

*Messaging Stones:
Islamic Grave Markers in Socialist Yugoslavia 1945-1999*

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Despite a broad similarity in the historic and religious origins of Muslims in Socialist Yugoslavia, Islamic grave markers located throughout Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia including the Autonomous Province of Kosovo¹ show considerable variety in style and message. This article argues that those differences reflect the variety and complexity of relations found in each community between Muslims and their neighboring ethnic groups and with the socialist regime. Citizens of Muslim faith composed approximately 16% of the population of the Socialist Federal Republic Yugoslavia during the 1970s-80s although their distribution among those Yugoslav Republics varied enormously. For example, while Muslims made up less than 2% of the population in Croatia, they accounted for approximately 40% of the population of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their dispersal throughout Serbia was even more uneven—they constituted only a small minority (less than 3%) of the population in Central Serbia and the Autonomous region of Vojvodina but held substantial majorities in both the Sandžak of Novi Pazar and the Autonomous Region of Kosovo, ranging from 60-80% over the period of Socialist Yugoslavia.² All Muslims within the Balkan peninsula were of Ottoman origin, meaning that nearly all were Sunni Muslims, excepting a few Sufi sects in Bosnia and Shi'ia dervish orders in Kosovo/Kosova.³ Nonetheless, consistent variations in the form, inscriptions, and symbols on their grave markers expose the multiple ways that they functioned in and responded to Socialist Yugoslavia's ethnoreligious and political environment. Many Muslims remained faithful to the

classic white flat or post pillar headstone and footstone typical of the Ottoman empire; others gradually adopted elements of memorial design associated with their Christian neighbors such as the granite rectangle form or use of photographs; finally others yet showed open resistance to what they clearly considered the oppressive policies of the Yugoslav communist or Serbian nationalist regime, creating grave markers and epitaphs intended to communicate national and political aspirations.

In doing so, Muslims of the former Yugoslavia revealed the dynamic interaction between private and public forms of commemoration. For while citizens certainly selected the grave marker that they felt best reflected their private interests, their choices were shaped by options provided by the socialist regime that encouraged modesty in style and required restraint in the use of religious adornment. Moreover, the ethnoreligious segregation of cemeteries that remained in place even fifty years after socialists took power framed all burial options and thus the ways that families might seek to communicate through grave markers both within and across communities.⁴ Finally, all burial culture in socialist Yugoslavia became deeply politicized under a regime that proclaimed equality while it clearly favored those whose grave markers bore the five-pointed star, even as the deaths of certain others were considered “ungrievable.” Human lives as Judith Butler has put it, so unworthy of public notice as to be ungrievable, were also “already the unburied, if not the unburiable.”⁵ In the Yugoslav case, this meant that those soldiers who had fought on the “wrong” side of the Second World War were often buried in mass and/or unmarked graves.

Grave Markers as Primary Sources

Grave markers in the modern world are monuments that memorialize the deceased and offer loved ones a means of expressing grief. In that sense, they have become an important form

of communication between the living and the dead. As primary sources of material culture, grave markers come closest to giving voice to the dead themselves, particularly in an era when individuals are increasingly inclined to design and even place grave markers prior to death. Yet grave markers are forms of communication not only between the dead and the living, but also among those still living who gather to mourn them. In many, perhaps most cases, the message and the target audience are simple and direct. The marker provides information regarding the inhabitant of the grave including name, age at time of death, religion, and sometimes also occupation, status, hobbies, and other family members to an audience most likely composed of family, friends, and neighbors. In other cases, however, that audience may be much broader and potentially less friendly, as when the deceased belongs to a marginalized group within the community or state. Under such conditions, and intentionally or not, the form, symbols, and inscriptions on grave markers may read as encrypted messages that reveal the position and social or political intentions of the deceased and their family.

The nature and composition of the cemetery is a critical component of gravestone messaging. As communities of the dead corresponding to those of the living, cemeteries are generally considered sites of unity and comfort where families, friends, and communities of the living gather to mourn and commemorate their deceased loved ones. In that context, grave markers serve to display the decedent's most important characteristics and status within that community by highlighting their profession, occupation, hobbies etc. Communal institutions and values validate each family's memorialization of their deceased as the family and community generally share the same religion, burial forms, and customs. But like communities of the living, cemeteries can be as exclusive as they are inclusive. Should the deceased be an outsider, or part of a minority ethnoreligious group, the family's private forms of commemoration may seem

either alien or familiar, sending a message of continued difference from or attempted assimilation to the majority community.

It has long been accepted that grave markers indicate social status within a community based on size, material, and artistic quality.⁶ But when the grave marker is in a multi-ethnic and religious cemetery, even if located in a separate section, it will be seen by those who do not share the same customs and values, and will likely be evaluated not only on the basis of size and artistic quality, but even more so by its form, inscriptions, and symbols, just as the outsiders themselves are judged by their clothing, homes, food, and rituals. Thus, while we cannot know with certainty whether a given family deliberately weighed the message it chose to send on grave markers and which audience to prioritize, the markers themselves, like other forms of material culture, undoubtedly represent a significant source of information about how the deceased and their family related to the broader community within which they existed.

Grave Markers in Europe and Ottoman Culture

As the name implies, grave markers in Western Europe were originally intended simply to mark the site of burial and protect it from disturbance.⁷ As a result, once the Christian churches began to encourage burials on sacred ground within a fenced area on church property, there was no particular need for gravestones. Indeed, for centuries most people in Western Europe were buried without any marker at all in mass graves and their bones later moved to charnel houses and ossuaries. Only elites were permitted burial within the church and therefore most of the early extant graves are inside the church buildings. The first ones from the 12th century were carved slabs sealing coffins with more elaborate stones set above. As space inside the church filled, tombs were set in the floor, in the walls, and in catacombs underground. Later,

walled galleries were constructed outside larger churches whose walls were also eventually filled with tombs.⁸

Once most cemetery monumentation moved outside after the mid-17th century, greater diversity in style and size developed. Although the 19th c. Napoleonic laws guaranteed every citizen the right to an individual grave, they did not guarantee every citizen could pay for a stone marker. Thus, many made do with a painted slab of wood or a wooden cross that would disintegrate over time leaving an unmarked grave whose lease would soon be up. In stark contrast, the old elites, those previously buried in churches, and perhaps even more important the new elites, now had the income to express their individual and social status as clearly after death as in life. Some built elaborate chapels and mausoleums within which their entire family would be interred; others commissioned exquisite sculptures to stand guard above the remains of a deceased loved one. Those in between made do with simple rectangular stones or cross-shaped monuments, now inscribed with the name, date of birth and death of the deceased.

Islamic grave markers also began with simplicity; according to Qur'anic and Hadithic writings, they were theoretically supposed to all be level with the ground, in order to emphasize the egalitarian quality of death. In fact, there is a specific prohibition against plastering and building over a grave, and in some cases a prohibition against inscriptions on grave markers.⁹ Ideally then, Muslim grave markers should be nothing other than simple uninscribed stones, lacking even names, dates, or religious symbols. Indeed, in many Arabic Muslim countries graves often consist of nothing more than simple mounds marked only by bricks or rocks.¹⁰

Yet despite the Qur'anic proscriptions and insistence of the official clergy, tombstones with inscriptions, as well as large, elaborate, and colorful mosques atop graves developed within only a few centuries after the death of Muhammad. Moreover, whatever the Islamic strictures on

inscriptions, the Ottomans are world famous for the epigraphic artistry displayed on tombstones and other forms of sepulchral architecture. According to Halevi, the first inscriptions on tombstones in the 8th century were Qur'anic verses intended to be read aloud by passers-by as additional prayers for the deceased.¹¹

Medieval and early modern tombstones in Bosnia-Herzegovina developed a unique style both in their tombstones and epitaphs, distinct from others in the Ottoman Empire and more clearly connected to regional forms of sepulchral art. Amila Buturović, describes the “malleability” of the local culture in early Bosnia as the Islamic faith first encountered pre-existing religious communities there. She notes that early gravestones in that region “contain a variety of textual and iconographic choices,” reflecting the influence of local customs and practices.¹² Further evidence of the gravestones' native style was the fact that the epitaphs in the earliest versions, from the 15th-16th century, were written in Bosnian not Arabic script.¹³ Thus, there is a strong heritage in the region of adaption, resulting in modest but highly artistic tombstones, embellished with Qur'anic and poetic epigraphs.

Later tombstones throughout the Balkans were likely more deliberately imitative of the Ottoman style. They began to adopt the white flat or post pillar headstone, sometimes accompanied by a footstone, which is now common throughout the region, adopted Arabic script and Turkish language, and also turban tops on headstones for deceased males and caps for females. Women's tombstones were also usually smaller and more frequently decorated. By 18th-19th century, however, all of the tombstones became more elaborate, depending in part on class. The shape, style, and size of the turban in particular, provided specific information about the class, educational level, and occupation of the deceased. There were, for example, particular turban types for different educational levels of muftis, different ranks of dervishes, differing

ranks of agas, and for various different types of trades and craftsmen. After the military reforms of 1832, the ranked turbans for deceased agas were replaced with the newly created fez required for all Turkish officers living or dead.¹⁴

In the modern era, as noted previously, all grave markers, regardless of religion are far from being mere markers but represent a critical medium of private/public communication. The public is neither silent nor passive in this process as long-standing social conventions may limit their choices and cemetery administrators (whether religious or secular) have traditionally played an important role in regulating the placement, size, and style of markers within their larger public function in building and preserving communities of the dead. In socialist regimes, the state may also restrict the ways that families memorialize their deceased loved ones, while commemorating the deaths of its own representatives in ways that may politicize grave sites and death itself. As a result, grave markers in socialist states—their size, style, placement, symbols, and inscriptions expose the greatest frictions between private and public concepts of mourning.

Politicization of Grave Markers

In fact, the socialist regime in Yugoslavia established few legal restrictions on grave markers, yet the relative homogeneity of markers during that era suggests the existence of effective informal constraints. Religious symbols were certainly permitted, but were expected to be simple, modest and few in number, and by the late 1960s some municipalities included articles in local laws forbidding the placement of epitaphs or symbols that “would insult anyone's national or religious feelings, or insult feelings of respect for the deceased or could provoke complaints among citizens.”¹⁵

Indicators of an individual's political affiliation are not usually included on grave markers in Europe. Even the Nazi party did not place the swastika on the grave markers of its deceased members, whether they be high ranking officials or soldiers. There have been exceptions: a family's coat of arms was frequently included on the gravestone in many regions, national heralds or those from a military regiment are sometimes displayed on the markers of fallen soldiers, and the Freemasons have been known to etch their insignia on grave markers.¹⁶ With the creation of the Soviet Union, however, it became standard for the symbol of the Communist party, most commonly a five pointed star, though occasionally also the hammer and sickle, to be placed on the grave marker of its devout followers. At the same time, it banned all other even vaguely political symbols and, in this way, politicized cemeteries in a way that they had not been previously.

In the case of Yugoslavia, the first grave markers to bear the five-pointed star were those participants in the Second World War who fought alongside the Communists. Many of them had died during the war and were considered martyrs for a Yugoslavia only recently reunited and liberated from fascist invaders. Over time, as additional soldiers from the National Liberation Struggle died, their grave markers also were decorated with the Partisan star. But the star was not limited only to soldiers; it could be placed on the grave of any citizen seeking to declare loyalty to the regime, or whose family wished to do so in their name. For example, the graves of several children under the age of 10 displayed the Partisan star, though it is difficult to imagine that they themselves were committed Communists. Many grave markers included both Partisan stars and religious symbols reflecting the existence of marriages and families in which not all members had committed to the Party and its atheist agenda. Most often, the husband was a Partisan while his wife remained Christian or Muslim, or the parents stayed tied to their religion while one or more of the children had become a party member. Five-pointed stars may be found

in all of the former Yugoslav republics on the grave markers of individuals from all ethnoreligious groups representing those who expressed their membership in and loyalty to the Communist party and socialist state, including of course Muslims. Not surprisingly, they were most commonly found on grave markers of a secular “modern” style. At the same time, of course any non-communist political symbols were banned from all grave markers. Moreover, the regime deliberately eradicated the graves not only of all occupying soldiers but also their domestic collaborators, including Ustashe, Chetnik, and Slovene, though not Croatian Homeguards.¹⁷

The extent to which the politicization of grave markers had been internalized was seen with the fall of communism in the early 1990s, when many individuals now residing in non-communist states began to replace old grave markers with new ones, substituting nationalist insignia for the previous Partisan stars. This process developed most quickly and effectively in Croatia where the Communist party had been almost entirely replaced by Franjo Tudjman’s nationalist HDZ. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the old Partisan symbols were usually not erased as that Republic had the most to lose from the dissolution of Yugoslavia, but nonetheless, the new fleur de lis, representing the Bosniak identity and state soon appeared on a great many grave markers. Serbia remains a bit of an enigma; certainly some Partisan stars were replaced, but many also remained. It is worth remembering, however, that the Socialist Party of Serbia did not actually lose power until 2000. Rather, it was simply reengineered as a different version of itself. In Kosovo/Kosova, there had likely been fewer Partisan stars on graves to begin with and many that did exist were likely on Serbian graves. While nationalist insignia appear first on the grave markers of Kosovo/Kosova, they were not intended as a replacements for Partisan stars.

Rather, in addition to those markers redesigned to replace old, now unacceptable ideological positions, some new private grave markers materialized. In some cases, these now bore explicitly nationalist symbols with the goal of commemorating those soldiers whose deaths during the Second World War had previously gone unmarked and officially unmourned. For nearly fifty years families of soldiers who fought on the opposite side of the Partisans had not been allowed to publicly commemorate their deaths, but they had not forgotten them and now did so openly and politically. In the case of Kosovo/Kosova, they bespoke a plan for national independence. While private mourning had finally triumphed over state restrictions, it had also clearly been politicized in the process.

Persistence, Adaption, Reaction

In his seminal work, *Muhammed's Grave*, Leor Halevi presents Islamic burial culture in the early Ottoman Empire as “partly ‘adaptive’ and partly ‘reactive’” in responding to the local context. He argues that while early funerary law was certainly prescriptive, often developing as a reaction to previous practices, especially those typical of non-Islamic religions, it was also frequently willing to “accommodate local customs.”¹⁸ Muslims in socialist Yugoslavia obviously faced different circumstances as they represented those “previous practices” that were now being confronted by other non-Islamic religions and a new ideology. Hence, many grave markers established by Muslims in Socialist Yugoslavia showed determined adherence to their longstanding traditions. Yet in ways echoing Halevi’s argument, others seemed to “adapt” to local circumstances, while others yet clearly “reacted” to the local context with signs of resistance. While there is an obvious connection between practices of persistence, adaptation or reaction and the relative strength of the Muslim community within a region, they were also

influenced by other factors, including the urban/rural environment and the historical development of national ideologies.

Grave markers from rural Muslims and those who made up a large majority of the population (like the Bosnian Muslims and those in Novi Pazar) were most likely to retain traditional styles of grave markers, showing signs of resistance only once war broke out in the 1990s. In contrast, Muslims in urban centers and/or who represented a small minority within larger non-Muslims populations (like Muslims in Zagreb and Belgrade) were most likely to adapt to local circumstances by adopting non-traditional forms of grave markers. Finally, the Albanian Muslims of Kosovo/Kosova, (excluding some in rural and/or conservative religious regions), despite making up a vast majority of the population, were highly secularized and, moreover, did not associate religion with nation. Already by the 1970s, many Kosovar Muslim grave markers were highly modernized, lacking any religious component, and by 1985, a few were displaying openly nationalist symbols in reaction to oppression. By the mid-1990s such symbols were widespread. Once the war began in Bosnia-Herzegovina, many Bosnian Muslims also began to react in defiance of the attacks against them, but they did so by both reasserting traditional religious styles and including the Bosnian state herald on grave markers.

“Persistence”

The overwhelming majority of Muslim grave markers in Socialist Yugoslavia from 1945 through 1995 are immediately recognizable by their characteristic Ottoman Islamic form. They are usually, as described above, simple white flat or post pillar head and footstones. From a distance, they are indistinguishable from one another and many Muslim cemeteries throughout

the former Yugoslavia give the appearance of complete homogeneity, as entire hillsides are blanketed in white, implying equality, harmony, and uniformity among all Muslims. [Figs 1, 2] Yet when viewed up close, even these white pillar/post markers within Yugoslavia show considerable diversity. (Figs 3-4) The pillars can vary from four to eight or even ten feet in height, and some also include a full slab between the head and footstones—usually flat on the ground, but occasionally raised up to 3 feet high and covered with elaborate inscriptions and decorations. At the other extreme, some are only headstones with no footstone and many are flat rather than pillar shaped and lack any “turban” top. The quality of the stone from which they are made also varies from marble to white granite, limestone, or simply concrete.

Bosnian Islamic culture is more decorative than the strictly Ottoman style and while most grave markers remain relatively simple, many include some decorative elements. For example, in some cases, while the pillars remain pure white, the decorative elements on them and sometimes the inscriptions are painted. Green (the color of Islam) is the most common choice, but others may use yellow, orange or multiple pastels. Inscriptions on most Muslim gravestones are sparse and often limited only to the name, date of birth and death. According to Buturović, Bosnian Muslim grave markers from the pre-communist era also included epitaphs. While the earliest ones tended to be brief and austere, providing mainly warnings to passers-by that they too would die one day, by the 18th century, they became more elaborate and poetic.¹⁹ Very few such epitaphs are found on markers from the socialist period, either due to financial contingencies or perhaps unspoken disapproval. Nonetheless, occasional secular epitaphs developed with time, and many religious grave markers also included the Ottoman Islamic crescent moon and star and/or a short qur’anic verse, in Arabic or Bosnian. These grave markers

are clearly derived from and in some cases almost indistinguishable from those erected in previous decades and even centuries.

Grave markers such as those described above are ubiquitous throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina and Novi Pazar, but may be found also in specific Muslim towns of Croatia (like Gunja), or in sections of Municipal cemeteries throughout Serbia and Croatia. Similar grave markers may also be found in Kosovo though with some variations—a few are far more ornate, while others are topped with a fez.

The first and most important message provided by these traditional grave markers is precisely that intended by the original Islamic scriptures: homogeneity, uniformity, and the equality of all in death. It is exactly the same message intended and received by any military cemetery—of a collective mission, purpose, and identity that transcends the individual.²⁰ Indeed, the deceased individual and each individual grave marker is considered insignificant; it is the community, represented by the cemetery itself, that matters. This understanding of burial culture is all the more palpable in the Ottoman Islamic context where grave and cemetery visitation after death was infrequent. Every Balkan citizen of every denomination knows the aphorism to pass a place by “as if by a Turkish graveyard” meaning that the place has been ignored and neglected. Muslims themselves often acknowledge the accuracy of the proverb while denying its implication that they lack respect for the deceased or history. According to Bosnian Muslim cleric and scholar Mustafa Sušić, while Christians have a religious obligation to care for graves, the Muslim approach simply reflects a different view of death that sees it as just another phase of life.²¹ Moreover, according to the *Qur’an* once the body has been buried, the soul has entirely departed from it. Thus, prayers are of no value to the deceased and the Islamic faith is unalterably opposed to the concept of prayers to the deceased on the behalf of those still living.

Theologically speaking, therefore, there is no good reason to visit the grave.²² Yet as noted previously, as early as 7th century and increasingly thereafter Muslims had begun to place Qur'anic citations on grave markers. Despite theological insistence, that prayers were of no use to the dead, many of these epitaphs appealed to passers-by to read them out loud, hoping that God would, nonetheless, intercede in favor of the deceased.²³ In both cases, however, with or without expectation of visitation, the message on the stone was directed at their own community of like-minded Islamic believers.

“Adaptation”

Less common overall, but still quite frequent and equally well represented in nearly all of the above-mentioned areas, are Muslim grave markers that show considerable signs of adaptation and assimilation to Christian burial culture. A leisurely walk through any urban Muslim cemetery in Bosnia-Herzegovina provides the viewer with an astonishing array of diverse and creative burial markers. While many have their roots in Ottoman and Islamic culture, they have adapted those models toward more modern styles and local circumstances.

By far the most common adaption to local culture has been in the use of photographs or other images on headstones. The practice of placing personal images on grave markers is practiced among various groups of Christians and has not been fully explained by existing literature. Phillip Aries claims that the tradition is particularly widespread in Mediterranean countries and that is certainly true, but while some Catholic communities, including Italians, Croats, and Mexicans, follow this tradition, the Orthodox are perhaps best known for it. According to Nicholas Condas, painted grave portraits were found on Byzantine grave markers as early as the 5th century. He further describes a 12th century prince whose tomb included a

large marble coffin inlaid with silver surrounded by a bronze railing, mosaic icons, and portraits of himself and his parents all properly lit and carefully maintained.²⁴ According to Olga Matich, the use of photos among the elites in Russia was rare before the revolution as it was associated with the petty bourgeois and considered to be in bad taste. After the revolution, it came to dominate Soviet grave markers as it reflected their anti-Orthodox and anti-bourgeois attitudes.²⁵ Whatever its origins, photographs or etchings on grave markers are practically ubiquitous among the Orthodox Slavs in the former Yugoslavia (as well as other Orthodox peoples of Central and Eastern Europe) but are also common among the Catholics there, dating as far back as the late 19th century.

Theoretically, one would not expect to see photographs on Muslim grave markers given Islam's aniconistic policies. Nonetheless, beginning in the 1960s and increasing steadily thereafter, some Muslim grave markers began to include photographs of the deceased. [Figs 5-6] Most often the photographs were on grave markers that showed other signs of assimilation but a few very traditional Ottoman post/pillar grave markers also bear photographs. By the late 1980s and into the 1990s, laser etchings and even color reproductions became common on Christian grave markers. Some also appeared on Muslim graves but more rarely.

Another version of adaption was simply to adopt the grey or black granite rectangular headstone (without a foot stone) traditionally used by their Christian neighbors. It is not unreasonable to assume that many of those who adapted these elements of Christian burial culture had been secularized within a socialist state. Such individuals may have made a conscious choice to reject Islamic cultural attributes and adopt those associated with the "modern" West. Yet, in some cases, the granite rectangular marker is adorned with an Islamic crescent moon and star and a short qur'anic verse complicating the interpretation. [Figs 7-8] Yet

while the qur'anic verse may indeed indicate religious faith, scholars of the region have noted that the display of a religious symbol is as likely a sign of national identity as piety.²⁶ Either way, such examples remind us that the words “modernization” and “secularism” are not and should not be considered synonymous. A great many of these adaptive grave markers were located in the municipal cemeteries of Croatia and Serbia, where Muslims made up only a small minority of the overall population.

Finally, a great many Muslim grave markers should be described as hybrids, displaying elements of both traditional and modern designs. For example, one frequent adaptation has been to retain the white stone, and elements of the traditional design, such as one or more pillars, but significantly rework the marker into different shapes. Some placed a white rectangular grave marker between the pillars, often bearing a photograph of the deceased. Others created entirely unique shapes based on floral images out of the white stone, either retaining the pillars as one element of the design or eliminating them altogether. Many of these grave markers may be reminiscent of the “funerary hybridity” that Butorović described among Christian nišans (tombstones) from 15th-16th century Bosnia.²⁷ [Figs 9-10]

Indeed, these hybrid styles were commonly found in the urban cemeteries of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo where Muslims were a majority of the population. However, Kosovo's municipal cemeteries undoubtedly contained the largest quantity of markers in strictly non-traditional shapes, many with no religious indicator whatsoever, and usually including a photograph of the deceased. This anomaly requires some explanation. Although the majority of Kosovar Albanians are Muslim, a significant minority is Catholic, and in Albania proper, Catholics and Orthodox together make up nearly 17% of the population. Thus, religion was never a dominant factor in the development of Albanian nationalism.²⁸ Moreover, Kosovar

Albanians have been successfully secularized by the socialist regime. Accordingly, most grave markers in larger cities lost their Ottoman characteristics very early on and include no religious elements. Only in a few very religious regions did the Ottoman post pillar markers persist into the 1970s.

The messaging indicated by these hybrid and adaptive grave markers was likely very different in these different locations. As noted previously, Muslims represented only small minorities of the population in Serbia and Croatia. In locations like Novi Pazar or even the tiny village of Gunja, Croatia, they had their own separate cemeteries where traditional white post/pillar grave markers predominated. In most other places, however, Muslims were buried in a separate section of a municipal cemetery. Despite having their own section, these Muslims could not reasonably consider the cemetery their own community of the dead. Rather, they knew that it really represented the community within which they also co-existed, that is, a community of either Serbs or Croats. While that community might not be openly hostile to them and their religion, it also was not always entirely friendly; nor was the political community of the communist regime, which while officially providing freedom of religion, nonetheless, promoted atheism.

It is impossible to know how individual Muslim families living as minorities in Croatian or Serbian cities negotiated this relationship in the context of their burial culture, or if indeed they gave it any thought. Indeed, the secular and Westernized grave markers on some Muslim markers may have simply reflected the socialist regime's successful modernization program. In other cases, however, the markers may have represented an attempt by Muslims to engage in what James Scott has called "public transcript . . . the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate."²⁹ Perhaps, by conforming to the burial rituals and traditions of the

dominant group, they sought to reassure their neighbors and the regime that they were neither “backward” nor “outsiders,” but “just like them.” In either case, the difference between a traditional religious, modern secular, or hybrid grave marker for Muslim families in such cities had the potential to send a message that went well beyond the private commemoration of the deceased. Whether deliberate or not, the use of traditional religious forms might indicate a determination to remain outside the majority community (and the political system), whereas, in contrast, the adoption of local customs and secularism could be read as a message of conciliation and a desire to belong,

The hybridized grave markers evident in urban cemeteries throughout all three Republics could be read in a similar way but with more emphasis on synthesis rather than assimilation. Such markers were especially common in Bosnia-Herzegovina where the cemeteries were multi-ethnic and religious but had strictly segregated and marked sections for each religious group as well as a marked section for Atheists. In that case, Muslims who chose to retain their traditional values could do so more easily as they constituted if not a majority, at least a plurality, of the Republic’s citizenry. Yet, they were also in a stronger position to create a truly multi-cultural community, retaining aspects of their own culture if they chose and adopting any elements from Christian burial culture that suited them. Markers based on recognizable Ottoman traditions, while also including photographs and other Western motifs resulted in syncretic gravestones that seemed to integrate diverse cultures. Meanwhile, fully secular and atheist Muslims (by nationality) could be buried in the Atheist section with or without the five pointed star on their grave marker. [Figs 11-12]

Finally, Muslim Albanians were a majority in AP Kosovo, but there even the municipal cemeteries were entirely religiously segregated. According to Ger Duizings, Kosovar cities

themselves were also largely segregated with quarters for each group and Orthodox Serbs living in downtown regions, while the Albanians populated most of the suburbs.³⁰ In that sense, Kosovar Albanian cemeteries really were communities of the dead that corresponded to their communities of the living as only Muslim Albanians visited them. Inasmuch as their grave markers served as messages then, they were speaking to the community of Kosovar Albanians, not to the Serbs. It is unlikely therefore, that the secularism of Kosovar Albanian grave markers was intended as a message, though it may have been read as such by some pious Muslim Albanians. Only when the form, symbols, and inscriptions on graves became overtly political, can we presume that they were clearly intended to send a message.

“Reaction”

While many grave markers in socialist Yugoslavia suggest a degree of assimilation and acculturation between Muslims and the majority Christian Slavic population, others reveal a very different response to their position: reaction and resistance. Certainly, persistent adherence to traditional Islamic burial culture on grave markers may be read as a “reaction” to the Christian faith of their neighbors and the atheist propaganda of postwar Yugoslavia’s socialist regime. More explicit indications of resistance on grave markers were those that moved beyond adherence to traditions and made a clear statement for or against a specific ideology. Such actions in an anti-liberal state socialist regime were risky and required considerable dedication to a cause. While most indicators of reaction did not appear until the wars of Yugoslav dissolution in the 1990s, the earliest cases occurred in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo when, as early as 1985, etchings of Albania’s national symbol--the double-headed eagle--began to appear on scattered grave markers in Priština’s municipal cemetery.

Public and non-anonymous display of a symbol that indicated a desire for the creation of an Independent State of Kosovo and possibly unification with Albania was a strong national and political statement. The fact that it occurred in the mid-1980s was no accident. Interethnic tensions had been high in the region almost since the origins of Socialist Yugoslavia. They had increased considerably, however, during the mid-1980s as Serbian nationalism accelerated under the initial leadership of the Serbian Orthodox Church which was then taken up by Slobodan Milošević. Although no Islamic clerical figures had to this time, participated in any of the Albanian protest movements, the Serbian Orthodox Church understood and framed the conflict as one based on religious as well as national differences. Although the Socialist Party of Serbia was initially unresponsive to such openly nationalist and anti-socialist rhetoric, by 1987 Serbia's socialist leader, Slobodan Milošević, on his infamous visit to Kosovo Polje recognized in it an opportunity to win popular support at a time when the socialist regime and indeed the entire country was in disarray. Over a period of just 3 years, he manipulated Serbian nationalism in his favor and worked to eliminate all of Albania's cultural and legal forms of autonomy.

By the spring of 1990, Albanians in Kosovo were living under a kind of police state with virtually no Albanian representation in government as new rules and regulations had resulted in a purge of nearly all Albanians employed in the public sector, police, and civil service. All the media was now entirely Serbian, as were schools at all levels.³¹ It was thus, in reaction and resistance to these spiraling conditions of rampant Serbian nationalism, increasingly harsh oppression of the Albanian population, and the gradual disintegration of Yugoslavia, that Albanian grave markers bearing the Double Headed Eagle and other nationalist symbols emerged, increased, and became ever more elaborate from 1985 onward, some including herald of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), and maps of Greater Albania or an Independent State of Kosovo.

Their existence in cemeteries was surprisingly early, six years before the outbreak of the Wars of Yugoslav Dissolution in Croatia and Bosnia, and 14 years before war broke out in Kosovo/Kosova itself. As noted previously, the regime had already politicized cemeteries through its selective burial policies and use of the five-pointed star on grave markers. At the same time, it had banned all other political insignia and under a repressive regime such open statements of resistance would appear to be extremely dangerous. In fact, however, because the regime had also tolerated the continued existence of ethno-religiously segregated cemeteries and funeral arrangements, Serbian and Muslim funerals and cemeteries existed as if in separate worlds. Accordingly, while Albanian resistance was not based on Islam, the vast majority of Albanians were indeed Muslims and the Islamic religious community supported their movement for independence. When Muslim Albanians died, they were buried according to Muslim traditions and in Islamic cemeteries, or in Islamic sections of municipal cemeteries, regardless of their degree of religious piety. In that case, the likelihood of a Serbian official ever seeing the politically offensive grave marker might be quite small and the political risk equally small. Accordingly, the messages presented by nationalist grave markers in Kosovar Albanian cemeteries were certainly not intended for the Serbian or Yugoslav authorities but only for the Kosovar Albanian's own community of the dead and living to spur acts of resistance. Once war broke out in the 1990s, nationalist symbols on grave markers mushroomed as further inspiration to the independence movement. [Figs 13-14]

In Bosnia, comparable symbols of resistance did not occur until war broke out in 1992. The enormity of sacrifices from that war mainly among Muslims and particularly in Sarajevo required the state to build more and more cemeteries, in old stadiums, parking lots, and on every accessible hillside. As the vast majority of victims in the war were Muslims, the new cemeteries

were overwhelmingly populated by traditional white pillar/post markers. By the end of the war, the Bosnian regime had also created military cemeteries to honor the deceased soldiers from its common military. The grave marker selected for the military cemetery was a mixture of old and new. In form it was the classic white Ottoman post pillar head and footstone, with a simple inscription providing name, date of birth and death and a short qur'anic verse. However, instead of, or sometimes alongside the Ottoman crescent moon and star, it bore the Bosnian state herald, the Fleur de Lis. Over time, many civilians also came to include the Fleur de Lis on their graves as a sign of sacrifice and national pride. In another case of cultural adaptation, some civilian graves, made of traditional white stone, were themselves reshaped into the form of a Fleur de Lis. While the Fleur de Lis was neither religious nor narrowly nationalist and was also found on the graves of Serbs and Croats within the Bosnian Republic, it was unquestionably political as it clearly represented the desire for an independent state and pride in sacrifices made during the war. [Figs 15-16]

Again, grave markers representing this kind of political reaction and resistance were found only in Kosovo and in the Bosnian-Croat Republic. What they share is not only the numeric advantage of Muslims in their region, but also a common experience of oppression. In Kosovo/Kosova, however, that experience had developed over centuries and decades and was more severe which can help explain the earlier emergence of reactive politicized grave markers. In Bosnia, however, resistance to Serb and Croat oppression from the state was more organized, leading to institutionalized and public, rather than strictly private forms of symbolic reaction. What most clearly differed in the two cases was the role of religion. It was almost entirely absent in Kosovo/Kosova, where the Double Headed Eagle on grave markers expressed only a desire for political independence, whereas in Bosnia, the Islamic identity of most (but not all) soldiers in the

Bosnian army was usually highlighted on both military and civilian graves, even as the common political goal of all citizens in the state for independence also appeared in the Fleur de Lis.

Conclusion

Grave marker selection among Muslims in the former Yugoslavia from 1945-1999 was not only or even mainly about interethnic relations. First, one might assume, the family would consider the wishes of the deceased. What had been their main goals in life? What kind of marker had they requested? Were they religious or secular? But then the questions might become more complex. What relationship did the deceased have toward the socialist regime? Had they fought in the National Liberation Struggle? If so, on which side? Were they a member of the Communist party, neutral toward it, or hostile? Did the deceased have other nationalist or political ideals that could be expressed on the grave marker? All of these questions became far more salient as the Yugoslav state collapsed into civil war in the 1990s. At all times, the answers to these questions, if reflected on grave markers, would be visible to others who might often be from other ethno-religious groups. In short, the answers could well echo beyond their own family, friends, and neighbors.

Muslims in rural regions were therefore those most likely to retain traditional Ottoman grave markers primarily because they were less subject to the modernizing influences of socialism, but perhaps also because they were more likely to bury their dead in entirely segregated cemeteries. Similarly, in most places where Muslims made up a clear majority of the population, such as Novi Pazar, most grave markers remained traditional in form. In the larger cities of Bosnia-Herzegovina where Muslims represented a plurality, but not a majority, Muslims still felt free to retain

traditional markers, but they were frequently interspersed with many hybrids and secular markers reflecting the greater penetration of modernism and secularism in the cities, but also the influence of interethnic contact. In contrast, the Muslim sections of municipal cemeteries in the larger cities of Croatia and Serbia where Muslims constitute a small minority, have a much larger number of secular and hybrid grave markers. Whether these were intended as a message of conciliation is impossible to determine, but they clearly reflect the differing relationship that Muslims in those regions had with their neighbors. Even so, by far the greatest number of secular markers exist in Kosovo/Kosova where the Albanian Muslims are a clear majority but have separated religion from nationality and have become largely secularized. It was there, however, that political/national symbols on grave markers first appeared in 1985 as an unmistakable sign of resistance to the oppressive socialist/nationalist regime. Images promoting national independence would appear on Bosnian Muslim grave markers later during the Wars of Yugoslav Dissolution, but often combined again with the traditional religious form. Ultimately then, in all cases, the grave markers, whether intentionally or not, accurately reflected the ethnoreligious and political circumstances of each Muslim community.

Clearly then, grave markers have moved far beyond their original goal of merely marking the site of burial. In the modern world, they may serve multiple forms of communication between the living and the dead, the dead and the living, and among many different constituencies of the living. For historians, however, they also serve as primary sources of material culture. Their form, symbols, and inscriptions may be read as messages not only about the character and achievements of the deceased, but about the social status and political ambitions of those left behind. To be sure, not all the messages are deliberate. Sometimes a gravestone is just a gravestone. But in other cases, they may indeed be encrypted messaging stones.

¹ The spelling of this region differs depending on time period and the national affiliation. When referring to the Autonomous Region or Province during the Socialist era, I will use the spelling appropriate to that period, Kosovo. When referring to the period after the region's Declaration of Independence in 2008, I will use the spelling assumed by that country's own inhabitants, Kosova. Otherwise, in generic use, I will use both spellings.

² Sabrina Ramet, *Balkan Babble*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 202) 119. In fact, it is difficult to determine their precise numbers as the census data counted citizens by nationality rather than religion. The category "Muslim" was indeed included as a nationality after 1971, but not all those of the Islamic faith fell under that designation, since it referred only to Slavic and mainly Bosnian Muslims. Those counted as Turks were almost certainly Muslim, Albanians were a majority Muslim but included a small percentage of Catholics and Orthodox Albanians, and similarly, most Roma were Muslim but some were also Orthodox or Catholic depending on where they lived. To the extent that I was able, I excluded Muslim Roma graves from this analysis due to their unique style and content. *Ukupno Stanovništvo po Narodnosti*, (Beograd, 1954); *Nacionalni Sastav Stanovništva SFRJ*, Knjiga 1, (Beograd: 1981)

³ Amila Buturović, *Carved in Stone, Etched in memory: Death, Tombstones and Commemoration in Bosnian Islam since c. 1500*. (Ashgate Publishing: England, 2015) 20-26; Ger Duizings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 2000) 10.

⁴ Carol S. Lilly, "Communities of the Dead: Secularizing Cemeteries in Communist Yugoslavia," *Slavonic and East European Review*, 94, 4 (2019) 676-710.

⁵ Judith Butler, *Precarious Lives: The Power of Mourning and Justice*, (Verso: London, 2004) 34.

⁶ See for example: Harold Mytum, *Mortuary Monuments and Burial Grounds of the Historic Period*, (Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers: New York, 2004; Julie Rugg, *Churchyard and Cemetery: Tradition and Modernity in Rural North Yorkshire*, (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2013).

⁷ Mytum, 160.

⁸ See for example: Phillip Aries, *The Hour of Our Death*, (Vintage Books: New York, 1981); Thomas Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, NJ, 2015).

⁹ Halevi, 32-33, 188.

¹⁰ Kodo Matsunami, *Funeral Customs of the World: A Comprehensive Guide to Practices and Traditions*, (Tochigi, Japan: Buddhist Searchlight Center 1998) 155-157, 162, 164-167.

¹¹ Halevi, 27-29.

¹² Buturović, 15.

¹³ According to Mehmed Mujezinović, they were not only often similar to, but were located near, ancient Bosnian "stečaks"—medieval pre-Ottoman tombstones usually associated with the Bosnian Church. Mehmed Mujezinović, *Islamska epigrafika u Bosni i Hercegovini*, Vol. 1, (Sarajevo Publishing: Sarajevo, 1998) 13.

¹⁴ Mujezinović, 14-15.

¹⁵ "Službeni glasnik Narodnog odbora grada Zagreba," XXI, 18 (November 18, 1967); Hrvatski Institut za Povijest.

¹⁶ Thomas A. Zaniello, "The Keystone of Neoclassicism: Freemasonry and Gravestone iconography," *Journal of American Culture*, 3, 4 (Winter 1980) 581-594.

¹⁷ Vladimir Geiger and Sladjana Josipović Batorek, "O provodjenju odluke komunističkih vlasti iz 1945. o uklanjanju grobalja i grobova 'okupatora' i 'narodnih neprijatelja' u Slavoniji i Srijemu," *Scrinia Slavonica*, 15 (2015) 291-294.

¹⁸ Leor Halevi, *Muhammed's Grave: Death Rites and the Making of Islamic Society*, (Columbia University Press: New York, 2007) 11.

¹⁹ Buturović, 190-199.

²⁰ Madeleine Mant and Nancy Lovell, "Individual and Group Identity in WWII Commemorative Sites," *Mortality*, 17, 1 (2012) 18-35.

²¹ Mustafa Sušić, "Naš odnos prema natkaburskim obilježima," in *Takvim za 2011* (Sarajevo: El-Kalem--Izdavački centar Rijašeta, 2010) 171.

²² Halevi, 205-6.

²³ Halevi, 27-29.

²⁴ Aries, 538; Nicholas Constatas, "Death and Dying in Byzantium," in Derek Krueger ed, *Byzantine Christianity*, from A People's History of Christianity, Vol 3, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Publishers, 2006) 137.

²⁵ Olga Matich, “‘Whacked but not forgotten’: Burying the Mob,” <http://www.stanford.edu/group/Russia20/volume> Accessed, 2/27/2015.

²⁶ Duizings, 31

²⁷ Butorović, 155.

²⁸ Aydin Babuna, “The Albanians of Kosovo and Macedonia: Ethnic Identity Superseding Religion,” *Nationalities Papers*, 28, 1 (2000) 67-92; Duizings, 30-31.

²⁹ James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (Yale University Press: New Haven, CT, 1990) 2.

³⁰ Duizings, 10.

³¹ Tim Judah, *Kosovo: War and Revenge*, 2nd Edition (Yale University Press: New Haven, 202) 62.