Contemporary political violence in Kosovo has frequently included the targeted destruction of architecture, at times to catastrophic proportions. As Serb forces destroyed mosques, religious schools, and other buildings associated with Islam during their campaign against the Kosovo liberation Army in 1998 and 1999, Kosovar Albanians have vandalized, burned, and bombed Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries in the years after 1999. The targets of this destruction are typically understood to comprise “heritage,” as indeed they have become for the communities that identify with and claim those targets. But this understanding assumes shared definitions of heritage across otherwise differentiated and antagonistic social formations. It assumes that enemies recognize the heritage of "the other," and that this recognition guides the targeting of destruction. The unsustainability of these assumptions prompts a closer examination of the relationship between violence and heritage.

The concept of heritage has long been recognized to be enmeshed with the concept of modernity. Modernity was formulated against a pre-modernity that, in the field of culture, was termed “heritage.”

But heritage is also dialectically related to another category. As well as being opposed to modernity’s non-historical counterpart, it is also opposed to despised history—to traces of non-modernity that are not valued, but condemned. This other category of the non-modern, which I term “counter-heritage,” has remained unmarked. The unmarked conceptual status of counter-heritage corresponds with, and testifies to, its demeaned social status. Counter-heritage is as conceptually invisible as it is physically eradicated.

If counter-heritage is recognized at all, it is as unrecognized heritage. The memory of destroyed historical objects is typically grounded in the status of those objects as a kind of heritage inadmissible to,
or unacknowledged by, hegemonic power. What these sorts of accounts cannot grasp, however, is that hegemonic power is manifested not only by selecting out certain cultural objects for preservation, but also by selecting out other cultural objects for destruction. Counter-heritage, in other words, is what the anthropologist Mary Douglas has termed an “abomination”: an entity made meaningful by a categorical order in the very process of being excluded from that order.

Sixty years ago, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno wrote that "[t]oday, the past is preserved as the destruction of the past." The immediate sense of this comment emerges in the context of heritage; it is the often-noted transformation that occurs when objects are identified as heritage, wrested from quotidian existence and endowed with museal aura. But the comment also suggests another context for understanding the cultural production of the past: that this production takes place not only through preservation that is destructive, but also through destruction that is preservative. That is, counter-heritage "preserves" a model of the past. The process of this preservation is destruction, yet this destruction—by extricating its targets from the social order—assists in the materialization of some version of history.

Like the positively-valued traces of pre-modernity that comprise heritage, counter-heritage is a component of modernity in many of modernity's formations. The site or context of modernist urban renewal and reconstruction proposals was counter-heritage, as were the traces of pre-modernity to which modern historic preservation failed to attend. Yet, counter-heritage is also salient in many postmodern processes and projects. Like other cultural forms emerging in the context of modernism and modernization, counter-heritage has assumed new meanings and new functions in new historical situations.

This article will look at the emergence of counter-heritage in the context of Kosovo's socialist modernization in the 1950s, focusing on the destruction of "Old Prishtina," the Ottoman-era urban core of Kosovo's capital city. On one level, this is the story of counter-heritage, of historical objects defined as
objects of modernist destruction. But this story has a further significance in the post-socialist aftermath of modernization in Kosovo. In that aftermath, counter heritage provided a template for the consolidation of power and identity during moments of extreme political instability. The modernist definition and destruction of counter-heritage in Kosovo became an initial moment in a history of spatial violence, a history in which a spatial practice that emerged within the domain of socialist modernization would be used to reorder contested territory in the domain of post-socialist conflict.

**Compensatory Modernism: Construction and Destruction**

In the years after World War II, socio-economic modernization was the focus of political will and state energy in socialist Yugoslavia. In Kosovo, an "autonomous region" within the Republic of Serbia, a number of ethnic, national, and geopolitical tensions acted as frictions on this modernization: the post-1948 Yugoslav-Soviet conflict (in which Kosovo was perceived as a vulnerable periphery adjacent to Stalinist Albania), Serb and Yugoslav efforts to control actual and imagined Albanian irredentism in Kosovo, conflicts within Yugoslavia about the economic autonomy of republics and distribution of federal capital, conflicts within and between Serbia and Kosovo about the political status of Kosovo, and ethnic antagonism within Kosovo itself. With these frictions, modernization proceeded far slower in Kosovo than in rest of Yugoslavia. The Republic of Serbia and Federal Yugoslavia narrated this slow pace as the result of Kosovo's backward social conditions, but, more accurately, Kosovo faced a chronic underdevelopment dictated by the contemporary political economy.

The construction of “New Prishtina” was the most significant work of urban renewal in socialist-era Kosovo and thus, a key component of Kosovo's supposed modernization. New Prishtina, however, was not an instrument of that modernization as much as a compensation for it. New Prishtina was a cultural substitute for a promise but undelivered socio-economic transformation of Kosovo, a transformation that was internally restricted from assuming its postulated form. As such, the construction of New Prishtina corresponds to what Marshall Berman has called a “modernism of underdevelopment,” a
modernism in which a symbolic representation of modernization is given as a substitute for, and deferral of, an incomplete renewal of socio-economic conditions.\textsuperscript{6}

In Kosovo, a symbolic representation of modernization was produced as much by destruction as by construction. These productions were each formally initiated in 1954 when an Institute for the Protection and Study of Cultural Monuments was established in Prishtina on the model of similar institutes founded in other Yugoslav republics after World War II.\textsuperscript{7} But also in that year, a master plan for Prishtina was approved, the main element of which was the placement of a complex of new municipal and provincial government buildings at its center, where the city's Ottoman-era bazaar was located.\textsuperscript{8}

**Diacritics of Modernization: Visualizing Counter-Heritage**

In the second half of the 1950s, some of the new buildings envisioned in Prishtina's master plan were constructed: a provincial assembly building, a city hall, and a new main street lined with modernist mixed-use buildings. But these buildings were not the only diacritics of the city's modernization—the buildings were located on the site of Prishtina's destroyed bazaar, or adjacent to other condemned or destroyed Ottoman-era architecture. Like the modernist buildings erected over and around them, the destruction of Ottoman-era architecture also signified the advent of modernization. Modernization, that is, materialized not only by newly-constructed modernist architecture, but also by the ruination of condemned pre-modernist architecture: the destruction of Old Prishtina's Ottoman-era buildings was equated with the destruction of a pre-modern social-economic system, and of pre-modernity itself.

The state explicated the architectural and urban diacritics of pre-modernity and modernity in a series of illustrated books about the progress of modernization in Kosovo. The book *Prishtina* was published in 1965 on the twentieth anniversary of the end of the World War II.\textsuperscript{9} “Until the end of the Second World War,” the editors describe, “Prishtina was a typical Oriental town, with small ground-floor houses and narrow streets. Only after the Liberation has Prishtina passed through strong economic, cultural and social development—and grown into a completely new modern town.”\textsuperscript{10} Modernity, in other
words, was a direct result of postwar socialism, and this reading was visible in the form of the city itself. An image of Prishtina from the book thus shows the city's newly-constructed main street in the foreground, the complex of new government buildings in the upper-left corner of the background, and the remains of the outmoded and partially destroyed pre-modern urban fabric surrounding all of the above (Figure 1). The caption of the picture focuses precisely on the contrast between old and new: "Modern buildings rise higher and higher above the low roofs of the old houses." Here, modernization is not a self-constituted and autonomous construction, but an implied destruction of the rejected remnants of pre-modernity.

In the book *Yugoslav Cities*, also published in 1965, it is specifically the remains of Old Prishtina's bazaar that are staged as signs of the superseded socialist prehistory. In one image, mud-brick buildings in a still-extant section of the otherwise-destroyed bazaar were juxtaposed with a new, white modern building with the caption reading, "Dilapidated small houses, a relic of the past, can still be seen in some parts of the town, but are fast disappearing. The people of Prishtina want large and modern apartment blocks" (Figure 2). The remains of the bazaar formed a counter-heritage, a "relic of the past" that was designated not for preservation, but for eradication.

Only while such designations were made and partly carried out were other "relics of the past" designated positively as heritage. While the remains of Prishtina’s bazaar gradually disappeared, Kosovo's Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments selected other examples of pre-modern architecture as historic monuments to be protected and preserved by the state. The state produced heritage and counter-heritage simultaneously, with each acting as a foil for the modernity that the state was attempting to represent aesthetically, if not institute socio-economically.

The division of Kosovo's pre-modern architectural culture into heritage and counter-heritage was refracted through a complex amalgam that included Orientalism, socialist modernism, and the international post-war ideology of historic monuments as singular and exemplary constructions. This
division yielded a corpus of heritage in Kosovo strongly oriented towards Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries, including those built after World War I; these buildings became “listed historic monuments,” protected by and cared for by the state. At the same time, another corpus of pre-modern architecture was produced, this one strongly oriented towards Ottoman-era architecture—some of which then became counter-heritage slated for destruction.

**Counter-Heritage, Spatial Violence, and Political Violence**

While the definition and destruction of counter-heritage emerged during socialist modernization, counter-heritage has also become a component of post-socialist spatial politics in Kosovo. This is because destruction—like other types of chronic violence—becomes an autonomous cultural form, detached from its original context and reproducing itself in new contexts under the sign of such terms as "Response," "revenge," "reprisal," "retribution," or "punishment." Most recently, in the waning aftermath of socialism in Yugoslavia, counter-heritage has become enmeshed with ethnic politics—or, more precisely, with the ethnicization of politics in Kosovo. That is, as the conflict over political sovereignty in Kosovo has transformed into a conflict between antagonistic ethnic groups these groups have defined both themselves and their ethnic other through the production, destruction, and memorialization of counter-heritage.

In the 1998-99 Serb counter-insurgency campaign against the Kosovo Liberation Army in Kosovo, along with the mass deportation of and violence against Kosovar Albanians, Serb forces damaged or destroyed approximately 200 of Kosovo’s 620 mosques along with a range of other buildings associated with or occupied by Kosovo's Albanian communities—houses, shops, and entire urban neighborhoods (Figure 3). This destruction was not collateral damage—in some towns and cities, mosques and other Islamic religious sites were the only buildings singled out for attack, and in other, most or all Islamic buildings were destroyed. Subsequently, during Kosovo's administration by the United Nations, violence by Albanians against Serbs in Kosovo has included the targeted damaging or
destruction of approximately 140 Orthodox churches and monasteries, along with houses and villages associated with or occupied by Kosovo's Serb communities (Figure 4).¹⁵

To the perpetrators of this violence, destruction was aimed not at heritage, but at counter-heritage—at signifiers of a despised history. There were, then, significant disjunctions between what was imposed as counter-heritage on a collective ethnic other and what that collective claimed as heritage. Serb forces targeted Islamic architecture, casting the identity of their adversary in ethno-religious terms, while Albanians have targeted Serb Orthodox architecture to institute a reciprocal casting. In both cases, perpetrators of violence did not choose targets on the basis of their status as listed historic monuments, historic age, or significance to the targeted community. Also, in both cases violence asserted the identity between an ethnic group and a state or para-state, so that violence against counter-heritage performed a forensic function, establishing the very parameters of otherness in the process of targeting an other.¹⁶

In the context of nationalist ideology, on both Albanian and Serb sides, the ethnicization of violence through destruction has been productive. Not only have Albanian and Serb antagonists targeted the religious sites of the other as counter-heritage, but memory projections on both sides have transformed imposed counter-heritage into inherited heritage. Along with monuments, representative and venerable edifices, and other objects deemed to be of historical significance, the architectural casualties of wartime and postwar violence have become subsumed into the category of architectural heritage for both Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo.

As buildings identified with both Albanians and Serbs have been destroyed in political violence, both communities have accumulated a heritage of destroyed architecture (Figures 5 and 6). What Albanians and Serbs have come to include as their heritage in Kosovo is precisely the counter-heritage defined by the other. This redefinition of counter-heritage as heritage—a negation of a negation—interprets violence from the perspective of its victims, but it is also a memorialization of victimization that can provide a resource for further violence. The formation of a heritage of destroyed buildings has
thus provided an incipient legitimization for violent responses to that destruction. To the extent that the counter-heritage of an other is destroyed as revenge for destruction wreaked by that other—a justification frequently made in Kosovo—then destruction has become self-reproducing and the recognition of a shared possession of counter-heritage across communal lines remains invisible.

---

2 Unrecognized heritage could be the referent of what Foucault termed “counter-memory.” I pose the term “counter-heritage,” however, not as a referent of counter-memory, but of hegemonic memory work that suggests or yields destruction instead of preservation.
9 Esad Mekuli and Dragan Cukic, eds., *Prishtina* (Belgrade: Beogradski graficki zavod, 1965).
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 *Yugoslav Cities* (Belgrade: Turisticka stampa, 1965).