The Albanian flag waves behind the tip of a gun held by a KLA fighter during a ceremony in Likosane, Kosovo, in February 1999. (© Ami Vitale/Getty Images)

8

‘Gun Culture’ in Kosovo:
QUESTIONING THE ORIGINS OF CONFLICT

‘GUN CULTURE’ AND CONFLICT: A SPURIOUS RELATIONSHIP?

The notion of ‘gun culture’ occasionally surfaces in the debate on small arms, particularly in connection with the issue of armed conflict. Although it lacks an established definition, the term is commonly used to denote a particular set of ‘reasons’ for the presence and use of small arms in a given society—reasons that go beyond the ‘economic’ or ‘utilitarian’ needs of individuals and the dynamics of local or international markets. In this sense, ‘gun culture’ is used to indicate a given society’s set of values, norms—both social and legal—and meanings that render the presence of firearms and their possession by private individuals acceptable and legitimate. For example, small arms possession among civilians—usually of firearms—can be seen as a symbol of status, of masculinity, or else, as a source of security where state structures are unable, or unwilling, to provide it.

The media and other observers sometimes treat ‘gun culture’ as the very ‘cause’ of armed conflict. Some of their accounts present it as the main reason behind the widespread proliferation of small arms in a given society; in turn, this proliferation is blamed for the outburst of violence in areas that experience various forms of political instability.[1] In other reports, this three-step relationship is collapsed into a two-stage process in which ‘gun culture’ contributes directly to armed conflict.[2] In the latter, ‘gun culture’ is equated with a ‘culture of violence’, which can be defined as ‘a system of formal or informal social norms and values which accept violence as a possible, normatively acceptable, and a potentially required form of behaviour and relationship between individuals’ (Martín-Baró, 1983, p. 127).

‘Gun culture’ has also been identified as the main reason for the failure of post-conflict recovery programmes.[3] This approach has produced some simplistic, if not patronizing, conclusions. For example, referring to the difficulties encountered by NATO’s Kosovo Force (KFOR) in post-conflict demilitarization efforts, one commentator stated that ‘[t]he easy availability of weapons in Kosovo means that not just ethnic tensions, but everything from bar fights to business disputes is solved with a gun’ (Farnam, 2003). A local observer echoed these words:

> In this part of the world, there is a strong belief in customary law which means an eye for an eye…. It is commendable that KFOR is trying to collect weapons, but it is an impossible task. … In our lifetime the rule of law has never achieved anything, only guns have provided a measure of justice. So you stick to your gun (Farnam, 2003).

While they may appear to substantiate that ‘gun culture’ can be conducive to armed conflict, these statements are the product of untested assumptions rather than systematic research. This chapter aims to shed light on this relationship between ‘gun culture’ and armed conflict by investigating the links between ethnic Albanian ‘gun culture’ and Kosovo’s descent into civil war during the 1990s. The chapter also presents brief discussions of four other cases—those of El Salvador, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—which reinforce the conclusions of the main case study.[4]

The key conclusions of this chapter are the following:

'Gun-cultures' do not automatically translate into armed conflict.

- 'Gun cultures' do not automatically translate into armed conflict. If the relationship between the former and the latter is to be seriously investigated, the interplay between social attitudes to the presence of guns and economic, political, as well as historical processes and experiences must be taken into account.
- Broad references to 'gun culture' may have little meaning, given that different social groups often relate to firearms in distinct ways, with significant variations appearing along gender, class, age, and 'ethnic' lines. In this sense, speaking of 'national gun cultures' is a gross oversimplification.
- Social attitudes to guns may change over time, so that it is not possible to speak of a stable permissive (or restrictive) gun culture. Like other cultural features, 'gun culture' is not a given, but the product of social and political interaction. As such, it may constantly evolve and be renegotiated by members of a given community.

The following sections provide a historical overview of ethnic Albanian attitudes towards firearms in Kosovo.[5] They are an attempt to show that, contrary to common assumptions, being accustomed to the presence of small arms and deciding to use them to achieve political goals are two very distinct things; the former does not necessarily lead to the latter.

The case of Kosovo is particularly interesting for at least two reasons. First, 'gun culture' among Kosovo Albanians has often been portrayed as a key—if not *the* key—factor behind the armed conflict as well as post-conflict instability. Second, Kosovo is a paradigmatic example for the whole Balkan region, whose 'gun culture' is often cited to explain 'atavistic violence'. Such simplistic assumptions have often provided explanations where others were not available; in the case of Kosovo they have shifted the focus of public opinion away from the international community's decision not to completely disarm the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA, or UÇK in Albanian), as discussed below.

SMALL ARMS AND 'GUN-CULTURE' AMONG KOSOVO ALBANIANS

Introduction

Foreign observers often portray Kosovo as having a strong 'gun culture'.[6] 'Gun culture', in turn, has been described as a key factor behind the Kosovo conflict during the 1990s, when growing numbers of ethnic Albanians took up arms against representatives of the oppressive Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). A number of subsequent accounts have also presented 'gun culture' as a fundamental reason behind the security and stability problems afflicting the province during the post-conflict period.[7]

These views are challenged by the fact that the Kosovo Albanian response to increased Serb repression was peaceful during the first half of the 1990s. Indeed, as detailed below, a concerted effort was made to end vendettas (so as to unite ethnic Albanians among themselves) and to respond to repression using peaceful means. In the latter half of the 1990s, however, the KLA and its militaristic, gun-based approach gained ground in the province.

Today, Kosovo is saturated with guns in private possession (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, pp. 11–26; Mustafa and Xharra, 2003). UN amnesties and control and collection programmes have been 'unable to make a dent in the numbers of illegal weapons still in circulation'.[8] Nevertheless, doubts have grown concerning the weight placed on ethnic Albanian 'gun culture' as an explanation for this situation.[9]

During the 1990s, both the militant and the pacifist resistance movements made cultural references to Albanian customary law—usually subsumed under the Ottoman term *kanun*—to promote solidarity among fellow ethnic Albanians. This tradition endorses private gun possession based on the need—whether real or perceived—for self-regulation in securing survival, regulating conflict, and achieving justice and dignity in an insecure environment. At the same time, however, it has continually served the advancement of power and prestige of particular interest groups.

Both the militant and the pacifist sides successfully appropriated and used cultural references to kanun; yet it was the latter's failure to garner international support against the persecution of the Kosovo Albanian majority that tipped the scale in favour of the 'side for war', which was rooted in the rural zone and the diaspora (Kraja, 2003, p. 163).

Within the province, this shift from unarmed to armed resistance reflected that traditionalist rural norms gained ground over those affiliated with the urban middle class. Today, these traditionalist norms still affect attitudes among Kosovo's ethnic Albanians.[10]

Box 8.1 Culture, violence, and small arms in El Salvador

In 2003 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) published the study *Armas de fuego y violencia* (Firearms and violence) in El Salvador. The section on arms and the 'culture of violence' deals with social attitudes towards the acquisition and use of firearms in the country, and their possible relationship to small arms proliferation among civilians. The study concludes that although cultural variables are complex and occasionally difficult to pin down, they may shed light on the presence of weapons in a given society. Contrary to mainstream assumptions, however, the report submits that the proliferation of weapons in Salvadoran society is neither recent, nor exclusively tied to the 12-year civil war that ended in 1992 (p. 125). Rather, the study asserts, it is linked to a long-established social system that legitimates violence as a means of interaction. In this sense, the study explicitly refers to a 'culture of violence'.

In order to assess social attitudes to violence in general, and to firearms in particular, UNDP conducted surveys in three focus areas. The first evaluates citizens' willingness to acquire and hold firearms. The second concerns attitudes towards firearms and violence, such as whether firearms are seen as tools of self-defence, means to ensure respect, or a right, and whether preferences for firearms correspond with approval for the use of violence. The third focuses on factors that could favour the existence of a 'culture of violence' and insecurity, including victimization and fear. UNDP surveyed 2,434 respondents who were selected from different municipalities nationwide, both rural and urban. They also spanned different social, age, and gender groups.[11]

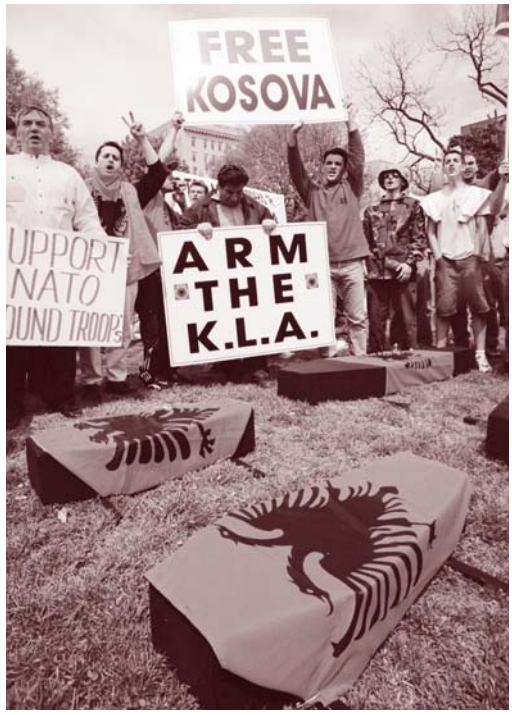
The results suggest that, in terms of their relationship with weapons, Salvadorans are essentially divided along gender, age, and urban/rural lines, with men and young people from rural areas having a higher propensity to acquire and use firearms (p. 132). In particular, young men are likely to buy firearms if they live in rural areas and have been direct victims of violence, or if they feel insecure because of a violent environment or because they have heard frequent gunshots (p. 157).

Most of those who acquire guns claim to do it for self-protection or for the protection of their families. In this sense, firearms are defined as instruments of defence, rather than as means of aggression (p. 133). Nevertheless, researchers have also registered the perception of firearms as instruments used to secure respect, a view more commonly encountered in areas where the rate of gun possession is high (p. 133). This notion implies that weapons may provide a form of status to people who lack other distinctions, such as higher education or an advantageous socio-economic position. The research also found that 18 per cent of the surveyed population perceives the possession of firearms as a right.

The general picture emerging from this study points to a 'culture of violence' that rests on value systems that accept and legitimate the use of violence in particular circumstances, including adultery and self-protection (p. 137). Firearm acquisition by private individuals, then, seems to rest on this 'culture of violence', so that the presence and circulation of firearms in Salvadoran society is endorsed by social attitudes legitimating the use of violence and aggression as a way to guarantee security.

In broad terms, this study indicates that 'gun cultures' are not always at the root of 'cultures of violence', but that the latter can indeed underpin the former. Moreover, the report confirms that the application of the term 'gun culture' to a national context is likely to be simplistic or inaccurate.

Source: UNDP (2003)



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Pro-Kosovo demonstrators shout slogans around a mock coffin during a rally across from the White House in Washington, DC, in April 1999.

As this case study shows, there are limits to understanding the behaviour of a particular society on the basis of simple dichotomies such as 'strong/weak gun culture'. Indeed, even a deep-rooted appreciation for the presence of guns does not automatically translate into violent behaviour in conflict situations. If anything, the relationship can be reversed: 'cultures of violence' may themselves underpin the development of permissive gun cultures (see Box 8.1).

In the case of Kosovo, traditional constructs of social behaviour, such as kanun and *besa* (see below), can be used by different groups with different aims, each with significant implications for the society's position on whether to take up arms. It follows that notions of cultural approach to firearms cannot serve as the only explanation for a group or society's adoption of militaristic attitudes; rather, these cultural components must be studied within a wider historical, economic, and political context.

Historical–cultural roots of 'gun culture'

Classic sources on northern Albania and Kosovo suggest that 'gun culture' not only has deep historical roots in peasant and pastoral life in the mountain villages, but that it was also shaped by Ottoman rule and the associated methods used to recruit soldiers.[12]

Firstly, as was the case in all mountain-dwelling Balkan societies, shepherds used guns to protect themselves against wild beasts and flock raiders (Coon, 1950, p. 10; Hasluck, 1954, pp. 204–05). Secondly, the Ottoman style of 'indirect rule' fostered the development of the local customary laws known as kanun.[13] These laws were based on the principle of self-regulation (including self-protection) and secured the availability of military resources—in terms of people and equipment—from local societies at the fringes of the empire.

From the mid-14th century, the Ottomans were recruiting 'slave soldiers', known as *janissaries* (Turkish for 'new soldiers'), from Balkan Christian families through a forced levy called *devshirme* (Keegan, 1994, pp. 214, 346). In the following centuries, many ethnic Albanian janissaries—especially those who converted to Islam—reportedly climbed high on the Ottoman military career ladder. Sons of impoverished Albanian peasant families also joined the Ottoman fighting forces as semi-regular mercenaries or served in mercenary troops (*levend*), often in conflict with the central power, such as when paid to support the interests of a governor. They routinely sent remittances to their extended families at home (Hahn, 1854, p. 63; Faroqhi, 1995, pp. 68–69). Throughout the Empire, the Albanian mercenaries became known as *Arnavuts* (Turkish for 'the Albanians') or *Arnauts* (Malcolm, 1998, pp. 150–02). They had to bring their own weapons, as was common in the Ottoman Empire (Faroqhi, 1995, p. 68); this 'investment' must have appeared worthwhile, given that 'Albanians who served with the Ottoman forces returned with luxurious items such

as gold, silver-inlaid arms and magnificent Arab horses' (Vickers, 1998, p. 26). Only towards the end of Ottoman rule in the early 20th century did the 'Turkish government' systematically arm some Albanian Muslim clans in order to fight Christian groups (Durham, 1909, p. 121).[14]

From the 17th century on, for purposes of military recruitment, the Ottomans introduced a political order of representation based on territorial units called *bajrak* (from the Turkish for 'a military standard or banner'). The purpose of the bajrak was to 'single out local leaders who could supply fighting men … and who would gain status and privilege in return' (Malcolm, 1998, p. 16). The basis of the bajrak system was territorial rather than tribal. As a consequence, a large clan's region could be split into several bajraks, each run by its own *bajraktar*; a medium-sized clan might form one bajrak, while several smaller clans could be combined into a single bajrak. In Kosovo, 'because of the geographical dispersal of the clans, the bajrak became an important unit, and the bajraktars wielded great local power as administrators, military leaders and settlers of disputes' (Malcolm, 1998, p. 16).

Janissaries with their weapons. Recruited by the Ottomans, many ethnic Albanian janissaries climbed high on the military career ladder.

Those bajraks directly subjected to Ottoman military conscription ensured that of two neighbouring 'houses', one supplied a soldier, the other his equipment (Peinsipp, 1985, pp. 29n).[15] Other sources, however, suggest that every 'house' had to provide both the soldier and his equipment (see Box 8.2). Starting from the 17th century, this equipment comprised firearms introduced by English, Dutch, French, and Swiss gun experts, who were hired by the Ottoman army to modernize its armoury (Keegan, 1994, p. 346). At the same time, the clandestine production of firearms prospered, mainly to meet demands of the irregular mercenary troops; weapons thus became relatively easily available for everyone (Faroqhi, 1995, p. 69; Inalcık, 1974). One observer notes for the 'Gheg country':[16] 'Gunsmiths in the market towns found the mountaineers eager to obtain the new weapons with which they could not only defend their home valleys from invaders, but also work off their local grudges' (Coon, 1950, p. 44).

Box 8.2 'Rituals of war'

When [a bajraktar] learned that war was imminent and troops were required, he had immediately to inform the tribe in the first instance by firing eight shots in quick succession into the air, and in the second by sending out the official runner called *kasnec* with news and a statement of how many men were wanted. One from each house was the usual number. The muster was soon complete, for it was thought shameful to hang back or to hide at home and no time was wasted hunting for deserters. When all had gathered, the march began. Two tribesmen in some cases, and in others four, led off singing. Next came a man closely connected with the bajraktar, preferably his eldest son, carrying the flag. The rank and file followed, firing constantly into the air to show their joy at the call to arms. Any sign of depression at leaving their homes would have been thought disgraceful and unmanly. … No equipment was issued to bajraktars or 'soldiers'; each brought his own rifle and pistols and came in his ordinary clothes. Nor was any military training given them. Their value as soldiers depended upon the rifle practice which they had had at home. It was usually sufficient to make them all good shots. After a few months the war ended and they came home again, still in their peasant clothes and again firing into the air for joy (Hasluck, 1954, p. 119).

In the mid-19th century, an Austrian consul found that, in northern Albania (and Kosovo), 'everyone walks with arms … most boys above 12 years of age carry rifles'[17] (Hahn, 1854, p. 92). This situation remained largely unchanged at the turn of the 20th century, towards the end of Ottoman rule (Durham, 1909). In 1908, 1910, and 1912 a number of 'ill-starred official attempts to disarm the population' and to enforce military conscription and taxation spurred popular revolts (Malcolm, 1998, pp. 18, 244, 249). In 1910, the Young Turk government sent armies to quell revolts and disarm the population: in the Albanian Highlands the programme collected 147,525 guns (Malcolm, 1998, p. 242). This event arguably prompted the large-scale arms contraband to replenish regional stocks and supply the so-called Kosovo Albanian *kaçak* movement (from Turkish for 'outlaw'), an insurgence tradition with which many KLA fighters subsequently identified themselves during the 1990s (Malcolm, 1998, p. 242).

In 1911, the kaçaks included approximately 5,000 rebel fighters, including about 100 clan chiefs and bajraktars (Malcolm, 1998, p. 242). From late 1912, with Serb forces replacing Ottoman rule in Kosovo, the movement became increasingly political. Indeed, 'the anti-Albanian policies of the [Serbian] government and local authorities … were a powerful stimulus to the rebellion' (Malcolm, 1998, p. 273). In late 1918, the kaçaks comprised up to 2,000 core fighters and 100,000 affiliates (Vickers, 1998, p. 100). They directed themselves against the newly formed Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and its colonization programmes in Kosovo. From its inception, the kaçak movement singled out and killed not only Serbs, but also Albanian civilians who cooperated with the authorities (Malcolm, 1998, pp. 273, 278). Its members typically hailed from and fought in traditional, rural places such as the Drenica valley, which saw continuous revolts during the early 1920s, or the area around Peja/Peč and other villages in northern and western Kosovo (Malcolm, 1998, pp. 272–73; Vickers, 1998, pp. 99–100).

Serb authorities reacted to the fighters 'by rounding up many extended families of up to fifty members and detaining them all together on pain of death until their "outlaw" relatives surrendered' (Vickers, 1998, p. 101). Arresting and interning the wives of the kaçak leaders proved particularly successful war techniques, as these moves challenged codes of honour (Malcolm, 1998, p. 247). Furthermore, confiscations of private land as part of continuing colonization programmes in the 1920s and 1930s targeted 'mainly the holdings of outlaws' (Bogdanovic, 1995). It should come as little surprise that the KLA movement of the 1990s originated in the same villages in which violent oppression of the kaçaks and atrocities against civilians form a fundamental part of family histories.[18]

During the Second World War, when Nazi Germany and its allies occupied Yugoslavia, Kosovo was under Italian command, which favoured the Albanian population. For example, Italian occupiers

> encourage[d] the establishment of Albanian schools and media and [gave] Kosovo Albanians the right to bear arms. Kosovo Albanians [took] revenge on Slavs, harassing and driving out Slavic families … (Mertus, 1999, p. 287).

Yet Kosovo 'emerged from the war into the new Federal Yugoslavia under siege and with its alienated Albanian population regarded, as in 1918, as a threat to the new state' (Vickers, 1998, p. 143). As the 'initial imbalance of power set up an oscillating dynamic of reaction and counter-reaction' (Malcolm, 1998, p. 314), violent oppression repeatedly produced armed resistance. Appeals to kanun and its traditions were used to buttress the armed reaction to Serb repression. Yet reference to the same traditions equally enforced a sense of ethnic identity and solidarity among the Kosovo Albanians who backed the peaceful resistance of the 1990s. Cultural knowledge thus served as a repository for responses to the same waves of repression; these reactions could be either armed or unarmed, militant or peaceful.

Kanun, *besa*, and private gun possession in rural Kosovo

Kosovo Albanian customary law, the kanun, used to be orally transmitted in proverbs and sayings. It is proscriptive rather than ethnographically descriptive, and village councils interpreted and changed its shape in decision-making processes regarding social and political conflict over time (Hasluck, 1954). In Kosovo, as in most of the north Albanian mountain regions, the only significant kanun 'is the most famous of them all: the Kanun of Lek Dukagjin' (Malcolm 1998, p. 17).[19] The Kanun regulated all aspects of social interaction and many of its features are still relevant today. It defined the gendered social roles of everyday family and village life and it established the conduct and procedures of inter-family rituals, such as hospitality (*miqesisa*), feuding (*gjakmarrje*), reconciliation (*besë-lidhje*), and the creation of social solidarity or trust (*besa*). It was based on the concepts of 'honour' (*ndera*, juxtaposed with 'shame', *marre*) and on the centrality and high symbolic content of firearm possession as the means to defend family integrity and reputation. The Kanun presupposed an insecure environment where non-related 'others' could only be categorized as either loyal 'friends' (*miqe*), or treacherous (*pabesë*, 'without besa' or *tradhtare*) or potential 'enemies' (*armiqte*).[20]

A boy became a man when he received his first gun.

In this society, built on communitarian principles—where collective family or tribal interests overrode individual aspirations—a gun was a man's only private possession (Gjeçov, 1933, p. 9, para. 24/3; Hasluck, 1954, p. 60). As soon as he was deemed able to handle a gun, a boy or young man would receive one from his father or the head of the extended family.[21] This rite of passage transformed a child into a 'person'—an 'honourable man' entitled to land rights and liable to become involved in blood feuds. Without a gun, a man was seen as a woman (Cozzi, 1912, p. 625), as women—who were not supposed to become subjects of blood feuds—customarily lacked the right to inherit land or own guns.[22] A father's most effective punishment of his son for acting against family interests would be to take away his gun for a week or two (Gjeçov, 1933, p. 8, para 20/10b). This symbolism in sayings and rituals, which made the weapon appear as a 'numinous being', underlined the intense relationship of a man to his personal gun (Reiter 1987, p. 155). Interviews with villagers suggest that boys traditionally received their guns at the age of 16; more recently, however, a young man would be regarded as 'equal' to the other adult men of the family only after his return from Yugoslav military service.[23] As in many other societies (see Box 8.3), the possession of firearms has thus come to represent manhood, creating a gendered split in the social attitudes towards small arms possession.

Box 8.3 Guns and masculinity

The interpretation of firearms as symbols of masculinity is a feature common to many societies, both traditional and industrialized. As an Oxfam and Amnesty report highlights, '[c]onventional notions of masculinity ascribe the role of protector and defender to men, and in many cultures this role has become symbolized by the possession of a gun' (Oxfam and AI, 2003, p. 47). This conclusion is supported by the fact that gun possession is primarily a male phenomenon in countries as diverse as the United States, Canada, Kosovo, and Israel (Oxfam and AI, 2003, p. 47; Ben Nun, 2004, p. 35).

Yet the link between firearms and notions of masculinity can be even more explicit. In Lebanon, for example, in the region of Baalbek, people still welcome the birth of a boy by announcing, 'We have increased by one gun' (AFSC and RHSC, 2002, p. 3). With reference to Afghanistan, a BBC observer noted that 'carrying a gun is a passport to adult society for most men' (Morris, 2003). Similarly, a correspondent in northern Iraq reported: 'It is unusual to meet an adult Kurdish man who does not own at least one firearm' (O'Loughlin, 2003). More generally, firearms are commonly considered an integral part of 'manhood' in Middle Eastern countries (AFSC and RHSC, 2002, p. 3).

Historically, an Albanian man would refer to his gun as 'his bride' or 'his loyal companion'; he would also claim to be 'married to his weapon' and that 'his bride had to call out for him', for example by discharging in joy upon arrival at a destination or in anger when killing another man (Peinsipp, 1985, pp. 228, 230). After successful blood

revenge, a man's 'rifle could be hung up' and 'go to sleep' (Hasluck, 1954, p. 220).[24] A 'discharged rifle' was a term used in Kanun rhetoric as a synonym for a completed killing.[25] A man could transfer a cartridge to symbolize a threat to kill, a transfer of a feuding duty, or proof of a successful killing in a feud, especially if the bullet was deliberately left at the site of the shooting for the community to recognize that an insulted honour had been cleansed (Hasluck, 1954, pp. 212–13, 217, 221, 228–29).[26] Furthermore, it was expected that the gun of a man killed in a feud would be properly placed by his head, so as to avoid the risk of a heightened blood debt in the next round. Indeed, theft of a gun, particularly in such circumstances, counted as either one half or one full 'blood'—equalling a woman or a man, respectively—depending on the region (Hasluck, 1954, p. 229). The Kanun of Lekë Dukagjin specified that a murderer who stole the weapon of his victim would owe 'two bloods' and would be considered 'black-faced' (Gjeçov, 1933, p. 81, para. 847). Along the same lines, a man whose gun was stolen was expected to kill the offender, even if this prompted a feud, as symbolic emasculation through gun theft was considered an insult to a man's honour. In such a case the thief, but not the avenger, would face community expulsion and fines (Hasluck, 1954, pp. 205, 208, 244; Gjeçov, 1933, p. 89, para. 952).

The kanun's clear prescriptions defined how to handle guns in various situations.

While taking gun possession by men for granted, the kanun sought to regulate related potential risks. A guest's weapon was always taken from him in the house as a matter of both welcome and precaution; it would be hung on a hook that was especially designed for that purpose (Gjeçov, 1933, p. 65, paras. 614–15). Men who dared raise their weapons at village or tribal assemblies risked being shot for endangering public security; clear prescriptions defined how to handle guns in such situations, such as cradling the weapon in one's lap (Hasluck, 1954, p. 151). Provisions also established the consequences of accidental killings, which—in the absence of the concept of mitigating circumstances—inevitably led to someone 'owing blood'. For instance, if a guest's gun fell from the hook and accidentally discharged, killing a member of the host family, the related responsibility fell on the host if the hook had given way, but on the guest if the strap had broken (Gejçov, 1933, p. 89, paras. 946, 948).

Unsurprisingly, observers have recognized gun possession as an integral part of the ethnic Albanian 'jury system'; one commentator notes that in the early 20th century, men would still foreswear their possession 'joyfully in the modern court, especially if this saved a friend or relative or concealed their possession of a rifle; this weapon being their chief treasure, they would deny "500 times" on oath that they had it' (Hasluck, 1954, p. 194).

Context, continuities, and change

Within communist Yugoslavia, Kosovo's rural kanun traditions were 'modernized' in many respects, and transformed in ways adapted to the 'modern' requirements of life in Yugoslavia.

Following the so-called Cominform conflict in 1948, when political relations between the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Albania severely deteriorated, Kosovo's ethnic Albanians came under general suspicion of secessionist interests.[27] Under the infamous minister of the interior Alexander Rankovic, they faced a terror regime marked by frequent abuse and purges by the Yugoslav secret police, a situation that significantly contributed to ethnic polarization in Kosovo. From this time on, the province appears to have been effectively emptied of a substantial number of privately held guns, which some feared could allow an armed uprising.

> One sign of this approach in the mid-1950s was a growing obsession with hunting for weapons among the Kosovo Albanians; whole villages would be cordoned off and the menfolk interrogated or beaten. So

> severe was the treatment of those who failed to hand over a gun that many Albanians would prudently buy a weapon in order to have something to surrender (Malcolm, 1998, p. 321).

Despite these measures, nationalist Serbs continued to suspect ethnic Albanians of private gun possession.

Kosovo was not alone in seeing its traditions of gun possession challenged by a centralized regime. During the Soviet period, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan faced similar strategies (see Box 8.4). In all these cases, the interaction between new and old social norms produced changes in the prevalent 'gun culture', indicating that the latter, like any social construct, is far from a permanent or rigid feature of a given community.

Box 8.4 Changing 'gun cultures' in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan[28]

'Gun culture' is often treated as a monolithic or homogeneous phenomenon. This conceptual simplification overshadows two important elements. On the one hand, as suggested by all cases treated in this chapter, 'gun cultures' often display significant degrees of variation across social groups in a given society. On the other, they may change over time, as members of a community reshape their content and meaning. These two features are evidenced in the following brief comparison of Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.

Prior to their inclusion in the Soviet Union, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan each had specific sets of attitudes and values with respect to weapons possession and use. In both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, weapons possession was not widespread, but rather linked to specific social strata or activities (for example, aristocracy or hunting). In pre-Soviet Georgia, which saw persistent conflict, small arms were initially luxurious and costly goods, mainly possessed by the nobility. With the introduction of revolvers in the 19th century, civilian gun possession became more common. In addition, in Georgia, as in Tajikistan, small arms were regarded as a symbol of masculinity.

With the imposition of Soviet rule, all three societies were subjected to a restrictive gun control regime that required civilian guns to be registered and issued permits mostly to hunters. Illegal possession was extremely rare. By and large, authorities removed guns from civilian life, except in some rural areas and among hunters. By the 1950s, cold war rivalry with Western countries prompted the Soviet leadership to enhance the combat readiness of armed forces and of the general population. Soviet life became highly militarized: a large percentage of the population worked within the armed forces; young men served as conscripts in the army for three years; and teenagers learned basic military skills, including weapons handling, in schools and universities. This approach familiarized citizens in all three countries with weapons use, while authorities strove to glorify soldiers and military excellence. At the same time, weapons were largely associated with the military sphere and the defence of the Soviet Union against a potential Western attack. Yet guns were no longer part of civilian life.

All three societies seem to have adapted and enforced the norm by which civilian weapons possession was inappropriate; carrying and using weapons outside the context of hunting or defence became socially unacceptable, as well as legally punishable. Georgians, however, appear to have adopted these practices half-heartedly, and the traditionally positive attitude towards small arms allegedly remained intact, particularly among young men.

As the Soviet Union collapsed, and as independent republics emerged in 1991, small arms issues came to the fore in all three societies—especially in Georgia and Tajikistan. Despite the shared legacy of the Soviet rule, however, the three populations evince different attitudes towards guns. In Kyrgyzstan, where the political transition to independence was largely peaceful, general attitudes towards guns remain much the same as during Soviet times. Kyrgyz civilians often stress that weapons are dangerous and should not be handled carelessly. In addition, there is strong popular support for the continuation of the strict Soviet gun regime, which limited civilian weapons possession to hunting guns. Civilians reportedly express dissatisfaction over the inability of law enforcement to reduce crime, including illegal weapons possession, to the low levels that were enjoyed during the Soviet times.

In both Georgia and Tajikistan, the transition to independence was marked by conflict, as well as by significant small arms proliferation. Since the 1997 national peace accord, Tajikistan has remained relatively stable. In most areas and social groups, firearms are associated with the civil war and thus have negative connotations. In the capital, Dushanbe, members of the economic elite—some of whom continue to operate in the shadow and drug economies—discourage carrying guns openly for the same reasons (even if they possess weapons for personal protection). In some of the previous opposition areas, however, certain groups continue to feel threatened and seem to be more ready to endorse gun possession among fellow community members.

Box 8.4 Changing 'gun cultures' in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (cont.)

In Georgia, large-scale fighting ended in 1994, but serious tensions connected to its breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have since continued. The 'Rose Revolution' of 2003, which installed President Mikhail Saakashvili, has not resulted in a political solution for either region. Georgians exhibit tacit acceptance of civilian arms possession for security reasons, in particular in areas with minority populations. Nevertheless, significant differences also exist across social groups. People living in urban areas show relatively little interest in or endorsement of civilian gun possession and use; the opposite is true of more traditional individuals in rural and mountainous areas.

As the brief cases of Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan demonstrate, gun cultures need not be homogeneous across social groups, nor stable over time. In each of these states, the 'gun culture' that is present today is the result of the interplay of traditional and contemporary conceptualizations of small arms with specific political, historical, and economic processes. The three countries under review may have shared a common social and legal gun control system during their decades as Soviet republics, but today they display individual 'gun cultures' nevertheless.

After Rankovic's fall in 1966, the political situation for Albanians in Kosovo improved. Liberalism and decentralization across Yugoslavia led to the 1974 constitution, which granted Kosovo autonomous status as a province of Yugoslavia. Since then, various kanun traditions have visibly dissolved, even in the most traditional villages. Anthropologist Berit Backer noted of the late 1970s:

> The rule [kanun] is still there. If asked, people will say that a primary duty of a man is to kill the murderer of a brother, son, or father.… But nobody does so anymore. Courts, judges, police and prisons have taken over the handling of crimes. People know the traditions and their rules, but on the level of social interaction they do not practise them all anymore... The possibility that 'Albanianness' can be re-codified and expressed in terms of participation in modern institutions and social settings produced by industrial society has been accepted as an alternative (Backer, 1983, p. 174).[29]

Some customs, however, have not subsided as readily. Feuding, for example, has not entirely disappeared in Kosovo, and 'innumerable small-scale feuds' continued into the 1990s in the remoter villages (Malcolm, 1998, p. 20; Reineck, 1991, p. 202). For the period from the mid-1960s to the late 1980s, scholars have suggested that conflicts over land—possibly exacerbated by the fact that 'the judicial means of regulating property and land sales have been ineffective'—resulted in a rising number of blood feuds, particularly in the south-western parts of Kosovo (Duijzings, 2000, p. 126–27). At the same time, many families stayed intact, particularly rural extended ones; nevertheless, the wider patrilineal clan structures and customary village authorities yielded power and significance to Communist Party structures. Some patriarchal customs were able to survive in defiance of Yugoslav legislation; for instance, daughters remained barred from inheriting land and other immovable property (Reineck, 1991, pp. 51–53; Rrapi, 2003, pp. 131–32). To this day, traditional village rituals—including celebratory fire—remain alive in Kosovo across the ethnic dividing lines, with men shooting in the air to express joy during festive occasions such as weddings or New Year (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. 33).[30]

Kosovo Albanians say that hunting guns—if they were available—were used during such celebrations.[31] These had to be registered, but in remote villages some people kept hunting guns without being aware of the need to register them. In many households, old pistols, called *kobura*, were kept for use on these occasions.[32]

In early 1981, one year after the death of Marshal Tito and amidst serious economic deterioration in Yugoslavia, ethnic Albanian student demonstrations 'proved to be the clarion call of a new phase, in which Belgrade authorities returned to the repressive style associated with Rankovic, resulting in escalating Serb–Albanian tensions in the province' (Ramet, 2002, p. 6). During the 1980s, the tensions continued to heat up, culminating in Slobodan Milosevic's visit to Kosovo where, on 24 April 1987, he assured local Serbs that 'no one shall dare to beat you'. In 1988 the autonomous status of Kosovo came under more insistent attack and popular ethnic Albanian political leaders were replaced. Kosovo Albanians responded with spontaneous yet peaceful protests in defence of the local party leadership. Three thousand workers of the Trepça mines swore solidarity in the name of the traditional concept of besa, went on strike, and peacefully marched to Pristina 'in defence of Yugoslavia and the constitution of 1974' (Clark, 2000, pp. 47–48). They were eventually joined by about 100,000 additional demonstrators. In 1989, Belgrade changed the constitution, effectively ending Kosovo's status of autonomy. Albanians were dismissed from all state employment and political representation.

In the midst of these political developments, which increasingly moved towards ethnic differentiation and discrimination, Kosovo Albanians sought 'refuge in their past' (Reineck, 1991); they withdrew into the private realm of the extended families (Rrapi, 2003). From that time on, strong revitalization processes of traditional kanun-type practices and structures began in rural communities. Anthropologist Janet Reineck observes that '[i]deological conservatism in rural Kosova had deepened as Albanians responded to mounting ethnic and economic marginalization. Albanians seized upon tradition in order to reinforce their personal and collective dignity, in the face of a demeaned status in Yugoslavia' (Reineck, 1993).

After the end of the war in June 1999, ethnic Albanians published biographies, interviews, and other original KLA sources that had previously been confined to the informal realm of illegality and 'parallelism'.[33] These materials reveal that individual actors and clans began to step up clandestine arms smuggling activities during the early 1990s, shortly after the autonomous status of Kosovo had been withdrawn.

The arms were explicitly acquired for distribution among the population. Until 1998, however, most ethnic Albanians in Kosovo wanted neither war nor arms (Judah, 2000, p. 129). Some gunrunners used the arms themselves in attacks on Serb police stations. These activists hailed mainly from villages in the Drenica valley and the Rrafsh i Dukagjinit plateau[34]; later they would gain fame as founders, leaders, and 'martyrs' of the KLA.[35] While those who identified themselves with the anti-Serb resistance and the 'liberation fight' saw their activities as honourable and legitimate, their targets predictably viewed them as criminal or terrorist.

Until 1998, most ethnic Albanians in Kosovo wanted neither war nor arms.

The biography of KLA commander Ramush Haradinaj reports that the money used to buy weapons for the local resistance was raised mainly among the diaspora groups, where enthusiasm for war was much higher than at home (Hockenos, 2003, p. 249).[36] Individual families, friends, and private ethnic Albanian sponsors sometimes contributed 'an enormous sum' (Hamzaj, 2000, pp. 28, 31). The People's Movement of (the Republic of) Kosovo (LPRK, later LPK) in Switzerland, for example, began to raise funds under difficult circumstances in 1991; with the public emergence of the KLA in 1997, however, their efforts began to bear substantially more fruit (Kola, 2003, pp. 320–01; Hockenos, 2003, pp. 244–49).[37]

Whereas this informal, militant approach found no wider approval in Kosovo during the early 1990s, ethnic Albanians were able to construct a more peaceful 'parallel system' to the official Belgrade-run structures thanks to massive diaspora contributions as well as local funding. Indeed, in July 1990 the ethnic Albanian delegates gathered outside the closed parliament building and declared *Kosova Republik,* the 'Republic of Kosovo'. Not until Yugoslavia

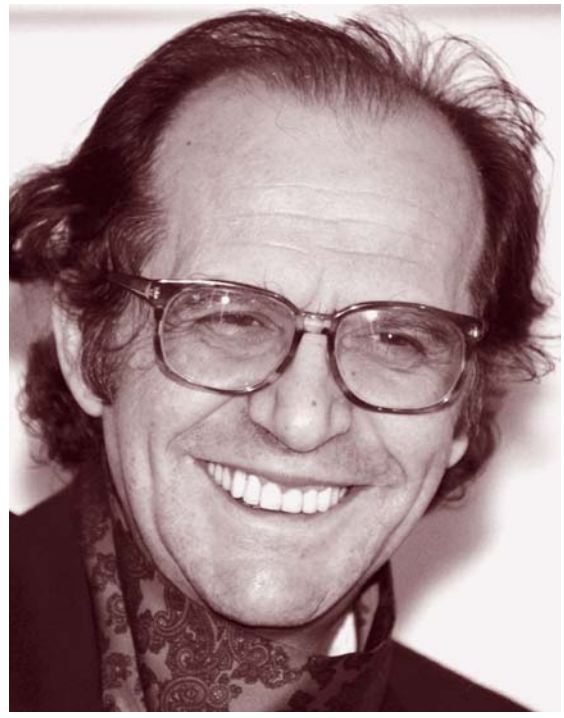
began to unravel and war raged in Slovenia and Croatia did the officially dismissed ethnic Albanian deputies pass a *Resolution on the Independence and Sovereignty of Kosovo*. This claim to independence, made public on 22 September 1991, was soon endorsed by an underground referendum, in which 'virtually the whole Albanian population' participated and '99.87 per cent [of the voters] favoured independence' (Clark, 2000, pp. 82, 117). With little interference from the Serb side, which continued to occupy the formal sector, the informal Albanian parallel state system developed to include a parallel government and parallel provisions for finance, education, and social and health care, among other services; logistically, both the old Communist Party structures and local traditional kinship organization that still prevailed in rural communities were utilized for distributing aid (La Cava et al., 2000, pp. 32–33).

'Non-violence' became the official line of Ibrahim Rugova's parallel government.

Ideologically, 'non-violence' became the official line of this parallel government, which Ibrahim Rugova was elected to head in May 1992 (Clark, 2000, p. 67). Employing tactics of civil resistance in the face of Serb violent repression, this strategy served as a powerful tool in constructing an implicitly superior—because 'moderate'—ethnic Albanian identity (Clark, 2000, pp. 66–69; Maliqi, 1998, p. 98–105). Non-violence and 'endurance' were also pragmatic responses to the imbalance of arms and power between Kosovo's Serbs and ethnic Albanians. In 1992, Rugova himself announced:

> We would have no chance of resisting the army. In fact, the Serbs only wait for a pretext to attack the Albanian population and wipe it out. We believe that it is better to do nothing and stay alive than to be massacred (Judah, 2001, p. 21).[38]

The 'official' ideology of non-militant resistance helped 'to validate the self-worth of Kosovo Albanians at a time when they were being vilified' (Clark, 2000, p. 68). Yet it also aimed at the 'closing of ranks' and thus produced a process of 'defensive homogenization', which involved promoting nationalism through traditionalism and resulted in a comparatively narrow view of non-violence (Maliqi, 1998, pp. 21, 101–04, 135; Clark, 2000, p. 69).[39] This outlook was evident in the mass ceremonies of 'binding besa', which were held throughout Kosovo between 1990 (the 'Year of Reconciliation') and 1992. The initiative involved the entire province in a tradition that had hitherto been practiced at the personal or local level only. It attempted to invert prevalent honour codes by 'shaming' revenge seekers as anti-nationalist, anti-democratic, anti-European, and anti-modern (Clark, 2000, pp. 61–62).



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Ethnic Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova in May 1996. He and other pacifist activists distanced themselves from the attacks on Serbs, for which a then little-known KLA took responsibility.

Until late 1991, Pristina University folk culture professor Anton Çetta ran this exceptional reconciliation initiative, which involved about 500 students, many of

whom gave up a full term, as well as various urban intellectuals and clergy across the province. Participants visited—and revisited—families engaged in a feud; in addition, radio and television broadcast appeals for 'magnanimous pardons' in line with the teachings of the kanun. The project set up councils to promote the goal of reconciliation. In this way, it reimported selected kanun structures of authority into villages where these had already been lost. In 1998, the Gjilan Community Council to Avoid Negative Phenomena reported that 'it had settled 541 of the 778 disputes brought before it in the past six years' (Clark, 2000, p. 62). All in all, the campaign managed to resolve about 1,000 feuds between 1990 and 1992, with only a few remaining unsolved (Clark, 2000, p. 63).

Among Kosovo Albanians, such binding besa was undertaken in the name of 'national solidarity' and 'unity' in the face of Serbian repression. The process made reference to ethnic Albanian tradition as well as historical precedents. In the numerous mass ceremonies, onlookers served as witnesses as forgiving families gave their besa 'in the name of the people, youth and the flag' (Clark, 2000, p. 62). The largest such public gathering took place on 1 May 1990 in the village of Verrat e Llukës near Deçan/Dečani. At least 100,000 people—other estimates reach 500,000—gathered on this day, a former communist holiday and one that continues to be celebrated as labour day in some countries.[40] From the end of August 1990, Serb authorities banned such large events and also staged some violent police interventions. Nevertheless:

> the campaign proceeded, but now by holding smaller ceremonies, for instance behind the walls of family compounds. These were all arranged by word of mouth and secretly, often with participants pretending that they were going to a wedding (Clark, 2000, p. 63).

During the first half of the 1990s, the appropriation of tradition by the 'official' parallel leadership of Kosovo aimed to protect civilians. Clandestine preparations for war, such as the training of Kosovo Albanians in Albania, 'seem to have been part of a contingency plan, in case of a Serbian military attack on Kosovo, to withdraw to the borders and fight to defend the population until the promised international military intervention arrived' (Clark, 2000, p. 65; Hockenos, 2003, p. 191).

On the political front, the core of Rugova's authority rested on hopes that he would prevent all-out war with high civilian costs by internationalizing the Kosovo Albanian plight, thereby questioning the legitimacy of Serb rule over Kosovo (Clark, 2000; Judah, 2000, ch. 3; Malcolm, 1998, p. 348). He was to bring about international intervention or external political involvement, 'ranging from diplomatic mediation to the setting up of a UN Trusteeship over Kosovo' (Malcolm, 1998, p. 348). For this purpose, he paid numerous visits to foreign capitals, but he 'achieved little beyond some resolutions by bodies such as the United Nations or the European Parliament' (Malcolm, 1998, p. 348). The strongest blow to Rugova's previously unchallengeable legitimacy, however, was the Dayton Peace Agreement, which was reached in Dayton, Ohio, in November 1995 and effectively ended the war in Bosnia. For international diplomatic reasons, Dayton contained no significant reference to Kosovo.[41] Furthermore, the fact that the Republika Srpska was granted relative autonomy within Bosnia and Herzegovina while the non-violent struggle for a Republic of Kosovo fell on deaf ears led some Kosovo Albanians to conclude that violence was the only remaining recourse (Judah, 2000, p. 120–26; Vickers, 1998, pp. 287–89).

Advent of the KLA

KLA soldiers sing upon returning from the front lines in March 1999, about 50 km east of Pristina.

After Dayton, political friction intensified, Rugova lost trust within the parallel government, and attacks on Serb police increased in the countryside (Judah, 2000, p. 131). These armed initiatives were long organized 'mostly at a level of personal or family connections' (Kola, 2003, p. 319); the village militant groups relied on members of the diaspora in Switzerland, Germany, and the United States to supply them with arms and support their military training in Albania (Kraja, 2003, p. 163; Hockenos 2003, chs. 8–11).[42]

In August 1993—two years before the Dayton agreement—local traditionalist militants met in Drenica and formally united with radical political diaspora representatives to found the KLA.[43] Yet the group was far from becoming a mass movement. In 1993, it only counted about 30 fighters, a number that increased to roughly 90 in the following years (Pushkolli, 2001, p. 250). In 1997, when the KLA 'officially' came out in public, it was composed of about 150 active members who operated clandestinely in Kosovo (Judah, 2000, p. 118). 'The KLA remained fragile and small and, despite launching several attacks in the course of 1997, it was [still] virtually confined to the fringes of Rugova's politics' (Kola, 2003, p. 330).

A first important shift occurred in 1997, when neighbouring Albania descended into anarchy and civil war after the collapse of the so-called pyramid schemes that eradicated many Albanians' life savings. These events, in conjunction with widespread armed violence and criminality, led citizens in Albania to attack and loot the well-stocked armouries throughout the country—a legacy of former dictator Enver Hoxha's obsessive militarization programmes. The population armed itself thoroughly, partly for defence purposes and partly to obtain potentially valuable commodities for free and 'in exchange' for their lost savings. As a result, an abundance of small arms suddenly became easily available to the previously troubled Kosovo gunrunners and soon-to-be KLA fighters.[44]

In biographical documents, KLA leaders—many of these previous gunrunners—subsequently described their relief at finally being able to acquire enough weapons for combat in Kosovo.[45] They profited from the disintegration of Albanian state power and rule of law in terms of supplies as well logistics, as borders had become more porous when Albania plunged into civil war and customs officers left their posts unmanned (Vickers, 1998, p. 311). Moreover, the boundaries between conflict and crime blurred as the KLA sought to import contraband weapons from the United States, Western Europe, Albania, and the FRY (Hockenos 2003, p. 252); the European Union and the United Nations placed arms embargoes on the FRY in 1991, and political sanctions applied from early 1998 until September 2001. Some commentators have suggested that KLA arms smuggling and military training were to a large extent funded through several activists' 'proximity to the criminal underworld, including drug trafficking' (Hockenos, 2003, p. 252).[46] In 1998, for example, Agim Gashi, a Kosovo exile pursuing the high life in Milan, achieved notoriety when he was arrested together with 124 other international drug traffickers. He allegedly bought large quantities of weapons for the KLA (Roslin, 1999).

Yet popular support for the militant approach did not grow strong until early 1998, when the Serb forces orchestrated massacres, notably of the Jashari clan in Prekaz. In the aftermath of these killings, the KLA drew masses of potential fighters at a speed that took even its core leaders by surprise (Judah, 2000, pp. 140–01).

> The rudimentary KLA structures soon found themselves overwhelmed. From northern Albania the few men already in place began to dispatch arms and uniforms over the border, the sleepers that Thaçi[47] and his group had recruited over the past few years 'awoke' and village elders, especially in Drenica, decreed that now was the time to fight the Serbs. Village militias also began to form and, whether they were KLA or not, they soon began to call themselves KLA…. Still, it was also increasingly clear that the KLA was beginning to establish some sort of control (Judah, 2000, pp. 141, 147).

While the first attempts to take up arms had failed in the early 1990s, the KLA succeeded in emerging from the 1998–99 war as the 'most successful guerrilla organisation of modern times' (Judah, 2000, p. 110). Unlike Rugova and his supporters, the KLA had achieved the internationalization of the Kosovo conflict. In official post-war Kosovo-Albanian historiography, Adem Jashari has been celebrated as the epic KLA leader who brought in NATO through his sacrifice, which cost the lives of 53 family and clan members, including women and children (Abdyli, 2000, p. 25).

Just as the non-militant movement had previously done, the KLA referred to the kanun to produce internal solidarity and compliance with the cause of 'national liberation'. This step was a relatively logical one, given that the most prominent KLA leaders hailed from traditional, rural extended families in Drenica and the south-western, rural parts of Kosovo; these men including those celebrated today as the KLA's first martyrs, such as Adem Jashari, and those who led the militant movement on the ground after returning home from years spent in the diaspora, such as Hashim Thaçi, Rramush Haradinaj, and Azem Syla.[48] The corresponding worldview recognizes a person who has 'the will' to use a gun as a 'man' (*burr*), and a person who exhibits the readiness to sacrifice his own life as a 'hero' (*trim*) of potentially epic dimensions.[49]

The militant worldview saw a person with 'the will' to use a gun as a 'man'.

In particular, the KLA used the kanun concept of besa. Firstly, all recruits of the KLA had to swear an oath of allegiance to the cause (Judah, 2000, p. 99), which justified violence against those defined as 'traitors', 'spies', and 'collaborators'. Indeed, KLA communiqués—clandestinely published even before the process of escalation in 1998 and with increasing intensity after 1995—explicitly advised that these should be killed.[50] In the same way, post-war biographies

of the most famous KLA commanders confirm that, from early on, violence was systematically used to target not only Serb policemen but also ethnic Albanians who were identified as 'collaborators' and 'traitors'.[51] The Albanian national anthem, frequently used by the KLA during the war at the sites of massacres, is still sung at ceremonies of the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC).[52] The anthem overtly celebrates weapons, national solidarity, and violence against 'traitors' in the context of the core concept of besa (see Box 8.5).

Box 8.5 The national anthem of Albania

Around the flag we all unite
With one desire and one goal
That all those who will give their oath
Have bound the besa for salvation.

War those only will evade
Who are born as traitors.
A man, however, will not fright,
But die, but die as a martyr.

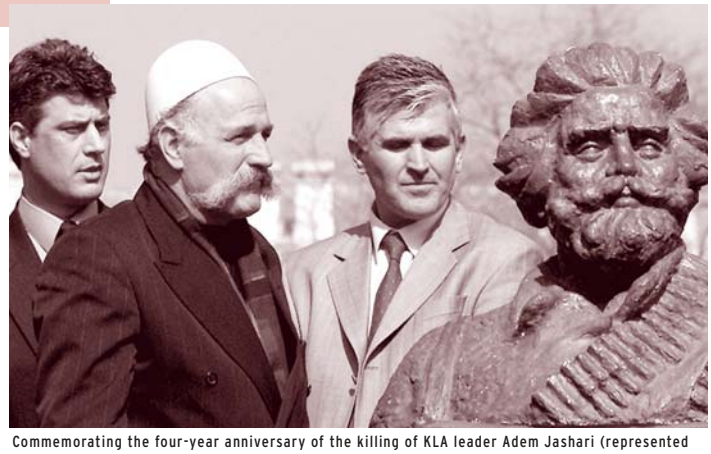
The arms we hold in our hands
Defend the fatherland in any country
We will not give up our rights
Here enemies (*armiqte* 'non-friends') have no place.

For the Lord Himself has spoken
That nations vanish from the earth.
But Albania will live on,
For you, for you we fight.[53]

These texts reflect a selective approach to cultural allusions, revealing an unabashedly militant orientation.

Today, the pilgrimage centre at the site of the Jashari massacre in Prekaz in the Drenica valley sells many booklets, one of which—published by the local municipality—offers an 'official', albeit mythologizing, description of Jashari. In stressing the kanun notions of loyalty, besa, and 'friends', it refers to him as one 'among the first' who 'gathered many of his most loyal friends around himself coming from all over Albanian lands deciding to take up arms against the Serbian police' (Halimi and Shala, 2000, p. 9). Another passage reads:

> Raised in a tower house (kulla) where heroes were theme of the day together with the century-old battles for liberation, he grew to adore heroes. And he never parted from his gun. Even as a young man he had said and anticipated that he would be dying by gun alone! (Halimi and Shala, 2000, p. 14)



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Commemorating the four-year anniversary of the killing of KLA leader Adem Jashari (represented as a sculpture) are his brother Rifat Jashari (centre) and former co-fighters Bajram Rexhepi (right) and Hashim Thaçi (left) in March 2002 in Pristina.

Guns in Kosovo today

On the whole, today's Kosovo remains awash with guns. In addition to the registered weapons held by official local and international security institutions, an estimated 330,000 to 460,000 are held by civilians, with a stronger concentration in the rural centres as well as among men over 18 years of age (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. viii). Yet the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) reregulated possession of hunting guns and requires a registration card that is valid for two years.[54] Celebratory fire at weddings and New Year festivities is usually tolerated, as long as it has not involved participation of members of the Kosovo Police Service or the KPC (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. 33). In 2003, well before major inter-ethnic violence erupted again in March 2004, the vast majority

of surveyed southern Balkan people, including a majority of Kosovo Albanians, said they recognized the 'presence of weapons as a threat to society'.[55] Yet an estimated 60 to 70 per cent of households in Kosovo continued to hold on to weapons regardless of the legal framework (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. 17).

This fact has long been linked to the unsolved question of Kosovo's political status (Saferworld, 2002); the general perception among Kosovo Albanians is that independence has yet to be achieved and that the conflict is still in need of closure (Mustafa and Xharra, 2003). At the same time, trust in the capacity of the UN post-war governance structure has decreased in recent years and remains very low (ICG, 2005, p. 4, fn. 22). Alarmingly, 'both ethnic Albanian and ethnic Serb children and youth claim to rely primarily on themselves and on weapons to ensure their security' and crime is widely seen as the major threat to security (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, pp. ix, 33).

Former KLA fighters have claimed that they hold on to their guns because the political future of Kosovo continues to be in a limbo (Heinemann-Grüder and Paes, 2002, pp. 29–31). This presence of small arms in Kosovo has been partly ascribed to KFOR's inadequate efforts to disarm the KLA.[56] In September 1999 only 10,000 guns were surrendered, even though the KLA claimed to have some 20,000 fighters, including volunteers (Heinemann-Grüder and Paes, 2001, pp. 19–21). Importantly, these results reflected KFOR's decision not to pursue the demilitarization too energetically more than the latter's unshakable attachment to firearms. As KFOR officials later admitted, 'The complete disarmament of KLA combatants was not seen as a priority during the first year of the protectorate, as "the KLA was not considered to be a problem at that time"' (Heinemann-Grüder and Paes, 2001, p. 19).

After the end of NATO's military intervention in June 1999 Albanian 'gun smugglers [used] the same routes as for other types of trafficking', though the gunrunning appears to have been limited in comparison to other illegal trade (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. 2). A 'substantial part of ex-KLA weaponry, 7,800–9,800 weapons', may have served some other ethnic Albanian insurgence movements: the UÇPMB in southern Serbia in 2000; the National Liberation Army in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and southern Serbia in 2001; and the clandestine Albanian National Army in Kosovo in 2001 (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. 15). By 2003, however, cross-border trafficking of small arms had by and large petered out (Quin et al., 2003).[57]

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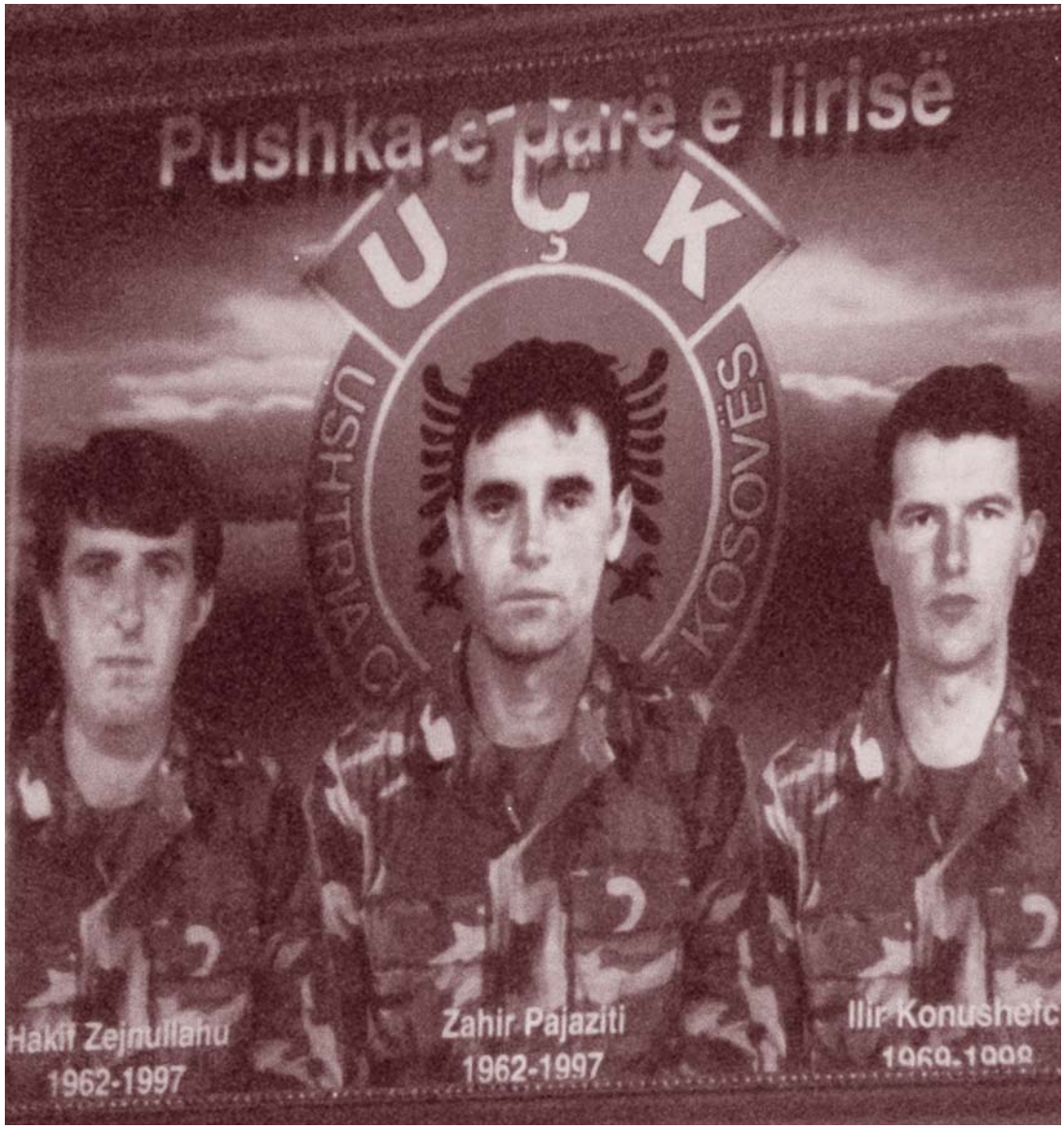
KFOR troops survey the contents of a secret KLA bunker found in June 2000 during a weapons search in Kosovo's Drenica valley.

Meanwhile, the ongoing active commemoration of the war—notably the frequent KLA memorial tributes—helps to reinforce the habit of civilian gun possession. These events often replaced or transformed former Serb symbols, such as statues or buildings erected during the 1990s, which communicated to ethnic Albanians, 'this is not your place'.[58] Today, '[p]ictures of armed people in schools around Kosovo, as well as posters and statues of former KLA fighters

with weapons, have created a [new] kind of gun culture'.[59] Despite the KLA's ideological references to kanun as a marker of proactive self-regulation, however, it is not traditional, rural 'gun culture', or the 'family gun', which explains most of the illegal gun possession among Kosovo Albanians today (Saferworld, 2002). Today, urban youth stress the significance of self-defence and self-defence weapons as sources of security (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. 10). There is 'particularly among urban youths … a growing number of automatic military style weapons' associated with criminality and new gang-land activity (Saferworld, 2002). Among young and old, civilians and KLA activists, weapons are held 'for personal and collective security' (Saferworld, 2002), a perception difficult to separate from, on the one hand, fears of crime and, on the other, the political situation and aspirations.



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A framed KLA poster with the title *Pushka e parë e lirisë* (The first gun of freedom) shows three fighters who lost their lives.

CONCLUSION

The current features of Kosovo's 'gun culture' are strongly linked to the recent war and the fact that initially isolated militant groups from mainly rural areas were able to gain legitimacy and momentum in a national and international political context. These militant groups actively tied their cause to Albanian history and elements of kanun culture, of which they offered a militant interpretation that would resonate in parts of Kosovo Albanian society, particularly in rural areas. The same historical and cultural references, however, had been used by other Kosovo Albanian political figures to legitimate phases of pacification and reconciliation. The fact that most KLA leaders and much nationalist post-war Kosovo Albanian literature explicitly identified the KLA ideals, leaders, and tactics with the local *kaçak* traditions and customary codes of self-regulation was thus clearly part of a particular politics of (self-)representation and identity construction. Violent opposition to violent ethnic persecution, in other words, was not the inevitable consequence of a culture used to the presence of arms.

This case study calls into question the assumption that 'gun cultures' are at the roots of 'cultures of violence'; in other words, communities that are accustomed to the presence of small arms are not necessarily willing to consider violence as a legitimate means of achieving their goals. Contrary to common assumptions about conflict in Kosovo, and in other regions more generally, this study suggests that the reasons for conflict should be sought in the interplay between cultural factors and the political context as well as social and historical determinants, rather than simply being ascribed to 'strong gun cultures'.

Via the brief discussions on El Salvador, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, this study also highlights how the treatment of 'gun cultures' as monolithic and homogeneous is simplistic and often inaccurate. Within any social context, 'gun cultures' may indeed vary according to age, gender, status, and other factors; furthermore, they may change over time. In this sense, reference to 'national' or 'stable' 'gun cultures' can hardly capture the particular interpretations of the presence and possession of guns in any given society.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FARK	Forcat Armatosur e Republikes se Kosoves (Armed Forces of Kosova Republic)
FRY	Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
FYROM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
KFOR	Kosovo Force (NATO)
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KPC	Kosovo Protection Corps
LDK	Democratic League of Kosovo
PPK	Parliamentary Party of Kosovo
UÇK	Ushtria Çlirimtare e Kosovës (Kosovo Liberation Army)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo

ENDNOTES

[1] See, for example, Regg Cohn (2001); Roy (2005); Stohl (2003); Ibrahimi (2004).

[2] See, for example, IWPR (2003); Peric Zimonjic (2004); Tola Winjobi (2004).

[3] See, for example, Gray (1999); Henley (2003); *Jane's Defence Weekly* (2001); and Morris (2003).

[4] The references to El Salvador are based on a UNDP study conducted in 2003. In Georgia, Kygyzstan, and Tajikistan, the Small Arms Survey conducted field research. The related results were published in: MacFarlane and Torjesen (2004); Demetriou (2002); and Torjesen, Wille, and MacFarlane (2005). Available on the Small Arms Survey Web site: <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/publications.htm>

[5] While references to a deep-rooted 'gun culture' have been made in connection to both Kosovo Serbs and Albanians (Saferworld, 2002), this report is based on field research that is focused on the notion of 'gun culture' among Kosovo Albanians only. Research on the relationship between 'gun culture', the presence of small arms, and armed violence would benefit from a comparison of 'gun cultures' among ethnic Albanians and Serbs in the province, as well as among ethnic Albanian across the Balkans.

[6] See, for example, Gray (1999); IWPR (2003); Singh (2001); Zimonjic (2004).

[7] See, for example, Farnam (2003). The post-conflict period began with the establishment of a UN peacekeeping force—the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK)—in June 1999, following the NATO intervention.

[8] Marie-France Desjardins, Programme Manager of the UNDP Illicit Small Arms Control Project, quoted in Quin et al. (2003).

[9] See, for example, Saferworld (2002): 'Gun-culture, often presented by the media as the main reason for the proliferation of weapons, is exaggerated and unlikely to be the main destabilizing factor in Serbia and Kosovo.'

[10] Note, for example, sociologist Gjergji Rrapi's description of adolescent peasant boys, raised primarily among kinship groups of men within typically extended family structures in the 1990s, who denigrated urban boys as raised in nuclear families 'by their mothers only' and saw them as lacking the experience of 'humanity' and masculine, 'heroic' qualities of a 'proper man' (Rrapi, 2003, p. 108).

[11] For more information, see the surveys conducted by the Instituto Universitario de Opinión Pública Universidad Centroamericana 'José Simeón Cañas', San Salvador, September 2001. Available at <http://www.violenciaelsalvador.org.sv/documentos/otros/encuesta_armas_fuego.pdf>.

[12] The First Ottoman garrisons established themselves in Kosovo alongside late medieval Serbian rule after the battle of Kosovo in 1389. Ottoman rule consolidated by the mid-15th century in Kosovo. It ended after Albanian uprisings with the First Balkan War (1912–13), when the Serbian army occupied Kosovo and northern Albania. See Malcolm (1998, chs. 4–6, 13).

[13] The term derives from the Greek word for 'stick' or 'rule' and entered the Ottoman-Turkish language via Arabic.

[14] Similarly, the Montenegrin government armed Catholic Albanians in 1911 while the Serb government armed Albanians in 1912 for the fight against the Ottoman Turks (Malcolm, 1998, pp. 243, 250).

[15] The words for 'house'—*ship, oda,* or *kulla*—all signify 'an extended family living under one roof'.

[16] 'Gheg' is an Albanian dialectological distinction that has often been used to denote cultural unity of northern Albanians with Kosovo Albanians. To this day, many social and cultural patterns, kinship groups, and rituals remain identical in northern Albania and Kosovo. International sources from before the London Conference in 1913, when the national boundaries were established, rarely separated these regions. For example, 'Northern Albania' for Durham (1909, map) includes parts of today's Montenegro and of Kosovo reaching up to Peja/Peč and Mitrovica. Coon (1950, p. 4) finds 'mountain Gheg country, newly divide into 3 provinces without regard to tribal boundaries' of Macedonia, Kosovo, and northern Albania.

[17] Author's translation from the German.

[18] Ethnographic research result of informal interviews with KLA veterans from Drenica and participant observation in KLA commemoration rituals, Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, February–March 2005.

[19] The most acclaimed source on this kanun is Leonard Fox's translation of Shtjefën Gjeçov's ethnographic collection of 1933 (see Gjeçov, 1989). An Albanian Catholic priest, Gjeçov advocated the drafting of national Albanian law (anticipating an Albanian nation state which would include Kosovo) and a more influential role for the Catholic Church among Albanians. Annotations should be read alongside his text, as they help contextualize his assertions and comment on the authenticity of the sayings he collected. See Malcolm (1998, p. 17, fn. 38).

[20] For details on the regulative capacities of kanun traditions, see Schwandner-Sievers (1999).

[21] See Gjeçov (1933, p. 8, para 21/8; p. 22, para 60/b) and Hasluck (1954, p. 37). The age at which a boy is ready to receive a gun is open to interpretation. Durham (1909, p. 155) mentions that children in specific north Albanian clans could become victims in feuding after the first haircut (at toddler age). Gjeçov's kanun assigns 'adulthood'—normally seen as the point at which a boy/man may receive a gun—to boys at the age of 15 (Gjeçov, 1933, p. 26, para. 95). An ethnic Albanian respondent from Pristina suggested that nowadays, a boy becomes a man at the age of 18; he also stated that a man would have the right to reject the weapon. In so doing, he would never be a legitimate target of feuding; at the same time, however, he would never be considered a 'full man' (informal ethnographic interview, 56-year-old man from Prizren region, Pristina, 16 May 2004).

[22] Limited evidence suggests, however, that women could renounce their female sexuality and, as 'sworn virgins', assume many elements of a male social role (Young, 2000).

[23] Ethnographic field interview with 45-year-old man, Prizren region, 20 February 2005.

[24] These reports refer to the district of Dibër and other northern parts of Albania.

[25] See, for example, Gjeçov (1933, p. 68, para. 666).

[26] Such symbolism can still be observed in some contemporary cases of Albanian transnational crime (Schwandner-Sievers, 2005, p. 325).

[27] Stalin expelled Tito's Yugoslavia from the Cominform in 1948, while, at the same time, Albania's Enver Hoxha tightened relations with Moscow.

[28] This box is based on field research conducted by the Small Arms Survey in the three countries (see Endnote 4 for a list of resulting publications); Nizharadze (2004); and interviews conducted by Stina Torjesen with: Alymbekov Narynbek, Ph.D. candidate in historical sciences, Bishkek American University–Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan, August 2004; Anvar Mokeev, doctor of historical sciences and ethnographer, Bishkek Manas University, Kyrgyzstan, August 2004; Sajar Tajimatov, vice dean, Osh State University, Kyrgyzstan, August 2004; Shonsar Shoismatulloev, director AFKOR Research Institute, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, September 2004; and Shukhrob Mirsaidov, deputy head, Department of Criminal Investigation, Ministry of the Interior, Dushanbe, Tajikistan, February 2004.

[29] See also Backer (1983, pp. 161–74).

[30] In the villages, the birth of a boy can also be a reason for such celebration.

[31] In 1989, the Yugoslav federal police estimated that there were about 400,000 illegal weapons in Kosovo, including 150,000 long-barreled ones, in addition to 65,540 registered ones. For more information, see Milan Gorjanc, *Small Arms and Light Weapons and National Security,* unpublished conference paper, 27 January 2000, quoted in BICC (2002, pp. 127–28).

[32] Oral history interview with a 53-year-old Kosovo Albanian man, London, October 2004 (interviewed as part of wider ethnographic research by Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers). After the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Tito aimed to arm the workers of all Yugoslav republics and autonomous provinces in Territorial Defence Units independent of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) as a means to pre-empt foreign invasions. Weapons were held at municipal, local, and okrug levels. The developments of the 1990s disenfranchised the Kosovo Albanians from official access to this national defence system and its arms (Hoare, 2003, pp. 18–19).

[33] For more on 'parallelism'—the parallel system of ethnic Albanian 'civic resistance' outside the official Yugoslav state structures in Kosovo—see Clark (2000).

[34] Rrafsh i Dukagjinit is the Albanian term for the western part of Kosovo, which Serbs call Metohija.

[35] For biographical examples, see Mehmetaj (2001) on Adrian Krasniqi from Drenica who, today, is celebrated as the first 'martyr' of the KLA because he was killed as the first fighter 'in uniform' during an attack on a Serb police station in 1997 (Judah, 2000, p. 128). See also Hamzaj (2000) on KLA commander Ramush Haradinaj.

[36] Ramush Haradinaj, who lost his brother during gunrunning operations across the Albania–Kosovo border in 1997, resigned as prime minister of Kosovo after the United Nations war crimes tribunal in The Hague indicted him in March 2005.

[37] In the early 1990s, a number of weapons were smuggled from the United States via Albania under pretence of organizing hunting club expeditions (Sullivan, 2004, pp. 216–17).

[38] See also Judah (2000, p. 114). Evidence that emerged after the 1999 conflict shows that the 'pacifist' parallel government, led by the 'ministry of defence' in exile under Bujar Bukoshi, secretly engaged in building a Kosovo Albanian army and police force. The 'official' army of the parallel state, the Armed Forces of Kosova Republic (FARK), recruited Kosovo Albanian officers who had previously worked for the Yugoslav army or police. The FARK was thus able to benefit from continuous contacts with—and arms supplies from—the Croat military (Hockenos, 2003, chs. 8–11; Kola, 2004, ch. 8). During and after the Kosovo war, however, it was the 'unofficial' KLA that played a determining role, integrating part of the FARK forces while persecuting the rest as rivals and 'traitors' (Schwandner-Sievers and Duijzings, 2004).

[39] The observers cited critically compare Ghandi's 'open' ideals of pacifism with the 'closed' character of non-violence based on homogenization processes and traditionalist nationalism in Kosovo during the early 1990s.

[40] Traditional kanun reconciliation usually takes place on religious holidays.

[41] Dayton discussions concluded that the case of Kosovo was an internal affair in which two issues needed to be addressed: the human rights situation and the question of provincial autonomy. Neither independence nor the right of self-determination were discussed as options for the province, disillusioning Kosovo Albanians who had expected an international reward for their suffering and peaceful resistance (Judah, 2000, p. 125; Kola, 2003, pp. 313–14).

[42] These splinter groups—called 'Enverist' for their affinity and contacts with neighbouring Albania's Communist dictator Enver Hoxha in the early 1980s—had individually agitated for armed resistance; some founded the radical LPK party (Judah, 2000, pp. 102–20).

[43] There was an internal split, however, as not all saw a need for long-term preparations to build a proper army before risking outright war. Despite insufficient weapon supplies, those in favour of an immediate continuation of attacks split from the LPK to form the National Movement for the Liberation of Kosovo, or LKÇK; this group subsequently assumed responsibility for many attacks against perceived 'traitors' (or 'collaborators') as well as Serb police. (Judah, 2000, p. 115).

[44] 'According to government estimates, more than half a million weapons—semi-automatic guns, 3.5 million hand grenades and 1.25 million land mines—fell into the hands of the civilian population' in Albania (Jorgensen, 1999). Other estimates put the number as high as 650,000 firearms; however, not all of these were semi-automatic rifles (BICC, 2002, p. 130–31). For details on the impact of these events on the KLA arsenal, see Heinemann-Grüder and Paes (2001, p. 13)

[45] See, for example, Hamzaj (2000, pp. 23, 27, 32–33).

[46] For a selection of critical, though sometimes biased, English-language reports on the topic of the KLA and crime, see Chossudovsky (1999), <http://www.srpska-mreza.com/sirius/KLA-Drugs.html> and <http://www.srpska-mreza.com/sirius/Albania-KLA-Crime.html>.

[47] Hashim Thaçi, political KLA leader and representative at peace negociations in Rambouillet in Febuary 1999, today heads the oppositional PPK party.

[48] According to Ramush Haradinaj, many urban Kosovo Albanians referred to these fighters in somewhat derogatory terms as 'people from the mountains' (Hamzaj, 2000, p. 100).

[49] Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, results of ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with KLA veteran fighters in Pristina and villages of Drenica, February–March 2005.

[50] See, for example, Communiqués no. 13 (June 1995), no. 21 (14 July 1996), no. 27 (27 October 1997); furthermore, see Communiqués no. 43 (2 March 1998) and unnumbered (29 August 1998), all published in Elshani (1998, pp. 32, 71, 104–05).

[51] For example, killing 'Albanian speaking collaborators' was described in 1991 as objective of Adrian Krasniqi, the first KLA fighter who died in uniform in 1997. See Mehmetaj (2001, p. 18).

[52] In January 2000, the former KLA was officially transformed into the KPC, a civilian agency tasked with providing emergency response and reconstruction services in Kosovo. The KPC is limited to 200 registered weapons for guarding facilities as well as some celebratory weapons. Suspicion that the KPC has informal access to weapons continues to this day (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. 12). Fore UNMIK details on the KPC, see <http://www.unmikonline.org/1styear/kpcorps.htm>.

[53] Author's translation from the Albanian. Available at <http://groups.msn.com/Kosovaweb/poeziprkosovn.msnw> (accessed October 2004).

[54] By May 2003, more than 20,000 guns had been registered in accordance with UN Regulation N. 2001/7 On the Authorisation of Possession of Weapons in Kosovo. If UNMIK Police determine that an individual is 'facing serious threats,' that person may acquire a Weapon Authorization Card. More significantly, hunters or recreational shooters were encouraged to register their hunting and recreational weapons at their local police station and acquire a Weapon Registration Card. About 9,000 hunters are formally organized in hunting associations under the umbrella of the Hunters' Federation of Kosova (Khakee and Florquin, 2003, p. 34 and fn. 95).

[55] UNDP representative Alain Lapon suggests that 80 per cent of the southern Balkan population espouse such critical attitudes (quoted in Zimonjic, 2004). For Kosovo Albanians see Khakee and Florquin (2003, pp. 9, 32–33).

[56] KFOR assisted UNMIK in demilitarizing the KLA, a process stipulated by UN Security Council resolution 1244. See the resolution at <http://daccess-ods.un.org/TMP/3323410.html>.

[57] Quin (2003) cites the police chief in Kukës, northern Albania. Military training was clandestinely conducted around Kukës, and in times of crisis weapons were stored in neighbouring Kosovo and FYROM.

[58] See also Clark (2002, p. 6).

[59] See the statement by independent Pristina sociologist Blerim Latifi, quoted in IWPR (2003).

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