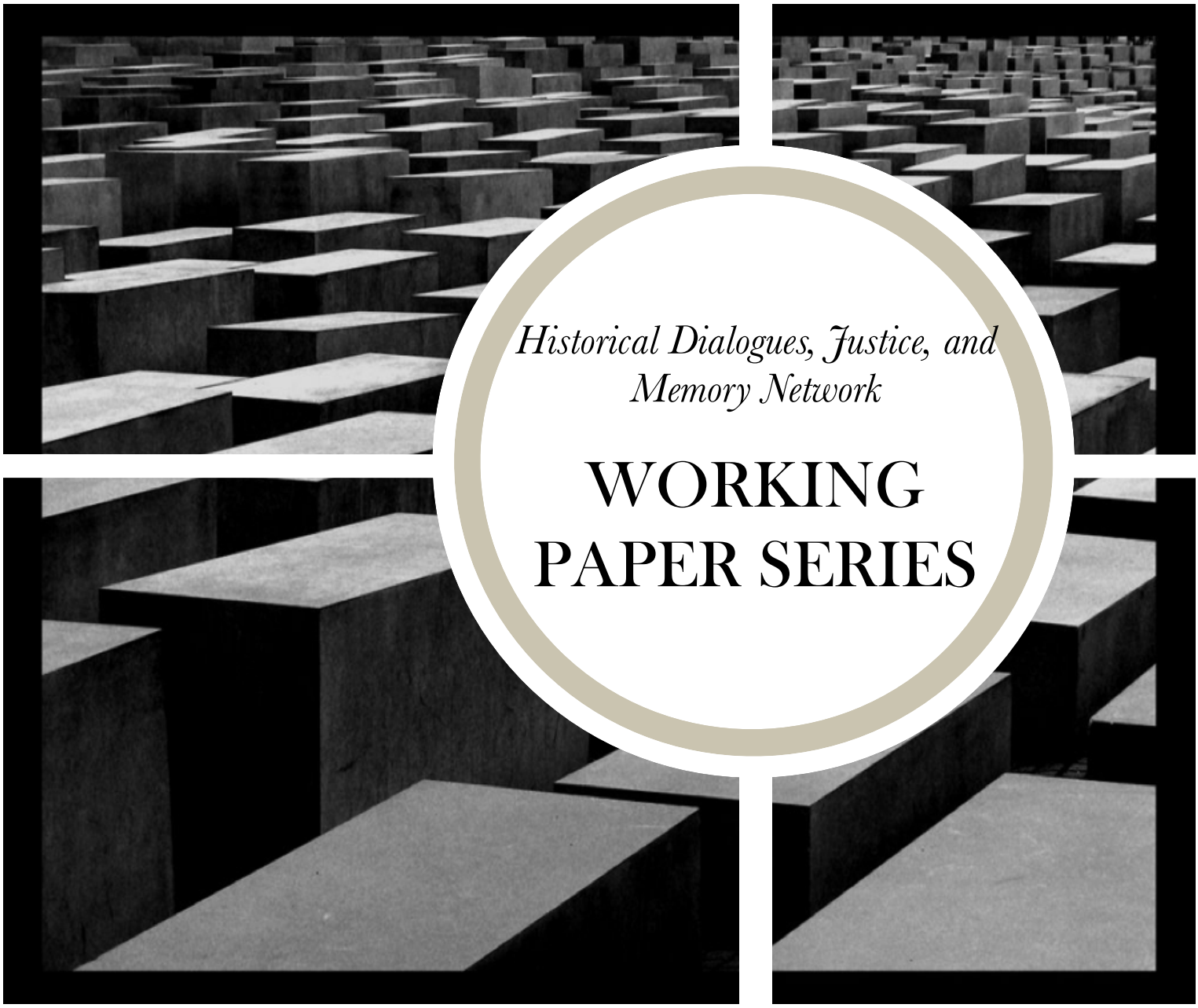

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Gjakmarrja as Conflict, the Potential for Informal Peace Education, and Transforming Attitudes in Albania

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Among the Gheg tribes in the highlands of northern Albania, as well as in western Kosovo, Montenegro, and other select areas of the Balkans, social and cultural order have been traditionally maintained through a centuries-old codified system of blood feud known as *gjakmarrja* (djak-MAHR-yeh, literally "blood-taking"). Since the fall of the repressive communist regime in 1991, Albania, in particular, has witnessed a revival of *gjakmarrja*. The transition to democracy has been an extremely difficult one for most Albanians. This period has overseen injustices, most particularly inequality, and a rise in insecurity, both of which have contributed to the resurgence of the blood feuds (Bozgo et al., 2002; Sadiku, 2014; Lawson and Saltmarshe, 2000). The post-communist incarnation of *gjakmarrja*, however, has some significant differences from the traditional system outlined in customary law, which will be discussed in detail later.

Though the data on the number of people presently involved in the blood feuds is limited and inconsistent, it has been estimated that more than 1000 families within Albania alone have become involved since its revival—a staggering figure in a country of just over 3 million (Mangalakova, 2004). While there is some agreement that the number is presently declining (Freeman, 2010), this can be due to multiple potential causes. Many have tried to flee to other countries and seek asylum from *gjakmarrja*. Some families have been wiped out entirely. In some cases, mediation (*besa*) has been effective; however, even well respected mediators often do not succeed (Mangalakova, 2004). Fortunately, many Albanians are becoming more and more aware of the magnitude of the problem posed by *gjakmarrja* and are taking action. Yet the phenomenon continues to persist.

Culturally entrenched systemic violent conflict—including *gjakmarrja*, female genital cutting, and honor killings—serves as a mechanism that reinforces other cultural values when society feels that certain members have behaved in a way that deviates from those values. In this essay, I argue that peace education as a way to introduce the possibility of socially and culturally acceptable alternatives to these mechanisms. The nature of *gjakmarrja* presents a good opportunity to assess how peace education might be introduced into informal settings – that is, any setting not directly associated with or organized by government. The definition of conflict used here will be *the perceived denial of something that is valuable to a group or entity by another group or entity in a given cultural moment*. "Cultural moment" is the set of cultural and social priorities possessed by a group at a given moment in the group's history; as this definition implies, these priorities are temporally dynamic.

Crucial for lasting change away from culturally entrenched violence will be transformation of attitudes regarding custom, which includes the treatment and perception of women. Education will be a key component here. Men and women will to have to collaborate in order to make sure that children and adults alike receive a good education. For those families in blood, education of any kind will have to be informal; mediators will need to play an important role here, as teachers will need access to homes and villages while long-term reconciliation and mediation take place.

Although *gjakmarrja* occurs throughout many areas in the Balkans, this essay will focus on Albania, where it is most prevalent. The data and information on this phenomenon are derived from secondary sources. Analysis will begin with understanding *gjakmarrja* as systemic violent conflict, drawing insights from theoretical bases and previous research. Few, if any, studies seek to understand it through a conflict lens. This will be used as a basis for understanding particular values

that Albanians attribute to their identity – the conflict analysis will illuminate how the system of *gjakmarrja* was originally intended to be a mechanism for protecting these values, particularly honor, but has since evolved into a type of "structured" violent conflict in the wake of the fall of communism. Albanian cultural values, as well as the system of *gjakmarrja* itself, present both spaces and barriers for promoting peaceful conflict resolution. Peace education in particular has the potential for transforming attitudes – the question is how to introduce peace education to informal settings.

Conflict Analysis: Gjakmarrja as Conflict Violence and Conflict Resolution

Most of the studies on *gjakmarrja* are anthropological in nature (Gëllçi, 2014); few, if any, studies seek to understand it through a conflict or conflict resolution lens – a puzzling gap, considering that the practice originated as a conflict resolution tool utilizing self-administered justice and has evolved into a semi-systematic manifestation of violent conflict. Conflict is the reason the system was codified in the first place. For this reason, this paper will use conflict analysis as a basis for reflecting on the areas in which informal peace education can play a role.

The conflict analysis will begin by surveying the origins and principles of *gjakmarrja* in its traditional form and understanding how and why it has changed in the post-communist era.

Origins: The Kanun of Leke Dukagjini

The system of *gjakmarrja* purportedly evolved during the Ottoman Empire. In the fifteenth century, invasions by the Ottoman Turks displaced Albanian tribes to the highlands of modern day Albania; resources are scarce there and, as a result, disputes erupted (Shryock, 1988). A northern Albanian prince named Lekë III Dukagjini (1410-1481) established a legal code of conduct in the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*. Many of these laws and customs predate Lekë, but he is credited with codifying them (Boman and Krasniqi, 2012). Traditionally passed on orally, the *Kanun* embodies Albanian customary law that, in part, regulates resolution of conflicts and disputes among members of Balkan peoples, either through violence (*gjakmarrja*) or through mediation (*besa*). This code of conduct has three major pillars: hospitality (*mikpritja*), truce (besa), and honor (*nderi*). The full *Kanun* contains 12 volumes containing nearly 1300 articles; it was only written down in its entirety for the first time in 1929 (Sadiku, 2014; Gëllçi, 2014).

Arguably, however, the *Kanun*'s *gjakmarrja* system perpetuates violence far more than peaceable reconciliation. *Besa*, a temporary truce that allows killers who will later be targeted freedom of movement without fear of being killed, is usually the method of last resort (Mangalakova, 2004). Mead (2000 (originally published 1940)) asserts that violence in conflict is a learned cultural behavior. The resurrection and endurance of *gjakmarrja*, even after decades of legal suppression of the practice during the communist regime in Albania, provides testimony in support of this argument. Furthermore, the phenomenon is hardly limited geographically: Feuds have spread to other parts of Albania as people migrate, and Albanians who emigrate to other countries sometimes find themselves involved in blood feuds with fellow ethnic Albanians (Mangalakova, 2004; Boman and Krasniqi, 2012).

Principles and Dynamics of *gjakmarrja*

The *gjakmarrja* system operates and endures on the tension between obligation and desire for autonomy (Shryock, 1988). Honor (*nderi*) lies within this tension. Pinpointing the precise definition of honor in this context is complex and difficult; it is probably best understood as a proven ability to maintain social worth based on upholding cultural values and customs. According to Shryock (1988), "[h]onor is depicted as a semantic field in which incommensurable social processes are given a

common, intelligible expression." Only men of a family or tribe (*fis*), and the family or *fis* itself as a whole, may have *nderi*. A man with *nderi* is one who protects his kinsmen, his guests (upholding the value of hospitality, or *mikpritja*), and his property, including his women. Women themselves do not possess the virtue of *nderi*, but they may add or detract from their family's or *fis's nderi* through their own conduct. Any man who, under the rules of *Kanun*, has had his *nderi* violated by another man is obligated to defend it for his own sake and for the sake of his *fis* (Shryock, 1988; Gëllçi, 2014).

Figure 1 below provides a visualization of how the obligations inherent in *gjakmarrja* feed the cycle of violence. The standards of conduct outlined in the *Kanun* govern all social interactions. Should a party be perceived to violate these standards in a way that directly threatens the *nderi* of another party, social pressures obligate the second party to take appropriate action. Typically, this means that the second party declares itself to be "in blood" with the first party and, as a result, seek to kill the violator himself or one of his male relatives. Once a male has been killed, however, the first party is open to exact revenge on the second party in turn, in defense of their own *nderi*. The arrows in Figure 1 all represent the direction of social pressures.

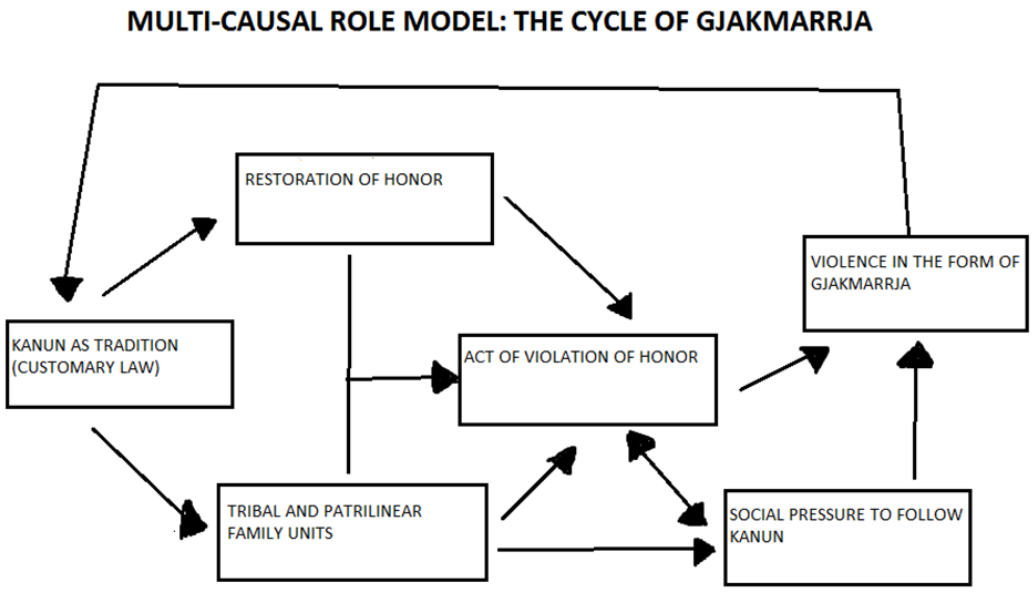

Figure 1: Dynamics of *gjakmarrja*

However, much, if not most, of the information and narratives about *gjakmarrja* that is available have been obtained through anthropological study. Masculine overtones dominate the narratives surrounding this cultural construct. Beneath these narratives, there appears to be recognition that women are a key to maintaining the system. For centuries, the role of women in upholding the *gjakmarrja* system has been a source of study and curiosity, particularly the "sworn virgins" who give up their womanhood and uphold their chastity to gain (most of) the rights of a man (see Horvath, 2011), a concept that will be expounded upon later.

Traditional Roles of Women. One of the most stringent rules of *gjakmarrja* is that killings may not take place in the home. This is due to the pillar of hospitality in the *Kanun*; even an enemy in blood with a rival may enter the rival's house as a guest and cannot be harmed. Many homes of those in blood are built like fortresses (*kullë*); some are even adapted buildings left over from the Kosovo and Albanian wars (see Marco Kessler's gallery; UK Home Office, 2014). As a result,

however, there are now generations who have grown up never having left the house in which they were born, for fear of being killed. The *Kanun* mandates that women (and children) cannot be targeted under *gjakmarrja,* so it has traditionally been up to the women and children to maintain the fields and flocks. However, with the trend of subversion of traditional *gjakmarrja*, women and children are also subject to becoming targets of revenge (Mangalakova, 2004).

Non-traditional roles: Sworn virgins. Within the *gjakmarrja* system, those women who choose not to uphold their traditional gender roles have one other choice: They may become sworn virgins, also known as "man-women." There are two types of sworn virgins. One type arises from the need for men; when a man has only daughters or all of the sons have died, one of the daughters may publicly swear chastity and thenceforth be considered a man, including having the right to carry a weapon and participate in *gjakmarrja*. The second type consists of sworn virgins who are seeking to escape an arranged marriage. Oftentimes a girl is betrothed even before she is born; should she choose to not go through with the marriage, she may swear chastity and become a man in order to prevent her former betrothed's family from exacting revenge for her rejection. The second type of sworn virgin does not have as many rights as the first type – he-she does not participate in *gjakmarrja*, for example (Whitaker, 1981).

From Old to New (1948 – Present)

Albania has long recognized the need to address the violence caused by *gjakmarrja*. The Communist regime under Enver Hoxha severely repressed these practices; punishments for engagement were severe. After the collapse of the regime, however, the feuds resumed and intensified in the absence of a strong state presence and lack of trust in the government. Since that time, the Albanian government has attempted to rectify this, with some success. Crime rates have decreased (Celik & Shkreli, 2010), but there is still little knowledge of precisely how many families are involved, as many of them flee or go into hiding.

Today there is an awareness of two different types of *gjakmarrja*, one traditional, one post-communist, or new. *Gjakmarrja* of the post-communist era endures for reasons that go beyond the impetus of tradition, though the causal pattern follows a similar flow as that depicted in Figure 1 (see above). Lawson and Saltmarshe (2000) conducted a study of two villages in northern Albania to document the links between insecurity and self-administered justice through an economic lens. They found that weak institutions in the new regime, coupled with widespread corruption and distrust, left a vacuum now filled largely by customary law, i.e. the *Kanun*. Moreover, the customary law of the *Kanun* has been subverted to handle situations that traditionally were not covered under *gjakmarrja* (Mangalakova, 2004; Lawson & Saltmarshe, 2000). The structure of *gjakmarrja* under the traditional *Kanun* has provided a violent framework in which to carry out personal vendettas. It is in under these conditions that *gjakmarrja* has been reincarnated.

Resounding Impacts: Social Fractionalization and Contention in Conflict

Overall, what are the main impacts of *gjakmarrja*? The answer to this has changed with the times, but today there is a growing awareness, largely due to the development of technology permitting information to reach international audiences, that the practice is not universally accepted in spite of its status as a long-standing tradition. Emerging narratives suggest that the time has come for reflection. Additionally, attempts to intervene and curb the violence of *gjakmarrja* are complicated by tensions between formal law and customary law of the *Kanun*. In the Albanian context, these institutions are not entirely compatible, posing problems for long-term stability. Customary mediation is the preferred method of conflict resolution (Celik & Shkreli, 2010). Mediation as a

standalone method, however, is insufficient for establishing long-term social and economic stability. Formal legal and judiciary institutions are crucial for a functioning democratic state.

Contentions in Identity: Narratives Through Media

Photography. Visual media is playing a role in highlighting the devastation of post-communist *gjakmarrja*. Photographer Marco Kessler has a gallery collection called "Gjakmarrja: Albania's Revenged Blood" that aims to tell of the misery of blood revenge in Albania and Kosovo. His gallery covers a variety of themes: The hardships of physical confinement; the psychological trauma of losing family; hiring of Albanian mafiosos for protection; the difficulties of mediators; and children learning to defend themselves with weapons.[1]

Film. In 2011, an Albanian-language film called "The Forgiveness of Blood" was released. Co-written by an Albanian and an American, the film portrays the story of a brother and sister who find themselves trapped in the cycle of violence due to their father's entanglement with rivals over a piece of land. Multiple independent video documentaries have also been produced to tell individual stories of fear and isolation.[2]

Literature. Literature also has given some voice to the subject. Perhaps the most famous is the novel "Broken April" by Ismail Kadare, which depicts the story of a fictitious man in the early 20th century, Gjorg, drawn into his family's feud with a rival clan. The story draws the reader into the dynamics of *gjakmarrja* from a various points of view: Gjorg, local leaders, and outside observers. Gjorg kills a member of his clan's rivals. Through customary mediation, the rival clan grants him *besa*, which allows him to walk freely for thirty days before they can target him for killing. As he travels to pay the required blood money for committing the killing to one of the local leaders – the "prince" of his district – he briefly meets a newly married couple who have traveled into the mountains to understand the blood feuds better. The wife, Diana, is simultaneously fascinated and repelled by the phenomenon. Despite the briefness of their encounter, she cannot stop thinking about Gjorg, whose fate, she knows, is sealed. The story also provides the perspective of one of the prince's servants, the steward of blood, who has incentives to encourage the blood feuds due to their profitability in blood money and, on a deeper level, sustenance of their positions of power. The novel yields a great deal of insight into the mentalities of those both directly involved and watching from the outside. One such insight arises from the reminiscing of the steward of blood as he compares the old and the new feuds:

> On both sides of the comparison, there was both good and bad. The old feuds, just like fields that had been tilled for a long time, were dependable, but rather cold and slow to bear. Contrarily, the new feuds were violent, and sometimes they brought about as many deaths in a single year as the old ones in two decades. But since they were not deep-rooted, they might easily be brought to a stop by reconciliation, while those of olden times were very hard to bring to settlement. Successive generations had been accustomed to the feuds from their cradles, and so, not being able to conceive of life without them, it never entered their heads to try to free themselves from their destined end (Kadare, 1990).

[1] The collection can be viewed at: **http://marcokesseler.com/gjakmarrja-albanias-revenged-blood/.** Accessed 15 October

[2] One example is a short documentary film called "Stuck At Home in An Albanian Blood Feud", available at **http://vimeo.com/76068511**. Accessed 15 October 2014.

In an interview with the Committee of Nationwide Reconciliation (n.d.), Kadare asserts that the blood feuds are hardly endemic to Albanians alone; they have existed since antiquity in Greece. It is a "sin" for Albanians to believe that the feuds are solely Albanian. He believes that the prohibition of the *Kanun* has led to the twisted revival of the custom – "a custom that shouldn't be revived" – and, having been constructed in specific historical circumstances, should remain relegated to Albanian history.

Newspapers and other written media. Newspaper articles and other written media often illuminate real life, personal stories of *gjakmarrja*. These stories are numerous and only provide mere snapshots into the psychological trauma and personal dilemmas that those involved face on a daily basis. One story (Jahn, 2000) centers on a conversation between a mediator and a potential killer. The potential killer has a young son and he struggles with the idea of opening himself to the possibility of being killed after committing revenge. The mediator gently asks him if he wants his son to grow up without a father. He asks him to think of the children in the other family, too. There is a clear tension between fulfilling obligation and allowing slights to pass by: the dilemma between the desires of self and the desires of society. Other stories (Freeman, 2010) tell of those who have committed suicide from the unbearable grief of losing loved ones to revenge. A single action, a perceived slight, has a large ripple effect, bringing repercussions months, years, even decades into the future.

Clashes of Tradition and Modern Resurgence: Effects on Society

Albanian society has experienced a vast number of resounding impacts in the post-communist era as *gjakmarrja* has resurged. Because of the uncertainty in the number of individuals involved in feuds, it is difficult to determine the magnitude of the consequences for Albanian society. However, it is not hard to imagine that, with the inability of families to leave their homes, their ability to contribute to the economy and society is severely hindered. Other repercussions are somewhat more easily identifiable.

Mediation vs. the Court System. Although the intensity of *gjakmarrja* has decreased over time based on decreased crime rates (Freeman, 2010), the fact remains that thousands of families are still involved in blood feuds (Mangalakova, 2004; Celik & Shkreli, 2010). Why does the violence continue despite the options of mediation and court justice?

As it stands today, the juxtaposition of traditional mediation and the modern court system actually contributes to the problem. The approaches have different desired outcomes: The justice of the court system and the justice of customary mediation are two different types. The courts administer punishment for failing to abide by the laws of the government, which hold murder as a crime. They do not attempt to reconcile relations between feuding parties. While mediation is tailored toward parties, it does not address the wider social problems inherent in accepting blood feud as a legitimate social mechanism of defending honor (*nderi*). Yet the imposition of legal limitations on mediation, such as those stipulated in Law 9090, prevents effective and legally permitted reconstruction and reconciliation of relationships.

The promotion of the rule of law is the result of Albania's transition to democracy in the post-communist era – in effect, state building. With the expansion of the reach of the Albanian state to the northern highlands comes subjection of *Kanun*-abiding tribes to legal norms in which Western concepts have permeated. Arsovska and Verduyn (2008) call this "culture conflict", as the meshing of Western ideas of justice and retribution have melded with concepts from the *Kanun*, causing confusion and resulting in the twisted version of the *Kanun*. Further complicating this problem is the repression of the *Kanun* during nearly five decades of communist rule; as a result, the rules of *gjakmarrja* have been misremembered or even made up (Celik & Shkreli, 2010; Lawson & Saltmarshe, 2000).

The tensions present between customary law (the *Kanun*) and Albanian formal law pose a challenge for those whose interest is in ending the violence. Legal norms adopted by the Albanian national government seek to invalidate traditional conflict resolution means, but how should blood feuds be handled when the people do not see the courts and rule of national law as legitimate? The state needs to collaborate with members of civil society possessing good relations with local mediators to address this problem.

The bottom line appears to be that the state's emphasis on rule of law is offsetting some of the positive impacts of the peacemaking approach of customary mediation. There is no attempt to instill a culture of nonviolence through broader peacebuilding measures beyond democratizing reforms. This is because the state recognizes that much of the world sees *gjakmarrja* as a barbaric practice to be punished as a crime – it does not see modern *gjakmarrja* as conflict.

Impact on Women. This case provides an example of how *gjakmarrja* as violent conflict is not limited to the bloodshed of men. The denial of women of their womanhood under *gjakmarrja* is arguably a type of structural violence. Women can only maintain the virtue of *nderi* if they do not fulfill their reproductive role as women and as a man's property (tradition holds that they are "a sack for carrying things"), either before marriage or as a sworn virgin. Such limited choices prevent them from finding their full productive potential within their families, their *fis*, and society at large. There is a certain irony here: The subordination of women actually makes them one of the vital actors in perpetuating *gjakmarrja*. Continuing to deny women their womanhood and as living persons with inherent value does not only hurt the women themselves, but it continues to hurt men as this aspect of the cultural mechanism allows the cycle of violence to endure.

In the post-communist era, the fact that women can now also be targets is a signal that something has changed (Freeman, 2010). They are not only subjected to their subordinated traditional roles; they are now instruments of revenge: Girls and young women are sometimes kidnapped, raped, and even forced into prostitution. An unmarried woman who has been kidnapped and raped is considered unsuitable for marriage, breaking down family cohesion and further spurring tendencies towards violence (Mangalakova, 2004). Insecurity, particularly economic insecurity, often leads to greater violence against women – and the case of Albania is not an exception (Lawson & Saltmarshe, 2000).

Impact on Children. Under the new incarnation of *gjakmarrja*, children are also permissible targets. In many of the highland villages, children do not receive education after the age of 15 (Lawson & Saltmarshe, 2000). Many of the children who are stuck inside their homes – estimated to be as many as 800 in Albania alone – do not receive more than a few years of education (Mangalakova, 2004). Some have never left their homes their entire lives (Mangalakova, 2004; Corella, 2013). The estimates, as stated previously, are uncertain and no current statistics are readily available. Children from families involved in blood feuds are often taught how to defend themselves with weapons once they are old enough to learn.

Seeking Opportunity in Enclosed Spaces: Informal peace education

The analysis provided in the previous section has provided the background and context in which peace education can play a role in informal spaces ("informal peace education"). The divisions exacerbated by *gjakmarrja*, even as they fractionalize Albanian society, also provide potentially valuable spaces for change. By understanding the dynamics and effects of *gjakmarrja*, interveners can use the local context to launch their efforts for change. The next part of this essay will explore how this can be operationalized in the Albanian context.

Defining Informal Peace Education

As stated earlier, "informal peace education" is defined here as *peace education taking place in informal spaces*. What does this actually mean? The parameters defining what this concept encompasses will be laid out in two parts, first by expounding on the meaning of "informal" and second of "peace education".

First, to clarify the meaning of "informal spaces": these are to be understood as spaces used to conduct social relations that are not directly organized or associated with government, but rather by people themselves as members of society. These can be events or occurrences – social gatherings, for example – or physical spaces, such as the home. The line between formal and informal is often blurry, however, especially in cases of interactions between government and grassroots. In this case, informal peace education takes place in spaces supported by the people, including civil society, outside of formally established schools.

The next, and much bigger, question that needs addressing is defining peace education in general. There is an enormous amount of literature on the subject, but for the purposes of this essay, the primary theoretical underpinning for understanding peace education will come from Bar-Tal and Rosen (2009). They provide a particularly useful view of peace education in situations of intractable conflict, which they define as violent conflict lasting more than 25 years. *Gjakmarrja*, when considered as violent conflict, arguably fits this description; many blood feuds for last decades, and the practice itself has endured for centuries.

> This is usually a process of societal change because peace education is launched when society members hold ideas that fuel the conflict and contradict the principles of peace making. Thus, there is a need to educate the society members, and we suggest differentiating between two approaches to peace education: a narrow approach that focuses on socialization for peace carried in schools and a broad approach that is concerned with socialization and persuasion of society members to support the peace process and function in it (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009).

They further add that the target populations and modalities of peace education vary by context (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009), but the intended outcome is the same: the transformation of attitudes that perpetuate violent conflict to attitudes that favor peace and peaceable resolution to conflict.

Bar-Tal and Rosen outline two main models of peace education: direct and indirect. Direct peace education entails directly teaching peace values to students to reduce the hatreds of the other side to which they have been exposed, reconcile with the past, and reflect on their "side's" own roles in the conflict. The indirect model of peace education, on the other hand, is a broader approach that targets society at-large, using means such as mass media.

In order for peace education to be successful, Bar-Tal and Rosen assert that at least some of the following conditions need to be fulfilled:

- There has been some progress made towards peace.
- There is substantial support for the peace process.
- The time is "ripe" for reconciliation.
- There is formal support from governmental and political actors.
- There is a well-defined peace education policy.
- There is an authority (usually the national ministry of education) that is mandated to carry out peace education and has sufficient resources to do so.

They emphasize that it is not necessary to have every condition fulfilled, considering that in most post-conflict or conflict-affected situations, this would be impossible. Efforts to leverage change must be made where the opportunity is available.

Why Informal?

The tension between the formal and informal (customary) justice systems in Albania, the effect on women and children, and the overall misconceptions of *gjakmarrja* after decades of repression all suggest that new attitudes need developing. Stemming the violence and its impact will require use of both formal and informal spaces. Mangalakova (2004) notes, "Practice has indicated…that reconciliation will be implemented in a very painful and difficult effort and will take time. There are feuds that have lasted for decades." She states that institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) need to wage the fight against blood feuds. These institutions and NGOs, however, will require widespread participation and collaboration across the populace, especially women.

Informal spaces have already at least partially fulfilled some of the conditions for success outlined by Bar-Tal and Rosen (2009). Awareness of the phenomenon of blood feuds has spread not only domestically, but also across borders. Many European countries have had to develop policies regarding the refugee status of those fleeing blood feuds (see UK Home Office, 2014). International pressure has induced the Albanian government to attempt to put a stop to the violence, to little avail. Organizations in Albania and around the world have emerged to encourage peaceable resolution to disputes as a direct alternative to the *gjakmarrja* mechanism and to raise awareness, including groups established by women who have lost husbands and children in the feuds (Mangalakova, 2004). Formal democratic institutions and rule of law are not strong enough and do not command enough respect to be effective in curbing the killings (Lawson & Saltmarshe, 2000; Ceylik & Shkreli, 2010; Arsovka & Verduyn, 2008). Thus, at present, the reach of formal spaces as a vector for promoting peace is limited.

Table 1 (below) presents the reasons for preference of customary mediation (informal) over rule of law (formal) among families in Albania. This suggests that customary mediators will be crucial to any on-the-ground approach taken to reduce violence, including peace education. Mediators are often trusted and have connections with families. They understand the complexities of family dynamics in ways that outsiders cannot. However, this is not to imply that formal spaces have no place in the overall conflict mitigation and reconciliation process. In fact, they are crucial to the long-term sustainability of peace and well-being and, as will be discussed later, formal actors (i.e. the Albanian government) will need to provide support.

Dimension of Conflict	Customary Mediation	Rule of Law
Personal	Family-focused, so does not necessarily address suffering on an individual basis.	Punishes individuals for murders.
Structural	Rebuilds and reinforces peaceful relations between families to maintain and restore the social status quo.	Transfers the responsibility of carrying out justice from society to the state.

Relational	Aimed at promoting peaceful relations between families.	Does not address relations between families or social groups.
Cultural	Transitions families from feuding to forgiveness.	Attempts to restructure dispute resolution to dissuade the use of violence. Does not account for the significance of honor. Retributive justice is the goal, rather than restorative.

Table 1: Comparison of Customary Mediation and Rule of Law across Dimensions of Conflict (Dimensions based on Lederach et al., 2007.)

Imagining Informal Peace Education in Albania

So what would informal peace education in the Albanian context look like? Who would be involved? How would it be taught? Raising intolerance for violence begins with transforming social norms. Initial exposure to these norms happens both in the home and at school. Addressing these issues at school, however, can be effective in promoting a culture of nonviolence and respect. One organization, for example, uses human rights education in schools to end bullying (Kennedy, 2013), but such an approach would have to be adapted to informal educational settings for the Albanian context.

The overall approach is a blend between the indirect and direct models described by Bar-Tal and Rosen (2009). It involves direct instruction of youth and adults, as well as indirect molding of the environment to favor peacebuilding. Most of the spaces in which activities will take place ("spaces of action", here) are informal, but there are certainly spaces that blend both formal and informal, as the government of Albania is a crucial stakeholder.

This section will outline major components for implementing peace education in informal spaces: crucial actors and their respective roles; peace values to be taught and their transmission; and what successful outcomes might look like.

Actors and their respective roles

1) *Actor:* Government of Albania
   Spaces of action: Interactions with NGOs; formal spaces; internet; mass media
   Role: The Albanian government, particularly the Ministry of Education and Sport, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Youth and Social Welfare, should serve as the coordinator of a unified strategy for peace education. Peace education needs to be in alignment is aligned with broader, more formalized peacebuilding and peace education efforts. To construct the peace education strategy, government officials need to consult with other stakeholders (e.g. local NGOs, teachers, customary mediators) to determine values that should be transmitted through the peace education curriculum. In addition, peace values need to be communicated through mass media and other public spaces to reach audiences all over the country and promote broader social acceptance of these values. The government should also draft and compile peace education materials that can be used in both formal and informal settings.

2) *Actor:* Youth (ages 5 – 19)
Spaces of action: Home; community spaces; internet; interactions with NGOs; interactions with mediators and teachers
Role: Youth are the main target audience for peace education, as they are the next generation and carriers of the values they learn; stopping the cycle of violence needs to focus especially on them. Those youth confined to their homes will require the most attention because they are the most directly affected by the violence and are often taught that violence is the only way to survive (Kessler, n.d.).

3) *Actor:* Women
Spaces of action: Home; community spaces; internet; interactions with NGOs; interactions with mediators and teachers
Role: The role of women in *gjakmarrja* suggests that they are a key to ending the cycle of violence. Women, however, who have grown up immersed in this system have likely internalized many of the values that come with it, including conceptions of their own place in their society. Even so, there are windows of opportunity. Reaching out to women who have been affected by *gjakmarrja* and bringing them together for mutual support will not only benefit their mental well-being, but it will provide a network for the cause of stopping the cycle of violence. Women are also in a position of influencing conduct in the home and encouraging other households to maintain the same values. For this reason, they should be involved with their children and other young relatives during peace education sessions; this will ensure they gain a thorough understanding of peace education.

4) *Actor:* Men
Spaces of action: Home; community spaces; internet; interactions with NGOs; interactions with mediators and teachers
Role: Men also need to participate in peace education sessions, since they are the primary purveyors of *gjakmarrja* violence. Their place in society puts them in a good position to encourage upholding of peace values in the community, particularly with local leaders. If men start refusing to participate in the violence on a larger scale, social pressures to stop participating and use other conflict resolution methods will increase for those who wish to perpetuate the cycle. Men should also receive special instruction on the treatment of women, as historically Albanian women, particularly those in the north, have been subjugated and poorly treated (Gëllçi, 2014; Whitaker, 1981).

5) *Actor:* NGOs
Spaces of action: Home; community spaces; internet; mass media; interactions with Government of Albania
Role: NGOs, particularly local NGOs, will play one of the most important roles because of their ability to work at both the grassroots level and on a broader social and political level. NGOs need to collaborate with the government of Albania to ensure that the peace education strategy is comprehensive and feasibly implementable. Other activities would include training of teachers and mediators in peace education and providing feedback on peace education successes, difficulties, and developments through monitoring and evaluation.

6) *Actor:* Customary mediators / Teachers

Spaces of action: Home; community spaces; interactions with Government of Albania; interactions with NGOs
Role: Customary mediators and teachers (either voluntary or professional) will be the main instructors for informal peace education, provided they receive proper training. Teachers could also include clergy, since clergy traditionally fall outside of the rules of *gjakmarrja* (Kadare, 1990). Instruction will largely take place within the home and in community spaces. Instruction will need to be adapted to the specific circumstances of an area with respect to mode of teaching: whether in person, through video, or online, depending on which is most appropriate in a particular area. Professional teachers and mediators should provide the Albanian government with insight in drafting peace education strategy and curriculum.

7) *Actor:* Councils of elders / Local leaders
Spaces of action: Community spaces; interactions with NGOs; interactions with the government of Albania; interactions with men
Role: The councils of elders and other local leaders are largely observant stakeholders with respect to informal peace education. However, in order to be successful, peace education needs buy-in from these leaders. With attainment of their support, they can be a more active actor in discouraging blood feuds.

Peace Values and Their Transmission

Peace values, in the context of mitigating *gjakmarrja* violence, should orient those involve toward reconciliation and mediation. Customary mediation, however, does not always result in the end of a feud. Some mediators are not very knowledgeable on the *Kanun* (Lawson & Saltmarshe, 2000); as a result, they lose respect among those who do have intimate knowledge. Additionally, social pressures on individuals for defending *nderi* are often enormous, as those who fail to do so are socially ostracized (Gëllçi, 2014; Lawson & Saltmarshe, 2000). Therefore, it needs to be ensured that teachers – both voluntary and professional – and customary mediators need thorough understanding of the *Kanun* as a way to comprehend the mindset of those whose families have been entrenched in these feuds for years.

The question is how to achieve the values that Albanians aspire to uphold without using violence. Instruction in human rights can go a long way towards transforming attitudes towards violence (Kennedy, 2013), forcing people to reconsider it as the only way to defend honor. Exploring understandings of honor can yield other ways to effectively communicate and encourage peaceable approaches to conflict resolution. How can Albanian society reach consensus on what honor is and why it is so important? The fact that the *Kanun* provides for peaceful mediation to resolve conflicts indicates that there is room for peaceful conflict resolution under custom; it is a matter of encouraging people to use peaceful means versus violence.

One value that customary mediators sometimes teach is empathy. To encourage pursuit of mediation and lasting reconciliation efforts, mediators illustrate for families how the other family party feels; they are often asked to think about the impact on the other family's children as well as their own (Jahn, 2000). This is one of the most powerful ways to humanize the "other" and open the way to peaceful discourse. This is a vital part to any peace education approach and should be supported in implementing informal peace education programs.

Related to both honor and empathy is the question of how to understand slights – those actions taken by one party to infringe on the honor of another. As mentioned before, the *Kanun* outlines what those slights are, but with the post-communist transformation of *gjakmarrja* well entrenched, slights previously not covered under customary law are now subject to blood taking.

Peace education will have to address how to deal with slights when they happen and redefine what actions detract from honor. Mediation, typically, can help for many of these, but learning how to handle insults by attempting to peacefully resolve the issue independently, for example – and insults have led to *gjakmarrja* deaths in the past (Freeman, 2010) can help redefine a slight and thus reduce the number of perceived slights.

Another value that will need to be emphasized is the rights of women. Women themselves need to learn of their own rights guaranteed by the Albanian government and how they can stand up for their own rights. Complementarily, men need to learn the rights of women and understand the ways in which the *gjakmarrja* mechanism has denied them many of the rights they are due under national law.

The question is left on *how* to teach peace values in the Albanian context. This is the crux of the topic at hand. Successful teaching – and learning – of peace values will only occur to the extent that families are willing to participate and open up to the possibility of eliminating violence from the list of socially acceptable methods of conflict resolution. Getting buy-in from not only families, but also from local leaders, will be vital. There are already stories of families involved who want nothing to do with the violence (see: Freeman, 2010; Jahn, 2000; Corella, 2013). This is where peace education efforts need to take place in order to leverage change. Families involved in the blood feud, confined to their homes and communities, are the starting point. The adjustment of peace education to informal settings, in this case, provides the flexibility to reach families that are literally behind closed doors for protection and survival. Empowerment within the home, even if they are not able to leave yet, allows them to retain dignity under extremely difficult circumstances. And by encouraging families in blood to opt for mediation when a perceived slight does occur, fewer deaths will (hopefully) take place.

Providing networks to facilitate communication will be key. Youth and women affected by *gjakmarrja* should be provided with opportunities to connect with one another, preferably in person, where feasible. Other methods could include online forums, video communication software such as Skype or Google Hangout, e-mails, or even through written letters – to share their stories and provide emotional support. There is evidence to suggest that this is effective, as such supportive groups and organizations already exist around the world, particularly for women (Mangalakova, 2004).

Ensuring that the peace values passed on are consistent with the overall peace education strategy will also be crucial. Drafting, publication, and distribution of materials to homes participating in informal peace education programs can help in this respect. These materials, including books, websites, movies, and pamphlets, should be written in collaboration between the national government, NGOs, teachers, and customary mediators. They should also cover the background on human rights (both in Albania and worldwide), current statistics on the impacts of *gjakmarrja*, and lists of resources for support for people affected by *gjakmarrja* (i.e. contact information for local organizations and institutions).

What Might Successful Outcomes Look Like?

It must be remembered that peace education, formal or informal, is part of a bigger peacebuilding strategy; it is not the "end-all, be-all". The long-term success of peace education is contingent on adequately addressing the grievances of the people embroiled in the conflict and the resulting consequences. Keeping in mind the limitations of peace education as a single piece of the puzzle, informal peace education efforts should involve objectives designed to address the following two factors at minimum, which have been derived from the conflict assessment in the first part of this essay:

1. *Social fractionalization*: Multiple estimates hold that hundreds of Albanian children do not attend school as a direct result of blood feuds – parents confine them to their homes to prevent the children from being targeted and killed. As a result, these children can only attain an informal education at best. What does this forced social fractionalization through isolation imply for future generations of Albanians? How can informal education – not just peace education – be improved so that it stems the cycle of violence? How can peace education be brought into informal settings to encourage pursuit of mediation?

2. *Contention in conflict*: Honor lies at the heart of the motivation to perpetuate blood feuds. Honor (*nderi*) must be recovered – otherwise he whose honor is tainted will be ostracized. Getting to the root of what "honor" really is in the Albanian context is crucial to transforming what constitutes defending honor and, more importantly, how it is defended. Peace education can be a vector for self-reflection, understanding what it means to have honor as an Albanian. In order for the violence to end, feuds must lose legitimacy as a conflict resolution tool – but the Albanians must revoke this legitimacy themselves.

Overall, successful outcomes would include evidence of the following:

- increasing numbers of families in blood opting for mediation;
- a decrease in the number of children kept home from school due to blood feuds;
- a reduction in the number of reported occurrence of domestic violence;
- a decrease in the number of murders attributable to blood feuds; and
- in the long term, maintaining high levels of preference for mediation over violence in dispute resolution.

Additionally, any informal peace education program should be accompanied by some method of monitoring and evaluating to try to get feedback on progress as well as unintended consequences.

Conclusion

Education is an ideal tool for bringing change, even as circumstances require informal educational types. Peace education, in particular, opens a way for reflection on and reconsidering identity. Reframing how identities are expressed and values upheld can undermine the motivations for engaging in violent conflict in the first place. Additionally, societies are never completely homogeneous in their perceptions and understandings of values; there will be elements that deviate from the "standard". These divisions can serve as spaces for change by introducing new points of view – that is, *learning* from one another.

In this essay, I have used the case of *gjakmarrja* in Albania to demonstrate that conflict opens spaces for leveraging change. The benefit of this example is its long history available for analysis. Yet it is a phenomenon with which few outside of the Balkans are familiar, and the academic literature on it is not broad. *Gjakmarrja* is generally not thought of as violent conflict in the typical sense, but it is certainly an example of conflict resolution through violence. Wars take place for much the same reason, but they usually happen on a much wider scale.

This approach of looking for informal spaces to bring in peace education will be a much bigger challenge in situations where the violence is (or was) more widespread and intense; in such situations, the appropriate windows of opportunity will be found in lulls in fighting or tension. The

hope is that in analyzing the conflict situation and understanding where social bonds are severed (or formed), opportunities for change become clearer.

Appendix A: Glossary

besa	mediation, truce, reconciliation; a temporary truce that allows a target of revenge to continue daily life without the threat of being killed
fis	tribe
gjakmarrja	blood feud, literally "blood-taking"
"in blood"	refers to clans that are involved in *gjakmarrja* with one or more other clans
Kanun	refers to the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini*, in which conduct for *gjakmarrja* is codified
mikpritja	hospitality
nderi	honor
NGO	non-governmental organization

Appendix B: Overview of Informal Peace Education Actors and Roles

Actor	Space(s) of action (Physical/Relational)	Role
Government of Albania	Interactions with NGOs; formal spaces; internet; mass media	Coordinator of plan for peace education. Consults with stakeholders to determine values that should be transmitted within the peace education curriculum. Ensures peace plan is aligned with broader, more formalized peacebuilding and peace education efforts.
Youth	Home; community spaces; internet; interactions with NGOs; interactions with mediators and teachers	Target population. Connects with other youth (both those affected and not) and members of the community to share stories.
Women	Home; community spaces; internet; interactions with NGOs; interactions with mediators and teachers	Participate in peace education sessions. Act to promote enforcement of peace values within the home and across the community.
Men	Home; community spaces; internet; interactions with NGOs; interactions with mediators and teachers	Participate in peace education sessions. Encourage upholding of peace values in the community, particularly with local leaders.
NGOs	Home; community spaces; internet; mass media; interactions with Government of Albania	Work with Government of Albania to ensure peace education strategy is comprehensive and feasibly implementable. Provide training of teachers and mediators in peace education. Provide feedback on peace education successes, difficulties, and developments.
Customary mediators / Teachers	Home; community spaces; interactions with Government of Albania; interactions with NGOs	Provide Government of Albania with insight in drafting peace education strategy and curriculum. Instruct members of the community within the home and in community spaces in peace values. Adapt instruction to specific circumstances of each area. May consider conducting courses through video or online.
Councils of elders / Local leaders	Community spaces; interactions with NGOs; interactions with Government of Albania; interactions with men	Stakeholder. Buy-in needed for success. With buy-in, discourage blood feuds.

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