Echoes of Destruction: Urbicide in the Heart of Prishtina

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Abstract:

This case study aims to trace urbicide in Kosovo, specifically in the historical core of Prishtina during and after Yugoslavia. During this span, Prishtina goes through an era of transition not only in governance but also in architecture. The creation of a socialist, modern city based on Yugoslav principles also meant the demolition of the past through the destruction of Albanian architectural heritage and, during the war, the destruction of roots. Through a multidisciplinary approach, this research aims to illuminate the complications of urbicide in the heart of Prishtina and its implications for the present and future of the city. But was urbicide achieved? How did Prishtina go through different stages of urban planning to form what it is today, and why was the historical zone used for modernisation? Strategies were used not only as a tool of fear but also to establish Serbian control over the territory, by not adhering to urban plans and creating a half-baked Prishtina. The study begins by providing an overview of the phenomenon of urbicide, followed by an analysis of historical interpretations of urbicide in Kosovo caused by the Albanian-Serbian conflict. Then, the identification of parallels and overlaps with other countries of the former Yugoslavia that also suffered the same fate. All this centers on the capital, the tracking of urbicide through quantitative analysis

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Echoes of Destruction:

Urbicide in the heart of Prishtina

Master thesis

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Prishtine, 2024

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This journey would not have been possible without the support of the people closest to me. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my mentor, Dr. Florina Jerliu, for her invaluable guidance, encouragement, and advice throughout the development of this thesis.I am also thankful to the friends I have made during these five years of study, whose presence made sleepless nights more bearable. Most importantly, I dedicate this work to those to whom I am indebted every day: my parents, Xhevrije and Sokol. Without their unwavering love and limitless sacrifices, I would not be where I am today. My heartfelt thanks also go to my sisters, Dafina and Arbenita, and my brother, Donat, for their constant support and patience. A special acknowledgment is due to my nephew, Deon, and my niece, Lea, whose daily joy and laughter bring light and inspiration to my life.

I sincerely hope never to disappoint you.

Abstract

This case study aims to trace urbicide in Kosovo, specifically in the historical core of Prishtina during and after Yugoslavia. During this span, Prishtina goes through an era of transition not only in governance but also in architecture. The creation of a socialist, modern city based on Yugoslav principles also meant the demolition of the past through the destruction of Albanian architectural heritage and, during the war, the destruction of roots. Through a multidisciplinary approach, this research aims to illuminate the complications of urbicide in the heart of Prishtina and its implications for the present and future of the city.

But was urbicide achieved? How did Prishtina go through different stages of urban planning to form what it is today, and why was the historical zone used for modernisation? Strategies were used not only as a tool of fear but also to establish Serbian control over the territory, by not adhering to urban plans and creating a half-baked Prishtina. The study begins by providing an overview of the phenomenon of urbicide, followed by an analysis of historical interpretations of urbicide in Kosovo caused by the Albanian-Serbian conflict. Then, the identification of parallels and overlaps with other countries of the former Yugoslavia that also suffered the same fate. All this centers on the capital, the tracking of urbicide through quantitative analysis along waves of urban development and how this affected Prishtina's identity.

As a result, it aspired to prove urbicide in Prishtina during the Yugoslav period—through what is left behind, collective memory, documents or photographs to achieve the complete picture of what happened to Prishtina, the genesis of its identity, and how conflicts and politics affected the Prishtina dream. As a final result, an alternative reality will be created. If urbicide did not happen, what kind of Prishtina would we have?

Key words: *urbicide, Pristina, old town Pristina, war, architecture, loss of identity, erosion of memory, urban destruction.*

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFP	French Press Agency
BIK	Islamic Community of Kosovo
BH	Bosnia and Herzegovina
ChwB	Cultural Heritage without borders
IKMM	Kosovo Institute for the Protection of Monuments
WW2	World War II
NATO	The North Atlantic Treaty Organization
UN	United Nations (UN)
PnH	Pristina in History
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Introduction

Located in the heart of the Balkans, Prishtina is a vibrant and culturally rich urban center. The urban evolution of the capital of Kosovo is a story intertwined with a turbulent history, cultural heritage and socio-political dynamics. As a city that has experienced centuries of transitions, Pristina's urban identity has evolved through the ages, each leaving its mark on the city's urban landscape. However, between the layers of historical narratives and architectural heritage lies the tale of defeat, the loss of identity.

Prishtina's genesis dates back to antiquity as a modest settlement in the Dardanian Kingdom. A strategic crossroads connecting the Adriatic Sea with the Danube River, it has undergone successive waves of change, shaped by occupiers ranging from the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman and Yugoslav periods. Contributing to the creation of a mosaic of architectural styles, religious monuments and urban spaces. However, despite this rich heritage, Prishtina's urban identity has been profoundly influenced by external forces, especially during periods of conflict and political upheaval.

The 20th century stands as a defining chapter in Prishtina's history, the end of World War II found Kosovo as a *"motherless state"* and the Federal People"s Republic of Yugoslavia under Josip Broz Tito took advantage of this situation by incorporating it as a province. Over the course of 45 years, Kosovo experienced changes in governance, architecture and identity. Prishtina as the capital took rapid steps towards becoming a socialist city with the slogan *"Destroy the old, build the new"*, the city underwent development and modernisation based on socialist principle but destroying the city's own indigenous past. However, this period laid the foundation for tensions that grew in intensity day by day until the outbreak of the violent conflict of the 1990s. A war that resulted in irreversible damage to the city's physical fabric and collective memory. As bombs destroyed buildings and bullets ricocheted through the streets, the very essence of Prishtina's identity was shattered, leaving behind scars of loss and displacement.

The consequences of urbicide in Prishtina extend beyond physical destruction. As such, it includes profound socio-economic, cultural, and psychological impacts on its inhabitants.

Displacement of communities, loss of heritage and fragmentation of urban life have presented complex challenges for reconstruction. This thesis aims to critically analyze the phenomenon of urbicide in the center of Prishtina, examining its historical roots, the tactics used during the war and the lasting legacies in post-conflict reconstruction. By delving into the narratives of Prishtina's development up to its *"destruction"*, it seeks to shed light on its dimensions and the implications arising from the conflict. This introduces us to the term *"urbicide"*, the war that Kosovo experienced not only with loss of people but also with architecture.

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to critically analyze and examine the evolution of urbanization in Prishtina, what was planned and what was ruined by the idea of creating a living city. With a special focus on the meaning of the loss of identity through urbicide caused by the occupiers. By delving into the past, present and future trajectories of the city, this study aims to shed light on the complex interplay of socio-political, cultural and economic factors that have shaped the urban landscape of Prishtina. It aims to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities for preserving and recovering the city's unique identity amidst rapid urbanization, globalization and post-conflict reconstruction efforts.

Objectives:

1. Analyzing the historical evolution of Old Prishtina's urban fabric, from its origins to its transformation during and after the Yugoslav period.
2. To examine the cultural, social, and political dimensions of Old Prishtina's urban identity and how they were affected by urbicide.
3. To assess the impact of external forces such as conflict, modernization, and urban restructuring on the destruction and alteration of Old Prishtina.
4. To identify strategies and opportunities for preserving and revitalizing the cultural heritage and collective memory of Old Prishtina in the face of past and ongoing urbicide.

Research questions

1. *Was the old town of Prishtina a victim of this phenomenon and if so, what resulted from it in preserving the identity and history of the city?*
2. *What were the specific targets of urbicide and why were certain urban areas and monuments in Prishtina selected for demolition?*
3. *How does urbicide in the heart of Prishtina compare to similar cases of urban destruction in other cities within Yugoslavia during this period?*
4. *What shape does old Prishtina have today after urbicide, in terms of urban landscape and collective identity?*

Methods and steps of the work

Step 1: Review of regional and global literature and documentation regarding the phenomenon of urbicide, its causes, impacts and consequences for city building in countries emerging from conflict. In this phase, an interpretative historical study will be conducted examining the complexity and implications of this destructive phenomenon within the context of conflict and war. From the very notion, when it is accepted as a principle that it has happened and is happening, to the consequences it leaves.

Step 2: Interpretive and historical analysis by tracing the urbicide caused by the Albanian-Serbian conflict during the Yugoslav period and the results of the same in Kosovo, respectively in Pristina. Also through a comparative analysis of this phenomenon with other countries of the former Yugoslavia such as: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, etc. In order to identify parallels and overlaps from this event in creating defeat in architecture.

Step 3: Continuing with quantitative and qualitative analysis with a narrower focus on Pristina, the three waves of urban development and tracing the genocide in architecture along them, affecting the damage to the identity of what Pristina residents actually know and remember as Pristina. This will be achieved through interviews with citizens. During this phase, these spaces will also be researched and coordinated, whether they exist physically or only spiritually in memory.

Step 4: In conclusion, the aim is to conclude the *"aftermath"* of urbicide in Pristina through comparative analyses of the past with the present and what is intended as an alternative for the future of Pristina. Documentation through photographs, archival documents of what Pristina lost from urbicide and what if the same had not happened. How different would Pristina be from today?

Expected results

This thesis aims to prove whether there was urbicide in old town Pristina, during the period under Yugoslav rule. Through tracing what is left behind, be it collective memory, documents or photographs, the completion of the full picture of what happened to Pristina, the genesis of its identity and how political conflicts contributed to the extinction of the Pristina dream of a visionary and metropolitan Pristina as planned in the 1970s. As a final result, an alternative reality will be created if urbicide had not occurred, what kind of Pristina would we have?

The phenomenon of **urbicide**

01.

I. The phenomenon of urbicide

Since the dawn of civilization, cities have stood as bastions of culture and urban development. However, amidst the tapestry of urban life, lies a dark thread, the phenomenon of *"urbicide"*. From the shadows of conflicts and wars emerges the deliberate and systematic genocide of urban centers or urbicide, a wound on the collective heritage of humanity.

But what does urbicide mean? The word *"urbicide"* comes from the combination of the Latin words: *"urbs"* which means city and *"cide"* which means death, *the death of the city*. This murder that arises in different situations: **natural, anthropic and symbolic**.[1] When the results are always the same, liturgical murder of the city, of spaces, squares, infrastructure, the extermination of society and civilization. Through urbicide, urban processes are understood from a different perspective, not from the way a city is built but from the way it is destroyed, from memory to oblivion.

1.1.1 Natural urbicide

The invisible warrior, **nature**, is often the cause of urbicide. Expressed through hurricanes, earthquakes, explosions and even droughts. Although as a climatic phenomenon, the victim of the same is always the city. We often come across definitions such as *"resilient cities"*, when the city must be adaptable to natural changes and not change their footprints, but this can not often be achieved.

Among the ancient cases of the destruction of civilization by nature is that of the city of *Pompeii*. An ancient Roman, as seen in figure 1, city located in the Campania region of Italy, on the edge of Mount Vesuvius, near the modern city of Naples. A city which during the Roman Empire, as a result of its strategic location, took a boost in economy and culture but this did not last long. The well-planned city, with a developed urban plan, met its nightmare in the hot August of 79 AD when Mount Vesuvius erupted catastrophically and buried the city in volcanic ash and debris as shown in figure 2. This disaster not only resulted in the loss of thousands of lives but also the city itself, sinking it from 4 to 7 meters deep in ash. The city was never rebuilt and remained only as an archaeological site accidentally discovered in the 19th century by the Italian architect *Domenico Fontana.* [2]

[1] Carrión, F. (2018) "*Urbicide, or the city"s liturgical death*", *Oculum Ensaios*.
[2] Roos, D. (2024) *A volcanic eruption wasn"t the only disaster that destroyed Pompeii*, *History.com*.

Today, the location is listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is one of Italy's most famous attractions.[3] While Mount Vesuvius is still active, it leaves one paranoid about which other city it will destroy next?

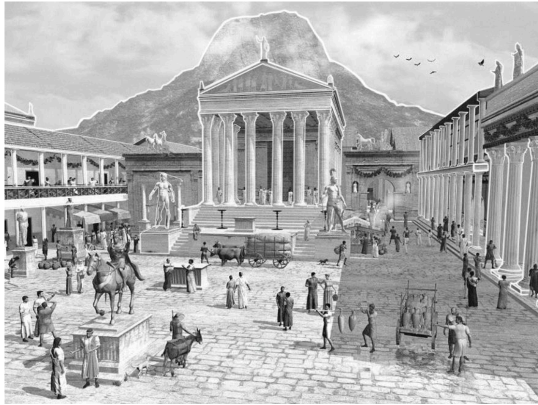

Fig.1 *The city of Pompeii before the destruction* (Source: Decodence, Youtube)

Fig.2 *The city of Pompeii, today, after the destruction* (Source: Ciro De Luca, Reuters)

1.1.2 Anthropic urbicide

Urbicide can also be the result of purely anthropogenic causes, where destruction is the result of human actions, the result of war, conflict or deliberate policies. This term is often used in the context of modern conflicts and urban warfare, where cities become battlefields and are deliberately targeted for destruction. Throughout history, many cities have been subjected to this type of urbicide in times of war or conflict, especially during World War II, where cities such as Dresden, Warsaw and Hiroshima, etc., experienced defeat as a result of bombing and ground and air combat (see figure 3), Hiroshima. The motives vary, from military objectives to ideological or political goals.

Fig.3 *The revival of the city of Hiroshima after the destruction in the LDB.* (Source: Roger-Viollet, AFK)

[3] Roos, D. (2024) *A volcanic eruption wasn"t the only disaster that destroyed Pompeii, History.com*. Accessible: https://www.history.com/news/pompeii-eruption-volcano-earthquakes (Accesed on: 03 Mars 2024).

While today, regions like Syria, Ukraine, Iraq and Yemen are still struggling against this phenomenon, where cities like Kiev, Aleppo, and Gaza are losing lives, suffering, and undergoing genocide even in cities as a result of wars, airstrikes, and sieges.

1.1.3 Symbolic urbicide

A third typology of urbicide is symbolic urbicide. This refers to the deliberate destruction or alteration of physical or cultural symbols, monuments of the city.[4] The primary goal is the transformation or erasure of the identity and memory of that city. As discussed above, physical destruction of urban areas is discussed, symbolic urbicide targets the symbolic and cultural essence of the city. It is used as a tool of power and dominance by governments, occupying forces, or extremist groups to seek control and achieve the erasure of a people and their history.

Among the cities that fell victim to this phenomenon was Jerusalem (figure 4). One of the oldest cities and continuously inhabited for thousands of years, the place where religion was born and the central point that united the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. But, unfortunately, it was the bone of contention that started the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict during which, despite the aim of control, they simultaneously divided the city into two parts, destroyed historical neighborhoods, changed cultural and religious sites just to establish authority in the location and to shape their own identity and not the city's own.[5]

Fig.4 *A man on a rooftop overlooking the former Moroccan neighborhood, 1917.* (Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division)

[4] Carrión, F. (2018) *Urbicide, or the city"s liturgical death*, *Oculum Ensaios*.
[5] Armstrong, K. (2011) *Jerusalem: One city, three faiths*. Random House Publishing Group.

An exemplary case is the destruction of the Moroccan neighborhood of the old city of Jerusalem. This neighborhood was home to a diverse population, where two religions coexisted together in a community with a language that knew no differentiation, Jews and Muslims. It was often called an Islamic gift where mosques, zawiyas (institutions/schools) were built. Transforming into an intellectual center from which prominent jurists, pilgrims, etc. would be born. All this sees the darkness with its eyes when the Israeli army, within hours between June 10, 11 of 1967, razed the same to create a square while leaving 650 residents (108 families) homeless (see figure 5).[6]

Unfortunately, the latter is still happening and elsewhere its wounds are still being healed. Do buildings have life as long as people breathe? Although in wartime circumstances it is very difficult to think about anything other than saving your existence, everything changes when you see the reflection of fire in the buildings that created your very existence. From the house filled with memories as much as it is brick to the school, cafes and work. But if objects could talk, what would they tell us?

Fig.5 *Israeli bulldozers at work destroying the ancient Moroccan Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem on June 10–12, 1967.* (Source: David Rubinger, Getty Images)

[6] Team, J.S. (2022) *The destruction of Jerusalem"s Moroccan Quarter: From centuries-old Maghrebi community to Western Wall Prayer Plaza*, *Jerusalem Story Project*.E qasshme në: https://www.jerusalemstory.com/en/article/destruction-jerusalems-moroccan-quarter-centuries-old-maghrebi-community-western-wall (Ac: 10 Mars 2024).

1.2 Symphony of destruction

When did the term "*urbicide*" emerge? Is it the word *urbicide* or the phenomenon itself that is older? Although the origins of the phenomenon can be traced back to the ancient sieges of Mesopotamia and the plundering of Rome, extending to contemporary forms of urbicide manifested through ruins and bombings, its grim reality remains unchanged regardless of whether it is named or not. As previously discussed, the term *urbicide* refers to the destruction of the city, but what constitutes a city? Everything that shapes our lived reality space, infrastructure, and even digital networks forms the city we inhabit daily. Every constructed structure that can be targeted and transformed into an agent of destruction falls within the scope of what we define as the city.

The term *urbicide* was first used in June 1963 in the science fiction novel *Dead God's Homecoming* by author Michael Moorcock, who employed the term to describe an attack on the imaginary borders of Sequoias. However, the term gained global attention and widespread usage three decades later during the siege of Sarajevo. In 1987, scholars *Marshall Berman* and *Bogdan Bogdanović* used the term *urbicide* to conceptualize the destruction of Balkan cities during the Yugoslav wars of '92–'96, particularly focusing on the assault on Sarajevo. According to their interpretation, urbicide is understood as the *"ritualized killing of the city"* [7]. A phrase that redefines urbicide as more than just physical destruction it signifies the intentional erasure of memory, identity and the cultural fabric woven into the city's structure.

Fig. 6 *The Mostar Bridge after its destruction on November 8, 1993.* (Source: Associated Press)

[7] Kalia, S. (2023) *A brief history of the term "urbicide"*, *The Hindu*. Accessible: https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/a-brief-history-of-the-term-urbicide/article67576893.ece (Accessed: 11 Mars 2024).

The war and attacks on Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1996 tragically served as a wake-up call that urbicide was occurring within the realm of architecture. The destruction of the Mostar Bridge (see Figure 6) a structure that connected the two parts of the city, linking the old Ottoman Mostar with the newer urban fabric symbolized the severing of the connection between past and present. The bridge was completely destroyed by Croatian army bombardments. This event led to the publication of *Mostar '92* in the same year, in which the term *urbicide* was employed to reveal the violence inflicted upon the city's structural and cultural framework.[8] Although cities have historically been considered immune to the direct impacts of war, over time they have increasingly become central arenas of conflict.

The term *"urbicide"* closely echoes the word *"genocide"*not only through their shared suffixes but also through the outcomes they produce. Until recently, *genocide* in international law referred solely to the deliberate killing of an ethnic group. However, the concept extends beyond the human realm: genocide can also target culture, the environment, politics, and the city itself. Though the means may vary, the objective remains the same total destruction. Motivated by hatred whether ethnic, religious, or racial by the desire for dominance or extremist ideologies, the consequences are ultimately borne by the same subject: humanity. Genocide of people, of the environment, of heritage, of cities, of humanism these forms collectively point toward a dark future: one devoid of civilization and cities, a future filled only with ash and blood.

To destroy a person's home is to destroy the person themselves. For human beings, the city becomes their home, the place where they are born, grow, and die. Therefore, the most effective way to kill someone without physically doing so is to uproot them by destroying their home, their city. A similar perspective is offered by Martin Coward in his book *Urbicide: The Politics of Destruction*, in which he defines urbicide as an attempt not only to annihilate the physical foundations of a city, but also to erase its collective memory, identity, and cultural heritage. In doing so, he sheds light on the motivations behind urbicide and its profound impact on communities.[9]

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[8] Al- Shoubaki, Hind.(2022) *War Victims and the Right to a City; From Damascus to Zaatari*. Springer Nature. p.44

[9] Coward, M. (2010) *Urbicide: The politics of urban destruction*. London: Routledge. p.21

1.3 Why cities?

If people shape cities, then cities shape people. A city serves as a repository of memories and the past, but also as a space where traditions and cultural values are preserved. The memory of a city is projected onto its buildings and structures, which then become not only architectural assets but also vessels of historical legacy. Thus, during wars and conflicts, strategies to eradicate a nation often involve more than the killing of its people and the occupation of its territory. They aim to destroy its culture, identity and memory by destroying its cities.

This idea is further elaborated by Robert Bevan in his book *“The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War”*, where he argues that cities, specifically symbolic buildings, have historically been epicenters of attacks during wartime, with the goal of spiritual devastation and the severing of a people’s connection to their past. Buildings, which are expected to endure across generations, often meet their end through acts of terror. In this way, a new form of warfare emerges: *a war against architecture*, carried out through the destruction of cultural artifacts that stand as evidence of a people's authenticity and origin. This becomes a tool for demonstrating dominance, instilling fear and attempting to erase an entire population. The rewriting of history serves the interests of the occupier, whose aim goes beyond defeating the opposing army, it involves ethnic cleansing down to the level of ruins. Architecture, in this context, assumes a totemic function: the destruction of mosques, churches, and temples targets not only religious buildings but the very presence of the community they represent. Similarly, the burning of a library or art gallery is not merely the loss of books or artworks, it is the deliberate erasure of evidence of a people's historical existence, undermining their legitimacy in the present and future. This is not merely *“collateral damage”*, as Bevan emphasizes, but a systematic and intentional destruction, where the erasure of memory, history, and identity is inextricably tied to the built environment. These structures are not destroyed simply because they stand in the path of military operations, they are the targets themselves.[10]

[10] Bevan, R. (2006) "The Enemies of Architecture and Memory", in *The Destruction of Memory Architecture at War*. London, UK: Reaktion Books, pp. 7–25.

Fig. 7 *The Boehme Strasse Synagogue in Frankfurt, Germany, burns on November 10, 1938, during the night known as "Kristallnacht".* (Source: CNN)

Many cities and peoples throughout history have fallen victim to such devastation. Among them were the Jewish people, who, under the infamous rule of Nazi Germany and Adolf Hitler, experienced these horrors firsthand. The Nazi regime aimed to deny both the past and the future of the Jewish people and this was pursued not only through concentration camps but also through architecture.

Kristallnacht, or the *Night of Broken Glass*, as shown in figure 7 was a genocidal episode against the Jewish population during which homes, schools, hospitals, synagogues, shops, and more were systematically attacked. The aim was to erase this community's identity within Germany. The shards of broken glass that covered the streets inspired the euphemistic name *Kristallnacht*. This event left deep, lasting scars. While minority oppression is often discussed in terms of language, literature, art, traditions, the destruction of their architecture is less frequently acknowledged. Kristallnacht illustrates how architecture became a battleground for ideological, ethnic, and national conflict, a struggle that did not end with World War II but continues in cities scarred by unrest, terrorism, and geopolitical violence. Beginning shortly before midnight on November 9th, Nazi antisemitic propaganda turned into violent action. In the darkness of that night, Jews witnessed the destruction of what they once called their own, their culture, identity, and religion, each increasingly denied day by day.[11]

[11] Bevan, R. (2006) *The Destruction of Memory Architecture at War*. London, UK: Reaktion Books.

The date **9/11** is not merely a point in time. It symbolizes destruction, demolition, and the erasure of architectural heritage. Across different historical periods and civilizations, it marks similar outcomes. It was not only the Jewish people who witnessed the devastation of what they called their own. On this same date in 1938, **the demolition of the Berlin Wall,** (figure 8) began, a structure that embodied the segregation of a single people, resulting from the prolonged tensions of the Cold War, which only ended in 1989. Four years later, on November 9, the historic **Stari Most bridge** in Mostar was destroyed by Croatian forces, collapsing into the Neretva River. And, not to be overlooked, the infamous terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York commonly referred to as 9/11, serve as a global symbol of destruction. Though the American date format differs, the sequence of numbers once again marks a singular theme: *a day of destruction*.[12] The Twin Towers, whose flames still "*burn*" in the hearts of Americans, (see figure 9) symbolized modern America: economic strength, innovation, and ambition. The morning of September 11, 2001, fundamentally changed how American citizens felt about their safety, freedom, and unity in the face of tragedy. The terrorists knew exactly where America hurt most and struck its Achille's heel. The focus here is not on the coincidence of dates, but on their destructive significance. These events reflect the deliberate and symbolic destruction of architecture and monuments, regardless of local time, continent, or cause. Genocide is no longer only about the lives it takes, but what it destroys in the survivors their collective memory, emotional ties to monuments and spaces and the meanings embedded in the surrounding architecture.

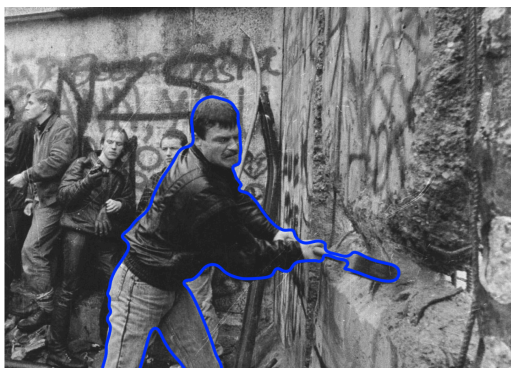

Fig. 8 *The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1938*.
(Source: Al Jazeera)

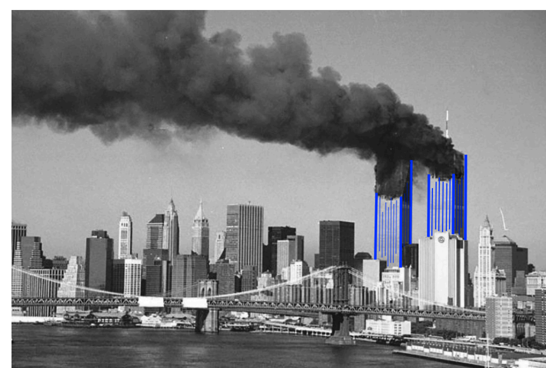

Fig. 9 *The Twin Towers burning on September 11, 2001.*
(Source: Boston University Today)

[12] Bevan, R. (2006) "The Enemies of Architecture and Memory", in *The Destruction of Memory Architecture at War*. London, UK: Reaktion Books, pp. 7–25.

The event that awakened global awareness of what was truly happening to architecture during war, though not the first of its kind, was the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the context in which the term *urbicide* first emerged. The 1990s found the former Yugoslav state in turmoil, marked by wars, mass killings, torture, and widespread destruction. For over 40 years, diverse ethnic and religious groups had coexisted under Yugoslavia's repressive communist regime. But this changed in the early 1990s with the collapse of communism. Bosnia and Herzegovina was among the first to seek independence, prompting Serbia to begin invasions under the pretext of *"liberating"* Orthodox Christian Serbs living in Bosnia. In April 1992, *the ethnic cleansing* of Bosnian territory began, systematically targeting Bosniak Muslims. Alongside mass killings and concentration camps, the war turned toward Islamic theology, expressed through the destruction of Bosnia's Islamic architectural heritage. Mosques were demolished, libraries burned, bridges torn apart, acts of cultural erasure. While much has been said about the human casualties of the war, far less has been acknowledged about its architectural victims. This reveals an inseparable link between the killing of people and the erasure of their physical and collective memory through architecture. The fragility of society echoes in the fragility of its monuments making the destruction of architecture a deliberate and tragic tactic for erasing a people's identity.[13]

In August 1992, one of the most tragic acts of destruction in history took place in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the burning of the National Library. More than just an architectural landmark in Moorish Revival style from 1890, the library held immense cultural and historical value. It stood as a symbol of Bosnia's multiethnic identity, a multicultural center housing around 1.5 million volumes, 155,000 rare books and manuscripts, state archives, newspapers, and more. [14] All of it was engulfed in flames over three days of relentless shelling and firebombing. In that inferno, centuries of Bosnian heritage were reduced to ash.

[13] Ordev, Igor (2008) *Erasing the Past: Destruction and Preservation of Cultural Heritage in Former Yugoslavia: Part 1,* Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe: Vol. 28 : Iss. 4, Article 2. Available on : https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ree/vol28/iss4/2

[14] Riedlmayer, A. (1995) *Erasing the past: The destruction of libraries and archives in Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Middle East Studies Association Bulletin, 29(1), pp. 7–11, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23061201.

Librarians, as custodians of knowledge, tried desperately to save what they could, many of whom lost their lives not long after (see figure 10).

A similar tragedy occurred three months earlier with the destruction of the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo, which housed invaluable Islamic and Jewish manuscripts, as well as the most comprehensive collection of Ottoman documents in Southeastern Europe. Manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, and Hebrew dating back to the medieval period, along with an archive of around 7,000 Ottoman documents, cadastral records, microfilms, and printed books, all testifying to five centuries of Bosnian history, were completely destroyed.[15] The destruction of these institutions, along with many other monuments across Bosnia, served as a catalyst for the development of the very term *urbicide*. As Sarajevo burned in ruins, its identity was vanishing with it. The city suffered immense loss, but it did not surrender. The building in question was eventually restored and reopened 22 years after the brutal war, not with the same books, but with the same symbolic value it once held.

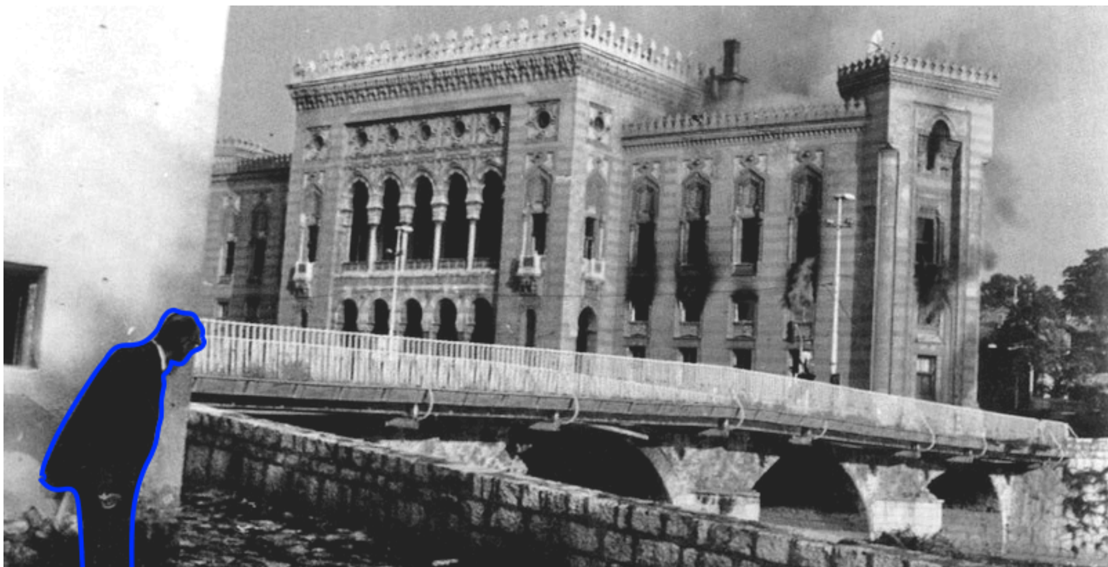

Fig. 10 *The National Library of Sarajevo as it burns to the ground during the three days of inferno on August 25, 26, 27, 1992.* (Source: Literary Hub)

The scorching summer of 1992 saw Mostar, a historic cultural and religious center of southwestern Bosnia, engulfed in flames. Targeted by occupying forces, the attack

[15] Riedlmayer, A. (1995) "Erasing the past: The destruction of libraries and archives in Bosnia-Herzegovina", *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*, 29(1), pp. 7–11. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23061201.

aimed to erase the city's Bosniak identity and Islamic heritage. Mostar's name comes from the *"Mostari",* the bridge keepers who guarded its iconic Ottoman-era bridge.[16]

The 429-year-old bridge, finally completed by engineer Mimar Hayruddin after numerous failed attempts by others, symbolized more than just the Ottoman era or Islamic architecture; it stood as a marker of multiethnic coexistence between the Muslim and Christian communities. *Stari Most*, or the Old Bridge of Mostar, tragically became a target during the conflict when former Muslim-Croat allies turned against each other. The bridge, viewed by Croat forces as both a military supply route and a symbol of Islamic presence, was repeatedly shelled and ultimately collapsed into the Neretva River on November 9, 1993, (see figure 11). Despite protective efforts, its destruction created a deep void, not only in the city but across Bosnia and Herzegovina. The goal of the occupiers was clear: to divide the population, erase memory and identity, and establish a new homeland, *"**Herceg-Bosna**"* for the Croats. Yet this failed. The people kept their memory alive because a nation that forgets its past has no future. A temporary bridge was erected until 1999, when it was lost to flooding. In 2004, the bridge was finally rebuilt as a faithful replica by architect Amir Pašić, using original materials and recovered stones from the river, building the future from fragments of the past. Today, it stands 22 meters tall, proud of what it represents: the enduring identity of Mostar.[17]

Fig.11 *Mostar Bridge, yesterday and today.* (Source: edited by the author)

[16] Hayruddin, M. (2017) *Old bridge in Mostar*, *Architectuul*. Accessible on: https://architectuul.com/architecture/old-bridge-in-mostar (Accessed on: 04 April 2024).

[17] Chapple, A. (2023) *Over troubled water: The fall and rise of Mostar''s bridge*, *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*. Accessible on: https://www.rferl.org/a/mostar-bridge-30-years-destroyed-restored/32677921.html (Accessed on: 04 Prill 2024).

Although once a symbol of destruction, war, and its consequences, the bridge has now become a symbol of the city's supposed reunification. For many locals, the new bridge lacks the original's brilliance and sophistication, while others view its height as ideal for jumping into the Neretva River. The perpetrators were fully aware of the impact of their actions, aiming to destroy the enemy's cultural identity through material destruction and population degradation. This intent was also evident in the destruction of 16 mosques, such as the Ferhat Pasha Mosque in Banja Luka, whose fragments were dumped into the water and landfill and the Aladža Mosque in Foča, with its remnants found in a mass grave. Similarly, churches were targeted, including the Eastern Orthodox Church of St. Nicholas whose fresco fragments were discovered in the village of Trijebanj and the Catholic Church of St. Ivo in Podmilačje, among others (see figure 12 and 13,14).[18]

Fig.12 *Ferhad Pasha Mosque demolished on May 6, 1993.* (Source: Aleksandar Ravlic)

Fig. 13 *Fragments of the mosque in ruins* (Source: Commission for the Preservation of Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina)

All of these and more elaborate the occupier's intention to destroy the Bosniak people through the erasure of their past, identity, and religion. The extermination of a people is carried out not only through killing, but also by erasing their presence from records denying that they ever existed. But why cities? Why are cities targeted in attempts to damage a people's identity? As discussed earlier, the city embodies the identity of a people, and thus becomes a primary target during military assaults. This happened in Bosnia, Germany, Japan, Poland and it is still happening today.

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[18] Hadžimuhamedović A. (2019) *Participative reconstruction as a healing process in Bosnia*. Accessible on https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335586739_Participative_reconstruction_as_a_healing_process_in_Bosnia. Accessed on: 5 April 2024.

However, urbicide is not limited to bloodshed and battlefields, it also includes urban restructuring and gentrification. A people's identity is expressed through history, culture, architecture, and community elements that collectively define what we call a **city.**

The key aspect of urbicide is that the attack aims to keep the region in a state of permanent destruction. This involves not only calculating the extent of destruction but also ensuring the impossibility of rebuilding what has been destroyed. A city sustains more than just identity and imagination, it supports daily life, art, science, trade, and more. Thus, attacks on cities are experienced by citizens on a daily basis. The ultimate goal is not only ethnic cleansing but the elimination of the people's future. However, urbicide is not merely a relic of the past, it remains a present day reality unfolding in cities wounded by civil unrest, terrorism, and geopolitical conflicts.

Fig.14 *Ferhad Pasha Mosque, after the destruction in May 1993 and after the reconstruction in 2016.* (Source: SarajevoTime; Collage edited by the author)

1.4 The shadow of urbicide

Each act of urbicide adds new ruins atop those not yet rebuilt, creating a cycle of urban space destruction. Urbicide did not end with the last war in Bosnia, it continues to manifest in various forms across conflicts worldwide.

Cities remain epicenters of military attacks, as seen in the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian conflict, where geopolitical urban dimensions collide within Ukrainian urban zones. The Russian war in Ukraine reveals a new chapter of deliberate urban destruction, evident in the devastation of Mariupol, Popasna, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, Kyiv, and Kherson, manifesting direct urbicide. But how does direct urbicide differ from indirect? Simultaneously, Ukrainian cities under Russian occupation have suffered extensive non-military destruction, making this an indirect experience of urbicide. This has given rise to a new asymmetric war that usurps all of Northern Ukraine, a urbicide not a repetition of past scenarios, but a novel genocide expressed in increasingly shocking ways.

Since 2014, Russia has attempted to occupy Ukraine through cyber warfare, maritime incidents, and prolonged political tensions lasting eight years. In February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion, initially targeting large parts of the country with overt aggression, escalating urbicide to unprecedented levels. Prior to this, developments in infrastructure, transportation, and urban activation aimed to erase the Soviet past and the values of the *"Russian world"*, provoking extreme urbicide from Russian forces. Since May 25, Russia has fired over 2,150 long-range precision missiles across Ukraine, many targeting critical national infrastructure hundreds of miles from active front lines, including the country's far west.[19]

An article by The Economist titled *"Vladimir Putin's war endangers Ukraine"s cultural heritage"* highlights how the Russian president deliberately targets cultural institutions and buildings. Through systematic bombardments, the aim is not only to dismantle infrastructure and statehood but to deconstruct the Ukrainian people as a whole. One might question whether Russian forces intentionally target specific sites but the destruction of cultural landmarks such as the Local History Museum in

[19] Mezentsev K., Mezentsev O. (2022). *War and the city: Lessons from urbicide in Ukraine*. Czasopismo Geograficzne, 93(3): 495–521

Kharkiv as presented in picture 15, and the *Ivankiv Historical Museum* strongly suggests deliberate intent. The case of the Hryhoriy Skovoroda National Museum suggests otherwise. *The Ivankiv Local History Museum* was destroyed on February 27, during the ongoing battle for Ivankiv. While the extent of intentional targeting remains uncertain given that the same day saw uprisings and unrest among local villagers it is possible that the armed forces had other strategic priorities. However, two months later, on May 6, the *Hryhoriy Skovoroda Museum*, located in a remote village west of Kharkiv was demolished, suggesting a more deliberate act. Other cultural institutions, such as the *Skovoroda Museum*, the *Chernihiv Regional Youth Library*, the *House of Organs* and *Chamber Music* in *Dnipropetrovsk*, and *the Mala Opera* in Kyiv, were also hit. Yet questions remain: were these truly the targets, or were nearby civilian infrastructure such as train stations or stadiums the intended objectives? Or perhaps, was it a case of killing two birds with one stone?[20]

Fig.15 *The destruction of the city of Kharkiv in Ukraine.* (Source: Jérôme Sessini, 2022)

[20] Kachmar, O. (2023) *Russia"s campaign of urbicide in Ukraine* , *New Lines Institute*. Accessible: https://newlinesinstitute.org/power-vacuums/russias-campaign-of-urbicide-in-ukraine/ (Accessed on: 17 April 2024).

Despite limited targeting intelligence, Russian forces did not hesitate to expend missiles on monuments such as the Motherland Monument, Saint Sophia Cathedral, and Kyiv's Golden Gate. The intent to reduce the heterogeneity of Ukraine's cities through bombardment is undeniable, as cities are the primary sites where attacks on history, culture, and national identity are made visible. Mariupol stands as the most devastated urban center, flattened after months of relentless bombing. Once home to 400,000 residents, it now resembles a second Chernobyl. Over 100,000 civilians were trapped in freezing basements while hospitals and theaters where many had sought shelter were deliberately attacked. In the Donbas region, particularly the south, civilian infrastructure has been systematically destroyed to assert territorial control. Strikes in the west, although far from the frontlines, spread fear, disruption, and chaos. These attacks serve as a stark warning of the current Ukrainian reality: a war marked by the erasure of life through the loss of water, food, shelter and identity.[21]

There remains debate over whether Russia's assault targets the Ukrainian nation or simply aims at the destruction and depopulation of its cities, as seen in Mariupol's extreme devastation. Many argue that Russia's primary goal is the forced displacement of the population and territorial control over Ukraine. Ukraine is not the only country subjected to Russian terror and urbicide; Syria has suffered a similar fate. The 11-year-long Syrian civil war provided a context for Russia to demonstrate urbicidal tactics. Beginning in March 2011, popular protests escalated into armed rebellion amidst complex clashes between various actors and states.[22]

The civil war revived the rivalry between the two Cold War antagonists, the United States and Russia, turning Syria into their battlefield. Supported by Iran's air force, Russia defeated Syrian defensive attempts, unleashing a new world war on Syrian cities with intensive bombings, facing no effective opposition. This led to the siege, destruction, and uninhabitability of cities, where hospitals, schools, markets, and neighborhoods were systematically destroyed, with over 3,000 civilian casualties

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[21] Mezentsev K., Mezentsev O. (2022). *War and the city: Lessons from urbicide in Ukraine*. Czasopismo Geograficzne, 93(3): 495–521

[22] Compagnoni, A.S.M. and Adam (2023) *Urbicide and the Russian-Ukrainian war " Wavell room*, *Wavell Room*. Accessible : https://wavellroom.com/2023/04/05/urbicide-russian-ukrainian-war/ (Accessed on: 15 April 2024).

from indiscriminate airstrikes. The cities of Ghouta, Aleppo, Homs, and Hama surrendered in 2016 after relentless bombings. Two years later, Russia targeted densely populated areas like Douma and Saraya, employing incendiary weapons with repeated strikes. These actions demonstrate the cruelty of urbicide, causing terror, suffering, and subjugation of the enemy as shown in figures 16 and 17.[23]

Fig.16 *Aleppo under rubble from Russian bombing.* (Source: AFP)

If urbicide during WW2 aimed at the annihilation of places, the complete destruction of urban spaces, and the loss of meaning of the destroyed sites, after the war the concept shifted and became connected to a constructive struggle, non-military wars of reconstruction. In this context, buildings on the verge of total degradation are demolished, but the goal is not merely to destroy a single object; rather, it is the entire identity of the surrounding urban area that is targeted. Acts of destruction, whether of cultural or religious buildings aimed at erasing identity and sense of belonging, have given rise to new terms such as *"identicide"* according to Meharg (2001). This phenomenon occurs when places of mutual identity are destroyed, leading to the loss of culture and shared global heritage.

[23] Mezentsev K., Mezentsev O. (2022). *War and the city: Lessons from urbicide in Ukraine*. Czasopismo Geograficzne, 93(3): 495–521

Fig.17 *Apartment buildings in Mariupol, Ukraine, destroyed by the Russian military.* (Source: Alexander Ermochenko, Reuters)

Alternatively, the term *"domicide"* refers to the deliberate destruction of homes and the terrorizing of civilians with the intent to erode their trust in their own land. This intensifies the displacement of residents from their homes, forcing them to become refugees in search of temporary shelter. Homes are destroyed, and memories along with them are burned, all with the purpose of expelling the inhabitants.[24]

Despite the lessons learned from the war and urbicide in Bosnia during the 1990s, acts of urbicide continue to recur, resulting in the destruction of significant historical sites, everyday spaces, and indiscriminate bombings. This deliberate devastation of urban environments aims to generate a profound sense of hopelessness by erasing history, space, and community.

Terror and horror events continue to confront the Middle Eastern countries, as discussed in previous chapters regarding the symbolic urbicide of '67 in the historic city of Jerusalem. The conflict, rooted in the 1947 division of the Palestinian territory into Jewish and Arab parts, persists this time centered in Gaza resulting from the ongoing struggle between Israel and Palestine over authority in Jerusalem, the

[24] Porteous, D. and Smith, S.E. (2014) *Domicide: The global destruction of home*. Montréal: McGill-Queen"s University Press.

stateless capital. Therefore, daily life in this region has been transformed into a landscape stained with blood and dust, a prolonged repetition of 9/11 that lasts over 102 minutes.[25]

"*We have even lost the paths to our homes. We no longer know where the streets, our houses, or any building we once knew are*", says Al Ghoul, a Palestinian author and founder of the Shaqaf Cultural Initiative, speaking to TRT World (figure 18).[26]

Fig.18 *A Palestinian in the ruins of his own home in Gaza.* (Source: AFP)

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has its roots in a colonial act carried out over a century ago, but it culminates with Israel declaring war on Gaza following an unprecedented attack by the armed Palestinian group Hamas. This war, through air bombings and ground offensives, has destroyed over 35 percent of Gaza's urban infrastructure, systematically erasing historic neighborhoods, cultural monuments, medical and educational institutions, and vital systems for sewage, water, and electricity.[27]

[25] The time it took for the twin towers to hit the ground was 102 minutes, while the first strike was recorded at 08:46 and they remained in flames of terror until 10:28 or 1 hour and 42 minutes.

[26] Araz, S.D. (2024) *"urbicide": Erasing Palestinian memory beyond Gaza"s ruins*, *TRT World - Breaking News, Live Coverage, Opinions and Videos*. Accessible: https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/urbicide-erasing-palestinian-memory-beyond-gazas-ruins-17809785 (Accessed: 9 April 2024).

[27] *Israel gaza war: History of the conflict explained* (2024) *BBC News*. Accessible: https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396 (Accessed: 9 April 2024).

Thus, October 7, 2023, marks the date that cast a dark shadow over Gaza, an act of urbicide that transformed Gaza from the home of 2.3 million Palestinians into a ghost city permeated by the scent of death (figure 19). Beyond the mere physical destruction of the city, the population that survived was subjected to injury, death, and the imposition of hunger and disease.[28]

Fig.19 *Before and after photos of Gaza's lost heritage as a result of Israel's war on the besieged Palestinian enclave.* (Source: AA)

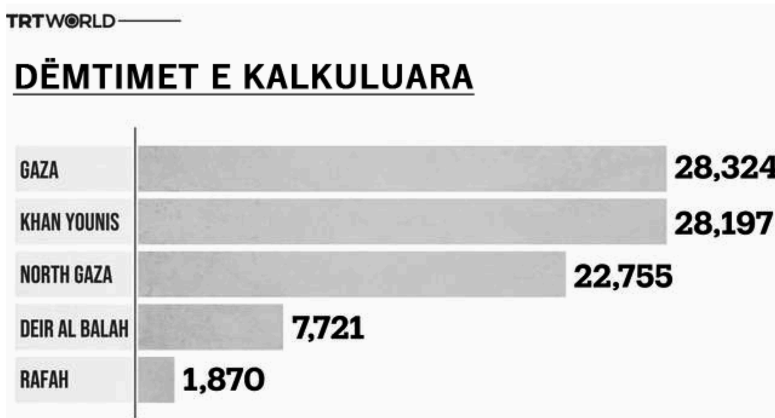

Table 1: *Calculating damage in cities.* (Source: TRT Worlds)

[28] *Israel gaza war: History of the conflict explained* (2024) *BBC News*. Accesible: https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-44124396 (Accessed on: 9 April 2024).

As Berman (2007) highlights, individuals may die, but the city endures. Urbicide is, in fact, a process of total annihilation that erases memory, sets ablaze recollections, photographs, and archives, with the intent to prevent a society from regenerating.[29] To what extent does architecture strive to keep alive the flame of hope and preserve collective memory?

War is no longer fought solely on traditional battlefronts between nations, it has evolved into a different form, negative architecture used as a tool of destruction, or "Architecture in war". This phenomenon dates back to the dawn of civilization, developed through the world wars, and was marked decisively during the Balkan conflicts under Yugoslav occupation, reinforcing the grim reality of genocide not only against people but also against architecture, which acts as a form of killing the same people. Urbicide has become an inseparable shadow of war, manifesting in every corner, challenging the notion that "*there are no wars in cities*". On the contrary, cities are no longer refugees from war but targets for the enemy, as centers of historical, cultural, urban, and artistic development. This reality is continually illustrated through photographs and news reports transmitted daily by the digital world, virtually bringing us to the scenes of destruction.

When discussing the Balkan wars, especially the conflict with Yugoslav authority, it is impossible not to recall the genocide inflicted in Kosovo. This genocide manifested not only through bloodshed and violence but also through the ruins and ashes of buildings that symbolized Kosovo itself and its identity. Thus, the question arises: Was urbicide also present in Kosovo, and where in particular?

[29] Berman, M., (1982). *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

“Destroy the old, build the new”

02.

Urbicide in Kosovo
during Yugoslavia

II.“Destroy the old, build the new” - Urbicide in Kosovo during the Jugo.

Social, economic, and political philosophy, Marxism represents a revolutionary period based on the doctrines of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the mid-19th century, aiming for a social transformation characterized by equality rather than privileges for certain classes. It envisions a classless society where every individual contributes to the common good, and the conflict between classes is theoretically abolished.[30] One of the concepts emerging from this revolution was the slogan, “*Destroy the old, build the new*”, which aimed at overthrowing the bourgeoisie to establish a proletarian society. During the Yugoslav period, this idea had significant influence in Kosovo but with what consequences?

Kosovo, located in the heart of the Balkans with a small territory and an ancient history, stands as a center of continuity for the ancient Illyrian-Dardanian civilization, preserving the Albanian language as a heritage of these kingdoms.[31] With its name meaning “*land of pear trees*”, it fought against various occupiers throughout the centuries, starting from the Roman, Ottoman empire until Yugoslavia one, each of them affecting the urban fabric of the place.

While the first ones played the biggest role on the religion of the country and also the tradition, the major changes happened during Yugoslavia, changes that never had good intentions.[32]

But what did Yugoslavia represent? Yugoslavia was the dream of the Slavic peoples, a union aimed at creating a new Illyria. The ideas that began around 1840 were realized in 1918 with the establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a symbiosis of the Serbian, Croatian, and Slovenian kingdoms. Yugoslavia encompassed Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia with its two provinces Kosovo and Vojvodina. [33]

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[30] *What is marxism? definition of marxism, marxism meaning* (pa datë) *The Economic Times*. Accessible: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition/marxism (Accessed on: 22 May 2024).

[31] Wilkes, John J. (1995). *The Illyrians* Oxford, United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishers Limited.

[32] Clark, H. (2000) *Civil resistance in Kosovo*. London: Pluto Press.

[33] *Yugoslavia (2024) Encyclopædia Britannica. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/place/Yugoslavia-former-federated-nation-1929-2003 (Accessed: 22 May 2024).*

Harta 1. *Harta e Jugosllavisë*
(Burimi: e përpunuar nga autorja)

2.1 Reconstruction and destruction - Kosovo after the WW2

After World War II, Kosovo experienced turmoil marked by political struggles, national identity, and ethnic tensions. So much so that Kosovo's period under Yugoslavia can be divided into four parts:

1. **First phase, 1945-1966- "A.Ranković Period"**

During this period, Albanians endured a dark era marked by massacres and widespread destruction. It was characterized by wars and uprisings against the oppression of the population. The aim of this system was the complete expulsion of Albanians from their territories, to the extent. Approximately 1,100 Albanians were killed, over 100,000 were tortured, and numerous settlements were burned and destroyed. This terror further accelerated the migration of Albanians to Turkey. The propaganda of respect for human rights starkly contradicted the policies being implemented, where the goal of decolonizing land remained and was repeated. [34]

2. **Second phase, 1967-1980- "Camouflage"**

Kosovo achieved a partial resolution of its political status. During these years, respect for rights such as education began to take shape, exemplified by the establishment of the University of Prishtina. Employment opportunities opened up within the administration as well as in public and social enterprises. However, discrimination against Albanians did not end; rather, it persisted in more covert and subtle forms.[35]

3. **Third phase, 1981-1989- "The Revolution"**

The phase that characterizes the struggle for political status through demonstrations by Albanians and the beginning of the policy of violence by Serbian rulers. The challenges that all classes faced in education, health and work as a result of the goals of differentiation within the species by the Serbian side. The Serbian state takes over repressive apparatuses and state institutions. In this way, the era of Serbian genocide begins.[36]

4. **Fourth phase, 1990-1997- "Resistance"**

During this phase, the expulsion of Albanians from public institutions and the suppression of political pluralism began. Once again, waves of displacement followed, not only toward Turkey but across the world, as the only hope for survival.

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[34] Krasniqi, J. (2010) *Kosova pas Luftës së Dytë Botërore*, *Bota Sot*.
[35] ibid
[36] ibid

Kosovo remained under a state of siege, with the principal aspiration being the unification of Albanians and the establishment of a national symbol of resistance. Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in September 1991, though not yet from Yugoslavia. Despite this declaration, Serbian violence persisted, and the ideology of ethnic cleansing from five decades earlier re-emerged in various forms. Gradually, Albanians were left with only two options: assimilation and emigration, or armed resistance. Thus, the army was born, and so was the war, one that destroyed and burned over 1,000 settlements, led to the complete destruction of 104,000 homes, severely damaged another 214,000, and claimed the lives of more than 13,000 civilians and 2,000 fighters. But to what extent did it destroy the identity?[37]

Despite historical facts, Kosovo is considered by Serbia as the "*cradle of Serbian civilization*" or their own "*Jerusalem*".[38] This makes the significance deeply symbolic, a symbolism that has been manipulated for centuries by the Serbian regime to reinforce its political goals, often through religion. By constructing Orthodox religious buildings, the intention was to support and legitimize their historical claims. A key issue that emerged for the Yugoslav state during the early stages of occupation was the religious identity of the Albanian population, a majority of whom practiced Islam, an influence rooted in over five centuries of Ottoman rule. Islamic faith was not only widespread among the people but also embedded in the built environment, with numerous mosques, bazaars, hammams, fountains, and military fortifications present throughout Kosovo. The Serbian authorities adopted a propagandistic strategy, direct destruction of Islamic monuments without justification would have incited strong resistance from the Albanian population. Thus, the slogan "*Destroy the old, build the new*" emerged, serving as ideological cover for architectural erasure. This slogan was also used in projects such as the construction of the "*Brotherhood and Unity*" monument, erected on the site of Prishtina's former old bazaar, symbolizing the aspirational unity between Serbs and Albanians while simultaneously obliterating physical traces of the latter's cultural presence. Serbian nationalism in Kosovo faced major obstacles, as demographic realities, an Albanian majority, undermined its narrative. To advance its agenda, Serbian authorities pursued the erasure of Albanian

[37] Krasniqi, J. (2010) *Kosova pas Luftës së Dytë Botërore*, *Bota Sot*.

[38] Clark, H. (2000) *Civil resistance in Kosovo*. London: Pluto Press.

cultural and historical identity, facilitating a constructed sense of Serbian authenticity in the region. Religious and cultural landmarks were demolished and replaced by administrative or political structures. This spatial transformation was central to replacing the historic fabric of Prishtina with a modernist cityscape aligned with Yugoslav and Serbian ideological goals, rather than its native cultural heritage.

Socialist Yugoslavia, as outlined in a 1959 publication by the Municipal National Council of Prishtina titled *Prishtina*, aimed to erase the city's historical character and rebuild it as a modern Yugoslav center, rewriting its identity through a Serbian narrative. The new city was to rise from the ruins of the old, planned with 2,200 new housing units, healthcare and administrative facilities, schools, roads, and sidewalks. This urban transformation was part of a broader strategy of ethnic cleansing: encouraging the displacement of Albanians to Turkey through "*Turkification*", while settling Serbs in their place. Between 1950 and 1970, new monuments dedicated to Serbian heroes were erected, modernist concrete memorials symbolizing both a departure from Soviet socialist realism and the assertion of Yugoslav-Serbian hegemony.

Fig.21 *Postcard from 1970 of the Revolution monument in Peja.* (Source: Spomenik database)

A typical example, in addition to the "*Brotherhood and Unity*" monument in Prishtina, is the memorial dedicated to the city's fallen during World War II and the victims of fascism, erected in 1967 in Peja, a city in western Kosovo. Following a design competition won by Serbian architects, the memorial was placed in the city park on Karagaç Hill, south of the city center.

This complex monument, titled "*Monument of the Revolution*" (see fig. 21), consisted of four aluminum figures, each about seven meters tall, raising their fists in the air and gazing into the distance, a typical partisan symbol, mounted on a concrete pedestal. Stone cubes engraved with the names of fallen partisan fighters from the Peja region, both Albanian and Serbian, were also part of the site. However, the 1990s Yugoslav wars brought turmoil not only to the country but also to the fate of the monument itself. Peja was one of the cities most affected by the war, suffering not only genocide but also the destruction of around 80% of its housing stock. The monument did not survive long. In 2012, the aluminum sculptures were removed, an act whose perpetrators remain unknown and all physical traces of the monument disappeared, while the remaining elements fell into disrepair due to vandalism and neglect. The site eventually became a dumping ground. In 2023, after the final remnants were cleared, the municipality of Peja erected a new monument on the same site dedicated to four commanders of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) from Peja who fought in the 1999 war (see figure 22).[39]

Fig.22 *The commander's memorials at the location of the revolution monument.* (Source: Gazeta +Projekti, 2023)

[39] *Spomenik database: Monument to the revolution at Pejë, spomenikdatabase.* Accessible: https://www.spomenikdatabase.org/peje (Accessed: 03 June 2024).

Through monuments, the Yugoslav authorities aimed to leave their mark in Kosovo and propagate the narrative that Albanians and Serbs had coexisted peacefully for centuries and jointly fought against common enemies. This entailed the destruction of Albanian heritage to build something socialist, justified under the premise of “constructing something better". For example, in Mitrovica, the construction of the so-called “*Miner’s corps*” monument symbolizes the joint struggle of Albanians and Serbs who rebelled against the German occupation, a revolt against oppression and sabotage during 1941. The monument, a massive structure consisting of two concrete columns shaped like mineral veins, symbolizes the mining industry. For the people of Mitrovica today, this monument holds symbolic value, often remembered as a relic of communism or as a monument dedicated to Serbian leaders.

This type of harsh architecture is also expressed in Brezovica, in the partisan memorial park commemorating the fighters of the Sharri Mountains unit during World War II. Architecturally, it is conceptualized as the two lungs of the human body, symbolizing parents protecting their children, while the metallic forms represent the revolution. In the capital city, this expression was not limited to the “*Brotherhood and Unity*” monument but also manifested in the monument located in the Jewish cemetery in the Velani neighborhood of Prishtina. This monument, shaped like a sphere or globe and encased by eight points, symbolically represents the Yugoslav star found on the national flag (see fig. 23). These and many other monuments still exist in Kosovo today, raising frequent questions regarding their durability and what they truly represent about our identity. In my view, these monuments express the Serbian side's propaganda of their supposed “*authenticity*” in Kosovo, aiming not only to communicate this through monuments but also through religious structures. Therefore, why should something remain if it does not truly belong there?

Fig.23 Y*ugoslav monuments in Kosovo* (source: compiled by the author)

2.2 The beginning of the end - Kosovo during the 1970s-1980s

The 1970s represent a golden era for Kosovo. Following the 1974 Yugoslav constitution, Kosovo was granted autonomy, which resulted in the equitable distribution of power and increased employment opportunities for Albanians. During this period, Kosovo experienced significant development in infrastructure, industry, education, and architecture. This era witnessed the construction of some of the most important governmental, administrative, and commercial buildings, including the Palace of Youth and Sports, commonly known as "BoroRamizi", the Rilindja building, the People's Bank, the "Gërmia" Goods House, Bankos, the Ljubljana Bank, Hotel "Grandi" and "Bozhuri", and the Technical Faculty, among others. It was a golden age characterized by cold architectural forms where Brutalism gained substantial momentum. Each architect referenced the architectural heritage of the individual socialist republics through a critical regionalism approach. This period also marked the beginning of urban planning initiatives in Kosovo's cities, particularly Prishtina, envisioned as a typical Yugoslav city transformed by visionary planning.

Gradually, an interference emerged between the traditional urban fabric and the socialist urban tendencies. As the old Prishtina faded away, as seen in figure 24, when traces of Byzantine heritage disappeared, when non-owners became owners, and original owners were either killed or forced to leave their homes and city, the urban landscape transformed profoundly.

Fig.24 *Pristina in the 1970s, view from a helicopter.* (Source: Kosovo's Archives)

The transformation of Kosovo's cities into modern socialist urban centers was not a simple task. To fulfill the Yugoslav objectives, numerous traditional Albanian houses from the Byzantine period and earlier were demolished. These historic structures were arrogantly replaced by high-rise buildings, erasing the Ottoman lifestyle that had long dominated the streets, especially in Prishtina. Cobblestone streets of Prishtina were being replaced with asphalt. Prishtina, along with historic cities: Gjakova, Peja and Prizren, became dominated by concrete structures that symbolized the ambitions of the working class, while marble spaces of the political elite. The cities irrevocably transformed and would never be the same again.

From an architectural perspective, the building designs during this decade reflected prevailing global trends, including brutalism, postmodernism, high-tech, and deconstructivism. Consequently, the materiality of these structures was embraced alongside symbolic expressions of identity, often oriented towards "*regional modernism*". However, throughout these new constructions, what was consistently overlooked was regional architecture, often dismissed or disregarded by architects as unacceptable. Conflicting visions among different groups led to a chaotic situation in Kosovo, where one faction sought to conserve originality, while another attempted to impose its priorities, indirectly resulting in the near-total loss of regional identity. The regime exerted every effort to subjugate the population and deny their rights to originality and cultural identity. But with what symbolism were the buildings of this decade constructed? To what extent was modern regionalism utilized? Certain buildings embody symbolic meanings through their architectural elements, such as the National Library and the Palace of Youth and Sports. The National Library's distinctive white domes are interpreted as references to Islamic architecture, reflecting the Ottoman influence over five centuries, while simultaneously evoking the traditional Albanian "*plis*". Similarly, the Palace of Youth and Sports may symbolically represent the eight federal Yugoslav regions but can also be interpreted as an eagle, a symbol of Albanian ethnicity. Through these multifaceted interpretations, a deliberate dialogue is created between the contemporary and the traditional, with the overarching aim of preserving identity.[40]

[40] Jashari-Kajtazi,T. Jakupi,A. (2017) *Interpretation of architectural identity through landmark architecture: The case of Prishtina, Kosovo from the 1970s to the 1980s.* Frontiers of Architectural Research

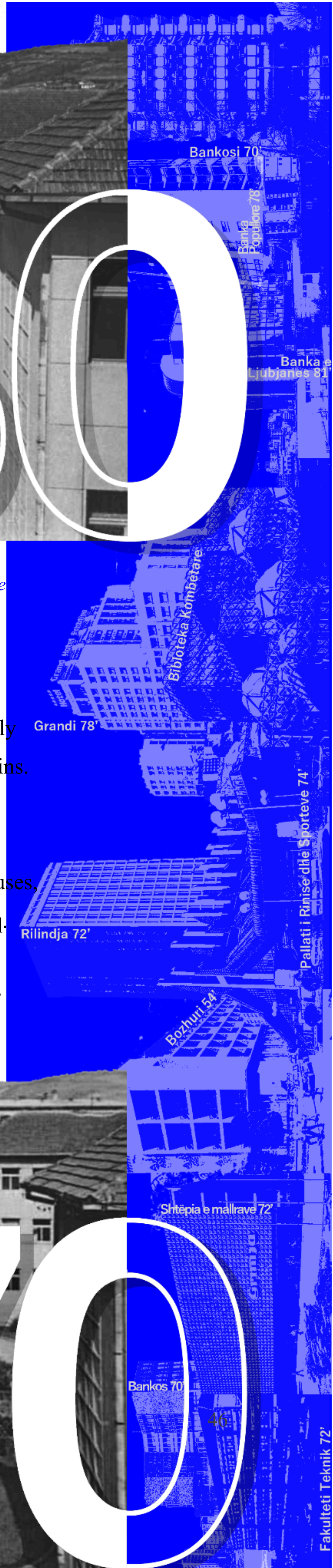

Fig. 25 *Former "Marshall Tito" Street or today "Mother Teresa" Square during the 60s* (Source: Luan Kantarxhiu)

In this way, Prishtina, in particular, experienced an architectural “boom”, a wave of modernism that unfolded along the city’s most prominent streets, while simultaneously erasing the historic core and relegating it to the urban margins. Modernism manifested not only through governmental and administrative buildings, (figure 25, 26)but also through residential developments constructed atop old Albanian houses, as exemplified by the transformation of “Mother Teresa” sq.

Fig. 26 *Former Marshall Tito Street or today’s "Mother Teresa" Square during the 70s (Source: Kenneth Andersen, 1973)*

In this context, the 1960s through the late 1980s were marked by a modernist architectural discourse and an ideological framework rooted in the concept of identity, with a dominant typology centered on landmark architecture. This explains the significant number of buildings and monuments constructed during this period—autonomous spatial entities with distinct character that formed new urban centers and separate fragments within the existing cityscape. Kosovo, having undergone its transition from an agrarian to an industrial society later than most Balkan or European countries, experienced a slower and more prolonged modernization process. One contributing factor was the continued dominance of Ottoman urban elements, which the socialist Yugoslav regime sought to systematically eliminate. Through the ideology of "*homogeneous Yugoslavism*", built on notions of social-political unity and economic centralization, the state aimed to transcend ethnic, religious, and regional identities in favor of a unified Yugoslav identity. However, this ambition was ultimately short-lived.

The 1980s marked a revolutionary period for Kosovo. The death of Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito triggered a phase of political instability, economic crisis, and escalating nationalist tensions. This unrest initially erupted through student protests at the University of Prishtina and later intensified in 1981, spreading across the entire region. The demonstrations resulted in numerous casualties. During this period, incidents were consistently attributed to Albanian nationalism, further exacerbating tensions between Yugoslav authorities and the Albanian population. By 1988, Kosovo was placed under martial law and its autonomy was significantly curtailed, triggering a state of crisis that led to violent protests and deaths in 1989. In 1990, following the state of emergency, ethnic Albanian delegates in the provincial assembly declared Kosovo a republic within Yugoslavia. This further inflamed tensions, prompting Serbian authorities to assert complete control by suspending Albanian-language broadcasting, shutting down the Rilindja newspaper, dismissing Albanians from public institutions, and closing Albanian schools. Consequently, architectural spaces were repurposed: homes became makeshift schools, and ordinary buildings were transformed into clandestine institutions. Gradually, in the bitter cold of February ‘98, Kosovo approached the catastrophe it had long attempted to avoid. The war had begun unfolding as a genocidal campaign before the eyes of a vulnerable nation.

2.3 Was this the end? - The 1999 War

"If we don't end war, war will end us", declared H.G. Wells. One of the most harrowing phenomena to plague humanity—war—descended upon Kosovo as well. While its echoes faded across distant hills, the very soil began to unfold the weight of its history. Between February 1998 and June 1999, a period of over a year, Kosovo was gripped by terror, violence, and genocide. The war claimed the lives of over 13,000 people, with more than 1,600 still missing.[41] and with it leaving behind deep wounds that still struggle to heal. A war recent in time, yet distant in perception.

Who was at war? Man against man, weapon against weapon—and in between, a third front emerged: a war against architecture. As previously mentioned, the Yugoslav regime employed various strategies to erase traces of the Albanian past, including the systematic targeting of historical and cultural landmarks, particularly Ottoman-era religious monuments such as mosques, bazaars, türbes, and kullas. The removal of these structures aimed to rewrite history by replacing them with architecture typical of Slavic tradition.

This agenda became evident with the establishment of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Kosovo in 1952, which included only a limited number of Ottoman-era monuments in its registry, despite their widespread presence—while prioritizing Serbian Orthodox architecture. Unlisted buildings that underwent renovations during this period often suffered from unsupervised interventions, leading to further degradation and loss of original architectural elements, rather than their revitalization. On the eve of the war, out of more than 600 mosques, only 15 had been granted protected status as historical monuments—even though many dated from the 14th to the 19th century. In contrast, over 210 Serbian Orthodox religious sites, including churches, cemeteries, and monasteries—were granted historical monument status, with more than 40 of them constructed between 1930 and 1990. When war broke out in Kosovo, historical monuments were not spared. Cultural heritage became

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[41] Halitaj, A. (2024) *Çfarë dihet për dëmet që iu shkaktuan Kosovës në luftë?*, *Raporto Korrupsionin! KALLXO.com*. E qasshme në: https://kallxo.com/lajm/cfare-dihet-per-demet-qe-iu-shkaktuan-kosoves-ne-lufte/?fbclid=IwAR3LMrav7K5B26BvfiVnCSUI73cDLSajnRHFEYhVtfC5smRUbLyXgc_jUFc_aem_AWG7kuntFejq62yDlB63I27GpUhQmTQKSVcMjSZLc8KWjpRZ4b73uJUG3qqyBqUSB9jm62Zqt95S4l2NGZLZ2TYv (Accesible on: 15 Qershor 2024).

a secondary battlefield, revealing that the conflict was driven not only by geopolitical tensions but also by identity-based political agendas.[42]

The architectural landscape of Kosovo bore the brunt of the conflict, with a significant number of historical buildings and cultural monuments deliberately targeted and destroyed. The war did not solely aim to displace people through massacres, rape, and forced evictions—it sought something far deeper: the erasure of Albanian identity, memory, and everything that defined "*Albanianhood*". The war began symbolically with the book—libraries were among the first institutions attacked due to the cultural wealth they housed, particularly the Albanian-language book. The National Library of Kosovo in Prishtina, which stored reserve copies from other libraries across the country, had its collections confiscated and sent to the paper factory in Lipjan. Of the 183 public libraries in Kosovo, 65 were completely destroyed during the war, resulting in the loss of over 900,000 volumes—followed by the widespread destruction of school libraries. A large number of archival documents were removed from Kosovo and transported to Serbia under the pretext of preventing falsification or destruction, never to be returned.The looting did not stop with libraries and archives. On June 13, 1999, just hours before NATO troops entered Prishtina—Yugoslav Serbian police set fire to the archives of the Islamic Community of Kosovo, erasing 500 years of community records. Valuable manuscripts and rare books were also lost in the burning of the Axhize Baba Bektashi tekke in Gjakova in May, including over 2,000 rare books and more than 250 manuscripts, some dating back to the 12th century.

Similar destruction occurred at the Hadum Suleiman Aga Library in Gjakova, which lost 1,300 books and 200 manuscripts written in Albanian, Arabic, and Ottoman Turkish; the Atik Madrasa Library in Peja, where only the outer walls remained after the loss of over 100 manuscript codes and 2,000 printed books; and the Atik Madrasa in Ferizaj, whose records dating from the Ottoman period were bulldozed. The Museum of the League of Prizren in Prizren was also severely damaged by grenades in March 1999.[43]

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[42] Herscher, A.,Riedlmayer, A. (2000) - *Monument and crime, the destruction of Historic Architecture in Kosovo.* Grey Room, Inc. and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, pp. 108–122.

[43] Bevan, R. (2007) *The destruction of memory: Architecture at war*. London: Reaktion Books.

The systematic destruction of libraries, archives, and historical documents in Kosovo inevitably recalls the war in Bosnia (1992–1995), particularly the burning of the Sarajevo National Library, where over two million books were lost. This tactic, repeatedly employed by Serbian forces, demonstrates that such cultural institutions were not collateral damage of war—they were its very targets. The deliberate incineration of evidence, collective memory, and cultural identity reveals the occupier's intent: to erase not just people, but their past and their presence.

As the German poet Heinrich Heine famously warned, "*Where they burn books, they will also ultimately burn people*". This statement underscores a recurring pattern in the lead-up to genocide,assaults on culture frequently precede the destruction of human lives. This was a systematic tactic employed by Yugoslav forces not only in Bosnia and Croatia but also in Kosovo, where ethnic cleansing was deliberately accompanied by cultural cleansing in an attempt to make the erasure permanent. The destruction of collective memory, the *Genius Loci* of place, and historical presence—embodied through architecture, was central to this strategy. In pursuit of the "*Greater Serbia*" project, Serbian nationalists understood the difficulty of assimilating populations with deep-rooted Islamic traditions and identities, such as those in Bosnia and Kosovo. Consequently, their campaign began with the targeted demolition of Islamic heritage. In Kosovo, this escalated during the war: according to the Islamic Community of Kosovo, approximately 217 mosques, 4 madrasas, and 3 Sufi lodges were damaged, destroyed, or reduced to rubble. Data from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) further confirms the scope of this devastation, documenting the destruction or damage of 225 out of the 600 mosques that existed in Kosovo at the time as seen below.[44]

Why were mosques and other Islamic sites targeted? On one hand, the destruction of architecture, homes, sacred, and secular buildings, was part of a broader strategy to obliterate Kosovo's physical and cultural landscape.

[44] Bajgora,S. (2014) *Destruction of Islamic heritage in the Kosovo War, 1998-1999*. Prishtinë: MFAK. f.100.

1. Xhamia e kuqe (1749), Pejë, 1998.

2. Arkivi i Bashkësisë Islame të Kosovës, 13 qershor 1999, Prishtine.

@Sabri Bajgora

@Fred Abrahams/Human Rights Watch

5. Xhami në rrugën Prizren-Gjakovë, Prizren, korrik 1999.

6. Xhamia e fshatit, Reti, Rahovec, Mars, 1999.

@Andrew Herscher

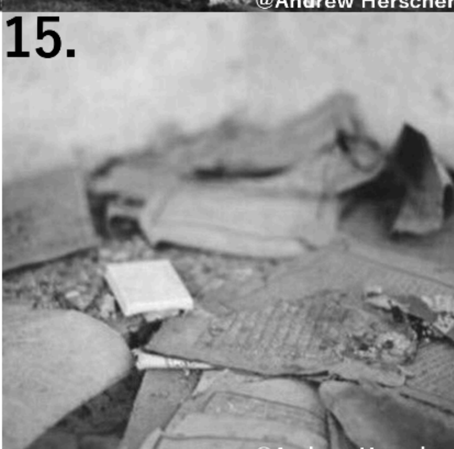
9. Xhamia e Hasan Pashës (1702) Mushtisht, Therandë, Prill 1999.

10. Xhamia në Novosellë, e djegur e grafituar Novosellë, Vushtrri 1999.

@Andrew Herscher

11. Xhamia e Gazi Ali Begut Vushtrri, 1999.

12. Xham



15. Libri i Kurannit i grisura ne xhamine e fshati Carraleve, Shtime 1999

@Andrew Herscher

18. Xhamia e Hadumit (1595), Gjakovë 1999.

@Sabri Bajgora

19. Xhamia e fshatit, Lismir, Fushe Kosove, 4 Prill 1999.

@Sabri Bajgora

3. Xhamia me minaren e hedhur në erë, Skënderaj, 1999.

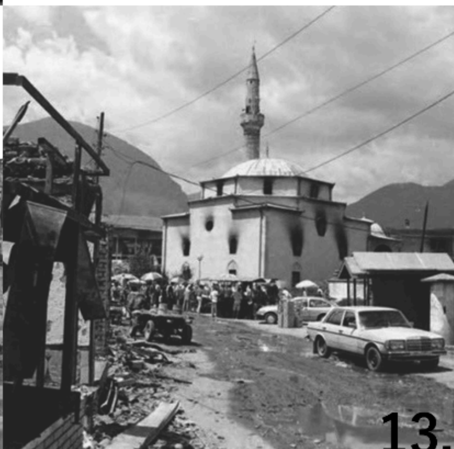
4. Xhamia tek Ura e Ibrit, Mitrovicë, 2 maj 1999.

@Sabri Bajgora

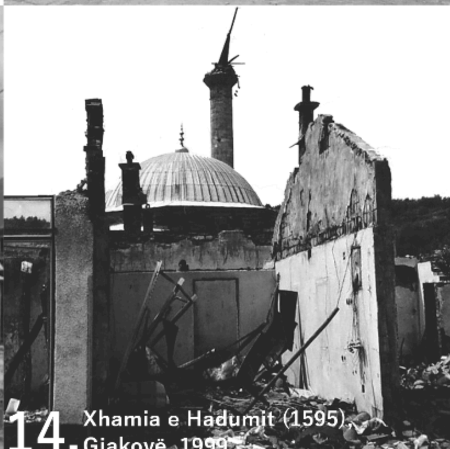
7. Çarshia e Vjetër (shek. XV) Gjakovë, 1999.

8. Xhamia e kuqe (1749), Pejë, 1998.

...ia, e ndërtuar si kullë Deçan, 1999.



13. Xhamia e Qarshisë (1471), Qendra e Pejës, Qershor 1999.

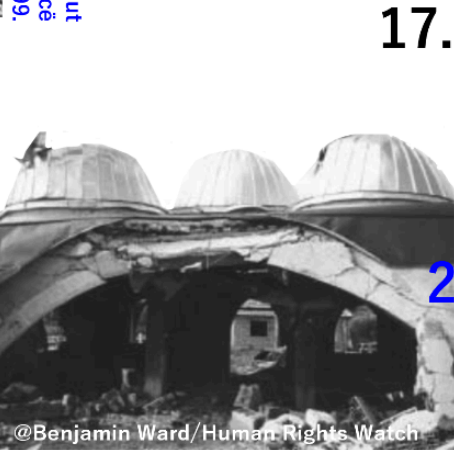


14. Xhamia e Hadumit (1595), Gjakovë, 1999.

@Andrew Herscher

16 Teqeja e Sheh Fejzullahut Mitrovicë Prill 1999.

17. Xhamia në Cernicë, e djegur dhe e grafituar Cernicë, Gjilan, 1999.



@Benjamin Ward/Human Rights Watch

20 Xhamia e Qirezit Qirez, Skenderaj 30 Prill 1999.

21. Xhamia në Gjyfatyn, vandalizuar dhe grafituar me shprehjet "Ne jemi serb"dhe " Serbia" dhe kryqin serb, 1999.

@Sabri Bajgora

On the other hand, sacred sites were themselves often primary targets, as their demolition served the occupier's objective of erasing cultural identity, historical memory, and the presence of a people. The destruction of Islamic religious architecture was both systematic and widespread, with one of the most heavily affected regions being the northwestern area of Peja, where each of the 49 Islamic sites suffered attacks during the 1998–1999 period. Mosques across Kosovo were subjected not only to structural damage, both interior and exterior—but also to acts of cultural and religious desecration. These acts included nationalist and anti-Islamic graffiti, expressions of anti-Albanian sentiment, and other forms of barbaric vandalism. Examples include damage to the Gjylfatyn Mosque in Peja, and the mosques of Carraleva, Livoç, and Stanofc. Tragically, sacred sites were not merely targets of destruction but were also repurposed as locations for the perpetration of atrocities and massacres. Of the 218 mosques and 11 Sufi lodges that were damaged or destroyed during the war, 13 mosques and 5 lodges were reduced to complete ruins. These included: the Çarshia Mosque (1762) in Vushtrri (see figure 30), the Ibar Mosque (1878), the Halil Efendi Mosque (1526) in Dobrçan, the Loxha Mosque (1900), and the historical Bektashi tekke (1790) in Gjakova. The only major Islamic urban center to escape large-scale destruction was Prizren, which suffered limited damage—most notably, the destruction of the Gazi Mehmet Pasha Medressa building, part of the historical League of Prizren complex.[45]

In addition to mosques, the Central Historical Archive of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK) met a similar fate, as it was set on fire just hours after the arrival of NATO troops in June 1999. Other Islamic archives located in cities such as Peja, Gjakova, Gllogoc, Lipjan, and Suhareka were likewise destroyed (figure 30) These facilities housed not only religious documentation but also vital records pertaining to the local population. During the 1998–1999 conflict, not a single Serbian Orthodox site in Kosovo was damaged or destroyed. However, this unfortunate reality changed after the war, when thousands of displaced Albanian refugees, upon returning to their burned and devastated towns and villages, targeted and damaged dozens of Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries in acts of retribution.[46]

[45] Bajgora,S. (2014) *Destruction of Islamic heritage in the Kosovo War, 1998-1999*. Prishtinë: MFAK. f.100.

[46] Bajgora, S. (2014) *Destruction of Islamic heritage in the Kosovo War, 1998-1999*. Prishtinë: Interfaith Kosovo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo, fq.100.

Islamic sacred sites were not the only targets of destruction; acts of vandalism extended to Albanian Catholic churches as well. Notable examples include the Catholic Church of St. Anthony in Gjakova, and its namesake in Prishtina, which was repurposed to host an aircraft radar system in its bell tower. This militarization rendered it a target and led to its bombing by NATO forces, along with the destruction of surrounding homes. Beyond religious monuments, the most extensive damage was inflicted upon Albanian residential settlements. It is estimated that between 120,000 and 150,000 homes were damaged or destroyed. Approximately 90% of traditional Albanian tower houses (kullas), many of which belonged to prominent families, were targeted, along with historic bazaars, resulting in both structural damage and complete annihilation. In the municipality of Deçan alone, where 263 kullas once stood, only four remained after the war, suffering minor damage, while 70 were completely demolished, according to architect Shkelzen Shehu (figure 28 and 29 show the damaged towers).

The main goal was ethnic cleansing, resulting in mass displacement and widespread destruction throughout Kosovo. Cultural monuments were often targeted in remote, depopulated villages far from battle zones indicating that the damage was deliberate, not collateral. Architecture was not a combatant, but it was drawn into the conflict. Lessons learned from Bosnia shaped a more calculated strategy in Kosovo, where the destruction of non-Serb heritage became central to the ethnic cleansing agenda. It was not just land, but identity embodied in architecture that was under attack.

Fig.28 *Jashar Pasha's Tower (1803) in Peja in* 1999 by Serbian forces. (Source: Xhavit Lokaj)

Fig.29 *Tower in Junik (17th century) demolished in* 1999 by Serbian forces. (Source: Xhavit Lokaj)

In addition to religious monuments and residential buildings, educational institutions suffered similar destruction. According to United Nations estimates, 649 schools were damaged during the conflict, with more than one-fifth partially destroyed and over 60 percent completely demolished. Furthermore, commercial shops located in the historic bazaars of cities, urban heritage oases were also demolished, particularly in Peja, Gjakova, and Prishtina.

During the war period, many significant religious and secular monuments and buildings were occupied by Serbian forces, who used them to establish their military strongholds. As the war came to an end and NATO troops liberated Kosovo from the occupying forces, these buildings became military targets. Consequently, the NATO intervention also led to the destruction of the very structures in which Serbian military units had entrenched themselves.

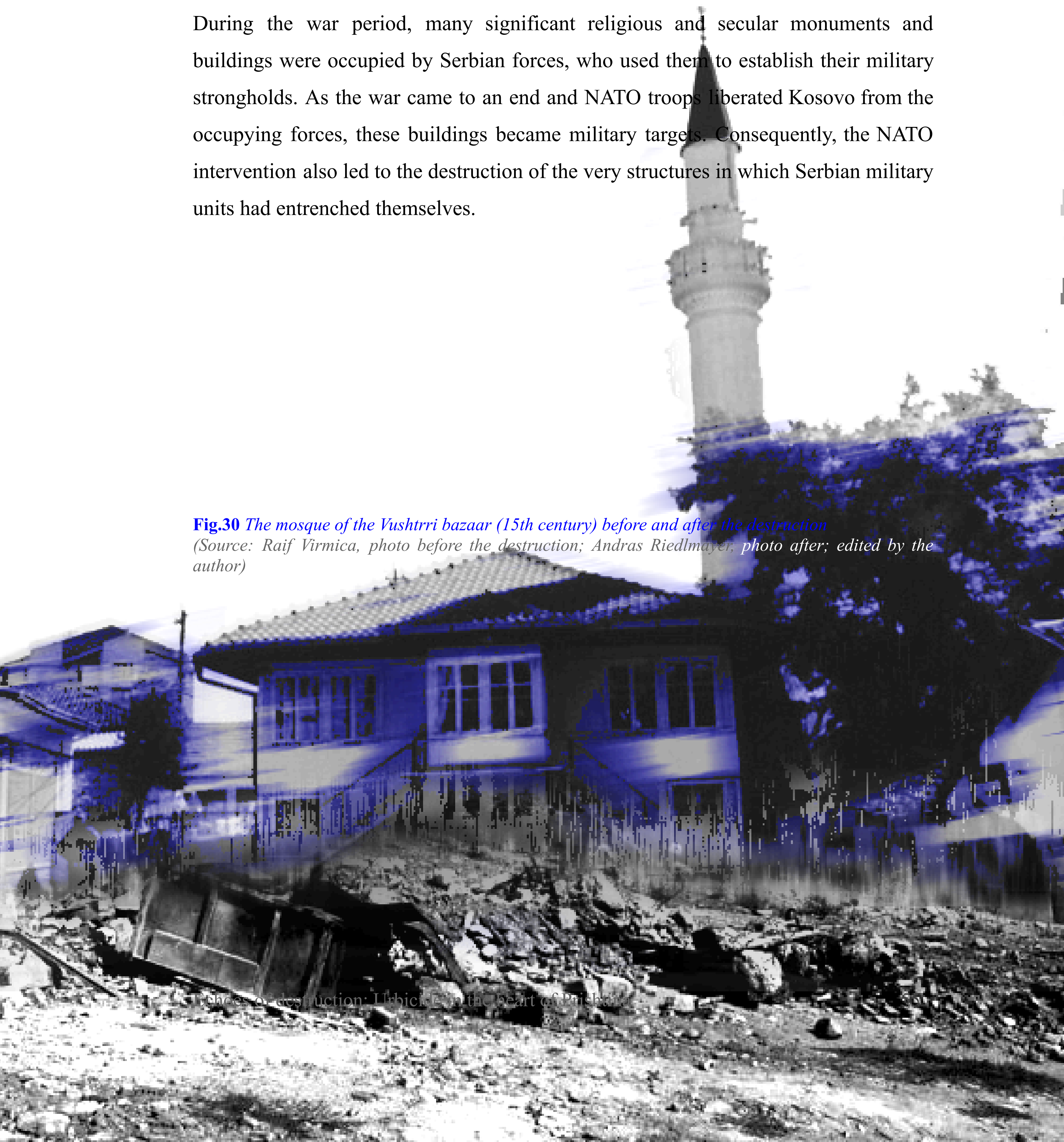


Fig.30 *The mosque of the Vushtrri bazaar (15th century) before and after the destruction*
(Source: Raif Virmica, photo before the destruction; Andras Riedlmayer, photo after; edited by the author)

The destruction inflicted upon Kosovo during the war targeted not only physical structures but also the collective memory, historical continuity, and the people's connection to place. This deliberate erasure signaled an attempt to eliminate the region's historical narrative, disrupt contemporary life, and obliterate cultural memory. Initially manifested through violence, massacres, and mass displacement, this devastation was further compounded by the phenomenon of urbicide, the targeted destruction of the urban fabric which left indelible marks on Kosovo's cultural heritage. The war resulted in the loss of cultural practices, intangible heritage, and architectural legacy. Serbian forces deliberately burned, destroyed, vandalized, and looted cultural properties including traditional residential homes, stone towers-"Kulla", cultural monuments, educational, cultural institutions, and religious structures. While many of the damaged monuments have since been revitalized, conserved, or even rebuilt from scratch, a significant number have suffered further degradation due to improper interventions. Currently, nearly two thousand heritage sites in Kosovo are under temporary protection, while only twenty-three enjoy permanent protective status. The country continues to struggle with the scars of war both in terms of material loss and the trauma to collective memory. Was there urbicide in Kosovo? The answer is unequivocally yes. The evidence lies in the nature of the targets selected by the occupying forces and the intentions behind these assaults. Yet the question remains: Was the war the starting point of urbicide in Kosovo, or did it begin earlier, and where?

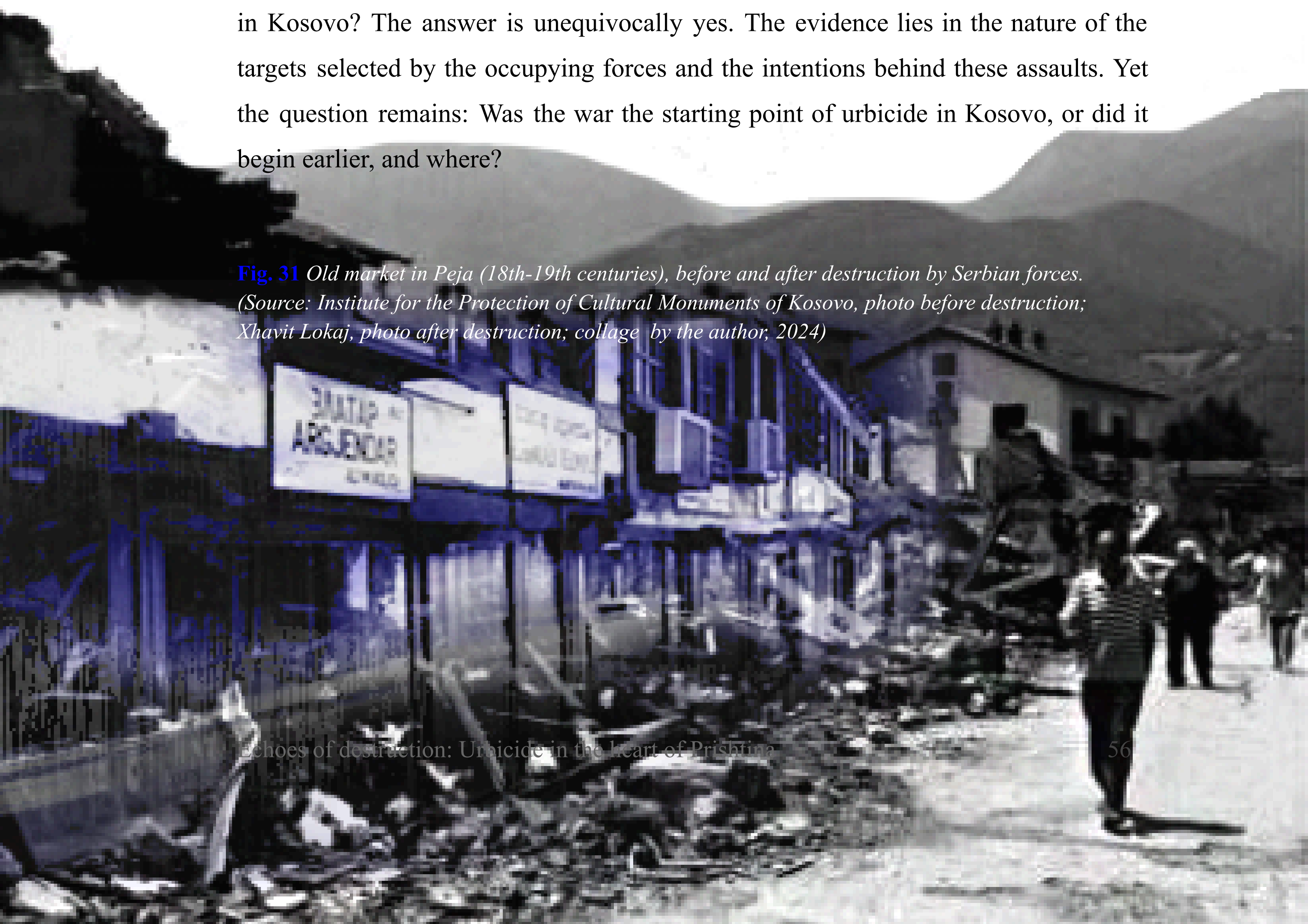


Fig. 31 *Old market in Peja (18th-19th centuries), before and after destruction by Serbian forces. (Source: Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Kosovo, photo before destruction; Xhavit Lokaj, photo after destruction; collage by the author, 2024)*

Beyond the ruins.

Urbicide
in the heart of
Prishtina

03.

III. Beyond the ruins - Urbicide in Pristina

3.1 A window into the past

Prishtina is an ancient locality with roots tracing back to the Neolithic period, whose urban development became evident during the Byzantine era, particularly in the 14th century. The earliest known historical reference to the city appears in a document by the Byzantine Emperor John VI Kantakouzenos, who described it as an "unfortified village Pristina". This raises the question: was Prishtina originally a village or a city? Initially, it was merely a small village under the jurisdiction of Artana (Novo Brdo), which at the time was a dominant urban and economic center. However, the event that catalyzed Prishtina's transformation into an urban settlement of strategic significance was the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 a major confrontation involving Albanian, Serbian, and Bulgarian principalities against the advancing Ottoman forces.[47]

From the defeat at the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 until 1912, Kosovo and particularly Prishtina remained under Ottoman rule for nearly five centuries. During the 14th and 15th centuries, the city experienced significant economic prosperity due to its proximity to the mining town of Artana (Novo Brdo), evolving into an important center of trade and craftsmanship. Prishtina became a cosmopolitan city, home to diverse religious and ethnic communities including Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Copts (Egyptians). According to the Ottoman defter of 1477, Prishtina was recorded as a settlement comprising nine neighborhoods and 352 households (namely: Mitropolit, Kaqanoviq, Pojasar, Potoqishte, Shtitar, Verlicko, Kosiriq, Llukar, and Llatinar. Gradually, Ottoman architectural style began to shape the city's identity evident in the construction of numerous mosques, hammams, clock towers, and government konaks leaving lasting marks of the centuries-long Ottoman presence that have never been fully erased.[48]

Prishtina was no longer merely a small village near Artana (see figure 32), for a period of 34 years, it served as the capital of the Kosovo Vilayet. Various theories exist regarding the etymology of the name *"Prishtina"*, yet one of the most concrete interpretations is provided by the American linguist Eric P. Hamp. He derives the

[47] Komuna e Prishtines (2018) *Narrativa e Prishtinës, Historik Konciz i Prishtinës*.
[48] Islami, A.(2024) Prishtina gjatë kohës osmane (1455-1912). Prishtina në Histori. Accessible https://www.prishtinanehistori.org/article/137/prishtina-gjate-kohes-osmane-1455-1912 (Accessed on 25 June 2024)

toponym *"Prishtina"* from Indo-European linguistic roots: *pri*, meaning "*ford*", and "*setin"*, meaning "*stone*". From this analysis, the name *"Prishtina"* can be interpreted as *"stone ford"*, "*ford over stone*", or as Hamp originally proposed, *Prisetina*.[49]

It took the Ottomans half a century to transform Prishtina into a typical Ottoman city. This transformation occurred through the prevailing Islamic spirit, embodied in architectural and cultural elements. The oldest surviving structure from this period, not only in Prishtina but in the entire Balkans is the Stone Mosque, also known as the Çarshi Mosque (figure 34, 35), dedicated to Sultan Bayezid I in the 14th century. During this era, the capital city evolved into a commercial hub due to its geographically strategic location for trade. Urban development was fueled not only by religious buildings but also by the construction of public infrastructure such as bazaars, inns (hans), roads, hammams, and more. Significant constructions from this period include the King's Mosque (1461), the Mosque of Yusuf Efendi (1551), the Llapi Mosque (1659), as well as the mosques of Hasan Emini, Mehmet Bey, Pir Nazeirt, Yusuf Çelebi, Hatunije, Hasan Bey, Alaudin, Jar Ali Çelibashi, and Hasan Efendi, along with the Çarshia Hammam, (figure 33) and others. Over time, Prishtina underwent a demographic shift, its neighborhoods took on a Muslim character and their names changed accordingly [50]

Fig.32 *Panorama of Prishtina in 1896 from the Ottoman archives.* (Source: PnH; edited by the author)

[49] Abdullahu, D. (2024) *Në gjurmë të origjinës së Prishtinës*, Prishtina në Histori (I). Accasible: https://www.prishtinanehistori.org/article/224/ne-gjurme-te-origjines-se-prishtines (Accessed on: 25 June 2024)

[50] Islami, A (2024), *Prishtina gjatë kohës osmane (1455-1912).* Prishtina në Histori (I). Accessible: https://www.prishtinanehistori.org/article/141/aspekte-te-urbanistikes-dhe-arkitektures-se-qytetit-te-prishtines-gjate-shekujve-xvixix.(Accessed on 6 July 24.)

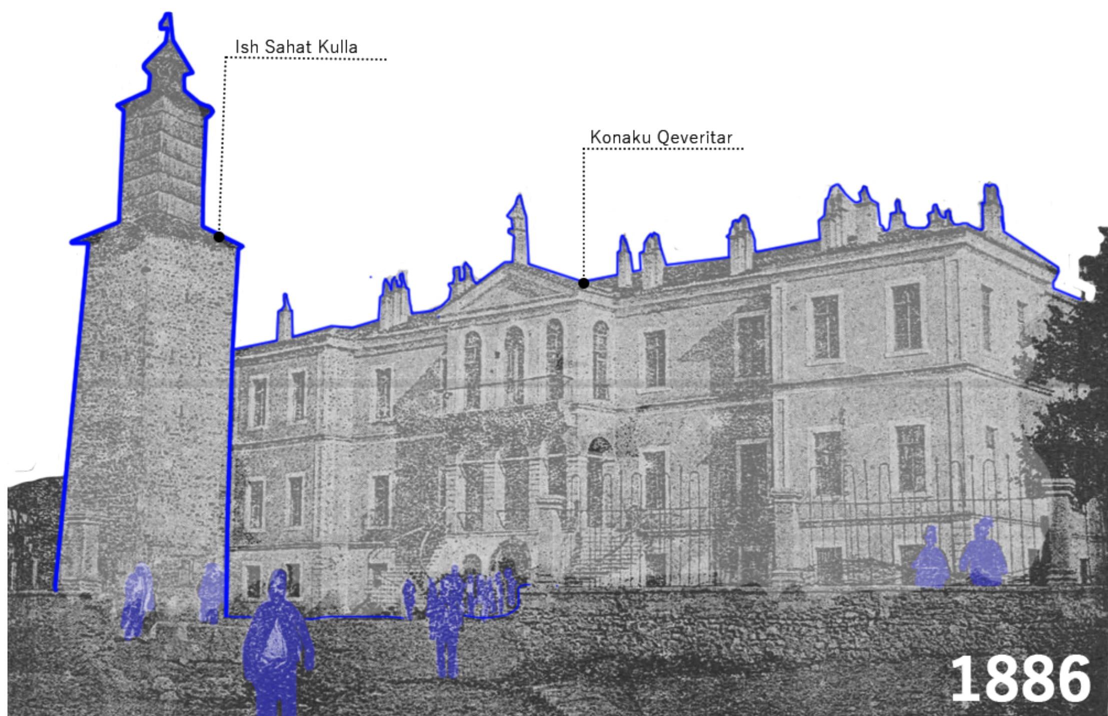


Fig.33 *Old Prishtina, government residence and clock tower 1886.* (Source: PnH; edited by the author)

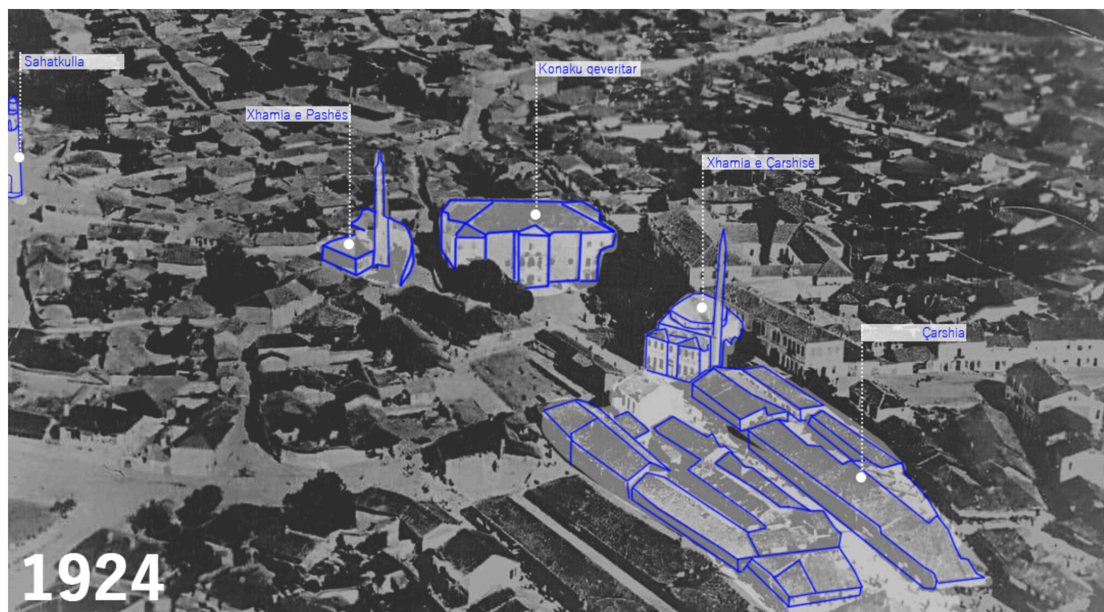
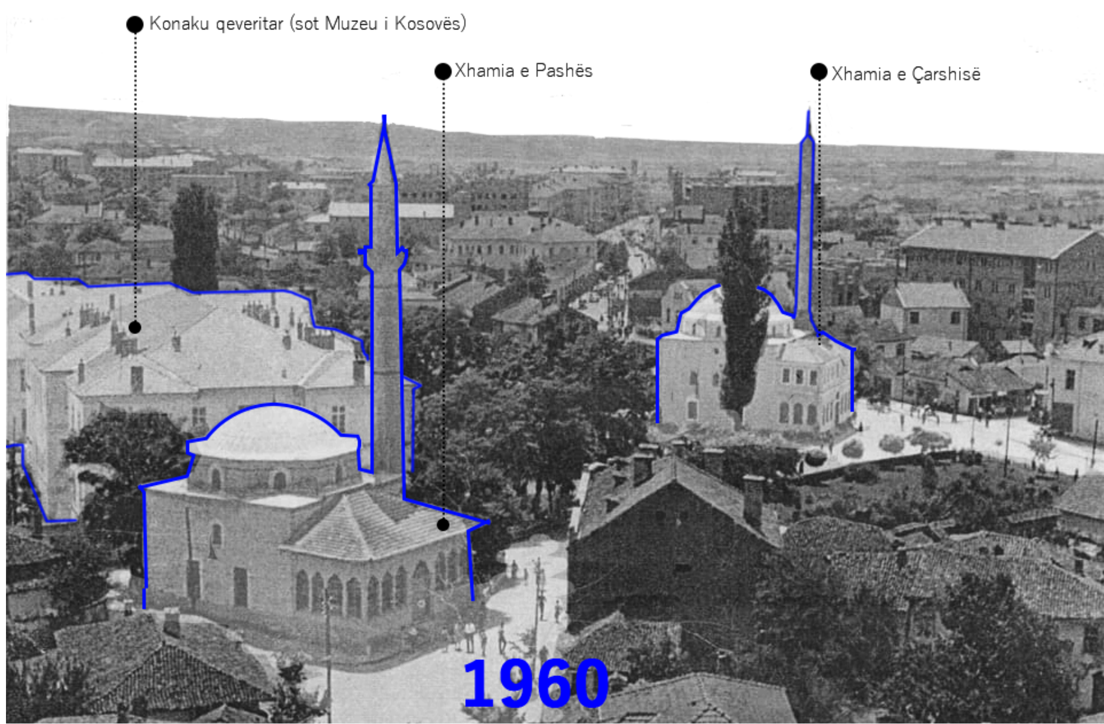
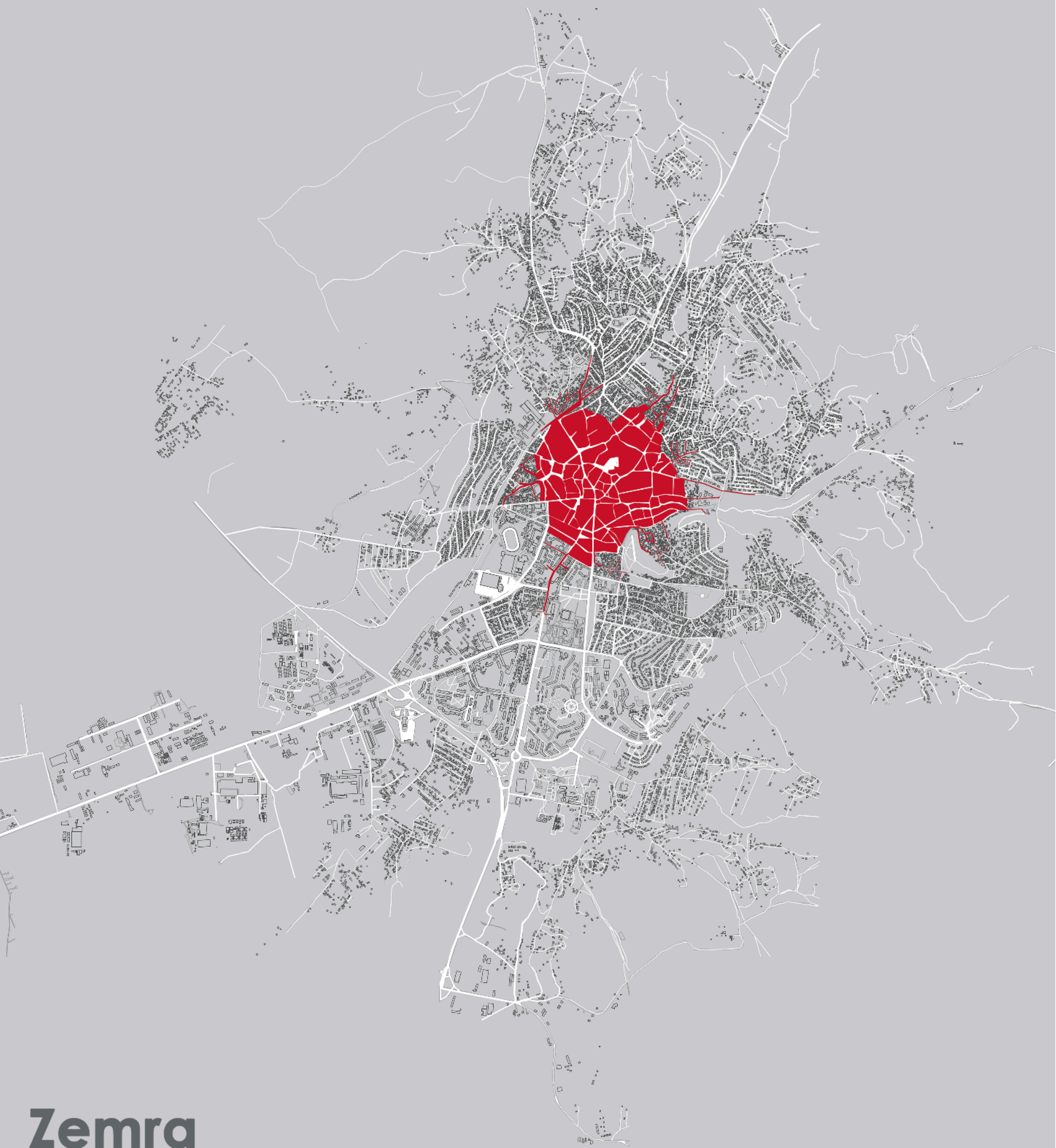


Fig. 34, 35 *Pristina in 1914 and 1960, with Ottoman objects* (Source: PnH; edited by the author)



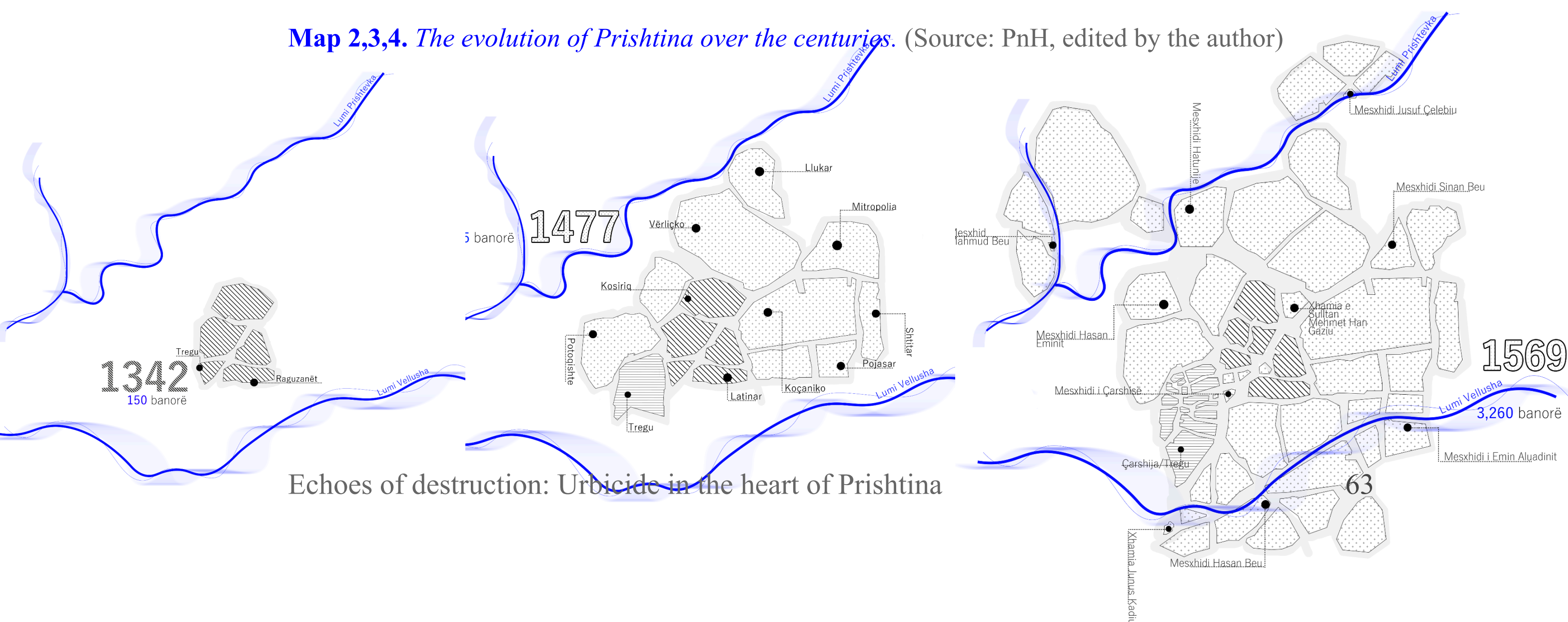


Zemra
e
Prishtinës

However, Prishtina was not created by the Turks—it was merely discovered by them. The urban transformations and the conversion of the city into a typical Islamic-Ottoman center through religious and cultural dissemination were strategic tactics employed by the empire to leave a lasting historical imprint. This was manifested not only through religious conversions from Christianity to Islam or Prishtina's development into a commercial center with bazaars and economic activity, but also through the transmission of customs and traditions that endured throughout the five-century period. A defining feature of Ottoman cities, the high defensive walls were notably absent in Prishtina. These walls, which symbolized authority and safeguarded urban identity, were never built, making the city's formation a process owned solely by the people of Prishtina. During the Ottoman rule, Prishtina's structure was composed of four main functional zones: residential areas, economic activities, religious-cultural institutions, and public spaces. At the center were the bazaars, while surrounding neighborhoods combined both residential and religious elements. Prishtina became a commercial hub with over 500 shops producing garments, carpets, cotton, and linen products, while livestock farming was practiced on the outskirts. In addition to trade, the city was also known for the two major fairs it hosted and the attention it received from the Ottoman Empire and Europe.

The harmony between urban life, religious practices, and social traditions was reflected in structures of cultural and spiritual value. Mosques stood near bazaars, linking faith with economy; fountains, clock towers, and hammams shaped the city's landscape. Prishtina, once a city of narrow streets and generous people, now faces the threat of losing its heritage to concrete. Yet its identity lives on in the streets, events, and collective memory of the city.

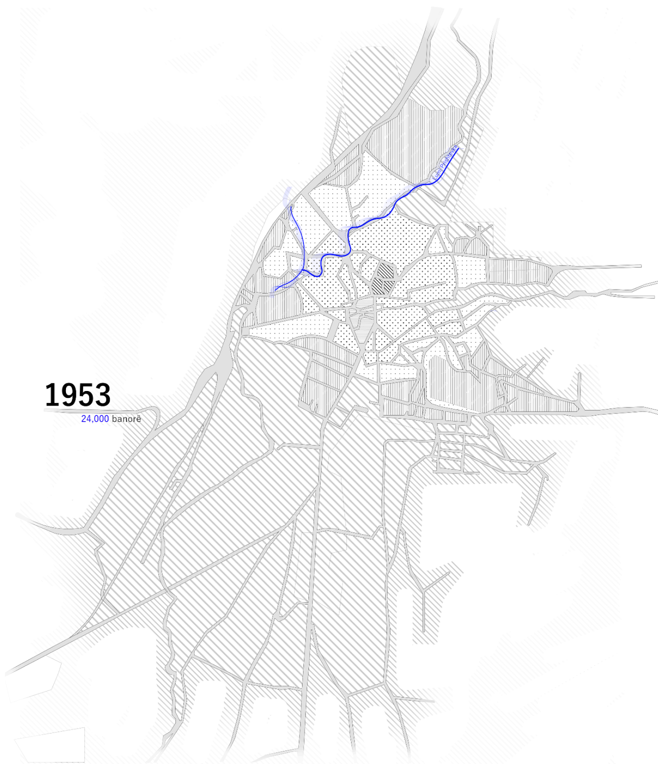
Map 2,3,4. *The evolution of Prishtina over the centuries.* (Source: PnH, edited by the author)

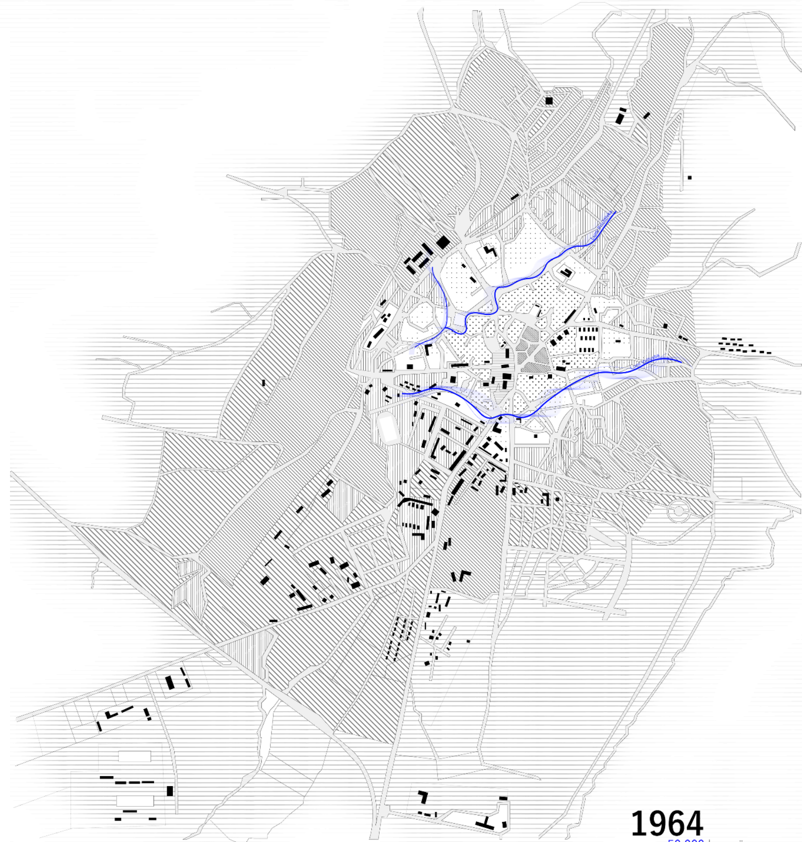


Toward the end of Ottoman rule, Prishtina gained military importance, marked not only by the presence of military forces but also by the construction of military buildings, such as the military barracks today the Kosovo Museum. Architecture began to reflect European influences, creating a unique blend between traditional Ottoman style and emerging European modernity.

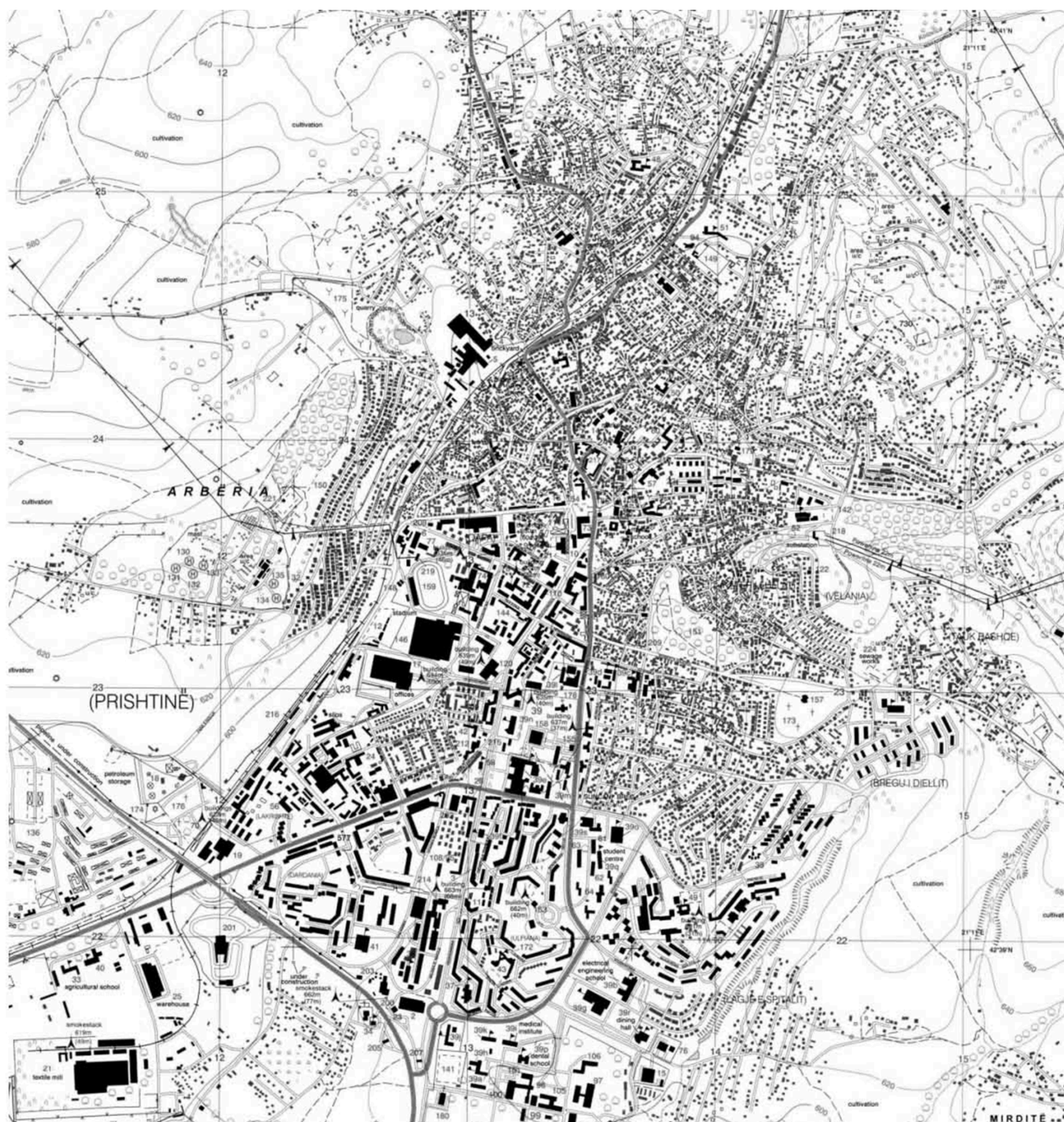
The 20th century marked a turning point in Prishtina's history. In 1912, the city was liberated from Ottoman rule yet freedom was short-lived. That same year, Prishtina was occupied by Serbian forces, first under Bulgarian control and then again under Serbia, despite Albanian efforts for independence. The Yugoslav era in Kosovo, and particularly in Prishtina, brought significant demographic and urban transformations. Under the motto "*Destroy the old, build the new*", Prishtina was turned into a "modern" city atop the ruins of the old one. This dark period saw the disappearance of Ottoman Prishtina, as socialist housing blocks and administrative buildings rose on the remains of traditional homes, inns, mosques, and churches. Concrete gradually replaced character, and with it, the city's only natural water sources, the rivers of Prishtina and Vellusha were buried. All of these presented on maps 2-10.

Old Prishtina now survives only in fragments confined to a small part of the historic center, with a few remaining streets and alleys. The city's past lies buried beneath rubble, while construction continues toward increasing urban congestion. Most traditional neighborhoods have vanished, their urban structure preserved only in archival sketches. What remains are scattered traces of residential houses, fountains, ruins visited today only through photographs and stories. But how did this happen? What happened to Prishtina? What happened to its architecture?





Maps 8,9,10. *Urban development of Pristina during the Serbian occupation.* (Source: PnH; edited by the author)



3.2 Architecture on target - What happened to Pristina?

At the end of World War II, Prishtina was left in the ruins of political chaos. The early stages of Yugoslav occupation marked the beginning of rapid urbanization and modernization, driven by the socialist policies of the Yugoslav government. These policies aimed not only at shaping the city's future, but also at reshaping its past. Traditional architecture with symbolic cultural value was deliberately destroyed, under the pretext of eliminating "primitive" and "backward" elements of the city—guided by the infamous motto: "*Destroy the old, build the new*". The result was the creation of a functional, efficient, and modern city at the cost of its architectural heritage.

The focus was on transforming typical Ottoman cities into modern ones, a broader trend across Southeastern Europe. According to Conley and Makas, this approach was not driven by urban progress, but rather as a form of retaliation against the Ottoman spirit, its customs, urban fabric, and culture. Given that Prishtina was one of the main regional centers of the Ottoman Empire, its de-Ottomanization and conversion into a typical Yugoslav city represented a symbolic "victory" for the Slavic side. Beyond de-Ottomanization, even the Albanian identity was challenged, with Albanian nationalism perceived as a threat. This assault began with the city's historical narrative and extended to its urban planning. November 19, 1944, would later be framed as the "rebirth" of Prishtina, marked by a new urban identity aligned with the emerging socialist order. And in the pursuit of this goal, started the attack of the Prishtina Bazaar (see figure 38). Thus began the manifestation of urbicide in Prishtina.

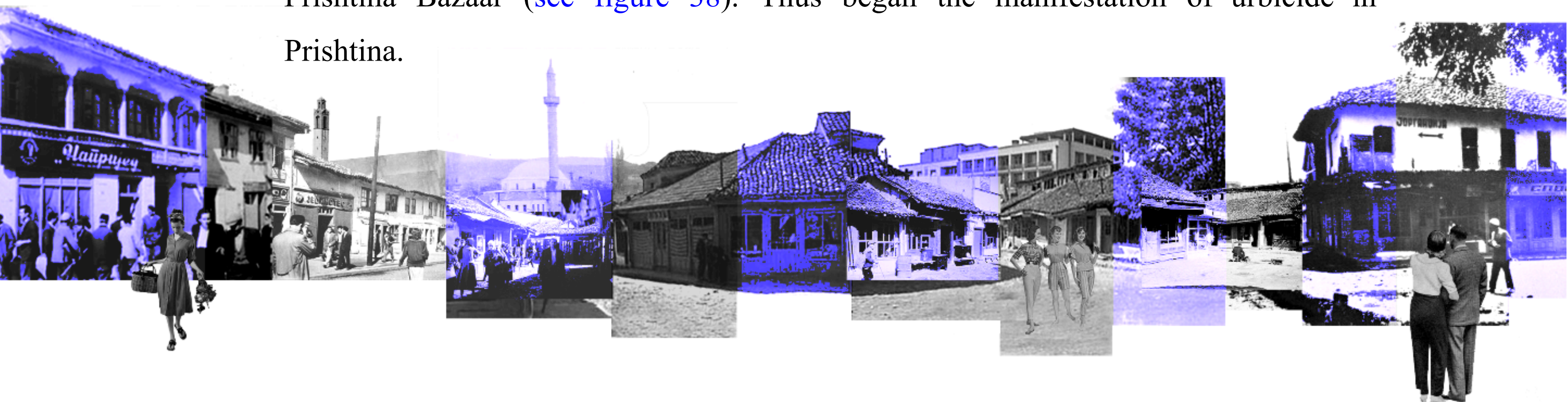


Fig.38 *Panoramic view of the Pristina Bazaar destroyed in 1947.* (Source: Kosovo Archives; edited by the author)

3.2.1 Nature as an agent of urbicide

In **Chapter I**, we discussed urbicide and categorized it into three typologies: natural, anthropogenic, and symbolic. These three forms function as tools of urbicide, acting as silent destroyers of cities. But how did urbicide manifest itself in Prishtina?

We begin with **natural urbicide** when the invisible hand of nature enacts its "revenge" on cities. In Prishtina, this was evident through its two rivers: the *Prishtina* (figure 39) and the *Vellusha*. Flowing from opposite ends of the city and meeting near the "*Prishtina Stadium*", these rivers were foundational in shaping the city"s urban landscape and historical development. Their presence influenced the layout of roads, neighborhoods, and infrastructure built around and along them.

Although small in size, they often carried heavy volume, and their floods would shake the city. According to oral tradition, as recorded by Qamil Batalli, the rivers were considered cursed, flooding every 32 years and destroying anything in their path. To mitigate this, poplar and willow trees were planted along their banks, though not always effectively. As *Şerafedin Süleyman* also described the Prishtina River:

"*......In some places towards the 'Tophane' neighborhood, there was a canal and a pool and sometimes we children would go there for swimming to cool off on summer days. Another good thing about the river was that the surrounding area contained willow trees and poplar trees that lightened the air. So it had good and bad sides. The The bad side was that when it overflowed its bed it destroyed everything. The bridges were wooden, only the strong bridges stood. So, we saw the benefits and on the other hand the bad..*"

Fig. 39 *Flood of the "Prishtina" River in 1954* (Source: Kosovo Archives; edited by the author)

In this city, where rain was frequent, the rivers often overflowed, flooding everything in their path. These floods regularly impacted the city's architecture, particularly targeting Prishtina's Bazaar. Repeated flooding compromised the structural integrity of the area, an issue later exploited by the Yugoslav authorities as justification for its complete demolition. The constant vibrations and water damage affected many homes, leaving numerous citizens displaced. Roads were damaged and polluted, contributing to the city's growing uncleanliness. These natural disasters eventually became a pretext for their full erasure.

3.2.2 The human hand in urbicide

In the context of **anthropogenic urbicide**, the human factor is essential and highly influential in the damage inflicted upon the city. One central activity that contributed to the destruction and transformation of Prishtina was undoubtedly the pollution of its rivers. The repeated flooding, coupled with human negligence, turned these rivers from symbols of the city's identity into sources of contamination.
The Vellusha River was covered in the 1950s, followed by the Prishtina River (figure 40) in the 1970s. But why were they covered rather than cleaned? The communist regime deliberately exploited this human-caused degradation as a tool for its broader agenda , the erasure of the city through the removal of its very origins. Beyond its impact on cultural and historical identity, the covering of the rivers also affected Prishtina's economic development, urban growth, and environmental balance.

Fig. 40 *The Pristina River as it sinks under concrete and becomes a man-made sewage system* (Source: Kosovo Archives; edited by the author, 2024)

The communist regime aimed to sever ties with the past and the traditional "*rural*" way of life in Prishtina, a lifestyle closely linked to natural elements such as rivers and the city's surrounding agricultural landscapes. This narrative aligned with their ideology of modernizing a so-called "*backward*" population. However, this vision of progress did not include the creation of structured social and environmental public spaces. On the contrary, the city lost a significant part of its natural landscape and identity. Today, Prishtina remains just that, a city without a river. And how could the so-called "*backward*" Islamic past in Prishtina be fully erased without demolishing all the fountains? That was precisely the goal(figure 41). A city where water once flowed from both sides enabled the construction of public fountains that were distributed to the citizens. With the disappearance of the rivers, the fountains vanished.

Fig. 41 *The "lost" fountains of Pristina. (Source: compiled by the author)*

The fountains once positioned near mosques and along main roads were deliberately destroyed by human hands. These included the fountains near the Llokaç Mosque, "Çekliku", "Katër Llullat", "Tophane", "Hynilerët", and others. The so-called "modern changes" in Prishtina extended to these fountains on one hand, as part of adapting to modernization trends, and on the other, as a conscious effort to eliminate symbols associated with the Ottoman presence in Kosovo.

In anthropogenic urbicide, war, specifically the 1999 conflict in Kosovo, has had a profound impact. For over a decade, Kosovo became a battlefield, a center of war, genocide, and bloodshed. Prishtina, as the political and administrative center, experienced the war through repression, psychological violence, and forced displacement by Serbian forces. However, the city's architecture did not escape unscathed. During this period, houses, mosques, and institutions containing important documents of the Albanian people were destroyed. Notably, the Central Historical Archive of the Islamic Community of Kosovo was burned on June 13, 1999, erasing records spanning approximately five hundred years. The Ramazan Çauşi Mosque (*Llapi Mosque,* seen on figure 42) was also set ablaze in 1999. Furthermore, Kosovo's libraries, including the reserves of the National Library of Kosovo, were targeted—documents from the library were sent to a paper factory in Lipjan for destruction.[51] Libraries and mosques were not the only targets in Prishtina; many such institutions in Gjakova and Peja were also burned, resulting in the loss of numerous rare manuscripts and books. **Fig. 42** *The burning of the Llapi mosque in 1999.* (Source: Behgjet Pacolli Foundation)

[51] Teijgeler, René (2006). *"Preserving cultural heritage in times of conflict"*

Grashtica
Stadiumi " Fadil Vokrri"
PRI SHTI
42°39'48"N Kosova

Parku i Gërmisë

Lumi Prishtina

Lumi Vellusha

NA

21°9'44"E

These events during the war draw a clear parallel with the 1992 conflict in Bosnia, when the Yugoslav regime burned the National Library of Sarajevo with the intent to erase the identity of the people and rewrite history. Urbicide has occurred in different places and at different times, yet always with the same goal: the destruction and erasure of a people's memory.

After the victory marked by NATO's bombings in June 1999, feelings of hope and curiosity for a new life were revived in Prishtina. However, in terms of its architectural landscape, the city was found to be a ghost town. This gave rise to a new era marked by a mixture of destruction, reconstruction, and post-war urban development. While the Yugoslav period attempted to erase the city's past, the post-war recovery also erased the city once again, aiming to build a new city by forgetting the old. Both cities faded: the old one sacrificed for the sake of the new ("*Destroy the old, build the new*"), and the new one again for the sake of what was "*new*".What happened to Prishtina in the 21st century is indeed a new chapter in a new era. But is it one of demolition or integration? The post-war reconstruction efforts have created a homogenized urban environment, a veritable urban jungle. (see figure 43) Through tactics aimed at creating a new, modern, and contemporary city, the preservation of the past, cultural monuments, and historic urban fabric has been neglected, resulting in a loss of character. High-rise buildings erected within community spaces and historic neighborhoods such as Tophane and Muhaxherë, primarily driven by profit rather than preservation, represent rapid steps toward creating an urban chaos. Prishtina thus transforms into an unfinished and poorly planned urban mix.

Fig.43 *Pristina of the 2000s.* (Source: Filippo Romano; edited by the author)

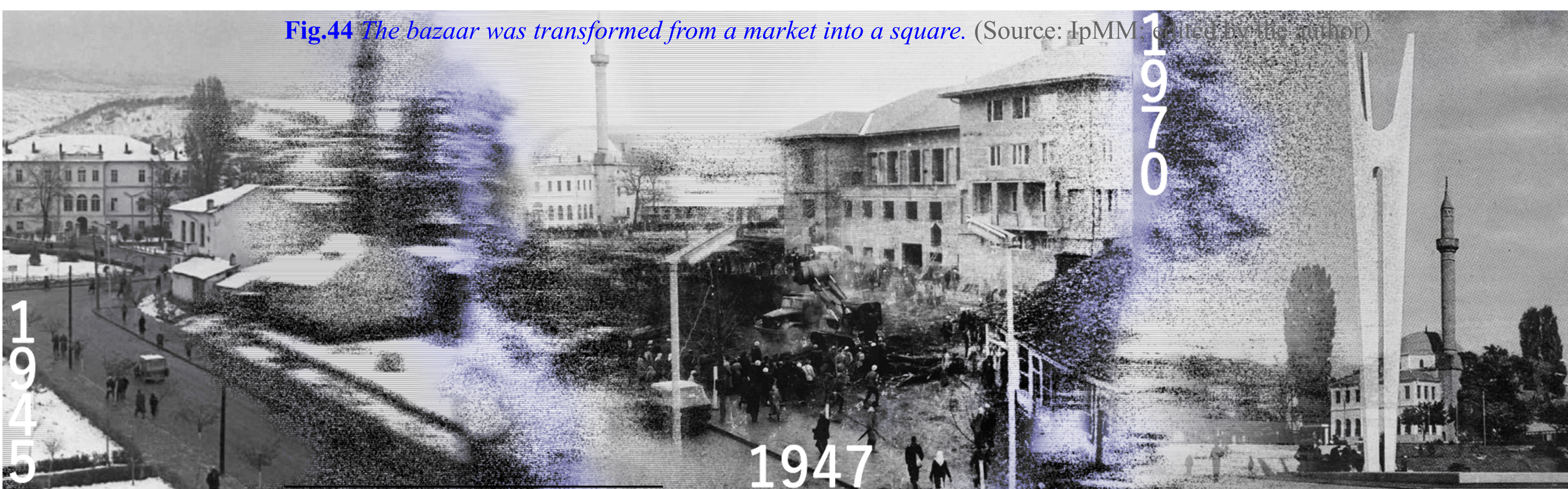
3.2.3 Erasure of the city, erasure of identity, symbolic urbicide

In symbolic urbicide, the connection to anthropogenic urbicide is undeniable. Both overlap in purpose and effect one lies behind the scenes while the other acts openly. But under what circumstances? What lies beneath this dynamic? Who is being manipulated in the name of a "more modern" future?

The entire urban destruction plan of Prishtina began with the demolition of its corethe Prishtina Çarshia in the 1950s and 1960s. The disintegration of traditional values and ways of life started by targeting the very soul of the city. The Çarshia, together with Divanjolli Street, served as the main urban hubs where artisanal and commercial activities gathered. Alongside the clock tower, hammam, and three mosques, they formed the city center as an irregular public square. Under the refrain of internationalism, approximately 500 shops in the Çarshia were reduced to ashes under the pretext of creating a new center for Prishtina, establishing "*brotherhood and unity*", as seen in figure 44 the transition and crowning the city with the main political, municipal, and assembly institutions as its "modern crown". Contrary to plans for organic urban development, the regime chose to remodel the city by targeting its core, erasing its architectural and historical values.[52]

Why was the identifiable core of Prishtina and its Çarshia specifically targeted? The eradication of the city's cultural and traditional pillars would weaken the entire urban center. Through the destruction of the Çarshia, many families who managed the local the economy and sustained the social fabric were also dismantled.

Fig.44 *The bazaar was transformed from a market into a square.* (Source: IpMM; edited by the author)



[52] Hoxha, E (2008) *"Shlyerja e të kaluarës "urban-izimi"* në Trashëgimia e mbetur e Prishtinës. ChwB

The model of intervention in the historic urban fabric was not only aimed at de-Ottomanizing the capital into a more modern and Yugoslav city but, according to Le Normand and Malcolm, also sought to maintain the inferior identity of Kosovo Albanians within the Yugoslav federation. This is evidenced by other former Yugoslav cities where the antiquity of the city was preserved while other parts developed further, such as New Belgrade, New Zagreb, and New Sarajevo.The shops in the Çarshia were destroyed through "voluntary" labor imposed by the state on the owners, carried out by volunteers of the "*People's Front*", while the owners were forcibly removed and often met violent deaths.What remains curious is the specific focus on Prishtina's Çarshia, unlike other Kosovo bazaars such as those in Gjakova and Peja, or even Skopje's bazaar, which was reduced to ruins by an earthquake but later fully restored as the city's integral center.[53]

The vibrancy of the Çarshia was replaced by a monitored square, ironically linked to the "*Brotherhood and Unity*" platform. The Yugoslav authorities leveled this space to open the way for the new city center the stage of new governance in Kosovo symbolized by an obelisk erected in the very place that represented "*unity and brotherhood*" among Albanians, Serbs, and Montenegrins, along with a sculpture of eight partisan figures positioned several meters in front of the obelisk. This structure still stands today, (see figure 45) although debates continue regarding its longevity and what it truly signifies for the residents of Prishtina modernism or the destruction of the past

Fig.45 *The "Unity-Brotherhood" monument during the Manifesta 2022 biennial.* (Source: author, 2022)

[53] Jerliu, F., (2024),"The tale of unfinished urbanization" Festival dell"Architettura Magazine

What do the residents of Prishtina remember from the old Prishtina—the artisanal city, the city of memories? The Çarshia complex, built over the 15th to 17th centuries, included two hundred artisan shops, eleven khans, a hammam, and 300 shops. The Çarshia is best remembered by those who worked there, such as Jakup Çeshmexhiu, (figure 46) son of Ramadan Çeshmexhiu, the initiator of the city's water supply system (the construction of fountains) in Prishtina, a tailor since the age of ten, who recalls:

"*I remember Prishtina very well because I worked in a Bazaar, which neither the Bazaar in Sarajevo nor the Bitpazari in Skopje was better than our Bazaar. Unfortunately, at that time, when the occupiers ruled, they tried to destroy the aesthetics of our city, and they achieved their goal. But ours have achieved their goal even more. And I have been doing this job since I was 14 years old… These streets were cobblestones, cobblestones you know what they mean, they were made of stones. Our street was completely cobblestoned then, now it is paved with cobblestones. It started with cobblestones, it started, not with stones, but now it is paved with concrete. The city was… now the fact that it was built was far, far, far more beautiful then than it was then. If only people had been better than you, there would have been no hatred towards each other".*[54]

Moreover, the Çarshia with its workshops is remembered for a variety of crafts and artisans who no longer exist, showcasing their creations in stalls about 1.5 meters wide. This wide area included several alleys stretching from today's government building towards Divanjolli Street. At that time, Prishtina's boundaries ended at the edge of Divanjolli Street, while neighborhoods such as Kodra e Trimave, Velani, and Bregu i Diellit were fertile lands. The only developed neighborhoods were Muhaxherët, Hani i Dilit, and Lakrishte, among others. According to the same source, Prishtina was a city with fertile land, especially in the Lakrishte neighborhood. Residents did not need supplies from other cities, as these were irrigated by Prishtina's rivers, therefore, affecting the city's economy.[55]

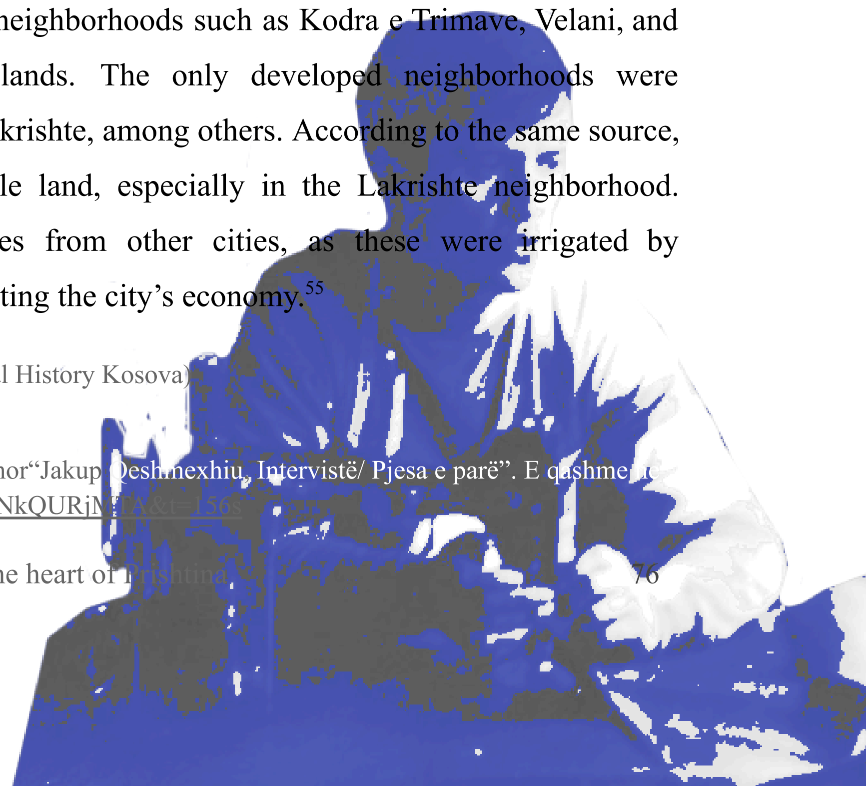


Fig.46 *Jakup Ceshmexhiu.* (Source: Oral History Kosova)

[54] Oral History Kosova (2019). 26 Qershor"Jakup Çeshmexhiu, Intervistë/ Pjesa e parë". E qashme në https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KENkQURjMTA&t=156s

[55] ibid

Mr. Çeshmexhiu also recalls his youth, when he and his friends frequented Çarshia (Bazaar) and attended films at 3:00 PM at Kino Vëllazërimi (today's Kino ABC) and at 8:00 PM at Kino Rinia. The Albanian Film Week was a time when Kosovars connected with Albanians in Albania through cinema. His fondest memories are tied to music—Albanian music, concerts held at Prishtina's stadium during 1974 when Kosovo began steps toward autonomous status, with stadiums echoing Albanian songs. He nostalgically remembers coffees at Hotel Bozhuri, adorned with numerous mirrors, and sweets at Union, the department store of Germia, which to him was a paradise of commerce. All these memories are now faded in his mind and in the memories of many elderly Prishtina residents.[56]

To build the "*crown of the modern city*", urban and infrastructural changes were made, including the main artery of Prishtina, the Divanjolli Street (see figure 47). The 1950s brought changes not only to architectural constructs but also to the urban fabric. With the construction of the square, the connection within Prishtina was blocked, and gradually settlements shifted from markets to modern residential buildings.The mystique of narrow cobbled streets was replaced by concrete and asphalt, and what was certain is that everything belonging to the past was left to the dust of modernism. In the Çarshia, besides its market, the small hammam was also targeted—used as the "*bath*" for the Çarshia mosque—and today it lies in ruins near the Parliament of Kosovo.

Fig. 47 *Divanholli Street in two eras, Ottoman and Yugoslavia.* (source: IKMM, edited by the author)

[56] Oral History Kosova (2019). 26 Qershor"*Jakup Qeshmexhiu, Intervistë/ Pjesa e parë*". Accessible on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KENkQURjMTA&t=156s

These were symbolic targets against the people themselves and their history as if the destruction of the Çarshia alone had not been enough. The next focus of destruction and "*transformation*" became the south-north artery, known as Llokaç Street. Along it stood historical buildings such as the Llokaç Mosque and the Church of Saint Anthony (Shën Ndou), both of which were leveled to the ground with the arrival of the Yugoslav regime under the guise of modernization a transformation that occurred even before the approval of the Detailed Urban Plan (DUP).[57] But why were historical religious buildings the first to be targeted?

The Yugoslav regime's policy toward the population and Islamic architecture reflected marginalization, repression, and discrimination due to their Albanian ethnic identity and the religion they belonged to, according to Herscher.[58] This was also manifested through the destruction of religious buildings, which later escalated into violent conflict, particularly through attacks against religious sites, especially mosques. This repression was part of a broader campaign to homogenize the population into a secular socialist identity, expressed through architectural erasure, the suppression of Islamic identity, and the "*imposition*" of modern architecture (see figure 48). These actions reflected the Yugoslav state's efforts to control religious expression and promote a unified socialist identity. However, this was ultimately unsuccessful, such architectural repression contributed to a wider cultural and political alienation of Kosovo's Albanian population.

Fig.48 *Photomontage of the mosque and the church as they coexisted in "Mother Teresa" Square.*

[57] Jerli[illegible], Navakazi, V.(2018) *The Socialist Modernization of Prishtina-interrogating types of urban and architectural contributions to the city*, Mesto a [illegible]ejiny Journa[illegible]
[58] Herscher, A. (2020) *Violence taking place: The architecture of the Kosovo conflict.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

The erasure of a people's identity through religion was also evident in 1992 with the construction of the Serbian Orthodox Church (figure 49) within the courtyard of the University of Prishtina campus. If genocide seeks to eliminate people, urbicide, as noted by Florina Jerliu and Xhelal Llonçari, aims to destroy their existential space.[59] The university courtyard, once referred to by Serbs as a fortress of Albanian nationalism due to its former use as a military camp during the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom was transformed into a space of knowledge, political activism, and Albanian intellectual leadership. The construction of the Serbian Orthodox Church within this space aimed to provoke tensions and rewrite historical narratives. Placing a religious structure within an educational campus created confusion and symbolic contradiction. Notably, the church's location was so strategically planned that, when viewed from the front of the Rectorate, the cross appears visually positioned above it, an intentional illusion of dominance. This reveals a calculated manipulation by Serbian authorities targeting education, the very tool Albanians fought to preserve through sacrifice and resilience.

The construction of this church illustrates how the Serbian regime sought to erase Albanian identity and assert a Serbian claim over Kosovo. It was not merely the building of a religious site, but a symbolic act of dominance over a space tied to Albanian culture and resistance. Moreover, it contributed to fueling tensions that led to the 1999 war. Today, the church remains unfinished and highly contested, a visible reminder of the failure of the nationalist project to erase and replace local identity through architecture.

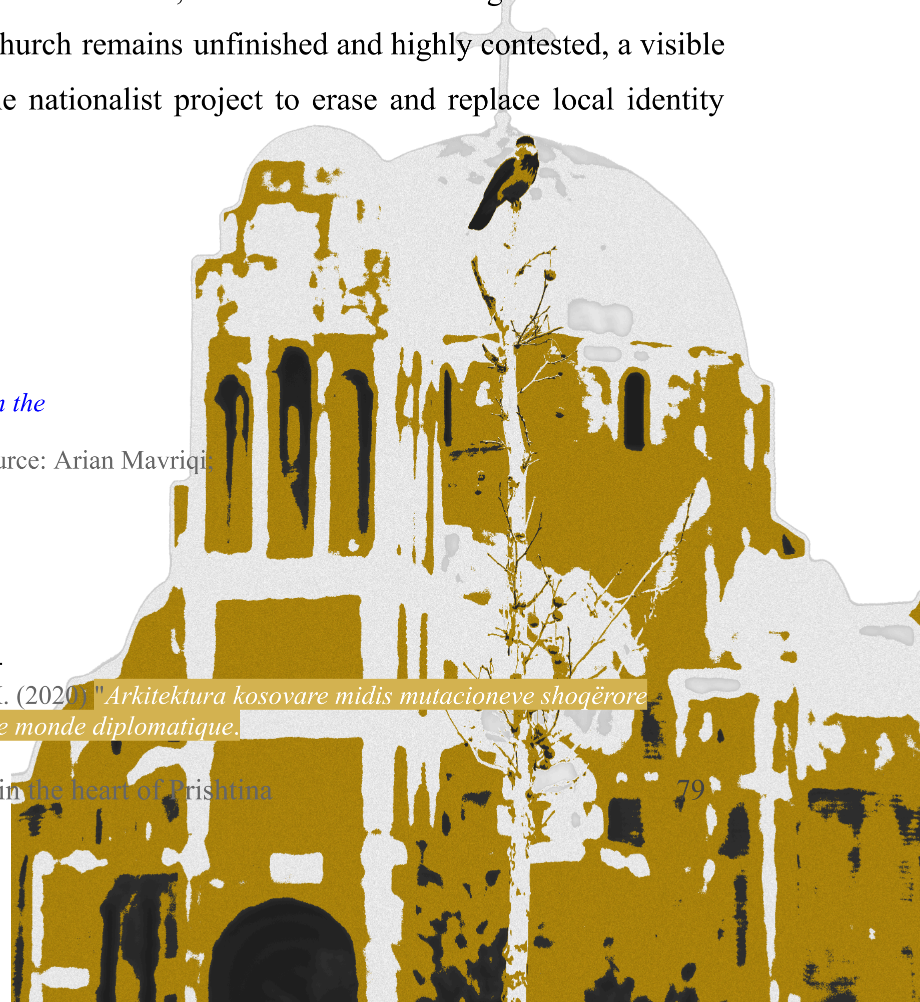


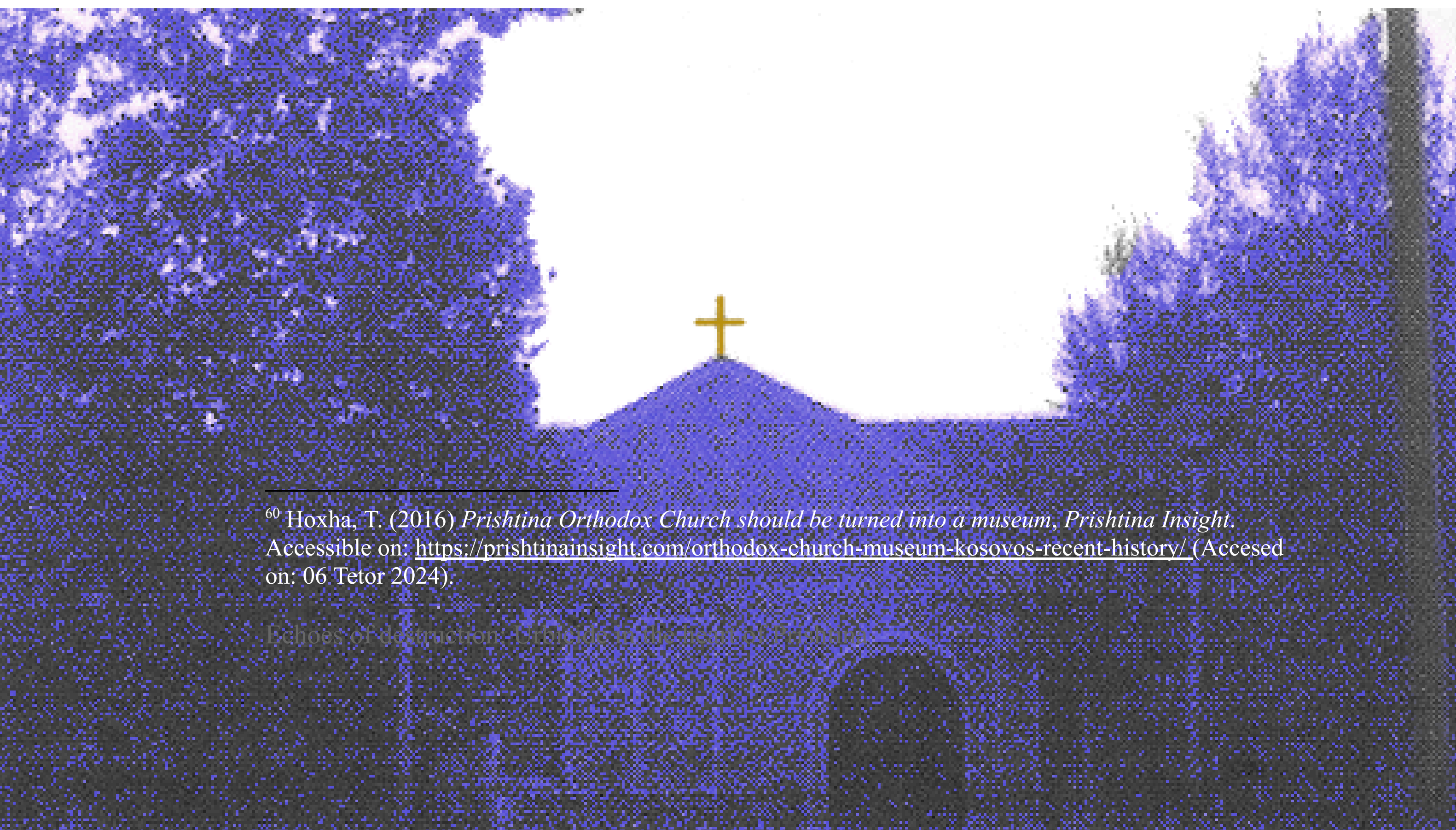
Fig.49 *Serbian Orthodox Church on the University of Pristina Campus.* (Source: Arian Mavriqi; edited by the author)

[59] Hoti, S., Jerliu, F. and Llonçari, X. (2020) "*Arkitektura kosovare midis mutacioneve shoqërore "Ballkanizimi" i (ri)ndërtimeve*", *Le monde diplomatique.*

Among other things, the construction of this church demonstrates how the Serbian regime attempted to erase Albanian identity and assert a Serbian presence by embedding symbolic dominance into the landscape of Kosovo. This was not merely the erection of a religious structure, but a strategic act of claiming authority over a space historically associated with Albanian culture and resistance. Simultaneously, it served as ideological fuel that intensified the path toward the 1999 war. Today, the church remains unfinished and a testament to the failure of the nationalist project to erase and replace local identity through architecture.[60]

The structure stands as a reminder of a dark historical period, a symbol of Serbian nationalism and the racism directed against Albanians. At the same time, it represents an act of urbicide, specifically symbolic urbicide, through which the construction of this church functioned as a calculated attempt to reshape the cultural and political identity of Kosovo. It was a deliberate provocation, rooted in the strategic selection of space that had embodied Albanian resistance. This imposition of architecture as a tool of political and cultural control is a quintessential example of urbicide, where the destruction or transformation of urban space is employed to undermine the identity and very existence of a community (see figure 50).

Fig. 50 *Illusion created that the cross is superimposed on the university rectorate.* (Source: Xhelal Llonçari; edited by the author, 24)



[60] Hoxha, T. (2016) *Prishtina Orthodox Church should be turned into a museum, Prishtina Insight.* Accessible on: https://prishtinainsight.com/orthodox-church-museum-kosovos-recent-history/ (Accesed on: 06 Tetor 2024).

In this way, the Serbian regime sought to demolish or rewrite anything that represented Albanians, their religion, and their culture. New buildings emerged while traditional cultural and religious spaces and monuments were destroyed—always in the name of "*progress*" or "*modernity*". This resulted in a displacement of cultural memory and the practices tied to those sites. It was a deliberate attempt to impose a new cultural and political narrative aligned with Yugoslav socialism. These actions contributed to a growing sense of alienation and discontent among the Albanian population, who perceived them as a direct attack on their cultural and religious heritage. As a result, many resisted such changes by preserving religious practices in private spheres.

In place of the Llokaç Mosque, Hotel "*Bozhur*" (figure 51) was planned and constructed in 1954, while the mosque's remnants resurfaced nearly a century later, in 2012. Following the demolition of the Church of Saint Anthony, the "*Department Store*" was erected, located today in Zahir Pajaziti Square. During the socialist period, religious expression was broadly discouraged in favor of a secular, state-driven identity. Yet, Prishtina continued to preserve its roots; its history as both an Islamic and Christian city stands as a testament to a layered and complex cultural heritage shaped over centuries.

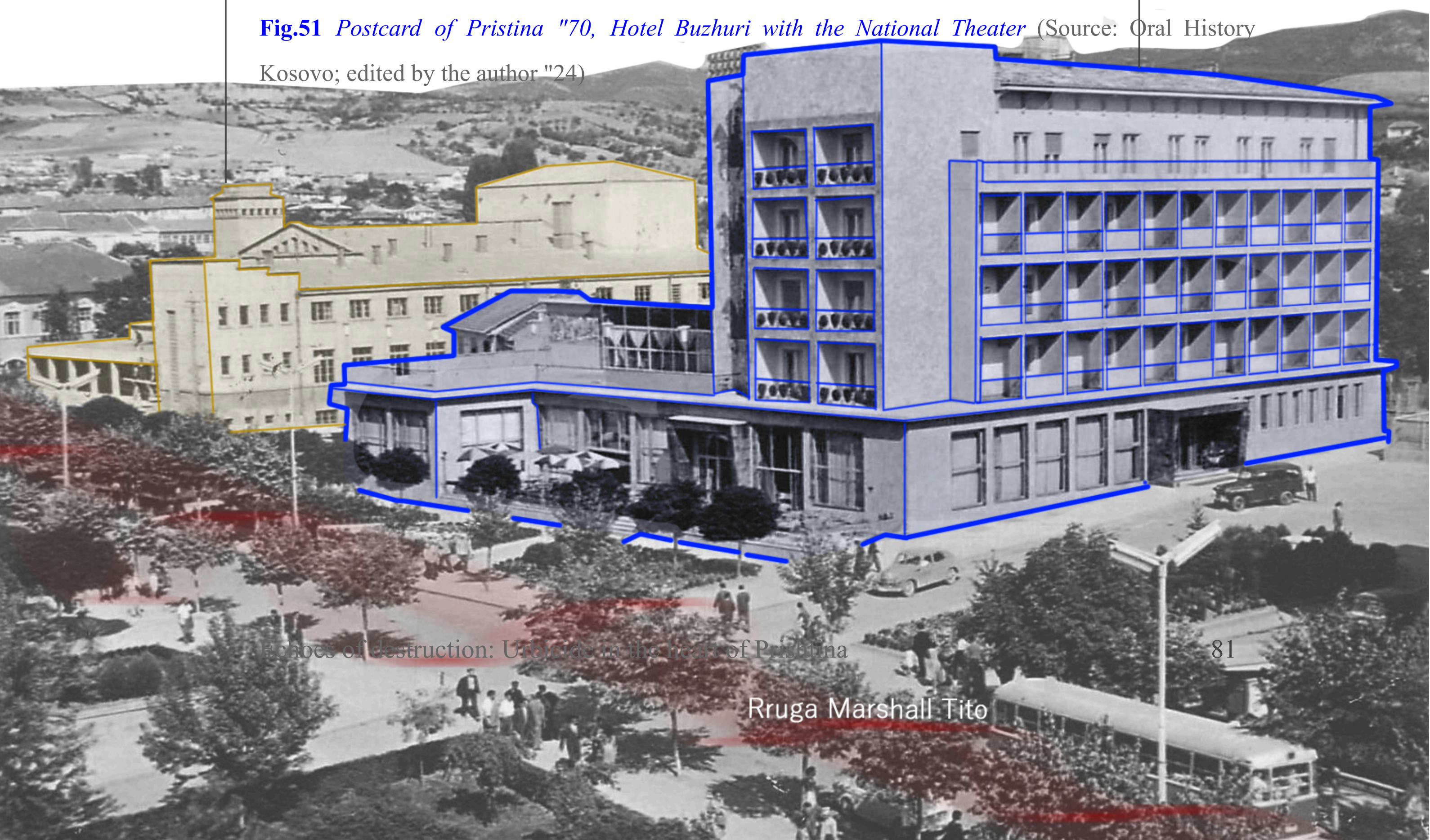


Fig.51 *Postcard of Pristina "70, Hotel Buzhuri with the National Theater* (Source: Oral History Kosovo; edited by the author "24)

The Yugoslav regime utilized architecture as a strategic tool both in Prishtina and analogously in Sarajevo to reflect political control, cultural repression, and the reformation of identity. By demolishing cultural landmarks and erecting massive state-driven structures, the regime sought to project dominance over the city's future while simultaneously erasing its past. The government aimed to suppress religious and national identities in pursuit of socialist state objectives. This suppression manifested through the destruction of religious symbols and buildings, replaced with socialist monuments and institutions that reinforced the Yugoslav narrative of unity and progress, while national and Islamic heritage was marginalized and devalued.

New urban spaces were designed primarily as secular and inclusive, reflecting socialist values, while in the background, religious monuments and traditional dwellings were pushed to the margins or concealed. This visionary image of Prishtina appeared "*perfect*" in photographs, yet it masked the darker realities of what was truly unfolding on the ground.

Therefore, it can be argued that this regime, beyond the genocide inflicted upon the people, spared neither their architecture, settlements, nor the spaces where they spent most of their time and which symbolized their very identity.

3.3 Loss of memory, loss of history, loss of the city

The concept of *Genius Loci*, or the "*spirit of the place*", a Roman idea that architectural monuments shape a city's identity, and that every place possesses a unique atmosphere that defines its character is deeply connected to the urbicide experienced in Prishtina. People form bonds with the spirit of a city through the structures that represent and embody its identity. But what happens when a city loses those structures? In less than half a century, Prishtina underwent numerous urban transformations, during which many buildings were destroyed, buildings that once constructed and reflected the city's character (figure 52).If the spirit of a place is weakened, what becomes of its identity? Does Prishtina still possess an identity?

The deliberate destruction of the city's architectural and cultural heritage was, in many ways, an attempt to erase the unique spirit of Prishtina, the symbol of Albanian culture and history and to obliterate its past. This was the primary aim behind the acts of urbicide committed both during the early Yugoslav period and later during the 1999 war in Kosovo.

Fig. 52 *Old Prishtina during the 19th century.* (Source: Kosovo Archives; edited by the author)

The destruction of the past in the name of progress ultimately erased old Prishtina, giving rise to a new city that no longer remembers its origins. Ironically, the city's icons became the communist-era structures, symbols of modernity built atop its ancient layers: the "*Brotherhood and Unity*" monument, Government Building, Regional Parliament, National Theatre, hotels "*Bozhur*" and "*Grandi*" and the "*Boro-Ramiz*" Sports Center, among others. Post-war reconstruction further sealed this amnesia. The city was reshaped into a chaotic urban mosaic blending Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, communist, and contemporary styles amid uncontrolled high-rises. This transformation was not only physical but also cultural and social, disrupting the link between past, present, and future. The erasure of cultural memory through the loss of physical heritage became an assault on the very spirit of the place.

Old Prishtina now lives on as a fading memory, found in worn photographs and the recollections of a few. Tucked away in the city's old neighborhoods, it is overshadowed by unplanned high-rises. Few still recall the Prishtina of the past. Among them is singer Sevim Baki (see figure 53), who remembers falling into the Prishtina River as a child. Her strongest memory, however, is of music, performing with Violeta Rexhepagiqi and Serbian artist Ivana Vitalliq in the band "*Vivien*" at the Eurovision Song Contest in Belgrade. At the height of the "*Brotherhood and Unity*" era, their song was performed in Albanian, Serbian, and Turkish.[61]

"But wherever society went, we would go as a group. Then in the summer, the korzo was fashionable. On the korzo, we knew which group stood where, the young people would divide into groups, we would say, 'Are you protecting the tree, what are you doing like this?', society, groups, groups. And they knew the place, everyone would gather, right there in front of 'Foto Nesha'... Then when we left there, 'Where should we go?'",

Fig. 53 *Sevim Baki.* (Source: Oral History Kosovo; edited by the author)

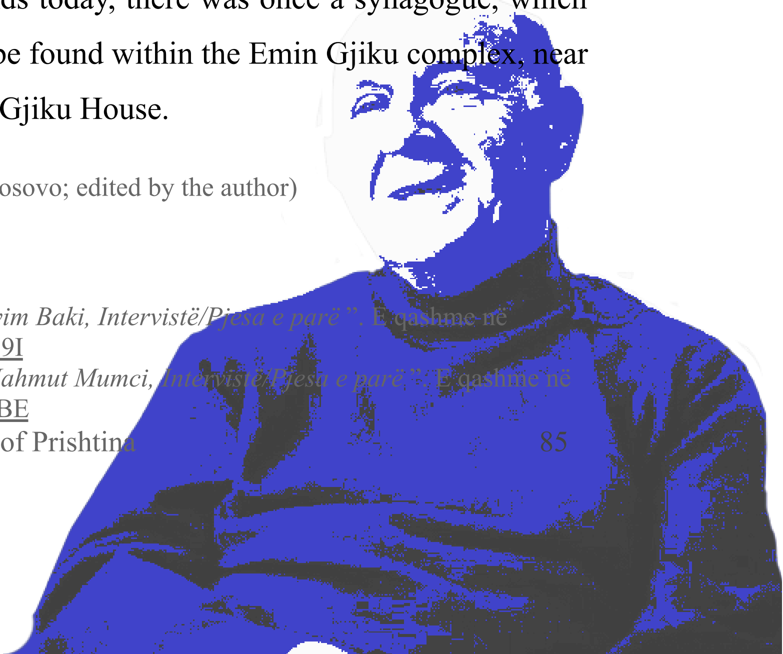
[61] Oral History Kosova (2019). 13 January "*Sevim Baki, Intervistë/Pjesa e parë* ". E qashme në https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gskMNQi159I

"Tonight we're going to 'Xhani' or 'Cannabis'", I remember these two cafes. 'Xhani' was on a corner of Tre Sheshirat, we sat outside. There were lots of people, music, and we stayed there. Whereas 'Cannabis' was there at the end of Kurriz, it became a new neighborhood, new cafes were also in 'Cannabis' a lot.... "[62]

And the pulmonologist Mahmut Mumci (figure 54) also speaks about the Old Bazaar of Pristina: "*When you go towards Divan Jolli, there is a space. There were three streets of the Closed Bazaar. And at the end of that Closed Bazaar there was a fountain, after the fountain there were three alleys that went north, and that was where all the craftsman's shops were ...in Pristina there were more than 200 craftsman's shops. They all had specific locations, for example, there was the blacksmith's, the saddler's or the tailor's bazaar. They all had specific locations… The tailors… now when you go north from the bazaar to the first street, there used to be saddlers and shoemakers. In addition to these professions, on the second street, there were mainly tailors. And on the third street there was an "Uzor" shop. That street was the rope-makers' street, there were the rope-makers' shops*"..[63]

According to him, the only remaining structure from that period is a shoemaker's shop belonging to the Straja family, located along Divanjolli Street, known today as UÇK Street. The wave of modernization led to most of the shops either changing ownership or transforming in function, along with the loss of their original trades. Opposite these shops, he recalls the "*Hani i Morrave*" or "*Bitli Han*", which also included a fountain bearing the same name. The *han* was demolished in 1956, and in its place now stands the "*ProCredit*" bank, currently housing the European Union offices. In this same area, where the Assembly building stands today, there was once a synagogue, which was fortunately relocated and can now be found within the Emin Gjiku complex, near the Ethnological Museum and the Emin Gjiku House.

Fig.54 *Mahmut Mumci.* (Source: Oral History Kosovo; edited by the author)



[62] Oral History Kosova (2019). 13 January "*Sevim Baki, Intervistë/Pjesa e parë*". E qashme në https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gskMNQi159I

[63] Oral History Kosova (2018). 8 December "*Mahmut Mumci, Intervistë/Pjesa e parë*". E qashme në https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0upzZDerHBE

Prishtina, once known in the medieval period for its equestrian games, experienced a significant rise in boxing from the 1950s to the 1980s. This legacy is embodied in the boxing club located in the "*Tophane*" neighborhood, where some of the most prominent boxers of the time trained and achieved remarkable success figures such as Xhevdet Peci, Mehmet Bogujevci, Shefki Bogujevci, Agim Tahiraj, Aziz Salihu, Nazif Gashi, Beqir Berisha, Abedin Lika, and many others. Under the leadership of coach Lah Nimani, the club won the national championship title five times in the top Yugoslav boxing league. Some of the members of the team shown in figure 55.

Formerly named "*Radnič*," the "*Prishtina*" boxing club saw its peak during the 1975–76 season with the arrival of Nimani from Mitrovica. Under his guidance, gold medals became a regular achievement, both in Yugoslavia and at the Olympic Games, despite the challenging political climate. The club regularly drew thousands of spectators to venues like the "*25 May*" Sports Hall (today "*1 October Hall*") and later the "*Boro-Ramiz*" complex (now the Palace of Youth and Sports).Together with football, boxing served as a unifying force for the people of Prishtina—a space where discontent with the communist regime was, if only briefly, transformed into collective passion through sport.

Fig. 55 *Some of the golden generation boxers of the 70s-89s.* (Source: Koha.net; edited by the author)

Fig. 56 *The old swimming pool of Pristina, at the location of today's "Heroinat" park.* (Source: Kenneth Andresen; edited by the author)

While boxing fans cheered inside the Palace of Youth and Sports, just across the way, the city's youth would escape the summer heat in Prishtina's former swimming pool (figure 56). This prestigious facility, built in the 1960s, was not accessible to everyone, reportedly reserved for families of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). Nevertheless, Prishtina's rebellious youth found ways to defy such restrictions, often expressing their resistance through acts of everyday defiance and adventure.

The pool remained in use until 1974, when construction began on the Grand Hotel nearby. According to the urban development plan of the time, the pool was to be relocated a block away, into the new "*Boro-Ramiz*" complex (now the Palace of Youth and Sports), forming part of a larger sports and recreational center. This envisioned complex included the Youth Palace, the Universal Hall, the Grand Hotel, and the Prishtina City Stadium, all connected via a raised pedestrian platform above today's "*Luan Haradinaj*" street, extending to "*Mother Teresa*" Square, a square above the square.The masterplan also included auxiliary sports fields and both indoor and outdoor swimming pools, effectively creating a miniature Olympic village in the heart of Prishtina. However, this dream was never realized. The political unrest of the 1980s, the onset of demonstrations, and worsening economic conditions in Kosovo halted the project permanently.

Today, although recent governments have proposed reviving elements of this vision, few promises have materialized. What remains is a city with limited public spaces,

only one public swimming pool located in the Gërmia National Park, and an overwhelming abundance of buildings but a shortage of social infrastructure.

When speaking of public squares, attention inevitably returns to the legacy of 20th-century modernism, particularly, to Mother Teresa Square (figure 57). As previously mentioned, this square has undergone significant transformations over a relatively short period. On one hand, these changes contributed to shaping the modernist image of Prishtina; on the other, they erased subtle but meaningful layers of the city's past. One such loss was the disappearance of the small cluster of shops at the entrance to the square.

Just as Prishtina's historic bazaar was erased in the mid-20th century, the remaining traces of it, what could be called a miniature version of the original çarshia, shared a similar fate. What older residents remember with deep nostalgia are the daily film posters displayed outside the cinema, the vinyl records purchased from local bookstores, the first television sets bought at the "*Uzor*" electronics store, coffee enjoyed at "*Nita*" café accompanied by trileqe from the nearby patisserie, or the drinks at "*Beogradi*" restaurant and cocktails at "*Arabeska*" in the Bozhur Hotel. Others fondly recall buying their first makeup products from Sadik Hoxha"s cosmetics store or getting their first haircut from barber Zenel Riza. These vivid yet fading memories form the golden years of youth for many Prishtina residents during a time of great change. What remains of that golden era are only a few enduring businesses that continue to preserve fragments of the city"s collective memory, such as the "*Elida*" patisserie in the Palace of Youth, "*Rinia*" patisserie in Ulpiana, and "*Destani*" burek shop in the Pejton neighborhood.

Fig. 57 *Center of Pristina, 1965.* (Source: Kosovo Archives; edited by the author)

kujtesa e Pr

42°39'48"N Kosova

Hani i Dilit

Kalaja e Furrat

Klarat Furra

Hotel Bozhur

Lumi

Çarshia

Studio e fotografisë në çarshi

Vetshërbimi i parë në Prishtinë

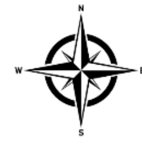
Prishtina/ës

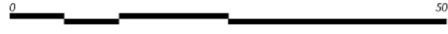
Ekzpozatat e filmave në çarshi

Sinagogu

ishtinës

21°9'44"E





Mehmet Berisha-Dyzi

Xhamia e Sulltan Mehmetit

Lumi

Klubi futbollistik "Prishtina"

jeta pas luftës në Pr

Restaurant "Skander Beg"

Vellusha

Pishina e Prishtinës

i Prishtinës

Fontana në Ulpianë

Çeshmja në Tophane

Nato në Prishtinë '99

Klubi i Boksit

Asgje s'të dhashë, e shumë të mora

Asgjë s'të dhashë
e shumë t'mora,
Vjedha kujtimet
që si ruajte ti.
At urën e drurit,
prapa teatrit,
plepat e gjatë,
e përrockë Vellushën,
Ribli restorantin,
ku Rexho Mulliqi
e "baresha" pinin raki!
Kafe Nitën e vogël,
e hotel Beligradin,
Bozhur e Union
që u rrinin karrshi.
Taxi pajtonët
me kuaj të dalldisur,
e pishinen e vogël
ku lahesha si i ri!
Aq shumë të deshta
sa ta fala rininë
e sa fort m'harrove
i humbur mbeta
rrugëve tua Prishtinë!

Çun Lajçi

3.4 Wounds in the urban fabric

The urban structure of Prishtina today represents a layering of cultures, Albanian, modernist, and those of former occupiers. Over the centuries, the city has undergone profound transformations marked by destruction, neglect, and the deliberate manipulation of both its physical and symbolic spaces acts that amount to urbicide. The attempt to erase the identity, culture, and political autonomy of its inhabitants left lasting impacts on the city's cultural and social landscape, etching both physical and symbolic scars into the very foundations of Prishtina.

Initially, the erasure of cultural and religious heritage, specifically Islamic architecture, with a focus on mosques and their associated structures, marked one of the deepest "wounds" in the urban fabric of Prishtina. A key aspect of this damage was the systematic destruction or neglect of the city's Islamic heritage, particularly its religious buildings from the five-century-long Ottoman era. As elaborated in Chapter II, during the socialist period, the Yugoslav regime sought to secularize urban spaces and marginalize religious structures associated with the city's Albanian and Muslim identity. Through deliberate demolition or state-sponsored neglect, these sacred sites were severed from the public realm, disrupting the spiritual and cultural continuity between the city's inhabitants and their historical memory. During the 1999 war in Kosovo, of the 560 mosques that once existed, 218 were destroyed.[64] According to Sabri Bajgora, in Prishtina and its surrounding region alone, 13 mosques were burned and destroyed during the war: the Ramadanije Mosque (Llapi), the Bardhi i Madh Mosque in Fushë Kosovë, the Lismir Mosque (Fushë Kosovë), the Upper Miradi Mosque (Fushë Kosovë), the Harilaq Mosque (Fushë Kosovë), the Albana (Sllatina) Mosque (Fushë Kosovë), the Hamidia Mosque, the Bardhaj Mosque (Barilevë), the Progonat Mosque (Prugovc), the Gjyqteti Mosque (Grashticë), the Keqekollë Mosque (Keqekollë), and the Prapashticë Mosque (Prapashticë). Beyond the material destruction, these mosques left indelible spiritual scars among the local population. They were not merely religious buildings for performing rituals—they were spaces of peace amid chaos, places where people gathered, made decisions, sought refuge from

[64] Bajgora, S. (2014). *"Shkatërrimi i trashëgimisë islame në luftën e Kosovës, 1998-1999"*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo, Pristina.

the enemy, and connected with one another. Mosques served as central points of cultural resistance and cohesion for the Albanian community.

Beyond the mosques destroyed during the war, many Islamic monuments in Kosovo, such as the Llokaç Mosque, Prishtina Bazaar, Hammam, and public fountains, were demolished under the slogan "*Destroy the old, build the new*". This deliberate erasure was a form of urbicide, targeting symbols of Muslim Albanian identity and replacing them with markers of state control and modernity. The shift from Ottoman to brutalist and modernist architecture, especially at the cost of historic neighborhoods, reshaped the city's aesthetic and aimed at ethnic and cultural erosion.

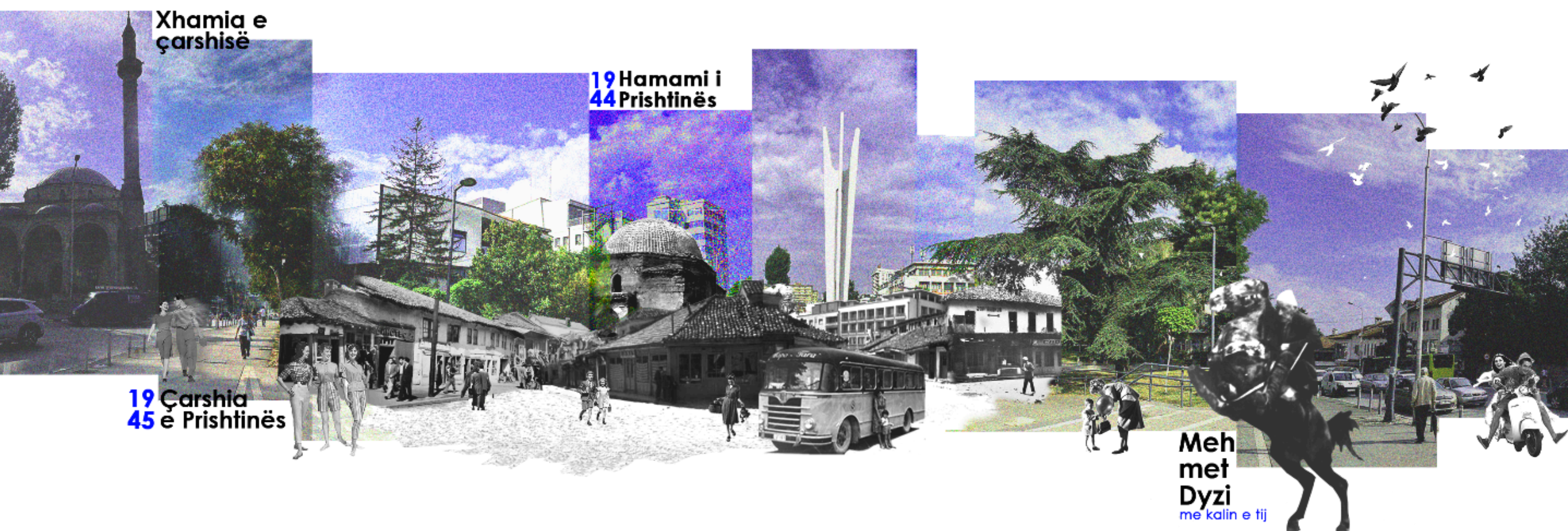
In terms of infrastructure, this was also evident in the dismantling of the traditional "*mahalle*" (neighborhood) concept, replaced by more fragmented, secular, and state-controlled urban forms. These changes produced segregated neighborhoods and a more divided and surveilled Prishtina. Traditional Ottoman architecture was damaged, neglected, and selectively preserved, thereby disrupting the city's historical continuity and severing ties with its cultural foundations. One might ask: what if this had not happened, what would Mother Teresa Square look like today? (figure 58)

Fig. 58 *A boulevard without urbicide, symbiosis of the past with the present.* (Source: edited by the author)

State intervention in urban planning through control over the city’s heritage significantly reduced the community’s role in shaping their environment. Centralized policies disregarded the organic structure of the city and imposed new developments without respecting the old, as exemplified by the destruction of Prishtina’s Bazaar (Çarshia). The Bazaar formed the core of the city’s social and economic life and symbolized the Ottoman heritage that connected Prishtina to its past. Its destruction led to urban fragmentation and structural voids within the city fabric. Beyond economic damage, the loss of the Bazaar severed the chain of traditional crafts, eroding professions vital to the city’s cultural and economic identity. This marked a symbolic break from tradition and a transition toward modernity.

The urban modernization of Prishtina erased traces of Ottoman-era life and structure, radically transforming the city's landscape and diminishing much of its historic character. Narrow streets, stone buildings, and traditional roofs, elements embodying the city’s history and culture, were replaced by modern and industrial influences. The loss of these symbols of continuity and connection to the past contributed to a sense of disintegration and identity loss. The destruction of the Bazaar created a cultural and historical void that remains perceptible to the city’s inhabitants. (figure 59)

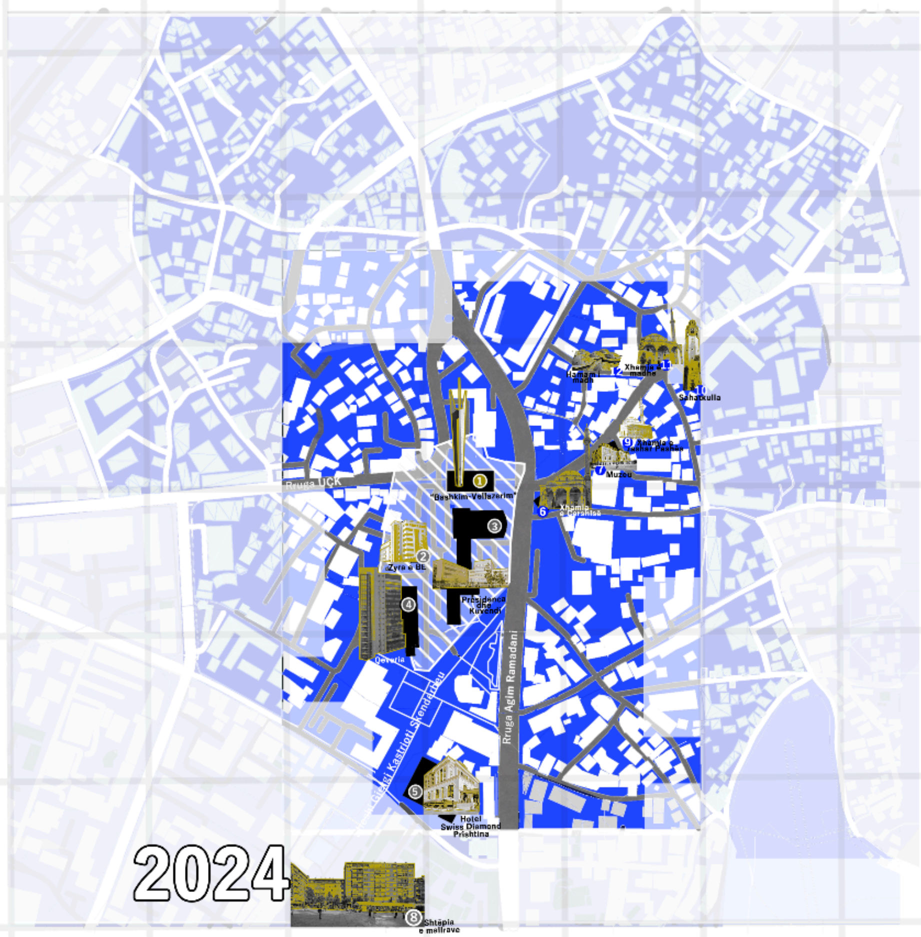
Fig. 59 *What if today's Prishtina still had its bazaar?* (Source:the author, photos Facebook group Prishtina e Vjeter)



Prishtina
Hamam i madh
12
11
10
Xhamia e madhe dhe Sahatkulla
9
Xhamia e Jashar Pashës
7
Muzeu
6
Xhamia e Çarshisë
Rruga Divanjolli
Çarshia
1
2
Hamami i Vogël
Rruga Llokaçi
Vellusha
5
Xhamia e Llokaçit

1937

8
Kisha e Shën Ndout



Urbicid
Të ndërtuara
Të demoluara
ekzistente

Besides other losses, Prishtina also lost its rivers, whose covering and degradation have had profound urban, ecological, and social consequences. This transformation created a rigid and artificial urban environment that significantly weakened citizens' connection to natural elements. Like many cities worldwide that develop vibrant social, economic, and recreational centers along rivers, Prishtina could have preserved and integrated its rivers into modern urban planning, making riverfront zones central to its development. Instead, the city lost this potential to expand in a compact and dense form, and the Prishtina and Vellusha rivers ceased to function as natural buffer zones and spaces for economic activities, rituals, and social gatherings—elements that would have enhanced urban life quality. This loss created a disconnection from the city's cultural past, as residents no longer relate to the city through its natural flows. One may ask: what would Prishtina look like if a different decision had been made and its rivers had not been covered? (figure 60)

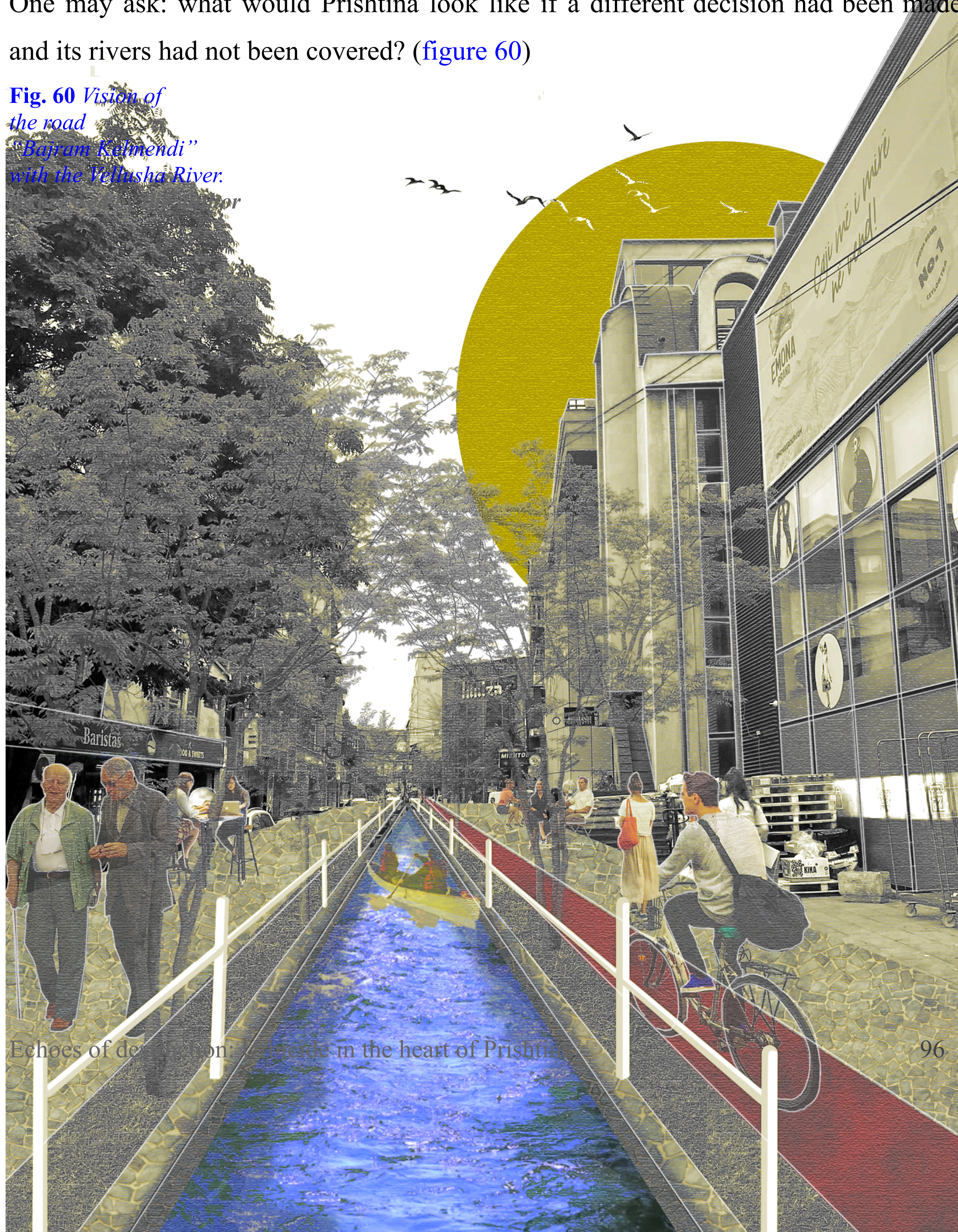
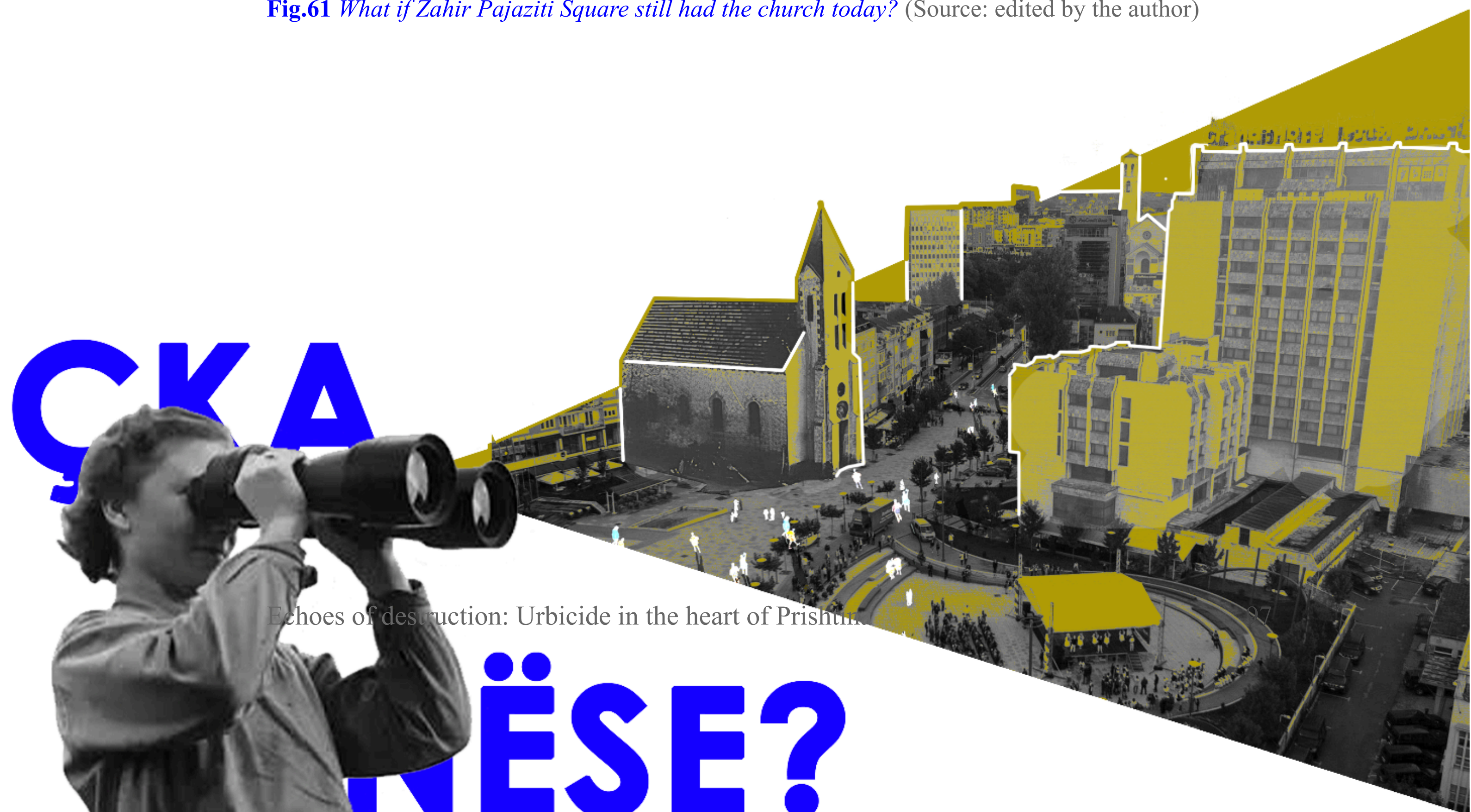


Fig. 60 *Vision of the road "Bajram Kelmendi" with the Vellusha River.* ***(processed by the author)***

This erasure also included the demolition of the Church of Saint Anthony, once located in what is today Zahir Pajaziti Square. As a symbol of Prishtina’s Christian heritage, its destruction represented a profound loss of cultural and religious identity for the Catholic community. This act was a significant step in the Yugoslav regime’s efforts to eliminate cultural and religious diversity. The rupture with the history and traditions of Catholic believers diminished their presence in the collective memory of the city and deepened the distrust toward state authorities, who were seen as suppressing and disregarding their identity. Under the guise of modernization, the church's destruction aimed to erase visible traces of Prishtina’s multi-religious past and reinforce the dominant Yugoslav narrative of secularism and nationalism over religious and ethnic pluralism. It created a void in the public understanding of the city’s historical religious diversity.

What if the church had not been destroyed? (figure 61) Its presence would have enriched Prishtina’s identity as a city shaped by a mosaic of cultures and faiths. It could have served as a catalyst for heritage preservation, promoting a culture of memory instead of erasure. A Prishtina that embraces all faiths embedded in its history where Muslims and Christians coexist not only within the same city but along the same street. The urbicide inflicted upon this church left a void in the city’s religious landscape, affecting both its collective memory and cultural fabric wounds that can never fully be undone.

Fig.61 *What if Zahir Pajaziti Square still had the church today?* (Source: edited by the author)



Urbicide was also carried out through the imposition of foreign symbols, most notably the Orthodox Church built within the University of Prishtina campus. This structure represents not only a physical scar but also a symbolic wound, emblematic of its intended purpose. It was an act of architectural domination, aimed at overwriting the Albanian character of the space and signaling Serbian cultural hegemony and supremacy. Today, its incomplete and abandoned state stands as a lasting reminder of the violence and repression the city endured, a wound that remains unhealed.

The destruction of significant cultural and historical spaces inflicted deep psychological trauma on Prishtina. For many citizens, the sight of ruined monuments, buildings, and neighborhoods serves as a constant reminder of displacement, marginalization, and the severing of cultural ties (figure 62). This trauma extends beyond individuals; the entire community has faced a collective sense of loss, as once-beloved spaces were transformed or erased entirely.

Fig. 62 *Postcard of Pristina, 1916.* (Source: Kenneth Andresen, edited by the author)

As Robert Bevan argues, when architecture is destroyed, so too is the sense of belonging and continuity of a community, as symbols of history and identity are deliberately targeted. It becomes an assault on the very structure of cultural memory. Such strategic actions are intended to destabilize societies and erase cultural identity, an embodiment of urbicide. With the loss of architectural structures, be they historic buildings, religious sites, or cultural monuments, citizens experience a "*memory void*". Future generations are deprived of tangible reference points that connect them to their past, making it increasingly difficult to preserve and transmit cultural heritage.

The destruction of architecture is not merely collateral damage; it is a deliberate erasure of memory, a tactic of disorientation and control, reducing Prishtina to a puppet city held captive by imposed narratives.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study set out to explore the phenomenon of urbicide, specifically questioning whether Prishtina was a victim of such deliberate destruction. By analyzing changes in the urban landscape during the Yugoslav period and the Kosovo War, it examined the attacks on physical structures and their implications for the city's cultural identity and collective memory. The thesis argues that the targeted destruction of architecture was not merely a consequence of war or a byproduct of modernization, but a deliberate assault on the cultural and historical identity of Kosovo's Albanian population, a strategic attempt to erase the past and destabilize the symbolic foundations of the city.

The primary findings reveal that the uprooting of cultural monuments, religious structures, and historic neighborhoods, such as the destruction of the Prishtina Bazaar (Çarshia), the Small Hammam, the Llokaç Mosque, and the Church of Saint Anthony—were calculated efforts to sever the community's connection to its heritage. This aligns with Robert Bevan's concept of cultural cleansing as a weapon of war. The loss of such symbolic spaces has left enduring gaps in the city's collective memory and complicated the process of post-war recovery. In this way, the destruction undermined the city's very essence, reflecting a broader agenda of cultural erasure in which the remnants of the past are not only physically removed but rendered invisible in public consciousness.

The impact of urbicide in Prishtina underscores the critical role of architecture not merely as physical infrastructure but as a vessel of cultural continuity and identity—a repository of heritage whose loss produces not only material destruction but also profound psychological and social consequences. This research highlights the depth of urbicide's impact on Prishtina, yet it also acknowledges its limitations. Due to the scope of the study and the scarcity of focused material on urbicide in Prishtina, not all affected sites beyond the capital were explored, nor was the full range of community responses analyzed. Furthermore, while this thesis concentrated primarily on architectural loss, future research might examine other dimensions of cultural erasure, such as the loss of intangible heritage and traditions once rooted in these physical spaces. Future studies should also consider the role of contemporary urban planning

in addressing these voids and the challenge of balancing modernization with heritage preservation in a post-conflict context.

The implications of this thesis emphasize the urgent need to protect and honor architectural heritage as a means of preserving collective memory and fostering resilience. The case of Prishtina serves as a powerful example of the destructive effects of urbicide, illustrating how the obliteration of the urban landscape can function as a form of erasing a city itself. As Prishtina continues its path of urban renewal, a balanced approach, one that respects historical continuity while addressing modern needs, is essential. Such a path may help restore a sense of identity and belonging, allowing the community to heal and rebuild in a way that acknowledges the past and promotes an inclusive future.

Ultimately, this thesis has contributed to a deeper understanding of urbicide as a deliberate strategy for cultural annihilation, one that seeks to erase history and the identity of a people, and how this strategy unfolded in Prishtina. The lessons from Prishtina illustrate the vital role of architecture in maintaining social and cultural continuity and the profound impact that loss has on a community's heritage and memory. The destructive potential of urbicide serves as a stark reminder of the challenges of reconstruction and cultural representation. The insights gained through this research demonstrate that Prishtina was indeed targeted by urbicide, particularly during the early decades of Yugoslav rule up until its end, destruction that did not end with the physical dismantling of buildings but left lasting imprints on social and psychological discourse.

Today, as the city continues to evolve, a thoughtful and balanced urban strategy, one that honors the past and promotes a flexible urban identity, is essential for cultivating a sustainable future and healing the wounds of the past. What we learn from the urbicide in Prishtina is not solely darkness and devastation; rather, it reminds us of the importance of architecture in embodying and preserving the soul of a community of maintaining the identity of Prishtina.

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Blerta Krasniqi, hereby declare that the Master’s thesis entitled *"Echoes of Destruction: Urbicide in the Heart of Prishtina"* is the result of my own independent work. All sources and references used have been properly acknowledged in accordance with academic standards.

This thesis has been prepared and submitted solely in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Architecture at the University of Prishtina and has not been submitted for the award of any other degree or qualification at this or any other institution.

Prishtina, 25.12.2024