A number of authors have argued that political scientists are lagging in understanding collective memory formation through the creation of monuments. Benjamin Forest and Juliet Johnson (2010) argue that studies of memory, public space, and monuments have been carried out by academics in art, architecture, geography, history, and sociology, but rarely in political science. Mark Wolfgram (2010) agrees, arguing that “political scientists are more comfortable with the material bases of power, such as money, control over the means of production, or military hardware, they are quite often less well equipped to deal with the immaterial or cultural bases of power” (2). This paper hopes to contribute to the efforts of this marginal group of political scientists which recognize that the manipulation of symbols, myths, and images, especially through their material expression in public spaces, is an important basis of political power.

On November 26, 2005 a monument to Bruce Lee was unveiled in Mostar, a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This was followed by a series of other pop culture celebrity monuments in Serbia. On August 18, 2007 a Rocky Balboa monument was revealed in a town in northern Serbia, Žitište. In a village near by, on February 27, 2007, it was announced that a monument to Johnny Weissmuller, known for his role of Tarzan, would be commissioned. By late August of 2010, when I conducted the interviews for this paper, a miniature of the intended statue and the head of full-sized Tarzan were finished, and the villagers were collecting the means for the completion of the full-sized statue. On August 23, 2007, a statue of Bob Marley was unveiled during a music festival in another village in northern Serbia, Banatski Sokolac. In early April of 2007, after Samantha Fox agreed to participate in the Dani Estrade, a two-day concert and music awards in the city of Čačak in southern Serbia, the press reported plans for a monument to be erected in the honour of the singer and former pin-up model. Lastly, by the end of 2008 there was word of an initiative to raise a statue to the hip-hop legend Tupac Shakur in one of the poorest suburbs of Belgrade (IMG MGMT 2009; www.llamabutchers.mu.nu 2007; www.blumology.net 2007). While the Samantha Fox and the Tupac Shakur monuments never came to life and the Tarzan monument has not been completed, a trend of monuments being erected to honour non-political celebrities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia is evident.

To my knowledge, this is the first academic article on the pop culture monument trend in the Balkans and thus a scholarly attempt to look at the phenomenon as a puzzle which carries important political and sociological implications. The paper aims to understand the meaning and the purpose of these pop culture monuments to the communities in question. The findings are based on several interviews which I conducted in August of 2010 in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with the initiators of the monument projects and members of their communities. Secondary sources include scholarly articles on public memory, public space, and memorialization, as well as numerous media reports on the specific monuments. The first section of this paper examines academic sources for theoretical insights on the purpose of monuments in public spaces. The second section applies this knowledge to the 21st century sculpture trend in the Balkans and argues that the pop culture monuments are not trivial embellishments of public
landscapes but radical political statements made by an emerging civil society. The findings suggest that the pop culture monument trend is a consequence of an ideological vacuum which involves disillusionment with the past and present political leadership, and a longing for notions of universal justice, tolerance, reconciliation, as well as better economic times. The last section examines the political contexts in which these messages are being formed, including the transitional regimes at the state level, and the power-dynamics between major actors at the community level.

Monuments manifest, signify, select, stimulate, and inspire social change

Monuments in public spaces are manifestations of particular collective memories. Marc Howard Ross explains that collective memory “offers accounts of emotionally salient events and persons in the past that have particular relevance to how a group understands itself and the challenges it faces in the present and future” (Ross 2010: 3). Some scholars use the term “popular memory” (Ross 2010: 3). I also apply this term in order to highlight that monuments are manifestations of events and persons as experienced by the specific community in question, as opposed to a positivist version of that community’s past. Popular memories and their expressions, including monuments, exist because a specific community believes that “an object, event, person, or place is valuable enough to ensure that it is passed along to the next generation” (Glantz and Figueroa 1997 qtd. in Benton-Short 2006: 299). What is worth preserving for the next generation is influenced by various contextual variables, such as class, religion, gender, culture, location, and political and economic situation.

It follows that monuments are not trivial and ornamental elements of public spaces but symbolic signifiers that assign meaning and represent power dynamics. Lisa Benton-Short (2006) argues that monuments are intended to stimulate debate. They can stimulate a debate over a specific interpretation of an event or a figure. Wolfgram (2010) explains just how much controversy can surround interpretations of the past: “While it is certainly too much to claim that Yugoslavia collapsed because the different national communities disagreed about the proper interpretation of World War II, any careful observer of the conflicts in the 1990s must also readily admit that this was one factor in the country’s collapse into civil war” (5). Monuments are thus politicized structures.

In addition to symbolizing interpretations and stimulating debate, monuments represent particular visions and narratives that define a specific moment in time. Johnson notes that each monument “represents a moment in time when a particular vision has captured hegemonic status, albeit briefly” (qtd. in Benton-Short 2006: 299). Ross (2010) argues that “group narratives with their familiar shared images provide reassurance and relieve anxiety while reinforcing within group worldviews” (5). While speaking of “hegemonic status” suggests that monuments are tools that allow us to freeze a moment or a narrative in time, monuments are also important means for change. A number of scholars have examined public space as a site for social change, “a site for the formation of citizenship, and a conduit for discussions on civil society” (Habermas 1989, D. Mitchell 1995 and 2003, K. Mitchell 1997, Staeheli 1997 qtd. in Benton-Short 2006: 301-2). Because monuments are erected in spaces for representation and because their purpose is...
in the present, they can contribute to social change. “While the object of commemoration is usually to be found in the past, the issue which motivates its selection and shaping is always to be found among the concerns of the present.” When monuments are chosen, the past is selectively exploited for the purpose of the present. The selection is never arbitrary and the events, objects, or figures chosen have some factual significance to begin with (Schwartz 1982: 395-6).

A monument does not need to be an object of representation in a strictly political sense. Confino (1997) notes the tendency of memory studies to overemphasize the political. He explains that “by sanctifying the political while underplaying the social, and by sacrificing the cultural to the political, we transform memory into a ‘natural’ corollary of political development and interests” (1395). Treating memory as an extension of politics leads to missed opportunities in exploring areas of study, including monuments, whose political significance is not immediately evident. We need to look in the non-explicit areas, those “implied rather than said, blurred rather than clear” (Confino 1997: 1395). Confino’s suggestion that memory scholars should look at activities such as tourism and consumerism are very useful for this paper. By examining monuments which are raised for the purposes of placing a town on the world market map and encouraging tourism, this paper embraces Confino’s challenge. The paper argues that while pop culture monuments cannot be immediately recognized and categorized as political, they are important expressions of how people in the specific communities challenge images of their past and construct visions for their future.

Following Confino (1997), I argue that monuments are much more than just selections of a certain past, because “to make a difference in society” the selected past “must steer emotions, motivate people to act, be received” (1390). I seek to discover why in certain Balkan communities figures such as Bruce Lee, Tarzan, Bob Marley and Rocky Balboa triumphed over other figures from the past. How are these pop culture symbols meant to make a difference in their societies? How can Bruce Lee stimulate debate? How can Tarzan bring about social change? How is Rocky Balboa an expression of active citizenship? I hypothesize that these monuments are not merely trivial embellishments in the communities in question, but radical political statements that are worth scholarly examination.
Monuments as radical political statements

The following section examines the radical political statements that the pop culture monuments in the Balkans are meant to deliver. First, the monuments are a sign of dismissal and disinterest in one’s ethnic and political history and dissolution with past and present leaders. This also involves a rejection of the available ethnic and nationalist ideologies and a search for alternative role models. Bojan Marčeta, a cameraman responsible for the Rocky Balboa initiative, explained that “Nobody from the wars of the 1990s or from the former Yugoslavia deserves a monument because all our leaders did was to prevent us from progressing” (2010). The youth group Mostar Urban Movement expressed a similar sense of disappointment with their past. They explained that Bruce Lee was “far enough away from us that nobody can ask what he did during World War II,” and spoke of their project as “a means of questioning iconic celebrity figures by mixing high grandeur with pop culture and kung fu” (Raspudić 2004). Some authors argue that pop culture monuments do not only illustrate disappointment with the past but are also mockeries of the 1990s governments and expressions of the ideological vacuums left by these regimes. A committee of artists and academics in Belgrade, appointed to decide on a monument to the victims of the 1990s wars, did not come to an agreement on whom to honour (IMG MGMT 2009). One of the committee members justified the committee’s indecisiveness by explaining that “People realize that many of our soldiers in the wars of the 1990s were criminals...
who stole, robbed and killed. So people are searching for alternative role models and this is a healthy rejection of nationalism” (Prodanović qtd in IMG MGMT 2009). 

In search of alternative role models, some people look back to the music and the icons of former Yugoslavia, a phenomenon which has been referred to as “Yugo nostalgia.” Yugo nostalgia is present even among the youth who were born in the post-Yugoslav era. “These youngsters are using iconography from the [FRY] period, they regard art movements and music from the FRY era as far superior to what’s available to them today” (Ajnađić 2011). A student of political science at the Belgrade University explains:

when I listen to alternative rock bands from that period, or watch the rally of students from 1968, I feel the spirits of those times and that people really believed in progress back then. My impression is that the state was in many ways more responsible towards its citizens than ours is today (qtd. in Ajnađić 2011).

Yet, how much this youth actually knows about and understands former Yugoslavia is questionable.

Others, as evident in Marčeta’s statement above, feel that the alternative rolemodels need to be entirely disconnected from former Yugoslavia and Balkan history and politics. According to Marčeta, “Hollywood can provide an answer” (IMG MGMT 2009). This external outlook and a projection of self onto the outside signify a desire of re-acceptance into the “world.” According to a political science professor at the Belgrade University this desire for re-acceptance is evident and quite strong in Serbia. Professor Radmila Nakarada argues that “on a psychological level Serbs are craving … the internal feeling that we are part of this European continent.” She further explains that Serbs have always considered themselves to be allies of major European powers, but during the 1990s wars and the aftermath “they have been thrown into something that is anti-Western, anti-European” (Nakarada 2010). The communities raising the statues are thus reminiscing about the times when they felt accepted into mainstream Western culture.

The enthusiasm to “reenter the world” is evident in the interviewees’ statements. Bojan Marčeta (2010) explains that the Balkan region was closed to the world for a long time and that he could not have initiated the Rocky project in the 1990s because of the domestic political scene and because of the international dislike of the Serbian nationalist regime. Stojanko Stojanović (2010), the initiator of the Tarzan project, goes into more detail about this dynamic between the domestic and the international contexts, making specific reference to Serbia’s relationship with the United States: “Before the US and us were on two different sides, today we are closer, and this is one square in the grand mosaic of connecting people (although we have already overcome [negative] emotions to a great extent).”
The enthusiasm for global connections is most evident in the interview of Dragan Marčeta (2010) who spoke about the effects of the Bob Marley statue. He explained that the statue and the Rock Village concert, during which the statue was first revealed, bring musicians and artists from around the world to Banatski Sokolac. Speaking of Jamaican and West African artists who visited Banatski Sokolac, Marčeta, a man in his 60s or 70s, said:

They stay with us under the same conditions that we live under. They are well travelled, and know war and suffering. … These musicians become a part of our community, they enter every house and every shop in the village. They become our family (2010).
Not only do these communities claim that they relate to the “world” by watching Hollywood movies, listening to the most popular music, and following international celebrities, but there is also symbolic significance to the figures they choose. Rocky Balboa, Bruce Lee, Tarzan, and Bob Marley, all, albeit to different degrees, fit the “underdog” prototype. These individuals come from marginalized backgrounds and, as a result of their own efforts and talents, manage to succeed. They are also symbols of the underrepresented and underprivileged groups who speak out against imperialism, mainstream attitudes, and global injustices. The communities erecting the statues are making a similar argument about their own role in the world. In many ways these communities are lagging behind Europe and North America and feel abandoned and manipulated by their own state and the international community, yet, they have enough hope and will to build a better future for themselves. This is suggested in the statement of Nino Raspudić, co-founder and head of the Urban Movement group:

It is very important to me that you understand that the idea behind erecting the monument to Bruce Lee, and all the fun that goes with it, was born from profound pain and misery of an unhappy town. We are the people who have outlived our own town and our own world. Or perhaps that world never belongs to us? Perhaps it is better to phrase it the other way around – our world: we still have to create and build it ourselves … (Raspudić 2004)

This underdog theme is prominent in the popular culture of the Balkans. A well-known example are the fans of the Red Star soccer team who refer to themselves as “gypsies.” The Roma are considered the local ‘blacks’ in the Balkans, popular figures in cinema and the music scene. The underdog subject is also central to rap music and raising a statue to Tupac in Marinkova Bara, whose residents are largely composed of Roma and perceive themselves to be the “blacks” of Belgrade, seems appropriate.

It is important to note that the search for answers in foreign societies, and the projection of self onto the outside is only effective if the initiative comes from within these communities. The residents of the communities would likely be skeptical of any outside source and assign this source imperialistic intention. Even if self-initiated, the projection of self onto the foreign and the external is problematic according to some. A visual artist, Milica Tomic, argues that “turning to Rocky or Tarzan is unhealthy and dangerous” because “we need to find a way of representing our grief, our responsibility and our despair. Until we do that, Serbia cannot come to terms with the present and the future” (IMG MGMT 2009). Tomic suggests that the turn to external rolemodels is a way of avoiding the pain and the responsibilities which are consequences of the 1990s. Her firm belief that this pop culture phenomenon is destructive to the communities in question is evident in her reference to the statues as “a dangerous joke in which history is being erased and replaced by Mickey Mouse” (IMG MGMT 2009).

Others, on the other hand, argue that this phenomenon of turning to the outside is not harmful but a positive sense of openness to the world and a more cosmopolitan way of identifying oneself. The Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek speaks of the virtue of “thinking global” while “acting local” and some authors argue that the import of Western idols in the
Balkans is an example of this. Žižek argues that the United States has followed a contradictory motto - “think local, act global,” which is highly problematic. Following Žižek, some argue that “it would do the West some good to reverse roles in cultural exchange by honoring heroes outside of their own geographical borders” (IMG MGMT 2009).

It is thus difficult to estimate whether this trend of celebrity statues is means for avoiding history or means for open-minded reinvention of identity. Perhaps it is unnecessary to limit the meaning of monuments to one of these two goals or even both of them. Symbols have different meanings for different people who project their own experiences and narratives. In the same sense, the pop culture monuments in the Balkans do not embody one fixed meaning, and this paper tries to highlight the different ways in which these symbols are currently being used. It is also important to point out that the meanings of symbols change with time and to wonder what these particular pop culture monuments will mean to the upcoming generations. Will their value continue or will they be neglected as remnants of the past? Will some meanings remain attached to these monuments, even though the next generation will not not be growing up watching Rocky and Tarzan and listening to Bob Marley? These are important questions to be addressed in the future.

Using foreign elements to rejuvenate a community's identity and revive a sense of inspiration can become problematic if the foreign sources reject this initiative. For example, the Rocky Balboa initiative received some negative response from Western media, mainly characterized though mockery. The best example is the documentary Amerika Idol, based on the Rocky monument story and directed by Barry Avrich. The documentary portrays the Žitište community in overly simplistic and condescending tones. The narrator states that Žitište is “exotic with fable places,” a town which is “cursed” with “destiny of war and misfortune for over 1200 years.” “For the first time in nearly 2,000 years the people of Žitište had a reason to celebrate,” he continues (Amerika Idol 2009). Bojan Marčeta finds such comments condenscending, as does a film reviewer who concludes in an ironic tone: “Oh, thank you, Hollywood, for spreading your wisdom to those goofy, naive foreigners” (Sloan 2009).

Despite these negative responses from some Western media, publicity in itself, whether negative or positive, can be extremely useful for the communities erecting the monuments. The communities in question arguably achieved their goal of placing themselves on the world map through publicity. This practical goal is evident in the responses of villagers in Žitište, Međa, and Banatski Sokolac. All of the interviewees suggested marketing, tourism, and investment as results they were hoping for. Stojanović (2010) explains that Međa is only one-hour drive from the capital, Belgrade. The Tarzan statue could therefore become a tourist attraction and possibly draw investment to the village. Bojan Marčeta claims that the economic incentive was the main purpose of his Rocky initiative. He notes “marketing” and “media attention on this small place” as his main concerns. Marčeta admits that by choosing to reveal the statue around the timing of the 2007 premiere of the Rocky VI film his goal was to “steal away a part of media attention” (2010). Marketing and media attention on the town of Žitište were also the reasons why the statue was revealed during the well-funded Chicken Fest festival. “Rocky has nothing to do with chicken but they live side by side,” explains Marčeta. Marčeta and his collaborators
certainly succeeded in gaining publicity for their town. In a town of 3000 citizens, 25 000 people came for the revelation of the statue, including about 120 journalists from different countries. “This is when people realized that this [initiative] is not just a kid’s joke but has benefits … Every parking lot in front of each house was taken up, people realized that everyone can participate in something, sell something,” explains Marčeta (2010).

Material and economic benefits are not the only aspirations of the communities erecting the pop culture monuments. Whether they are conscious of it or not, the interviewees imply a goal of “recreation” and “rediscovery” of oneself. The 1990s brought serious damages to the citizens of former Yugoslavia including “a traumatic political and economic transition, a major cause for the breakdown of traditional social, political, and cultural identities” (Raspudić 2004). The interviewees suggest that, with the fall of the former Yugoslavia, a system of values, which many people relied on, was also lost. The fast transition to capitalism and economic “shock therapy” influenced normative and ideological values in a way that many people found difficult to comprehend. One observer explains, “In the FRY, we had fewer choices or material possessions, though the system of values was different, too. What mattered most then was not what you owned, but what you accomplished in your life as a person” (Bajraktarević qtd. in Ajnadzić 2011). She is not comfortable with the new system of values and the ideological shift:

Today, children are more familiar with the names of politicians than musicians, football players and artists. Politicians have determined the lives of these young people and their system of values. Today’s youngsters simply copy what they see – the lack of true moral and ethical values amongst politicians (Bajraktarević qtd. in Ajnadzić 2011).

In such an uncertain ideological environment, nostalgia for “good old times” is bound to reappear. “Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals” (Boym 2001 qtd. in Legg 2007: 461). Yet, if one takes a closer look at the communities erecting the monuments, it is extremely difficult to answer what this sense of nostalgia is for.

Whether this ideological state can be termed a crisis of identity depends on whom one speaks to. According to the Serbian Orthodox Church, the pop culture monuments are a clear example of an identity crisis. According to a Serbian Orthodox priest in Žitište,

The faith does not support this sort of statue, idea of idols is not supported in our faith in general, and so what this statue shows is a crisis of identity. Human beings need a purpose in life, and if they don’t find their real purpose, they will fulfill that need with something else (qtd. in Amerika Idol 2009).

Some argue that this crisis of identity has been taking place since the 1980s and the monuments are just the latest expression of it. Turbo-folk is a musical genre unique to the Balkans which has the same paradoxical undertones as the pop culture monuments. According to the singer-songwriter Rambo Amadeus who coined the term turbo-folk, this genre combines everything “turbo,” referring to industrial and modern progress, and everything “folk,” referring to tradition, and rural norms and lifestyles. Turbo-folk is an intentionally humorous response to the difficult political and economic times, one that
involves a great degree of self-mockery, exaggerations, and extremes. After the invention of turbo-folk, “turbo” became a prefix for various social and media phenomena. The monuments of Bruce Lee, Tarzan, Rocky Balboa, and Bob Marley mock political affairs and are examples of “turbo-sculpture,” and are thus part of a larger “turbo-culture” (IMG MGMT 2009).

While religious leaders, scholars, and analysts of cultural, social, and media phenomena claim that there are many signs of a crisis of identity, my interviewees did not see it as such. Bojan Marčeta (2010) was defensive when I mentioned the identity crisis hypothesis: “Serbia does not have a [identity] crisis, we saved whatever we could save, I write in Cyrillic, and my son’s name is Pavle. … I live like the mass of people in the world, I just don’t have the financial means that others do.” The first part of Marčeta’s statement confirms his identity as a Serb, emphasized through his decision to name his son after the Serbian Patriarch Pavle. The second part confirms his identity as a world citizen, and his economic status as a non-wealthy person, which he shares with most of the world’s population. He further argues that his Serbian background should not limit him to erecting a monument to a Serbian king or any other Serbian political and historical figure. A young man from the same town agrees with Marčeta and refutes nationalists, whom he refers to as “big Serbs.” Speaking of the most renown Serbian tsar, Tsar Dušan, the young man comments: “Who knows Tsar Dušan? Tsar Dušan is a regional hero of ours, but this does not go beyond our borders. [On the other hand,] Rocky is a phenomenon” (qtd. in Amerika Idol 2009).

Similar to their denial of the identity crisis hypothesis, the interviewees refuted that their decision to raise a pop culture monument is part of a larger trend taking place in Serbia and Bosnia. When I asked whether they were inspired by a preceding project, they disagreed. Each interviewee admitted that he knew about the other pop culture monuments in the region, but none revealed that there are any connections between the monuments when it comes to purpose, theme, or figure chosen (Dragan Marčeta 2010, Bojan Marčeta 2010, Stojanović 2010). One of the reasons why this may be the case is because each village or town initiating such a project is hoping for its own fifteen minutes of fame and does not want this moment overshadowed by another project. Each monument is meant to place the remote location on the world map and draw attention to its uniqueness, rather than be a mere example of some general trend.

While the interviewees did not accept arguments which emphasize that they are experiencing an identity crisis or contributing to a larger trend, they recognized that they are sending ideological and political messages through their pop culture projects. A common message present in each project is about tolerance and multiculturalism. The interviewee from Banatski Sokolac explained that in his region “there are so many nations, 80% of the residents are Romanian, but also Hungarian, Slovenian, and Macedonian. … People here are not bothered by different nationalities and ethnicities” (Dragan Marčeta 2010). A similar attitude exists in Žitište. Bojan Marčeta (2010) explained that “[his] municipality is multicultural. So why not have an
American?” Marčeta (2010) then reflected on the fact that the actor playing the role of Rocky is American but the character is of Italian background. “It really doesn’t matter. We want to make this place even more diverse. Why not?” he comments. His goal is to overcome ethnic, national, religious and racial divisions and focus on basic human values. Similarly, Raspudić (2004) explains that Bruce Lee, “a man from a completely different race to our own and from another continent, was dear to us all, no matter our political or ideological convictions.” Raspudić (2004) speaks of Lee's values and why they are important to Bosnian society:

For generations raised on his movies of the 1970s, he was the embodiment of honesty, justice, protection for the weak and loyalty to his friends and master. At a time when all moral values are underestimated, when kids in Bosnia and Herzegovina carry guns to school and seek criminals as role models, the monument to Bruce Lee in the centre of Mostar will be a reminder to us of our own childhood dreams and about more righteous world where the raw brute force would not count but where the deepest strength and highest importance would lie in skill, quick wit and the power of will of the person fighting for a just cause.

The message is thus about basic universal values, and universal justice in particular. The communities in question are looking for reassurance that, after so many “bad guys” in recent Balkan history, “good guys” can win.

The second common message is about reconciliation. Mostar had one of the most violent and tragic experiences during the 1990s. This resulted in a city which is split between two major communities, the Croats and the Bosniaks. A feeling of hostility between the two is evident upon one’s arrival in Mostar. Consequently, the Bruce Lee monument had a reconciliatory aim: “In a city where everything is divided, we would like to remind that, outside of this vicious circle of national conflict, there still exist numerous things that are common to all citizens of Mostar” (Raspudić 2004). Despite how “plastic,” superficial, or foreign the monument may seem, both Croats and Bosniaks share memories of Bruce Lee and for this commonality the monument should be treasured. This monument is especially important in a city where all other structures and public spaces are exclusive to either the Bosniak or the Croat community. In Mostar “urbanism exists as a ‘prolonging of war using different means’: each one of the constituent parts of the city is trying to endow ‘their own’ space with ‘their own’ characteristics” (Raspudić 2004). The Bruce Lee monument suggests an attempt on the part of civil society and youth to recapture public space and put an end to the divisive political forces.

Even though the residents of Banatski Sokolac and Žitište did not experience bloodshed in their towns in the 1990s, they were affected by these wars indirectly, mainly through political and economic means, and they too imply aims of reconciliation in their public space projects. The interviewees were proud to note that the sculptor of Rocky Balboa is a Croat, Boris Taparac, who was hosted in Žitište for four months and at no cost while he constructed the monument. Moreover, in a conciliatory symbolic gesture, both Croatian and Serbian musicians were on stage during the revealing of the Bob Marley monument in Banatski Sokolac. The Croatian rock star
Dado Topić and the Serbian musician Jovan Matić unveiled the statue together (IMG MGMT 2009).

The residents of Međa also note the goal of reconciliation, however, they speak of this goal in reference to different groups. Similar to Žitište and Banatski Sokolac, Međa did not experience direct violence in the 1990s. The last major bloodshed that took place was during Second World War. Stojanović (2010) speaks of the revenge against the Germans in the aftermath of World War II. Many Germans and Austro-Hungarians who were in the region since the Austro-Hungarian invasion or since World War II were murdered or expelled. A small number were allowed residence because they did not have ties to the German and Austrian governments and because their professions were valuable to Serbia and Yugoslavia. Honouring an actor of Austro-Hungarian heritage, Johnny Weissmuller, whose family resided in Međa, is thus a way of recognizing the injustices against Germanic people committed by the Serbian and Yugoslav regimes on this territory.

While there is therefore no agreement on whether the monuments are signs of an identity crisis or not, important themes, such as justice, tolerance, multiculturalism, and reconciliation, emerge in the interviewees’ responses. These valuable and wide-reaching ideological bases seem to be necessary for the success of the monument projects. This hypothesis is based on the example of the Samantha Fox project. After Fox agreed to participate in a local music festival in Serbia, a project to erect a statue to the former pin-up and singer was initiated. Many newspapers, websites, and blogs announced the building of a Samantha Fox monument, including announcements in English, German, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Norwegian, etc. However, the project did not move beyond the idea and the reasons for this are not entirely clear. What is clear is that the residents of Čačak understood that the monument would not be honouring much beyond Fox’s body image and sex appeal. This project was more superficial than the others because it lacked ideological substance. A monument to Fox would not be a radical political statement since she is neither an underdog figure nor a renowned promoter of tolerance, multiculturalism, and reconciliation.

The second requirement for the success of a monument project is communal consensus. I draw this hypothesis from the events that followed the revelation of the Bruce Lee monument. At some point the statue was removed from its stand. It is unclear whether this was a simple act of vandalism, or a politically or economically inspired act. Since the statue was located in a public park in the Croatian side of Mostar, the removal could be a consequence of continued divisiveness and hostility between the two communities. On the other hand, when I arrived in Mostar in August of 2010, the park guard told me that the statue was removed by youth who wanted to melt it in order to gain a profit from the material. This explanation suggests that the act is a consequence of economic circumstances and, possibly, a political message about the priorities of Mostar residents. People in post-war Mostar might be more concerned with mere survival and daily life than with reconciliation and universal justice. A third source claims that the statue is intact in a museum in the capital of Croatia, Zagreb. Security issues are cited as the reason for the move, which also implies that the Bruce Lee project failed in its reconciliatory and
unification aims. Finally, the last suggestion is simple vandalism, void of any radical political message.

**Relationship with the state and power-dynamics involved in the erection of monuments**

The next section explores what the pop culture monuments and their political messages suggest about the states and the regimes where they are being erected. The countries in question, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, are transitional states. However, their transition is not necessarily linear or smooth or a positive progression, and there is no defined and fixed endpoint (Burch and Smith 2007: 934). Even though “what” the two states are transitioning to is unclear, the mere fact that they are in transition implies, according to Forest et al., that their societies need to debate identity in public space (Forest, Johnson, and Till 2004: 358). In these intermediate regimes, in addition to political power being contested, identities are being challenged. The process of erecting a monument can take the community through this necessary identity debate. Moreover, since the monument projects are a reflection of the mindset of the community at a particular time, it is not surprising that during transitional times the projects themselves lack clarity.

Forest and Johnson (2010) find that changes in memorials are propelled by the government in authoritarian states, by the society in democracies, and a combination of the two in case of hybrid regimes, which have “neither democratic legitimacy nor an authoritarian leadership” (7-8). They also find that there is more monument talk but less action in hybrid regimes because the intermediate regimes are weaker than democratic and authoritarian regimes and it is more difficult for governments and private actors to influence the symbolic landscape (Forest and Johnson 2010: 7-8). Democratic regimes establish systematic ways of incorporating and consulting civil society on monument projects, while authoritarian regimes usually make such decisions without discussion and without an interest in the opinion of the civil society. Forest and Johnson (2010) make a second hypothesis claiming that national identity is more challenged in hybrid regimes, which results in an abundance of talk but not action since establishing consensus is difficult in these societies (7-8). In hybrid regimes agents of monument projects have an easier time proposing and contesting monuments than building them (Kopstein 2010).

The two hypotheses provided by Johnson and Forest might offer some insight into why the Tarzan monument project is stagnant and why the Bruce Lee statue was removed. First, the weakness of the intermediate Serbian regime is seen in the example of the Tarzan project. The initiators of the project implied that there is not enough of a push in their community: civil society groups are not strong enough, municipal officials are supportive but disinterested in taking on the task, and, at the time of the interviews, there was no potential private sponsor. Support through speech but lack of commitment though action was also the response of politicians in Žitište. Marčeta noted that the party in power in his municipality is the democratic party, which replaced previous rule by socialists. In his statement to the press, the president of the municipality said that “Whatever the youth does should be supported but if they mess up they need to deal with the consequences” (qtd. in Marčeta 2010). Therefore, the new Serbian regime
offers the freedom to civil society to impact public landscapes, something that was quite unlikely in the past, however, no clear policy exists on how government officials are to cooperate and assist these civil society initiatives. Second, the removal of the Bruce Lee statue is possibly an example of the identity contestation that takes place in transitional regimes. Even if the “action” of building a monument takes place, its lasting presence is not assured in an unstable regime.

Forest and Johnson are also interested in examining which actors and groups have the power to alter public spaces. Monuments “declare publically” which groups are officially significant; “They reveal and reify the state’s level of inclusiveness – not simply designating who ‘belongs’ to and in the state, but who may legitimately aspire to political power” (Forest and Johnson 2010: 1). “During change and crisis, political actors employ monuments and memorials as vehicles to legitimate their claims on power and their visions of society” (Forest and Johnson 2010: 1). However, in the case of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, elites are not preoccupied with making their claims of political power and legitimacy by marking public spaces, even though it is an important time of change for both countries. The political elites are also not preoccupied with monitoring the projects in public spaces initiated by civil society groups.

In Meda, it was an elderly group that formed an organization in support of the Tarzan project and registered with the local government. The Rocky monument was a project of several friends in their 20s. The Bruce Lee monument was a project of a local youth-based NGO. The initiative to raise a monument to the hip-hop icon Tupac Shakur started with a youth organization in Belgrade, named Rad i Vizija (Work and Vision). A hip-hop forum was held where musicians decided that the location for the monument should be Marinkova Bara since “there’s no place in Belgrade that looks more like a ghetto than this” (qtd. in IMG MGMT 2009). Marinkova Bara is poorly lit, unsafe, and mainly inhibited by Roma, the minority group which experiences most discrimination in the Balkans. The aim of Rad i Vizija was to “highlight the inferior position of the Roma people and set a role model for socially deprived youth” (IMG MGMT 2009). While the Tupac initiative is stagnant because the group lacks adequate resources and political power, all of the monument projects are evidence of the rise of civil society in the two countries. Youth groups and elderly groups have opportunities to raise awareness on various issues and become initiators of social movements independently of their governments. This is a new role for such groups in the Balkans, which is representative of the changes these societies are going through.

The observation that the monument projects were for the most part instigated and carried through by bottom-up initiatives does not negate the involvement of elites and officials. Forest et al. (2004) illustrate that complex relationships exist between the “elite” and the “public” in public memory projects. They explain that “Groups may have different agendas and conceptions that sometimes lead to elite-public conflicts, but that may also engender elite-elite and public-public conflicts” (374). Additionally, they point out that “civic organizations and interest groups may have highly differentiated access to public forums that affect their power and influence in the process of public memory” (374). Similarly, the pop culture monument projects are not simple examples of bottom-up “counter-memory” or “resistance” memory. In fact, the two most successful projects – Rocky Balboa and Bob Marley – were supported by at least one powerful local actor, a well-known businessmen, in both cases.
The contribution of powerful local actors implies that access to material and political resources is an important element in the raising of monuments. Wolfgram (2010) writes about the “memory-market dictum,” “which suggests that the more ‘capital’ a given practice or artifact requires, the more likely this artifact will conform with given social norms of interpreting the past” (1). Wolfgram’s political economy analysis explains that memory-makers need some form of capital to produce their representations of the past (4). Wolfgram’s analysis is most insightful of the power relations present in communities and how much impact these have on which public space projects succeed, and to what extent. We can extend his hypothesis to this study to conclude that the Rocky Balboa and the Bob Marley projects had the most economic and political capital. It is arguable that the Tarzan project lacked economic capital because its initiators had the support of the town dwellers but lacked the financial means to finish the statue. On the other hand, the Bruce Lee project had enough economic capital since the statue was completed and erected but lacked political capital because the town dwellers were not united on its purpose and utility. Finally, at the time of my research, the Samantha Fox and the Tupac projects both did not acquire enough capital to be launched.

What does this study tell us about politics, and political action in particular? Or, more precisely, what is the connection between collective memory, emotion and collective action (Kopstein 2010)? Ross (2010) notes that

collective memories, even if they are deeply felt don’t explain group mobilization in any simple way. Rather, the emotions and beliefs contained in the memories need to be translated into actions – a process involving mechanisms that concretize the connections between the memories about the past and what should be done in the present (4).

Therefore, even though I refer to the pop culture monuments in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina as “radical political statements,” the emphasis should be placed on the word “statement,” because they are far from being “radical political acts.” I also recognize that we should be realistic when analyzing the political impact of these projects. The direct impact is minimal, and no one expects the establishment of a Rocky Balboa political party.

Nevertheless, this paper has argued that that the monument projects have a valuable impact on political discussions, debates, and perceptions in their communities. Celebrating Hollywood, characterized through its trivial, superficial, and “happy-ending” stories, is a way of highlighting the lack of ideological substance and direction in these societies and the consequent frustration felt by their people. At the same time, these projects are humorous, light-hearted, and celebrate childhood memories and are thus expressions of hopes for the future that these communities nurture. Most important, the monument projects are democratic expressions of the groups initiating them; they are opportunities for small communities to reach out to the world. In a region where people feel that they had been excluded from the international scene for a long time, this point itself justifies the value of the monuments.
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