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**THE ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL RELIGION IN THE
POST-CONFLICT SOCIETY OF KOSOVO**

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Abstract: This paper explores the ethnonationalist narrative that was built in post-conflict Kosovo from 1998-1999. In this discursive period, Kosovo Albanians used the vocabulary, rhetoric and images of early Albanian nationalism borrowed from the European nationalism from the times of the world wars. Among them, the discourse of political religion occupies the central position in which political and historical events undergo a process of sacralization, and these events thus assume the characteristics of a mystic reality. The Kosovan narrative of the Kosovo Liberation Army and its key figures bear all the elements of a developing political religion. This paper analyses the fundamental ideas of this narrative, starting with the general concept of political religion elaborated by various authors from the field of philosophy and social sciences and then contextualizing this concept within Albanian nationalism to finally analyse its re-emergence in nationalistic mythology that was built in post-conflict Kosovo.

Key words: Ethnonationalist narrative, political religion, sacralization, mystic reality, the Kosovo Liberation Army.

1. The Concept of Political Religion

Within the framework of numerous interdisciplinary studies on processes, developments and phenomena of modernity, one of the most commonly used concepts is that of *political religion*. This concept has been developed as a result of many efforts to explain the character of cultural, political and intellectual transformations of modernity. One of these transformations is the process of secularization, during which the spheres that make up a society gradually break away from the control and the hegemony of religion.

Amongst theoretical approaches that deal with the interpretation of this process, two that have long dominated the debate over this issue can be distinguished. One is the approach of the German philosopher Karl Lowith, while the other one is that of the philosopher Hans Blumenberg. While Blumenberg insists on the idea that the modernity and secularization as its essential feature are original creations of the new era (Blumenberg 1985), Lowith develops the idea that modernity is an expression of Judeo-Christian secularization and eschatological mythology (Lowith 1957).

The basis of this belief is that the contents, ideas, images and symbols of Jewish-Christian eschatology are not eliminated during the process of secularization, but rather they only take secular forms. This leads to the emergence of modern philosophies and ideologies that develop claims for the ultimate resolution of the problems posed by traditional religions, such as the problem of understanding the world and its moral order. It is precisely these claims that make these modern ideologies appear in the role of substitutes and successors of traditional religion. The concept of political religion is the concept that chiefly summarizes these claims. Carl Schmitt in his work *Political Theology* argues that all modern political concepts are the secularization of religious concepts (Schmitt 2010, 1).

In conceptual history, the authorship for the idea of political religion is attributed to the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who, in his well-known “The Social Contract”, argues that the legitimacy of a post-religious civil order requires a certain level of religious experience of this order by citizens (Rousseau 2002, 245-253).

Meanwhile, the term political religion began to be used by scholars during the twentieth century, apparently during the rise of great ideologies such as fascism and communism that came to power in the first half of the last century.

French sociologist Raymond Aron (Aron 2003, 177-201) and Austrian historian Eric Voegelin were among the first scholars to use this notion (Voegelin 2000). They and many others notice the process of a re-emerging religious dimension in politics. They identify this re-emergence as *the sacralization of politics*. This sacralization transposes modern politics from the field of liberal understanding, where politics is reduced to an

administration of rules of the free capitalist market in the metaphysical field within which politics undertake the effort to find final solutions on issues dealing with the human fate, society and humanity.

Emilio Gentile, one of the most renowned contemporary scholars of this phenomenon, insists on its essentially modern character. For Gentile, the sacralization of politics must be distinguished from all premodern patterns of building up the relationship between politics and religion. It is a distinct model from the Caesaropapism model, in which the two political and spiritual authorities are united according to the formula in which the church is subordinate to the state, but also from the opposite model, the theocratic model, in which political power is subordinate to religious authority (Gentile 2017, 22).

Further on, Gentile writes: "Historically, the sacralization of politics, ... is a phenomenon which has originated from the emergence of modern democracy and the mass politics. Its origins are democratic, republican and patriotic. Basically, the earliest forms of political religion have emerged during the American and French Revolution as a set of beliefs, values, myths, symbols and rites that have given a sacred character and meaning to new institutions of state sovereignty. Later on, cultural and political movements such as romanticism, idealism, positivism, nationalism, socialism, communism and racism, introduced as global concepts of human existence, have given an impetus to the spread of the sacralization of politics during the nineteenth century, taking on various shapes of secular religions, which sought to replace traditional religions with a new one for mankind" (Gentile 2017, 23).

Nationalism is unquestionably among these cultural and ideological movements of modernity, which manifested a direct form of sacralization of politics. Following its fundamental purpose of affirming the nation, nationalism "has used rather refined forms, complex of myths, rituals and symbols to bestow sacrality upon political institutions, to exalt the core principles and values of the nationalist community, to form and cultivate the collective identity of citizens, instilling them the sense of duty, loyalty and devotion to the state and nation" (Gentile 2017, 23). Starting from this, Gentile adds that nationalism has become the most universal witness to the sacralization of politics in the contemporary world.

Although it takes different forms in different social and historical contexts and societies, in general, nationalism as a narrative and discourse is created by appropriating the terminological apparatus, lecturing, and emotionality of religion (Hayes 2016, 164, 182).

During this appropriation, nationalism does nothing else but replace the subject of loyalty and social worship. One of the earliest examples of this loyalty replacement process is found in French nationalism, which during the French Revolution of 1789 built a powerful symbolism, whose function was to replace the holiness of Christianity with the sacralities of the French nation. A typical case that illustrates this is the replacement of

the Christian cult of the Mother of God (Saint Mary) with Marianne's national cult, which symbolized France as a god of freedom. Another case is the conversion of Paris's Notre Dame Cathedral, from a Christian temple to a worship temple of the supreme being, through which French revolutionaries identified the illuminating cult of reason. The Albanian nationalists would be inspired by this symbolism of French nationalism to build their own mythology. The monument Mother Albania, located in the martyrs' cemetery in Tirana is the perfect example of the French influence. If we look at this monument, we can see that it is a copy of the French monuments devoted to the God of Freedom. In this context, nationalism replaces the religious image of God's Sovereignty with the image of Nation's Sovereignty. This completely changes the formula of legitimacy of power; in the age of nationalism, power does not become legitimate by the divine will but by the will of the nation. The nation is transformed into a supreme being to which everything is subordinated and in the service of which is found Everyman. God's Altar is replaced by the Altar of the Nation. The divine sacrifice is replaced with sacrifice for the homeland. Church martyrs are replaced with nation's martyrs. Honouring the graves of the church saints is replaced by honouring the graves of the martyrs of the nation. In this context, as Gentile writes, "In the 20th century, the cult of martyrs was seen as the most universal manifestation of the sacralization of politics. Every country participating in the conflict, with the exception of Russia, witnessed the culminating moment of the sacralization of politics during the years of the Great War. Many contemporary states have raised the cult of the Unknown Soldier, a symbol of the fallen for the salvation of the homeland. In the cities and villages of the countries participating in World War I, the symbolic appearances of heroism and mercy, engraved in marble and bronze, immortalize the memory of martyrs, pursuant to the millennial model consecrated by Churches in celebration of saints and martyrs" (Gentile 2017:91).

2. Albanian Nationalism and the Cult of Fallen Soldiers in Post-war Kosovo

Albanian nationalism, whose origins we find in the second half of the 19th century, has developed while absorbing all the features of European nationalism, especially the German ethnocultural model in which language plays a key role in shaping national consciousness. The political principle of Albanian nationalism is the principle that Gellner records in his famous study of nationalism, *congruence between the political unit and the ethno-cultural unit* (Gellner 2008:1). Within the context of this report, the Albanian nationalism develops a specific that makes it distinct from other Balkan nationalisms. This specific relates to the fact that the Albanian

nationalism, in its project of building the Albanian national identity, could not be based on their traditional religious affiliation. This is because of the religious plurality: Albanians belong to three religions, Catholic Christianity, Orthodox Christianity, and Islam. Being divided into religious affiliations, the Albanian nationalism was bound to seek another element of unity, thanks to which Albanians could develop the feeling of being a unique nation with a common origin. And this element was found in the Albanian language, so the poets and intellectuals of the Albanian National Renaissance in the 19th century began to glorify and deify the Albanian language, presenting it as the language of the god. The most renowned Albanian National Renaissance poet, Naim Frashëri at that time would write the well-known poetry “Gjuha Jonë” (Our Language), where the Albanian language was epitomized as the language of god. (Frashëri 2007). In this deification of the Albanian language, the Albanian nationalists were inspired by German romanticism, led by Herder, who considered language as the most essential expression of the spirit of peoples, and not their religious affiliations. Meanwhile, other Balkan nationalisms developed another nationwide relationship with religion because they did not have the problem of religious plurality. Serbs, Greeks and Bulgarians, being homogeneous in religious affiliation, based their nation-building project on this affiliation. This was also influenced by the fact that Orthodox Christianity dominates the Caesar-papist model of regulating the relationship between state and religion. According to this model, religion is in function of the state; spiritual authority depends on political authority. While Albanians, being unable to pursue this model, were obliged to follow the model of French political religion in their process of nation-building, which sacralizes the nation and the German cultural model, which sacralizes the elements of ethnic culture such as language, myths, folk legends, and so on. The national problem of Kosovo Albanians from 1912 to 1999 is strictly related to the fact that this principle was not entirely fulfilled in 1912 because Kosovo remained outside the political boundaries of the Albanian state created at that time.

The Kosovo Liberation Army was founded precisely for the purpose of fulfilling this principle (see Perritt 2008). Its liberation war meant to include not only Kosovo but also the western and northern parts of Macedonia inhabited by Albanians, then a part of Montenegro, as well as northern Greece, known as the former Albanian Çamëria. The oath of the KLA said: “I, the soldier of the Kosovo Liberation Army, vow to fight for the liberation of Albanian lands and their unification. I will always be a faithful soldier, a worthy warrior of freedom, vigilant, courageous and disciplined, ready to fight and give my life at any time defending the sacred interests of my country. If I break this oath, I shall be punished with the toughest laws of war and if I betray, my blood shall be lost. I vow, I vow, I vow.” (A. Jashari 2014).

This entire platform was nurtured largely by the Albanian romantic nationalism of the 19th century, which had adopted the romantic views for the nation as an organic community that should be stretched to a compact territorial space.

During the post-war period in Kosovo, a rapid rise of its mythology in Kosovan society took place. The subject of this mythology was, first of all, the Kosovo Liberation Army, which began to be considered as a triumphal ending of the linear history of sufferings of Kosovo Albanians. The concept of a linear flow of history is the central concept in modern philosophies of history, which evolve on the idea of the universal progress of mankind. This idea was widely developed by thinkers of European Enlightenment. In Albanian culture, the idea of progress initially entered through the literature of the Albanian National Renaissance of the 19th century, literature inspired directly by European enlightenment and then through Marxism, which for a half century was the official doctrine of communist regimes in Albania and Kosovo. In the public discourse, the war of the KLA was portrayed as the final conclusion of this history, as a reward for all the suffering and injustices that had been endured by the Kosovan Albanians throughout history. By giving it such dimensions, the name of the KLA gradually began to gain mystical and sacred attributes. Related events began to be seen as sacred signs of a predetermined destiny of the Albanian nation. The fact that Adem Jashari, one of the main founders of the KLA, was born on November 28, 1955, the date of the birth of the Albanian national state in 1912, was perceived as the sign of a sacral linearity of Albanian national history.

The Albanian national state was founded on November 28, 1912, but as a result of the so-called "historical injustice of the Great Powers", according to the vocabulary of Albanian nationalism, half of the ethnic Albanian territories remained outside the borders of its state and this led to a conclusion that the national project had not fully met its ultimate goal. The liberation of the remaining territories had to be carried on by other heroes, and at the time when the national myth for Adem Jashari was being built, his date of birth especially was considered as an indication that history had chosen him to continue the historic mission for the national liberation of Kosovo. The sacred litany of national events began on November 28, 1443, when the national hero Scanderbeg declared independence from the Ottomans; it continued on November 28, 1912, when the independent Albanian state was proclaimed in Vlora; it passed through the birth of Adem Jashari on November 28, 1955, and came to an end on November 28, 1997, when the Kosovo Liberation Army went public and announced the start of the liberation war.

In the post-war historical imagination of Kosovo, all this was not believed to be a historical coincidence but rather an expression of a sacral providence that has oriented the historical destiny of Albanians throughout the linear course of the centuries.



Figure 1. Anonymous picture circulating in Albanian social networks, in which the idea of sacral linearity of Albanian history is clearly expressed. In this picture, Scanderbeg is seen next to Adem Jashari watching an eagle (symbol of the Albanian national flag) flying over the sky of the Albanian lands. (Etnike 2009)

The sacralization of Adem Jashari's birthday is only one of the elements in the mythology built around his figure.

Other elements focus on his combat activity. He was awarded the title "Legendary KLA Commander" immediately after the war. The title itself expresses the sacral dimension that was attributed to the figure of the founder of the KLA. The connotation of this title is very clear; we are dealing with a historical figure that crosses the boundaries of the real and the possible.

He moves on the border between the historic ordinary and the extraordinary. His qualification as a "legendary commander" seeks to express the extraordinary dimension of Adem Jashari, given that legends are the stories in which factual events are ascribed by features related to supernatural forces. This is how the mythical origin of the Kosovo Liberation Army is designed.

This origin then implies the construction of other myths about the KLA war. One of them is the myth on the triumphal fight between the weak and the strong, a myth that has its roots in the Bible with the narrative of David's battle against Goliath. This is the myth of a battle between good and evil, and although the forces of evil are far greater than those of good, the ultimate victory belongs to the latter because, in the worldly moral order set by the omnipotent God, the right cause has to win over unjust intentions, despite the fact that the evil can be supported by the superiority of physical force. The Kosovan imagination attributes this role to the KLA; its supremacy is not seen in the physical force of its weapons but in the cause it represents. It embodies a modern David facing

the Serbian Goliath. The victory of this confrontation was predestined by the powers that guarantee moral order in history.

The sacrality and mythology that Kosovans built around the KLA in the post-war period are essentially related to the use of a heroic discourse that took place in Europe during the two world wars, and a discourse that raised the war to the level of an aesthetic interior experience. This discourse is widely analyzed in the book "Fallen Soldiers – Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars" by historian George L Mosse. In this study, Mosse discusses the raising cult of fallen soldiers in Western societies involved in the world wars. This cult contains the entire psychology and symbolism of the old cult of saints and martyrs of the church. The places where the soldiers have fallen and cemeteries of soldiers who fell for the glory of the nation gained the same force of worship as the former relics of Christian martyrs. In the era of nationalism, the symbolism of Christ's empty tomb is replaced by the symbolism of the Unknown Soldier's grave to which everybody bows down (Mosse 1990).

This cult of European nationalism is used to build the mythology of the narrative of liberation in post-war Kosovo.

Fallen KLA soldiers became subject to an almost religious cult within a short time. The places of their fall are marked as places that attract as much attention and respect as a sacral place. The same is done with battlefield sites where monuments commemorating the heroism of the fighters are erected.

Soldiers fallen in the war are differentiated, not only from those who died from natural causes but also from those killed in massacres. A strict hierarchy of inequality in reverence is established between them.

Soldiers fallen in the battle are placed at the top of this hierarchy and are given the title of martyrs. Civilians killed in the massacres committed by the Serbian army are ranked below them and are given the title of victims. Meanwhile, the last category comprises those who died of other causes.

This necropolitical hierarchy is also expressed in the material plan. The tombs of soldiers fallen in the KLA battles are separated from the tombs of martyrs and the common tombs of other dead people. They are visited and honoured far more often than the other two. Their maintenance is also different. The fallen soldiers' tombs are covered with costly monuments, while those of martyrs are usually covered with plain grave plates. This discrimination is an expression of the patriarchal-epic mentality of Kosovo Albanians, whose norm appreciates those who die fighting more than those who are simply the victims of a military conflict. According to this mentality, to die as a victim to an aggression is perceived as a failure of the canonical manhood norm. The concept of manhood is related closely to the concept of violence. Scholar Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers (2008) traces the roots of this concept to the customary Albanian law code known as *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, where the medieval honor code

is inseparably interconnected with the ideals of heroism, masculine courage and the ability to exercise violence. Martyrs' graves are viewed more as evidence of Serbian barbarity and less as sites of national pride. This discrimination is also expressed in the post-war folklore in Kosovo; epic songs are reserved only for fallen soldiers in the battlefields. The epic of Kosovo Albanians is dominated by two figures of warriors: medieval epic valiant warriors, characterized by superhuman skills and traits and late-epic *kachaks*, who fought the oppression and injustice of certain regimes. When we analyze the figure of Adem Jashari as a warrior, built on the imagination of the Albanians after his fall, we can see a kind of melting in this figure of the medieval valiant warrior (*kreshnik*) and modern *kachak*. For more on the concept of Albanian epic about valiant warriors see Stavro Skendi (1954), *Albanian and South Slavic oral epic poetry*, American Folklore Society, 1954. In regards to the Balkan features of the phenomenon of the *kachaks* see Hobsbawm (1959), and about his Kosovan specifics, see Banac (1984).

The same is done in other areas where the use of historical symbolism is required; the streets are mostly named after the names of the fallen KLA soldiers in the towns and villages of Kosovo, while their statues are placed in various squares. The names and statues of martyrs are almost completely inexistent. Women killed in war are also subject to this exclusion. The number of monuments built for them is negligible. Later, in Prishtina, the capital of Kosovo, a monument that recalls the suffering and victimization of Kosovar women during the war was erected, but this monument has not managed to receive the same attention and appreciation as the monuments of male KLA heroes. Moreover, public critics stressed that this monument is not an original work but a copy of a monument set up during the 2014 Olympic Games held in Russia. (ZëRI 2010) Statues erected in honour of fallen KLA soldiers are usually built following the style of the sculpture of the socialist realism of former communist Albania, in which the figures of heroes are put up in colossal proportions, always equipped with weapons standing in fighting positions and without any sophistication or artistic detail. In this dimension, they look like statues built in former communist countries, but they do not resemble the statues of the fallen soldiers that appeared in western Europe in the time of world wars. We find statues of fallen KLA soldiers in all squares of every city in Kosovo, through which Socialist Realist monumentalism is expressed. This is a consequence of the fact that, on one side in Kosovo, there was no other tradition of sculpture other than that of Socialist Realism and that the main sponsors of the KLA monuments are its former leaders who were ideologically close to Enverism, the Marxist-Leninist ideology of Enver Hoxha's regime from 1945-1990. The People's Movement of Kosovo (*Lëvizja Popullore e Kosovës*, LPK), whose roots were in the Marxist-Leninist illegal groups formed in

Kosovo during communist Yugoslavia, is the group that played a major role in organizing and expanding the KLA (Judah 2002, 134-154).



Figure 2. The monument of fallen KLA soldiers in Morinë, Drenica. (KosovaPress 2014)

3. “The Albanian Mecca”

As mentioned above, the epicentre of mythology and sacral image of the KLA war is located in the birthplace of its founder, Adem Jashari, in the village Prekaz of Drenica. In her study on the cult of Adem Jashari that was built for him in post-war Kosovo, sociologist Anna Di Lellio writes: “After the war, social reproduction of the Jashari legend became ubiquitous and this is evident in many schools, military barracks, squares and streets all over Kosovo that are named after him. There are many representations of Adem Jashari as a brave warrior in popular songs, postcards, calendars, medals, posters, copper plates, watches, notebooks and other souvenirs. Designed to encourage recognition and gratitude, this merchandise is on sale at the gift shop at the Prekaz Commemorative Complex, a park enclosing the three bombed houses of the Jashari family and the nearby cemetery... For a large number of Albanians from the region and abroad, this whole site is a shrine and its sacredness is defined in a Durkheimian sense, by the simple fact that this place and its people are set apart from the ordinary, the profane”. (Lellio n.d.)

In this context, the place where he fell at the beginning of the war today is regarded as a place that has all the features of a sacral place. This can be best witnessed during the pilgrimage to which Albanians and some non-Albanians go to pay homage to this place not only on certain dates but also throughout the year. The rituals of this pilgrimage are completely similar to those of pilgrimages in the sacred places of religions. Visiting

the grave of Adem Jashari and graves of other victims of his family, symbolically bowing down, visiting the ruins of houses where the hero was killed and touching them, and the silent sacral movements that are made while doing so, resemble the touch of sacred things.



Figure 3. *The Memorial Complex Adem Jashari. (Lajmi.net 2016)*

Another element that is observed during these rituals is the writing of pilgrims' names on the walls of the ruins, an act by which the pilgrim imaginatively intends to be identified with the traces of the sacred and become part of its eternity.

Although the land of Adem Jashari's fall, including his tomb and tombs of his family members killed alongside him, is officially called "The Memorial Complex Adem Jashari", its evocation is far deeper than this seemingly neutral denomination. This can be observed when analysing the public vocabulary that is used by Kosovo Albanians to refer to this complex: a place of sublime sacrifice for the nation. In the spirit of early Albanian nationalism, whose slogan was "Albanian religion is Albanianism", this slogan is in the poem "*O moj Shqypni*" (My dear Albania), written by Pashko Vasa, a poet that belonged to Albanian Renaissance. Pashko Vasa's poem sums up all the myths of Albanian nationalism: the myths of the golden age of the nation, the myth of its centuries-old decline and suffering, and the mythical call to revive the nation. In addition, Pashko Vasa's poem at its core represents the first attempt to develop Albanian nationalism as a political religion. This is seen clearly in his call for Albanians to abandon churches and mosques because their true religion is Albanianism. See Schwandner-Sievers and Fischer (2002:61).

The Memorial Complex of Adem Jashari began to be called "The Albanian Mecca" soon after the war. A well-known Kosovan publicist wrote: "Mecca is the ultimate destination of life for all pilgrims of Islamic faith and all those who do not visit the epicenter of pilgrimage feel unfulfilled. Jerusalem is the place of suffering and the last station for the lost state, both for Palestinians and Jews. These two places represent the symbolism of survival and longing for freedom and search for inspiration and retribution for all that they have been gone through. Kosovo Albanians have and should have two addresses of inspiration, historical memory, the highest reach of national and human pride: Prekaz of the Jashari family and Glogjan of the Haradinaj family, as a starting point and a goal towards the future, as places where sacrifice has changed the genetic code of Albanians." (Shala n.d.)

In the mythology about the war of the Kosovo Liberation Army, the Haradinaj family represents an important element due to the fact that the KLA (Kosovo Liberation Army) rebellion in the western part of Kosovo is strongly related to this family. The members of this family are part of the Kosovo guerrilla founders. Following the martyrdom of the Jashari family on March 5, 1998, the second attack by Serbian police forces was carried out exactly against the Haradinaj family on March 24, 1998, which during the war lost three of its members, today considered as Kosovo heroes. Today, the commemoration of war events related to this family is a very important element in the ceremonial manifestations of Kosovan political religion. It is characterized by such names as "the heroic family", "the family of freedom", "the family of national resistance" and many others.

We find another important element of the sacral place in this lecture: its power to cause spiritual changes to the pilgrim. A visit to the cemetery of Adem Jashari is perceived as a visit of spiritual transformation, just as Mecca is perceived by pilgrims to be their most sacred place.

The religious experience of visitors of the *Memorial Complex Adem Jashari* becomes best visible when looking at the messages they write in the book of impressions. Most of these impressions are characterized by emotional expression with religious vocabulary. This is the case even with international visitors. One of them, Anne Bissmen from Finland, wrote: "I finally visited this legendary and holy place for Kosovo Albanians" (T. m. Jashari 2002, 172).

The writer Ismail Kadare, one of the most prominent writers in European literature, is among the pilgrims who left a message on their impressions during the visit to the "Adem Jashari Complex". In the book of impressions, Kadare wrote: "I am in the family of Jashari, where a great flame began, the flame of freedom that illuminated the entire Prekaz, followed by Drenica, and then the entire Kosovo. That glint awakened Europe and the world. Centuries pass, the Light of freedom, the Light of those who gave their life for it, never fades. I stand here deeply affected, as I rarely am in my life. From this house, I take the message that everyone

pretends to know, but that needs to be repeated perennially” (T. m. Jashari 2001, 39)

In Kadare’s opinion, we find the mystique with which sacred places are ascribed; it is believed that something unusual happened there, something that transformed the whole course of human history. On this premise, Adem Jashari's national cult maintainers insist on the universal value of his message. Part of this cult is also the unwritten social norm functioning today in Kosovan society, according to which every kind of public criticism for the life and activity of Adem Jashari is forbidden. Sacred always implies taboo. Those who flout the taboo risk being expelled from the community. In the present case, this expulsion takes on the characteristics of a charge for national treason and the renunciation of national identity. Adem Jashari's cult hence is manifested as a powerful marker of the identity of Kosovo Albanians in the post-conflict period.

4. Conclusion

A large number of modern societies that have recognized the phenomenon of secularization of values and institutions in the process of forming national status have adopted the discourse and symbolism of traditional religions to give sense to this process. This adoption has resulted in the creation of the so-called political or civil religions.

In this context, nationalism comprises one of the most prominent examples. This also applies to Albanian nationalism, which had developed by borrowing the vocabulary and ideas of the dominant European nationalisms.

Leaving out the religious affiliations of Albanians, Albanian nationalism from the time of the National Renaissance in the 19th century rose to the level of a political religion within which the Albanian collective identity experienced the process of sacralization.

The war and liberation of Kosovo from Serbian rule in 1999 was envisaged as the final stage of the fulfilment of goals of Albanian nationalism and on the basis of this envision, during the post-war years, within a short time, a great mythology was built in Kosovan society for the years and conflict events. At the epicentre of this mythology was the sacral narrative of battles and figures of the KLA war.

Aside from this narrative, the cults of fallen soldiers were built within a short time, following the pattern of building these cults in the Europe of the two world wars, as well as the sacred places of national remembrance that were and still are envisaged as places of sacrifice for the freedom and altars of the Homeland in the collective imagination. These places are attributed the mystical power from which Kosovo Albanians managed to win freedom and thus build an independent state. In Kosovo society today, the saying "there is no freedom without blood" has the power of a

widespread popular belief. The tombs of martyrs are regarded as the tombs of saints and their bones are ascribed the same mystical force as that of relics of church martyrs during the Middle Ages. This mentality has created the practice of building monuments honouring martyrs in every part of Kosovo, while the search for the disappeared of the war holds the public's attention clearly because of this sanctification of the fallen in war.

Although the state of Kosovo, formally and constitutionally born in February 2008, is a multi-ethnic state, its symbolic background is based on the ethnonationalist narrative of the Albanian majority, a narrative entirely constructed by elements of political religions.

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