Global Transparency and Hidden Transcripts:
International Media Portrayals of the Kosovo Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Using Kosovo as a case study of the contested space between globalization and local production of cultural meaning, this paper argues that a dilemma of emergent nations is created by the contradictory forces that simultaneously promote transparent openness, and the persistent hidden transcripts that are deeply embedded in, for instance, ethnic identities. Because media systems and practices provide the framework around which new national identities are rewritten in emergent nations, the dilemma between communicative transparency and hidden transcripts causes deep fractures in how a nation wishes to be seen as a global citizen, and its unspeakable internal discourses embedded in historical consciousness. As important as journalism standards and practices might be for emergent nations, this paper extends Benedict Anderson’s (1983) and Arjun Appadurai’s (1996) arguments about how cultural consciousness can be torn in the contest of communication processes.

The paper outlines three instances of the hidden transcripts of ethnic Albanians to demonstrate the ambiguities embedded in news coverage of the 1999 crisis in Kosovo. It examines the paradox of local identity and global transparency with qualitative data gathered during a research trip to Kosovo in 2001: (a) Verification of a massacre at the village of Racak; (b) Construction of social Icons of Kosovo’s cultural heroes like Adem Jashari; and (c) the OSCE campaign for international transparency.
INTRODUCTION

In the center of Kosovo's capital Pristina, stretched across Mother Theresa Avenue, was hung in 2001 a promotional banner proclaiming: “Prishtina, Transparent and European City”. The history and politics of few East European nations are, in fact, less transparent to outsiders than Kosovo. It is a place described by one experienced international journalist as a “disinformation trap” in which reporters and other outsiders are ill-prepared to understand or explain complex cultural, historical and political geography (Poggioli, 1993). The gap between global transparency and the “hidden transcripts” (Scott, 1990) of ethnic identity create a contested space where ambiguity and misunderstanding can thrive.

Transparency has emerged as a new paradigm of global communication, encompassing the popular movement toward political and market openness. These trends toward democraticization and globalization are captured in the conceptual language of transparency (Finel & Lord, 2000). As one internationalist observed, it is, “the new buzzword of the international community, cropping up in all of the official communiqués” (Anjaria, 1999).

Transparency is used simultaneously as a metaphor to delineate the political, economic and technological boundaries in both developed and developing nations as part of democratic processes of openness and accountability. Skeptics argue that such porous boundaries are unrealistically utopian. Theorists like Jurgen Habermas (1989)

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1 Geographic names in Kosovo are important markers of ethnic and language rivalries. For example, “Kosovo” is the Serbian language designation for the southern most autonomous region of Yugoslavia. Ethnic Albanians call the disputed region “Kosova”. Similarly, Serbs call the regional capital “Pristina,” while Albanians use “Prishtinë” or Anglicized as “Prishtina”. There are dual names for all other geographic places, constituting a continuing rivalry between between languages and ethnic identity. For simplicity, this paper uses some the generally accepted place
have idealized the possibilities of discourse in the “public sphere.” There remain, however, articulation of the unspeakable elements, the so-called “hidden transcripts” (Scott, 1983) that evade public view. The distance between open discourse (i.e. the ideal speech situation) and these hidden transcripts is perplexing for discourse idealists.

Still, the pervasive use of the term “transparency” persists in topics ranging from freedom of information, public access to documents, state decision-making processes for arms-control agreements, and transnational finance (Battini, et al., 1998; Birkinshaw, 1997; Clifford, et al. 1998; Doyle, 1997; Gronbech-Jensen, 1998; Lamberti, 1995; McDonagh, 1995; Miles, 1998; Österdahl, 1998; Rouban, et al., 1998; Saarenpää, 1997; Sandoz, 1998; Sejersted, 1999; and Temmes, 1998). The term transparency is also employed somewhat more figuratively to account for the global acceptance of Hollywood narratives in entertainment media (Olson, 1999).

In some quarters, transparency suggests new standards of accessibility to government and business documents, and decision-making processes. U.S. Congress asked the International Monetary Fund to lead efforts for greater openness among its 182-member countries, and, then later, for greater transparency from multilateral institutions themselves. Whether the same term can be used effectively in other domains remains in doubt. Still, there is a logical parallel between public transparency as government policy, and access to events managed by the same entities.

The technologies of transparency are, among others, satellites, the Internet, and 24-hr. news coverage, all constituting the “mechanisms that facilitate the release of information about policies, capabilities, and preferences to outside parties” (Finel & Lord, 2000, p. 137). Analysis of the information technologies bringing changes to the diplomatic arena has given rise to such concepts as the “transparency web” (Livingston,
2000). Transparency is also applied to the diplomatic outcome of new access to high-resolution satellite remote imaging (Baker, O’Connell & Williamson, 2001).

“Transparency provided by satellite imagery is particularly comforting,” wrote one technology policy analyst. “Security depends on detailed, broad-scale timely information about Earth’s surface…especially since…[development of] access to high-resolution satellite imagery” (Williamson, 2002, p. 13).

Despite earlier Cold War optimism that high resolution satellite imaging would enable diplomatic equilibrium through the UN policy of “equal access/open skies,” critics pointed out that open information access to previously closed state defense secrets would eventually conflict with security interests. They predicted state secrecy would prevail when confrontations occurred (Krepon, Zimmerman, Spector & Umberger, 1990). Still, the steady movement toward private commercialization of satellite imagery, and the enhanced power of that technology, creates moments of tension between contending nations—such as the Gulf War (Palmer, 1992). Outside of such occasions of state conflict, international organizations emphasize the potential usefulness of satellite imagery for science and humanitarian missions (see, for example, Bjorgo, 2002).

Later, in post-Cold War Europe, when leaders launched a campaign early in 2002 to improve institutional transparency among European Parliament member nations, it was argued: “How can anyone expect people to take interest in Europe when they are being denied access to information?” asked European Parliament Vice-president Charlotte Cederschiöld. In response, Secretary General of the European Commission David O’Sullivan, argued against sweeping institutional openness: “the political process should not be undermined with requests for too much transparency…sometimes an open discussion is best held in confidence. The trust of people is important but it is not always best served in things happen in the open” (EUobserver.com, Jan. 7, 2002).
Skeptics argue about the metaphor of information transparency because it glosses other apt characterizations of globalization (e.g. stretching, shrinking, networking, flows, etc. See Moores, 2002). Others suggest that unrestrained transparency might be detrimental because: (a) openness might aggravate conflict, in the absence of universally shared, or at least mutually compatible, norms of behavior; (b) some secrets are legitimately worth protecting if revelation will betray, for instance, competitive market advantage; and (c) information can easily be misused or misinterpreted because transparency reveals behavior but not intent (Florini, 2000).

Steven Livingston (2000) suggests that transparency should be separated into three conceptual levels. At the first, a free media meets its obligations to open democratic society in the preservation of transparency, even though democratic governments may object to transparency in specific cases. In the second level, new information technologies actually constitute a threat to state security, since they may reveal tactically significant information to an enemy. The third level is what Livingston calls “systemic transparency,” in which micro technologies contribute to “regulation by revelation” as individuals use them to function as the eyes and ears of a public audience eager to tap into the restricted realms of forbidden documentation.

The Global Boundaries of Subalternity

Transparency is relative to the “openness of places” in new “global times” in which the boundaries are becoming “far more open than they have been in the past” (Massey, 1995, p. 58). How those boundaries might be reconfigured in globalization is of considerable interest in social and cultural studies (Chan & McIntyre, 2002). Contrasting conception of “weapons of the weak” and “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1985, 1992) also hint at how ethnic and cultural groups stubbornly maintain their subaltern identities, interests and meanings, even when confronted with threats to their physical and cultural
survival. We should not underestimate the force of local mentalities—folklore, language, tradition and stereotypes. Such identity formations are not easily displaced by other community formations such as globalization (Bugrova, 2000). Even in relatively advanced, developed societies, where globalization more directly affects everyday life, local identities and self interests persist, reacting to various kinds of state policies and ideologies of control, containment, and development, precipitating strikingly volatile situations and social cleavage (Warren, 1993). At their base, however, persist the historical roles and functions of ethnic and cultural patterns.

Huntington's (1993) thesis about a "clash of civilizations" suggests how religion can work in the information sphere: “The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations…[they will become] the battle lines of the future (Huntington, 1993). Religion, as a local cultural reality, can trump a global agenda. We should ask repeatedly: “Are our theories contextually sensitive to particular time and place conditions?” (Wilkins & Mody, 2001, p. 387).

The cultural currents that shape national identity, or what Benedict Anderson (1983) called “imagined communities,” arise from massive structural changes affecting identity and consciousness, involving significantly diminished role of religion, dynasty and temporality. In this view, the transformation of national identity is grounded in the means of communication production because it creates a unified field of communicative exchange. Those fields have since been enlarged to shape “global communities” through such as conceptual tools as “ethnoscapes” and “mediascapes” (Appadurai, 1996).

From an idealistic perspective, global communication assumes a substantial degree of transparency. Even if such transparency is possible, the complex web of
causality and responsibility will be constructed in ways incomprehensible to a generalized, global audience. These processes are reflected as well in the “crisis of national identity” in the other, more stable, states of Western Europe, challenging the presumption of institutions that have evolved to regulate relations of culture groups (Rex, 1996). Such changing relations suggest the need for more complex models of communication and mobilization in identity formation.

CASE STUDY: NATO’S HUMANITARIAN WAR IN KOSOVO

Kosovo presents a tableau of contradictions about the transparency of global events. After the 79-day NATO bombing campaign in early 1999 forced Serb military and police units, along with thousands of ethnic Albanian and Serbian refugees, to retreat out of the former Yugoslavia’s southernmost province of Kosovo, a tense calm settled over what has been an historically troubled region. After a recent history of immigration by 200 thousand Serbs out of Kosovo since about 1980, approximately 1.5 million Albanians were expelled from their homes or fled the country during the 1999 conflict, with seven to 10 thousand Albanians killed by Serbs.

After a peace agreement approved by the United Nations was signed on 7 June 1999, international troops positioned across the region now assure a measure of peace in this corner of the Balkans, but it is still a troubled and perplexing region. Heavily protected ethnic enclaves are guarded by UN troops. The alleged “atrocities and "ethnic cleansing” committed in the region by the Serbs, and earlier actions by ethnic Albanians, were compelling topics in global media coverage (Buckley, 2000; Chandler, 1999, etc.).

Western media attention focused primarily on the massacres of thousands of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in reaction to what was framed as a brutal ethnic cleansing
campaign by Serb military and police forces. Such massacres triggered NATO’s “humanitarian” mission to force military disengagement by Serb troops led by Slobodan Milosevic. Based on the political doctrine of what Noam Chomsky (2000) has called the “new interventionism” by “enlightened states,” the Kosovo War raises important issues about the new, larger arena for war as a global media event, drama or spectacle. Once the air attacks were underway, the cycle of violence between Serbs and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo escalated, and the global media watched as hundreds of thousands of refugees fled the region.

The causes of the conflict and suffering in the Balkans are complex and varied. Throughout the former Yugoslavia, there are sharp lines drawn between ethnic and language groups that give rise of deep resentment and hatred. Hatred is irreducible, recursively seeking legitimation in ascribing ideological motives in current and historical events. Even a balanced history of the region and its peoples resembles a vast chess match of competing ethnic, language and religious groups.

At one point, six centuries ago, Albanians and Serbs were neighborly Christian peoples, defending their own countries against an Islamic Turkish invasion and lost. Numerous migrations by both groups over several centuries, and political divisions during two world wars, have created a historical maze of contradictory historical claims. Serbs have made a strong political claim to Kosovo for their religious history; here were fought great battles against Islamic invaders in 1389 and 1448. Kosovo is to the Serbs

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2 The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia listed seven alleged massacres in its indictment against former Yugoslav President Milosevic and four of his top commanders. Six of those occurred after NATO began the bombing campaign on March 24, 1999.

3 Subsequent investigations have raised questions whether deaths in some of the deaths were, in fact, "massacre" or elaborate displays of propaganda by ethnic Albanian resistance as propaganda against their Serb combatants.

4 Some observers of the Kosovo war sought to explain, for instance, why NATO and other western military powers would come to the defense of the predominately Moslem ethnic
an equivalent of what Jerusalem represents to the Jews (Tomashevich, 1998). On the other hand, ethnic-Albanians claim Kosovo as descendents of ancient Illyrians, and argue politically for annexation of the region into a “greater Albania,” including parts of present-day Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, and other lands. With international focus, even though the former Yugoslavia territory took shape as the intersection of several ethnic and religious groups, and as a zone of dispute between the former powers in the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, ethnic and religious identities have always played a significant role in the relations of its peoples. Still, as Bugrova (2000) argues, “no unified state identity has taken shape” in this disputed region. “It is here whence comes the Kosovo problem, where we can see a clash between the traditional identity as a claim laid to the territory of the ancestors [and] language problems…” (p. 271).

The Politics of Cultural Difference

Kosovo amply demonstrates the ambiguities and complexities of media and international conflict in the wake of irreconcilable claims between deeply-entrenched enemies. While cultural differences between the Serbs and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo are distinct barriers to cooperation, their mutual animosity is not fully defined by any single issue. Julie Mertus (1999) placed the intractable conditions of Kosovo's contending ethnic conflict around these specific problems:

1. In the foreground are two ethno-national groups, entrenched in a bitter struggle for political, economic and social control—(a) ethnic Albanians and (b) ethnic Serbs, with several other subordinate ethnic groups lurking in the margins.

Albanians in Kosovo, given the historical reluctance of such nations to defend Islamic interests elsewhere. Analysts disagree about the role of religion identity in the Kosovo conflict.
2. The most populace group in the Kosovo region, ethnic Albanians (90 percent), were physically dominated by the least populace group, ethnic Serbs (10 percent) through police and military.

3. The two groups lived almost entirely separate from each other, neither side understanding what each other wanted, needed and feared. Few outsiders understood the complexity and depth of historic mistrust.

4. The dispute concerned competing notions of borders, history, language and culture. Both sides make historical claims to the land: Serbs claimed Kosovo as a religious shrine to its defeat of the Ottoman Empire; Ethnic-Albanians claimed Kosovo by historic rights of the pre-Christian Illyrians.

5. Competing narratives of both groups were punctuated by increasingly militant and violent actions of the Serb police and military, and beginning in 1997 by armed resistance by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA).

6. The long stalemate pushed some groups on both sides to greater militancy. As a result, Serbs claim that Kosovo Albanians were armed and dangerous, and Kosovo Albanians, in turn, bitterly denounced Serb police control.

7. The conflict was heavily influenced by outside forces, including the war in Bosnia and Croatia; and more recently, in Macedonia.

International journalists sought to understand, and explain, these kinds of ambiguities in terms grounded in their own cultures, often at odds with the realities on the ground in the region of conflict (Grundmann, Smith & Wright, 2000; Nohrstedt, Kaitatzi-Whitlock, Ottosen & Riegert, 2000; Thussu, 2000; and Vincent, 2000).

Few people in the outside world knew very much about Kosovo, except for the occasional glimpses into the region beginning in the early 1980s when journalists began to report about ethnic rivalries and incidents of violence between Slavs and Albanians. European and North American journalists provided coverage of the early 1980s violence

An Associated Press writer, Kenneth Jautz, wrote on Oct. 17, 1981 about these tensions in terms of the departure of hundreds of Serbs and Montenegrins “in the aftermath of rioting…over demands of the ethnic Albanian majority for greater autonomy”. The writer noted that Serbs were a minority in the autonomous province of Kosovo, but held most of the important government positions. “Serbs have been gradually leaving the province for years. This trend, coupled with an ethnic Albanian birthrate three times the national average, could raise the likelihood of increased Albanian nationalism in the area” (Associated Press, 23 Oct. 1981).

The Christian Science Monitor assessed the Kosovo unrest in terms of the broad demographic and political issues lingering for years between these ethnic groups creating the poorest region in Yugoslavia. “Ever since 1945, this backward, onetime Serb ‘colony’ has been the problem child in the effort to force and maintain a stable Yugoslav union of so many different peoples, languages and religions. Anti-Serb demonstrations have flared periodically. Steady federal aid since the 1950s, and the Albanization of the police in 1966, have made little real difference” (Christian Science Monitor, 7 May 1981).

A few months later, the Christian Science Monitor looked even more closely at Kosovo’s “intractable” problems that seemed to prevent economic development parallel to the rest of Yugoslavia. “In the post-World War II period there has been a conscious attempt to bring Kosovo into the 20th century. But setbacks have included [a high birthrate among ethic Albanians]...politically guided investment in prestigious projects rather than in a sound economic base, a draining of population away from farms to the glamorous city, and over education of an unemployable Kosovar intelligentsia in the 10-year-old university in Pristina” (Christian Science Monitor, 15 Dec. 1981).
The unrest was traced loosely to student dissent at Pristina University in March 1981 when a dozen people were killed and hundreds injured in what was described as “almost weekly incidents of rape, arson, pillage and industrial sabotage, most seemingly designed to drive Kosovo’s remaining indigenous Slavs— Serbs and Montenegrins— out of the province” (New York Times, 28 Nov. 1982). The newspaper also described an incident in which someone attempted to set fire to a 12-year-old Serbian boy: “Such incidents have prompted many of Kosovo’s Slavic inhabitants to flee the province, thereby helping to fulfill a nationalist demand for an ethnically ‘pure’ Albanian Kosovo (New York Times, 12 July 1982). He cited estimates of 20 thousand Serbs and Montenegrins had fled Kosovo since the 1981 student riots.

Efforts to place responsibility for the ethnic tensions looked variously as economics, religion, language and culture: “There is a historical background of former Serbian colonialism. The Albanians’ language and literature were suppressed under Serbian and Yugoslav monarchies. With the new postwar republic, Albanians regained use of their language in Albanian schools, and in due course in a university, in libraries, newspapers, radio broadcasts, and later, on television” (Christian Science Monitor, 28 July 1986). In turn, there was revolving focus on intentional damage inflicted by ethnic Albanians on Serbian Orthodox churches and shrines, in the Kosovo regions considered to be their medieval religious homeland. Reuters news service wrote this article in 1986: “Ethnic conflicts are boiling again in Yugoslavia’s wayward Kosovo…. In recent months serious nationalist tension has resurfaced between Kosovo’s 1.7 million majority of ethnic Albanians and the region’s minority of 200,000 Serbs and Montenegrins. Authorities have smashed a plethora of separatist groups, and scores of Albanians have been jailed for activities allegedly aimed at bringing about Kosovo’s secession from Yugoslavia” (Reuters, 27 May 1986). Those activities included intimidation and verbal abuse: “Angry Serbs complain that Albanians are forcing them to leave Kosovo by destroying their
cemeteries, vandalizing their fields, killing their animals, pouring disinfectant down their wells, even raping their daughters” (Christian Science Monitor, 11 March 1988).

Eventually, a renewal of tensions in the 1990s resulted in efforts to isolated the Albanians through segregating schools and denying them other public services. Books in the Albanian language stored in the Kosovo National Library in Pristina were destroyed. Because of the increasing isolation, “parallel” services and schools were organized by the ethnic-Albanians to provide health, social and educational services in Kosovo. In effect, the Kosovar Albanians created a “shadow” government to meet public service needs.

The continuing rise of international media attention on the Kosovo conflict in the 1990s can be attributed to the convergence of political and social forces, in particular to the willingness of the United States and NATO leaders to respond to global humanitarian crises against the ethnic Albanians (Thussu, 2000). Kosovo’s strife was framed around a surge of Western sympathy for the plight of ethnic-Albanians. At the height of the Kosovo bombing, CNN had 70 journalists and other news production workers in the Balkan region and was spending an estimated $150,000 a day to broadcast reports (Thussu, 2000).

Eventually, the 199 NATO bombing campaign was built around transnational news discourses about genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Albanians (Grundmann, et al, 2000). Particularly in the American media with significant international distribution, this discourse comprised a political campaign to vilify Serb brutality and demonize Slobodan Milosivich as an evil Hitler-like figure who was willing to engage in a campaign of genocide to achieve clandestine Serbian political objectives (Ionescu, 2002). While radical elements among both Serbs and ethnic-Albanians were vulnerable to accusations, it was this shift to sympathy of the Albanians that framed international news coverage.
The problems that beset this troubled land involve irreconcilable claims of historical rights by both the majority ethnic Albanians, and the Serbs. "Myth is important here," one observer noted (Pettifer, 2001, p. 26). How the media use language to reconstruct social memory of the war is part of the intricate structure of mythology (Duijzings, 2000; Clark, 2000; Craft, 1998). Some journalists, in fact, have tried to isolate the importance of language as a cultural variable in tensions here, but they have failed to fully explore its significance. Both the Serbian and Albanian media are “incendiary” dealing with Kosovo, according to the Independent International Commission on Kosovo.

Three examples are outlined below to illustrate how images of Kosovo were constituted in the international news media: (a) the dilemma of verification of a massacre at the village at Racak; (b) the images of cultural “heroes” among Albanians who embodied their resistance to Serb cultural domination; and (c) the campaign for transparency by UN and OSCE, and other international organizations in Kosovo.

Verification of a Massacre at Racak

The brutal deaths of 45 ethnic Albanians at the village of Racak in January 1999 was a key event in justification of NATO's "humanitarian mission" to intervene in Kosovo in what it framed as an overt and deliberate act of Serb genocide. Subsequent findings by investigators raised questions about the massacre were later publicized in European media, but were not widely discussed in the United States.

The chronology of events at Racak began in January 1999 when the head of the OSCE mission in Kosovo, William Walker, announced that Serb soldiers had massacred 45 Kosovar Albanians. He condemned the killings as a “horrendous” massacre, stating that the dead were civilians who had been brutally executed, some mutilated after death.
After the initial news reports, political momentum for war intensified both in Europe and the United States. President Bill Clinton said in his televised address announcing NATO’s determination to launch airstrikes against the Serbs:

As we prepare to act we need to remember the lessons we have learned in the Balkans…. We should remember what happened in the village of Racak back in January—innocent men, women and children taken from their homes to a gully, forced to kneel in the dirt, sprayed with gunfire—not because of anything they had done, but because of who they were” (19 March 1999).

A subsequent Washington Post account noted, “Racak transformed the West’s Balkan policy as singular events seldom do” (Washington Post, 18 April 1999).

Yugoslavian journalists gave alternate accounts of the Racak deaths in French newspapers Le Figaro (“Dark Clouds Over a Massacre,” 20 Jan. 1999) and Le Monde (“Were the Dead in Racak Really Massacred in Cold Blood?”, 21 Jan. 1999). The German newspaper Berliner Zeitung reported that OSCE monitors in Kosovo believed the victims in Racak were not victims of Serbian massacre, but were KLA fighters killed in battle. The Sunday Times of London reported (12 March 2000) that Walker’s OSCE Kosovo advisers were intentionally pursuing a policy to push NATO into war in Kosovo.

After the Racak deaths, the European Union hired Finnish forensic pathologists to investigate the deaths who found no evidence confirming a massacre. The report was largely inconclusive whether it had been a “massacre,” but OSCE and the UN did not release the report itself for two years, raising suspicions about political influence. According to Berliner Zeitung (16 Jan. 2001), the Finnish investigators could not establish that the victims were, in fact, civilians, whether they were from Racak, or even exactly where they had been killed. Only one body showed traces of an execution-style killing, and no evidence was reported that any bodies had been mutilated.
The Philadelphia Inquirer reported (23 Jan. 2001) during the early stages of the war crimes tribunal at The Hague that “Serbs” refuse to accept the world’s vision of them as aggressors,” and that Yugoslav president Vojislav Kostunica “alleges the killings [at Racak] were staged to look like a massacre to embarrass Yugoslavia”. Even though the original accounts of Racak were widely discussed, the two major Western news agencies, United Press International and Associated Press, each published only one brief news report about the Finnish forensic report on Racak (18 Jan. 2001). Two separate reports (1 Feb. 2001 and 18 July 2001) about the Racak inquiry by the American media monitor Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) complained about the lack of U.S. news media interest in conflicting explanations at Racak. An initial FAIR report said the Finnish forensic investigation raised serious doubts about responsibility for the massacre. In a follow up report, six months later, FAIR retrenched on its first report to say the Finnish forensic report was, in fact, indecisive on many important points. FAIR then pointed to observations by French journalists who were among the first to arrive at Racak after the deaths that the area of fighting was not sealed off and there were no shell casings on the ground. Whether CIA operatives staged the tragic event as a strategic political justification for OSCE’s to escalate the Kosovo conflict is still not clear. The German magazine Der Spiegel (19 March 2001) later obtained a report of evidence compiled by prosecutors at the war crimes tribunal in The Hague, stating the victims in Racak were probably unarmed at the time they were killed, but that evidence “also reveals manipulations, deceptions and cover-ups—on all sides”.

That violent events can be ambiguous, or used to justify political action, is not surprising. Examples of elaborate staging of international news by ethnic identity groups are a phenomenon recognized in global communication (Palmer, 2001). The events at Racak confirm that journalistic images and facts of most kinds can be contested and
challenged. Discrepancies can open in the space of such events between denotative and connotative meanings, signifiers and signified.

Social Icons of Kosovo’s Cultural Heroes

There is little doubt that Kosovar Albanians were a colonized, fractured people in the late 1990s. While most looked to their ancestral cultural homeland, Albania, Yugoslavian political borders effectively cut them off. For most of the decade of the 1990s, ethnic Albanians in Kosovo found themselves under progressively stronger Serbian control. The iconic portrayal of Adam Jashari, an Albanian martyr from the Drenica region of Kosovo whose death has been portrayed as a mythic example of the strength of ethnic Albanians to vanquish their enemies. When news that almost 50 members of the extended Jashari family were killed by Serb police, the event was soon appropriated as a turning point in the ethnic struggle.

A report from the Independent International Commission on Kosovo (2000) affirmed that Kosovo was on the brink of open conflict at the beginning of 1998. Student demonstrations and protests ignored calls from Kosovo’s leaders to stop street protests. Serbian police had started to detain known opponents throughout the region. In October and November 1997 the KLA began for the first time to make public appearances at funerals of its soldiers and sympathizers. These events drew large crowds of Albanian supporters, often tens of thousands. During this same pre-war period, the KLA began to openly confront Serbian Police control in the areas of Drenica and Pec in northern Kosovo, declaring them the first “liberated areas” by the militant KLA. In response to these actions, the number of armed skirmishes in Kosovo increased dramatically, with 66 in January and February 1998, up from 55 in all of 1997, and 31 in 1996 (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000).
Despite international appeals for restraint and dialogue, Serb forces accelerated action against suspected KLA partisans. At the beginning of January 1998, Serbian police forces commenced exercises in the Drenica region, aimed at intimidating the militancy of Kosovar Albanians. At the same time, Serb civilians were becoming armed and paramilitary groups begin entering Kosovo from Serbia.

On February 27, 1998, heavily armed Yugoslav forces attacked the Drenica village of Likosane, using armored units and helicopter gunships. Four Yugoslav policemen and a comparable number of Albanians were killed. The fighting continued for several days in the region. In response, street protests erupted in Pristina on March 2. Yugoslav forces broke up the protest with water canons, tear gas, and batons, injuring at least 289 people.

Serbian police had tried to arrest Adem Jashari on January 22, but were fought off by the KLA. On March 5, after a week of fighting in Drenica, a concerted and heavily armed police action converged on the houses of the Jashari clan. Using artillery against the houses, the death toll reached 58, including Adem Jashari who became a popular martyr for their ethnic struggle. Images of Jashari have become popular street icons in Kosovo, depicting him as a fierce figure, heavily armed and defiant.
What happened to the Jashari family in March 1998 also assumed importance in Milosivich’s trial because the first prosecution witness at the war crimes trial of Slobodan Milosevic cited the Jasharis’ deaths as a key point of his testimony. Mahmut Bakali, an ethnic Albanian politician, testified that Milosevic had defended the killings of the Jasharis as a justified police action against terrorists. Serb leaders had long argued that the Kosovo conflict was between armed secessionists and government forces.

A pamphlet titled “The Jasharis, the Story of a Resistance” later distributed to visitors at the Jashari’s village describes Jashari as a KLA founder. The brochure presents a picture of the family fiercely devoted to the fight for independence and ready to give their lives for that cause. The pamphlet traces Jashari's KLA loyalty, stating that family members were "loyal co-fighters" who were "ready for sublime sacrifice."
In 1991, Adem and his friends went to Albania to get prepared for the battles to come," the publication reported. "During 1991 they frequently crossed the Kosovo-Albanian border, beginning armed actions against the Serbian police. Numerous actions were successfully undertaken. . . . The Serb state was being hit in its most sensitive part: in its repressive apparatus.

Serbian police and military first "laid siege" to the Jashari family compound Dec. 30, 1991, the pamphlet says. Large numbers of armed and unarmed people rushed to Prekaz in support of the Jasharis, and "this was the last time that the police [went] into Prekaz in seven years," it says. Serbian forces returned to assault the Jashari compound on Jan. 22, 1998, using "mortars, guns and automatic weapons," the pamphlet says. Jashari was not home, but the men who were there drove away the attackers. The next day, once again, thousands of supporters descended on the village from the surrounding Drenica region, it says.

"The challenge was too open, and the disgrace of the Serbs was too much to swallow," the pamphlet continues. "Therefore, they were preparing themselves for the final, fatal and antihuman blow that was to follow." On Feb. 28, 1998, a small KLA unit was ambushed by a Serbian police patrol near Likosane, but only one fighter was wounded while six police were killed, the pamphlet says. "A typical Serb revenge was organized," with police forces using tanks and helicopters to lay siege to the villages of Likosane and Cirez, killing 24 people, "among whom only four resisted with arms," it says. Jashari helped evacuate the wounded. Then he went home and warned his family members that they might be next. Friends and well wishers urged them to flee, but "they had decided not to leave their home and land."

According to the document, there were 19 members of his family who died with him, as well as 36 distant relatives and neighbors also killed in the three-day siege. Jashari's wife, Adile, was the first person killed in the siege by the Serbs, "while taking ammunition to Adem," the brochure said. The last to die was their son Kushtrim, 13, who
fell "holding the automatic gun in his hands". Most of the family members—including Jashari's mother, a 7-year-old niece and 11 others--were killed when a Serbian mortar shell hit the house, while Jashari's niece Besarta survived the siege "to tell about the . . . hell," it says. Growing up on stories of "century-old battles for liberation" waged by Kosovo's ethnic Albanians, Jashari came to "adore heroes" and "never parted from his gun," the pamphlet says.

According to reports by foreign journalists quoting survivors of the battle, some of the distant Jashari relatives who lived nearby were executed after being captured or killed while trying to flee. The pamphlet does not address how the others died, but it stresses that none of the people killed in Adem Jashari's immediate family had tried to escape. Jashari and his family knew the previous night that Serbian forces were poised for an armed assault on the family compound, the pamphlet says.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) conducted an extensive investigation into the events surrounding the Drenica campaign and affirmed that these events constituted a "turning point in the Kosovo crisis:

Regardless of what triggered the incident, there is no question that the special police forces acted in a quick and well-organized manner, which suggests that the police may have been planning to attack. There is also no doubt that the police used arbitrary and excessive force against the villagers long after resistance had ceased" (Independent International Commission on Kosovo, 2000).

The report goes on to look at armed conflict in several other villages, and it concludes that a wide range of civilians, including dozens of women and children, died in the local actions. In addition to killings, the report chronicles a range of other human rights violations committed by Serb forces and authorities, including attacks and restrictions on humanitarian workers, arbitrary arrests and detentions, restrictions on the media, and forced disappearances. Some KLA abuses were also detailed, focusing
predominantly on abductions. Reported KLA abuses concentrated on Serbs, but also on occasion included fellow Albanians who were judged to be Serb collaborators.

The Yugoslav government characterized the situation as an internal conflict that was under control, but tried to control access to the area by outsiders, including foreign media. Following the four-day operation in Drenica, the Serb deputy chief of the Kosovo province of Odalevic, announced: "The operation to liquidate the heart of Kosovo terrorism has ended." Thereafter, Yugoslav officials bused reporters and officials into Kosovo to tour the villages where the operations had been conducted. Meanwhile, the region remained sealed off and the estimated 5000 internally displaced people remained without food or medicine. Simultaneously, Tanjug, the Yugoslav news agency, quoted Milosevic: "[T]he Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is resolutely opposed to all the attempts to internationalize internal problems of another country."

Extended interviews published after the 1999 war with KLA military leaders, have documented their intentions and strategies in the rhetoric of freedom fighters (Hamzaj, 2000; Zejnullahu, 2001). The Serbs, however, insisted the KLA actions were simply lawless terrorist insurrection by secessionists. Indeed, as late as 1998, the KLA was declared a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department and some human rights organizations. The KLA was variously accused of financing its operations with support of both Middle Eastern and Islamic interests, as well as profits of international drug smuggling.

Transformation of the KLA into an army of “freedom fighters” was a significant achievement, contributing to the sympathetic shift of the Kosovar Albanians in the Western media in a few short months in 1999, even though the KLA provisional leader, Hashim Thaci, seemed to “care little for the civilities of Western-style democracy” (International Herald Tribune, 30 July, 1999, p. 6). The transformation of Kosovo from an ethnic island of Moslem Albanians into a legitimate Western-style democracy makes this
problem a key issue for UN and OSCE peacekeepers. OSCE has focused its efforts
since 1999 to organize an election system, but they face the reality that most Albanians
are not interested in a multi-ethnic state, and an open vote would heavily favor Albanian
candidates based on its dominant population. OSCE mandated recent provisions in the
election laws to guarantee a small number of seats for Serbs and other smaller ethnic
groups in the Kosovo parliament, but such guarantees have been controversial.

The depth of suspicion and mistrust between Kosovar Albanians and their former
Serb neighbors makes almost any level of cooperation difficult. OSCE officials worry
about militant Albanian factions that agitate against the return of Serbs to Kosovo.
Kosovo’s UNMIK (UN Mission in Kosovo) police removed posters on the streets of
Pristina depicting a Yugoslav soldier killing an Albanian child from Pristina, UNMIK
reported that the posters were put in up by a group of ethnic Albanian extremists with to
create fear among the Serbs who intend to return to the province. The posters said: “Do
not allow criminals to return to Kosovo” in Albanian and English. (Vecernje Novosti, 16
July 2002). A first wave of 200 returning Serbs returned to the Kosovo village of Osojane
in Northern Kosovo in August 2001. Their tiny village enclave was being protected
around the clock by a Spanish contingent of NATO soldiers from the Kosovo Force
(KFOR). Because of restrictions on movements, KFOR prohibited any outsiders from
entering the village without an entry request 24 hours in advance. The future of many
such closely-guarded Serb enclaves in Kosovo remains uncertain.

The OSCE Campaign for Transparency in Kosovo

With the arrival of international peacekeeping agencies and forces, a program to
strengthen the independence and objectivity of local media was implemented by the
Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). In this campaign,
Kosovo’s future as a democracy requires the free and responsible flow of information.
Thus far the local assessment of this level of media freedom is stark: "A free journalist in Kosovo is a dead journalist", complained a post-war Kosovo news reporter to OSCE.

“But it is not so much censorship by killing that threatens freedom of the media in Kosovo — even if two Kosovo journalists have indeed been killed in the past — it is the fact that such things can happen" (OSCE, 16 July 2002).

Journalists in post-war Kosovo express concerned about their safety. According to a survey of Kosovo reporters conducted by the OSCE Mission in Kosovo in December 2001, 78 per cent of journalists questioned say investigative journalism is almost always accompanied with fear of threat or reprisal. Two murdered Kosovo journalists, Bekim Kastrati in 2001 and Shefki Popova in 2000, are reminders of the consequences of aggressive reporting.

Intimidation of journalists makes it easy to control newspapers and broadcasters. Passive control, such as ensuring that some stories never get covered, seems to be the preferred method in Kosovo, some insiders claim. "Like every post-communist society, Kosovo has to face a difficult transition period. But it is now, with the international administration acting as a guarantee for democratization and development, that journalism has a special role to play," said Anna Di Lellio, Kosovo, temporary media commissioner " (OSCE, 16 July 2002).

It is not only the task of the media to inform people correctly and accurately, but also to educate readers, viewers and listeners.... Kosovo media could be the fourth dimension of public power, if it was independent, and if journalists did not have to fear to publish balanced truth. But sense of threat easily turns into self-censorship. I think that this has already happened up to a certain degree (OSCE, 16 July 2002).

According to the OSCE media survey, 35 per cent of Kosovo-Serb and 40 per cent of Kosovo-Albanian journalists say they have been threatened while investigating sensitive stories. Overall, 19 per cent of the journalists experienced an "explicit threat to their safety", 9 per cent said the threat entailed pressure from local authorities, 9 per
cent experienced "interference" while doing their job and 7 per cent were victims of direct physical attacks.

The survey also underlined that journalists in Pristina felt more threatened than their colleagues in other regions of the province. A total of 68 per cent in the capital Pristina say they have been threatened, and 26 per cent of those working in the regions had similar experiences. But even that figure is unacceptably high.

In December 2001, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo hosted a conference on protection of reporters. "Co-operation between police and journalists is still not at an appropriate level," said Refki Morina, a Kosovo police officer. He added that the police were ready to help as long as they were informed of the problems. "That is the only way the police can address the issue properly." OSCE leaders believe the best way for journalists to achieve the desired standards of openness and safety is to establish a strong professional identity (OSCE, 16 July 2002).

For outside journalists who tried to understand the nuances of the intractable conflicts in Kosovo, obstacles were different. They were, as one later described, "scouts without compasses in a completely unknown terrain" (Poggioli, 1994). Besides Kosovo, international journalists were drawn to wars in Slovenia in June 1991, then Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia.

The [earlier] Cold War had accustomed generations of reporters to analyze world events almost exclusively in terms of the bipolar confrontation, where good and evil were easily defined and identified. This mindset often proved unsuitable in trying to make sense of the disorder…and it was an easy prey for the highly sophisticated propaganda machines that have characterized the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia (Poggioli, 1994).

The "information war" between warring factions often placed international journalists at risk. A militiaman told an Associated Press reporter in Yugoslavia: "Reporters are like soldiers—the less they know, the longer they live" (Poggioli, 1994).
Coupled with the desire to eliminate the moral ambiguity over the conflict, journalists simplified the ways that Albanian nationalists and Serb police contributed to regional tensions. What resulted were news accounts that reduced the complex dynamics of the conflict to a gross caricature, or “a cartoon of good vs. evil” (Naureckas, 1999), with bombing the culprits as an obvious solution.

**SUMMARY**

This exploration of the gap between global transparency and local realities reveals the fragility of intercultural understanding. At the broadest level, the Kosovo conflict confirms the irreducibility of ethnic hatred and distrust. The emotional meanings of such conflicts are negotiated in the intricate relationships between signifiers and signifieds. The reciprocal acts of contending ethnic groups in places like the Balkans defy simple cause-effect explanations. Even analytical attempts drawing on deeper social, political or economic causes fail to capture the emotion that can sweep across a population, bringing it to carry arms and commit atrocities against neighbors who, although different in language, religion and culture, are in the end not so unlike themselves.

Communication is vulnerable to distortion when the kind of careful, intricate analysis that journalists require, they are unable to master; media managers are unwilling to publish and disseminate; and audiences, by and large, are uninterested in sorting through. In Kosovo, local media are incendiary, and Western media relied on a simplified, truncated official history that meshed with NATO policy objectives and the US political agenda. Even today, peaceful reconciliation and multi-ethnic democracy are ideas of outsiders and not many local people share them, but they are the very basis on which international intervention persists.

In Kosovo, the memories of mutual antagonism are still too painful to hope for forgiveness and forgetting. Any hope of achieving any meaningful level of transparency
in Kosovo requires coming to terms with the atrocities of the past in a deliberate, open program of truth and reconciliation (Krabill, 2001).

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