

BORGES'S LABYRINTHS, KOSOVO'S ENCLAVES, AND URBAN/CIVIC DESIGNING (IV)

Intimations of Change: Urban Design

For many years, some of the residents of Prishtina have voiced their disappointment about the layout of their city. Compared to many other capitals in Europe, the center of Kosovo's capital is seen as more of an eyesore than a source of pride

This should be no surprise, given that the present urban landscape is the result of Communist planning and unconstrained development.

The rationale for changes in the outdoor public areas of the capital, including landmark buildings and squares, is more nuanced, however. It is, in part, a reflection of the relationship between building and identity: what they build is a result of who they are, and the "they" are the majority Albanian population. It is no surprise, then, that key figures in the Albanian liberation movement are memorialized, those who were behind liberating Kosovo from Serb rule. And it is no wonder that a need exists to tear down buildings and monuments that remind its Albanian majority of the past: the partisans who fought during World War Two, being a part of Yugoslavia, and the years of repressive Serbian rule. It is as if some want to erase the dark past through urban design. What all this amounts to is a smoothing of the space within the Albanian enclave, thus strengthening the centripetality and centrifugality of the totality of the objects of Albanian nationalism while at the same time reducing the material and symbolic remains of Serb nationalism and their power to both unite and separate people within that same enclave. Two examples of how the urban landscape of Prishtina is being redesigned will suffice.

Strengthening the Albanian Enclave through Urban Design

The unfinished Serbian Orthodox Cathedral of the Christ the Savior is a building that has led to anger and resentment on the part of many Albanians since its construction on the university campus in 1995. With the Serb population being as small as it is in Prishtina and in Kosovo as a whole, some look at the presence of the unfinished cathedral as having little

By **Rory J. Conces**

Department of Philosophy and Religion
University of Nebraska at Omaha

if anything to do with taking care of a religious or spiritual need of the Serb community and everything to do with nationalist intrusion. Others take property ownership as the central issue and, since the university owns the property, the matter should ultimately be decided by the university and not the Serbian Orthodox Church. Still others look at the



Statue of Bill Clinton in Prishtina

church as an object that has no value, including architectural value. The recommendation that is suggested by those who view the church in these ways is either the church should be demolished or it should be given another function. Either way the outcome would be to create a less textured space that strengthens the Albanian enclave. As of now, the future of the church remains uncertain.

The other example is the grand project to revamp a series of squares along Prishtina's central axis. The project amounts to the honoring of three Albanian heroes: two KLA fighters, Zahir Pajaziti and Adem Jashari; and the first president of Kosovo, Ibrahim Rugova. The project as a whole initially came under heavy criticism. Critics cited problems ranging from the lack of adequate consultation and transparency to the use of public

money and whether the project would be a coherent one from an urban design perspective and as aesthetically enlightened as it could be. None of these, however, were sufficient to stop the project, which will be completed later this year.

To be honest, the three squares are meant to create interactive space. They will not only showcase statues of the three Albanians, but also create large public areas that include fountains, playgrounds, parking structures, retail stores, and remodeled buildings. This will achieve what the planners have set forth as one of their goals: to enhance Prishtina's economic and social future. One would be hard pressed to chastise the city's municipal and business leaders for working towards this goal. At the same time, however, they should be thinking in more inclusive terms, attempting to draw in people from other ethnic groups. As it looks, those who will most benefit

from these squares are the Albanians. The centripetality and centrifugality of these squares will no doubt enhance the Albanianess of the enclave.

The construction of the new Adem Jashari Square has a twist to it; it will include the removal of the monument to Brotherhood and Unity, a structure consisting of three 15-meter high columns joined near the top symbolic of the unity of three peoples of Kosovo: Albanians, Serbs, and Montenegrins. Although the future of the monument is yet to be announced, it appears that it will suffer the same fate as the monument to the Partisans who fought in World War Two that is situated in the Velania neighborhood and the likely fate of the Cathedral of the Christ the Savior if municipal leaders get their way. Again, it amounts to the use of urban design to erase the

unwanted past of Prishtina and the rest of Kosovo by ridding the environment of buildings and monuments, and enhancing the divide between ethnic groups.

There is Democracy and Then There is Deliberative Democracy

Kosovo, once a province of Serbia that was granted virtual autonomy within Tito's Socialist Republic, had its autonomy drastically reduced under Milosevic in 1989. Yet from its earliest years of being a part of Yugoslavia, the province gradually acquired the institutional mechanisms of a representative democratic republic form of governance. During the period in which governance was transferred to the United Nations following the signing of the Kumanovo Agreement in 1999, these mechanisms were improved to the point at which final status talks were initiated that could well have led to the negotiated creation of an independent Kosovo. Instead, Kosovo's Parliament declared independence on February 17, 2008. Over the course of the last five years, more and more countries have recognized Kosovo as a sovereign democratic republic.

It must not be forgotten, however, that this newly formed state was forged from oppression and violence, in part between peoples of different ethnic groups. It is one thing to have democratic legitimacy based on the aggregation of preferences that occurs in voting, it is an entirely different matter to have that same legitimacy be the result of authentic deliberation. Perhaps the latter is especially important for Kosovo, a country fragmented into ethnic enclaves and whose Albanian electorate continues to create an inequity in political power. This asymmetrical power structure raises some doubt to the legitimacy of the democracy itself. This doubt is furthered by the presence of enclaves because enclaves are not only crucibles within which ethnic identities become dominant for individuals, but they are also breeding grounds for competing ethnic nationalist ideologies.

An ethnic nationalist ideology is a particular triad of ontology, psychology, and morality that is destructive to a stable

and harmonious peace and a well-functioning democracy. Its ontology distinguishes persons according to ethnic categories (e.g., Albanian, Serb, Roma), its psychology is xenophobic (fearful of the "Other"), and its morality is chauvinistic (one's own ethnic group is morally superior to the others). Given that peace, harmony, and democracy are predicated on a continuing exchange of ideas, the fact that enclaves push peoples farther and farther apart leads to a short-circuiting of this exchange and produces increasing amounts of uncertainty and mistrust. Enclaves are even more troublesome, since emotions are important, particularly empathy, which allows an appreciation of how Others experience their lives. If the Other is out of sight and out of mind, then it will be difficult to empathize with that person who you already dislike.

But to bring about a stable and harmonious peace, and something resembling a deliberative democracy, requires that ideas are more than just exchanged. They are part of the process of reconciliation, the development of a mutual, conciliatory accommodation between "formerly" antagonistic groups. Given that reconciliation requires interpersonal forgiveness, which entails the recognition of a moral judgment followed by a letting go instead of seeking revenge, reasoning and the commonplace self-restraints on



The unfinished Serbian Orthodox Cathedral of the Christ the Savior

reasoning become crucial. And not, to be sure, the sort of weak reasoning (and lack of self-restraints) of the fanatic, which leads to the fanatic's self-righteousness, intolerance, extreme certainty, credulity, and zealotry.

For a democratic decision to acquire a certain degree of legitimacy, it must be

the result of authentic deliberation. Such deliberation produces less partisanship, more sympathy with the plight of others, and increases commitment and consensus building. It does so by placing more value on evidence-based reasoning, agreeing that reasons need to be public and understandable, and being open to the possibility of changing one's mind. These are the hallmarks of non-fanatical reasoning.

Deliberative Democracy and Civic Design in Kosovo

Unfortunately, little of this, including a meaningful emotive connection, will occur in Kosovo unless there is reasoning and emotionally situated dialogue that cuts across enclaves. In a sense, that would amount to the core activity of deliberative democracy running rampant. An effective way for this to take place is through people having face-to-face contact with others so that their worlds collide. So the more a society is composed of discrete ethnic groups, some of which have a long history of antagonism with one another, the more there is a need for integration. It is through integration and the demise of ethnic enclaves that Kosovo will become a multiethnic society.

A multiethnic Kosovo, however, cannot simply be wished into existence. And enclaves will not suddenly disappear because of the deal that was struck between Kosovo and Serbia in April of this year. A multiethnic society will unfold through the creation of a collaborative environment, one that is in large measure inclusive, integrated and interactive, peaceful, and respectful of difference rather than simply tolerant of it. How is to be done?

It is in part accomplished through civic design, the design of cities and towns with the goal of creating persons who are more inclined to work towards civic improvement. In this case it includes a reduction or elimination of public evocative objects that are likely to be divisive along ethnic lines. Part of this divisiveness is created through the memories that are reawakened from the sight of these objects. The Albanian flags displayed on buildings and from cars throughout

Prishtina and Serbian flags found on hill-tops and light poles in north Mitrovica are such objects. Dealing with them would go some way to making these places more hospitable to members of locally non-dominant ethnic groups. Indirectly, it would be a way to tinker with people's memories. The hope is that at some point changing the physical landscape will allow more people to dwell in the same neighborhoods, feeling at home with one another in much deeper ways than could have been ever realistically hoped for by Albanians, Serbs, and others when Kosovo became independent in 2008.

Although it is unlikely that the composition of neighborhoods would quickly change because of civic design, it would begin to change the conditions needed for neighborhood transformation. Yet this mechanism for the restructuring of both private and public space leading to the breakdown of the enclaves is not without its problems.

The enclaves and the distortions they create throughout the social, political, and economic landscape may be where some legislation is necessary. However, expecting an Albanian dominated government to draft and pass legislation that defines the permissible use of evocative objects, including those that are prevalent within the Albanian community, is a bit unrealistic. Even if such laws were invoked, using the law to deal with the enclaves in this way could be a violation of Article 40 of the Constitution of Kosovo that covers freedom of expression. Of course, freedom of expression is not absolute: "the freedom of expression can be limited by law in cases when it is necessary to prevent encouragement or provocation of violence and hostility on grounds of race, nationality, ethnicity or religion" (Art. 40.2). But is using the law as a blunt instrument to reduce or eliminate evocative objects going too far? Is the public display of evocative objects that antagonize along ethnic nationalist lines an expression guaranteed by "the right to express oneself, to disseminate and receive information, opinions and other messages without impediment" (Art. 40.1)? If it is but that right is not absolute, then under what circumstances would the display of such objects be construed as "encouragement or provocation of violence and hostility," thus making it lawful for the state to limit their expression?

Perhaps what is needed is to refrain from what is legal but both unrealistic and unacceptable, and to rely on respecting difference in order to create a more lived sense of equality of dwelling and the opportunities that emerge from this equality. Interpreting the use of these evocative objects as "encouragement or provocation of violence and hostility" and to use the law to censor the display of such objects could be correct but offensive to do. Better yet would be to promote reason-giving and emotionally situated (read empathetic) dialogue to create the self-imposition of standards



Serbian flags in Kosovska Mitrovica

that would censure those who display such objects in order to create ethnic enclaves. Surely, that would be legal and should be acceptable to most.

Beyond Labyrinths and Kosovo 2.0

As was noted earlier in this work, stories of all kinds offer us a means of acquiring fresh perspective on the world and to make it more difficult to hide from disturbing revelations. One of those revelations is to accept historic recurrence as a half-truth. The narrative found in "The Wall and the Books," an essay of three pages tucked in the middle of Borges's *Labyrinths*, was used as a pedagogic tool to make the reader mindful of the recurrence of history by linking ancient China with modern day Kosovo. Shih Huang Ti planned to safeguard China from the Other by creating defenses that included the building of stone walls and the burning of books. Kosovo is in a similar situation. The creation of its enclaves through the use of evocative objects to keep the Other at bay is the recurrence, the half-truth. Of course, Shih Huang Ti never intended to build a multiethnic society. This is where the similarity ends, for such a society is here advocated for Kosovo.

Although the maxim of what we build is a result of what we are supports the building of defenses that we find in Shih Huang Ti's China and present-day Kosovo, there is also the maxim that what we are is the result of what we build, which supports the creation of a multiethnic society in Kosovo. If our cities and towns were built differently, we would become different persons with a new set of beliefs, feelings, and behaviors; even members of different groups, and eventually of a different society.

The idea is that by using legal redress or relying on respect for others to deal with the problem of evocative objects, peoples of different ethnicities are more apt to come together to engage in dialogue, which in turn may result in the reconfiguring of identities that people take as dominant in public space, making (shared) citizenship a more dominant one. The hope is that, over time, a multiethnic society will develop as Kosovo 2.0, with blue fla-

gs outnumbering eagles and tricolours. I have not devised a plan for this change, but only a series of intimations or ways of embarking on a journey. Creating and sustaining enclaves is a way of creating labyrinths, structures within which starting points become end points and end points become starting points. But the labyrinths need not be permanent fixtures. These intimations suggest a way to end the recurrence of those labyrinths.

A final point should be made. I am not sure how to respond to those who say that this civic design project is itself an "erasing of history." Isn't taking down Albanian and Serbian flags from light poles and removing statues of military heroes from city squares just another form of historical revisionism? It is not clear that moving those flags back into private space is an erasing of history? As for the statues, perhaps their histories could be kept alive by placing them in something like The National Dialogue Space for a Multiethnic Kosovo. Not a museum, but a space in which provocative objects like flags and statues are placed to provoke dialogue about histories and identities, and in which people can create works of their own that continue the dialogue even as part of the reconciliation process. Perhaps it is good to simply leave this for further debate.