events of 1998, rather than the conventional symbols and figurative representations that have been designed to represent the events and all their positive outcomes it raises questions about the role of design in shaping visitor perceptions.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of the Prekaz Memorial demonstrates the profound impact of memorials on collective memory, national identity, and the individual's understanding of past events. While the memorial serves as a poignant reminder of the sacrifices made for freedom, it inadvertently highlights the selective nature of collective memory, privileging some narratives over others. The overshadowing of survivors, exemplified by the story of Besarta, is a stark reminder of how memory and memorialization practices can marginalize the very individuals they seek to honour.

The emotional resonance of the site, enhanced by the original materials bearing witness to the violence, underscores the importance of authenticity in historical representation. These materials do not just stand as markers of the past but are powerful tools that evoke deep emotional responses, which transcend nationality and other divisions. They form the core of the memorial's ability to influence visitor perceptions, serving as silent yet potent narrators of history.

The findings of this paper suggest that while the design elements of memorials are significant, they pale in comparison to the impact of authentic, tangible remnants of the past. Memorials like Prekaz should strive to integrate the stories of all affected—both the fallen and the survivors—to ensure a

comprehensive and inclusive narrative. As a site of persuasion and a catalyst for public dialogue, The Memorial has successfully solidified its place within the social and educational fabric of society. However, for memorials to truly serve their purpose, they must evolve to reflect all facets of history, enabling visitors to engage with the full spectrum of past experiences.

In moving forward, it is imperative that memorialization efforts encompass a broader narrative scope. By doing so, they will not only honour those who have suffered or sacrificed but will also provide a space for healing, learning, and reflection for future generations. The memory of Prekaz, and indeed any historical event, should not be static but rather a dynamic and inclusive dialogue between the past and the present, ensuring that no story, no matter how small, is left untold or forgotten.

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Zana Llonçari Osmani, born on April 23, 1987, in Prishtina, Kosovo, is a distinguished conservation architect and a dedicated advocate for the preservation of cultural heritage. She holds a Bachelor of Architecture from the Faculty of Civil Engineering and Architecture at the Public University of Prishtina and pursued an MSc in Historic Conservation from Oxford Brookes University, UK. Zana further honed her expertise through a certification

program at Ritsumeikan University in Japan, focusing on the Conservation and Risk Management of Historic Towns. Currently, Zana is a dedicated PhD student in the field of heritage conservation. She is pursuing a Professional Doctorate in Heritage (DHeritage) at the University of Hertfordshire in the United Kingdom

Professionally, Zana has served as a Cultural Promotion Officer at the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports in Kosovo. Zana has received accolades such as The Trevor Osborne Property Group Prize and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors South East Student Award. Zana is a member of ICOMOS, ACSH, TICCIH.

Nita Llonçari, born on January 18, 1997, in Prishtina, Kosovo, is a distinguished professional in cultural diplomacy and heritage. Holding a Master of Arts in Heritage Studies from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, her focus lies in the intersection of heritage and modern infrastructure in Prishtina. With a diverse career, Nita has engaged in architectural internships and held pivotal government roles, shaping cultural diplomacy. She actively contributes to national working groups, emphasizing creative industries and media development.

As an advocate for cultural heritage, Nita presented her thesis on the Transportation Landscape of Prishtina at Leiden University's "Landscape Biography" seminar. Her roles in policy-making and international heritage platforms showcase her dedication to global cultural heritage promotion and preservation. Nita is a member of ACSH, Docomomo, TICCIH.