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The Movement of a Movement: VETËVENDOSJE! and the Transition from Grassroots to Government

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The Movement of a Movement: VETËVENDOSJE! and the Transition from Grassroots to Government

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To begin this paper in the best of ways (with a cliché, of course), they say it takes a village to raise a child. Well, if that child is this essay and the village is the SIT team, then yes, it truly took a village to write this examination of VETËVENDOSJE!. While there are many people I would like to thank for helping me produce this work, there are a few people I would like to specially mention. The first is my grandfather, Bill Bowman (to whom I would like to dedicate this paper), whose stories of Istog and the MercyCorps are what brought me to Kosovo in the first place; Colleen Bruce, my barely taller twin sister with the beautiful hair, who had to listen to me drone on about all of my ideas for this paper; Afrim Hoti, of course, my wonderful advisor who lent not only his guidance and personal contacts, but a pretty nice office with all the coffee I could possibly drink; Orli Fridman and Mirjana Kosić, both wonderful professors and academics whose supervision allowed me to have this whole magnificent experience (and who, of course, taught me pretty much everything I know about the region!); and last but definitely not least, Nenad Porobić, the sane older brother I never had, whose interesting conversation (and, needless to say, opinions) and much needed help mean more to me than I can possibly express in words. Thank you!

ABSTRACT

Fifteen years after the enactment of UN Resolution 1244, the resulting international administration in Kosovo has been experiencing a waning sense of legitimacy among the state’s population. Heading up the opposition to this ongoing administration is a group of self-proclaimed ‘young international activists,’ also known as Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE!, or the Self-Determination Movement! Since its creation in 2005, however, this group has transformed from a small, tightly-knit group of outspoken activists to a new type of political force with an elected body of officials in Parliament. This paper attempts to determine how such a transition from political movement to political party affects such a group—particularly its membership—through an analysis of members’, former members’ and community members’ personal definitions of ‘movement’ and ‘party.’ A total of eight citizens of Pristina were interviewed about their thoughts on these concepts, in particular relating to their views on how the group’s message, membership and organizational structure has been affected since its entrance into Parliament. This examination then outlines the practical implications of VETËVENDOSJE!’s Parliamentary involvement, in particular focusing on changes in membership and the group’s resulting institutionalization. Finally, it concludes with the message of changes in membership as the number one force of institutionalization for VETËVENDOSJE!, affecting not only its structure and platform, but its chances for success in the future.
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In the summer of 1999, NATO launched an air campaign that effectively ended the Slobodan Milosevic regime in Kosovo and its oppressive actions against the Albanian people who resided there. With the end of this era, however, a new one began—this time characterized by an international administration who held in its hand virtually all of the executive, judicial and legislative powers of the small protectorate (Knoll, 2007). This establishment of an international administration was not unique to Kosovo; Timor-Leste’s own status as an international protectorate was being developed around the same time, and there is a relatively long history of international governance in weak or disputed territories in the aftermath of World War Two (Tansey, 2009). Notwithstanding these facts, however, this new type of all-powerful, regime-building interim administration under which the two new protectorates found themselves was a relatively new development in international politics. Unsure of what to expect, Kosovar citizens (as well as the rest of the world) watched as what began as a liberative international intervention morphed into an internationally controlled government whose “decisions couldn’t be challenged by the local population, whose actions were not always transparent, and who couldn’t be removed from power by the community in whose interests he or she exercised ostensible authority” (Lemay-Herbert, 2009, p.66).

Despite the international community’s mandate through UN Resolution 1244 to create a temporary administration (embodied by the United Nations Interim Mission in Kosovo, or UNMIK) to rehabilitate social, political and economic structure, the perceived legitimacy of this interim government began to wane among many in Kosovo with the passage of more and more time.¹ While the interim international administration continued to exercise almost limitless

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¹ UN Resolution, 1244, S/RES/1244, 10 June, 1999, Annex 19, “Decides that the international civil and security presence are established for an initial period of 12 months…” While the international presence did
power in the running of the administrative region, the citizens of Kosovo waited in earnest for the international community’s supposed progressive withdrawal from the newly constructed state institutions (see Lemay-Herbert, 2011). When it became clear that this withdrawal and the allowance of self-government in Kosovo was far from realization, opposition against the international community’s administration—whose intervention had once been hailed as heroic—began to grow. Nicolas Lemay-Herbert succinctly describes the reason for this opposition in his article „The “Empty-Shell” Approach: The Setup Process of International Administrations in Timor-Leste and Kosovo, Its Consequences and Lessons:”

“...Deprived of a peaceful and democratic outlet within the system, opposition grew outside the (international) system in order to express its complaints. The international administration’s neglect of local social process and sources of legitimacy lead certain actors to redeploy strategies to confront the UN international administration and tap into the popular wave of discontent among the local population” (Lemay-Herbert, 2011, p 195).

Heading this growing opposition movement was a group of self-proclaimed “young international activists,” a community of protestors who vehemently opposed what they perceived was the “refugee status” of Kosovar Albanians resulting from conflicting interests between the international interim administration and the citizens over which it governed (VETËVENDOSJE!, 2010). On June 12th, 2005, six years after the interim government was created, this group of activists took it upon themselves to convey this frustration at the international administration’s ongoing hindrance of Kosovo’s ability to self-govern by scrawling “NO NEGOTIATIONS –
SELF DETERMINATION!” on the walls of the UNMIK headquarters (VETËVENDOSJE!, 2010, p 3). This simple political act, spurred on by similar anti-internationalist, anti-decentralization actions from protest groups in Kosovo, brought about the rise of a new community of people who “refuse to submit, and intend to achieve and realize self-determination for the people of Kosova” (VETËVENDOSJE!, 2010, p. 3). This new community is known as Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE!, or the Self-Determination Movement! of Kosovo.

Since that fateful day in June of 2005, however, Kosovo has evolved, and the VETËVENDOSJE! opposition movement has evolved with it. In some regards—perhaps those most important—the movement has stayed firm to its fundamental rhetoric. Despite the declaration of independence in 2008, the group has remained true to its outcry against the detrimental nature of the international administration; it claims the declaration was one step forward in terms of recognition, but three steps backwards in “encouraging the ignorance and oblivion of people for the reality of what is happening on the ground” (VETËVENDOSJE!, 2010, p.1). In other respects, however, its tactics regarding its own political action and its organizational structure have somewhat transformed; as of December of 2010, VETËVENDOSJE! has become a fully-fledged political party, holding twelve seats in the Parliament of Kosovo and becoming a politically recognized voice in both domestic and international affairs (Assembly Republic of Kosovo, 2010). In addition, since joining Parliament, VETËVENDOSJE! has allowed several political parties to merge into its ranks, including the

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2 It should be noted that according to this article, accessed from its website, Vetevendosje views itself as a successor organization from an activist group called Kosova Action Network (KAN), which was made up of members of the international community who disagreed with the creation of an international administration in Kosovo. In this way, Vetevendosje is able to gain credence in its efforts to promote self-determination—even in describing the Kosovar people as “refugees”—even after independence by allowing for origins within the international community itself as well as within an organization that was created several years before the international administration was created.
New Spirit Party, the Socialist Party of Kosovo and the People’s Movement of Kosovo (VETËVENDOSJE!, 2010).

There is no doubt that the evolution of the group has had several positive impacts that help to carry on its grassroots origins—including a massive upswing in membership and renewed enthusiasm for the movement during election time, as well the ability to continue on with its grassroots campaigning mechanisms such as boycotts and protests on a much grander scale. However, its transition may have also come with a price; its original message is being refined and deepened, shaped into a party platform with which not everyone agrees, and the upswing in membership has led to the induction of members who may or may not fully understand the group’s full political agenda. In addition, time, energy and money that could be used to further its famous on-the-ground protest and civil activism mechanisms must now go into political research and parliamentary debate. VETËVENDOSJE! is now attempting to wear two political hats—that of a party and that of a movement. Several important research questions thus arise: how, if at all, does the transition from grassroots to government entrench a movement like VETËVENDOSJE! into a particular institutionalized framework, and in what ways does this affect both its membership and local perceptions of the group? In other words: can an organization such as VETËVENDOSJE! be considered both a movement and a party, and if so, by whom?

It is with these questions in mind that this paper will address VETËVENDOSJE!’s very transition into the parliamentary sphere with the intention of reaching two specific goals: to determine whether or not there is inherent institutionalization in the political party system in Kosovo and to define Kosovar citizens’ willingness to participate in governmental politics versus political movements. To achieve these goals, this paper will compare and contrast the
nature of political movements and parties so as to analyze the changes that have occurred in VETËVENOSJE!’s message, membership and organizational structure since its entry into the Kosovo National Assembly. In particular, two different analyses will be performed: VETËVENOSJE! as a movement and VETËVENOSJE! as a party.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there are several lengthy and quite well researched examinations of VETËVENOSJE! as a grassroots opposition movement, the relatively recent developments of Kosovo’s independence and VETËVENOSJE!’s transition into a political party makes it difficult to find comprehensive analyses or documentation of internal or external changes in VETËVENOSJE!’s structure. Unfortunately, this lack of information is compounded by my mono-linguistic capabilities, which also limit the amount of current analyses of the movement I am able to find; VETËVENOSJE! is a movement with a very specific goal in a very specific area of the world. As a result, many of the critiques or examinations into the group come from local sources with limited publications in English. Nevertheless, there is a seemingly limitless amount of sources that allow me to ground my research into the movement into historical, cultural and political context.

Many secondary sources that address the historical-political background of post-intervention Kosovo make very clear the controversy surrounding the international community’s use of international law both before and after an administration was created. In an attempt to explain early opposition to the administration, Matthew Weller places the international community’s actions regarding intervention in Kosovo into said international law—not only from a conventional standpoint, but into a concept of an ideal international legal system that changes with the times. While Weller’s book does not confront individual or group political
activism regarding self-determination, it does do two necessary things for the furthering of research on the question of groups promoting self-determination and opposition to international administration; it provides a historical framework for the international community’s reaction to the “Kosovo crisis,” and it describes the contradictory laws with which this community has to work when developing a government from scratch.

Weller’s work is backed up by the research of three authors, who delve further into the controversy surrounding international administrations: Bernhard Knoll, Nicolas Lemay-Herbert and Matthias Ruffert. Lemay-Herbert and Knoll in particular deal with the idea of legitimacy in international administration—Knoll claims that “an international territorial authority needs to concern itself with the legitimacy of its rule, as seen through the eyes of the people under its tutelage” (Knoll, 2010, p.3). Thus the frustration of individuals and groups such as VETËVENDOSJE! toward the international community is described by—among other things—a lack of ability to prove political legitimacy from the international community. Additional information provided by from the International Crisis Group synthesizes this frustration by explaining the temporary manner of the international community’s (UNMIK AND EULEX) mandate and emphasizing the ways in which their legitimacy has waned over time.

While historical and political context is indeed vital in determining the reasons behind VETËVENDOSJE!’s formation, the theory of identity formation becomes a particularly applicable issue when it comes to understanding why and in what manner political actions are realized in VETËVENDOSJE! and other political opposition groups. This idea of civil resistance and identity formation expounds the necessity of remembering that resistance groups are made up of individuals, each of whom has their own opinions and abilities that they are able to use in promoting a movement’s message. Thus, to whom a movement targets itself becomes its own
type of political action. This is described in the processes behind social movement and political opportunity theory. Several authors, such as Joshua Gamson, Iliriana Banjska and Srilatha Batliwala deal with these theories and with the mechanisms used by civil resistance movements in Kosovo to draw in members, as well as how these civil resistance movements are shaped by and shape the very lives of those involved. Banjska, for example, claims that while most of the civil activists in Kosovo join their respective parties or groups out of sympathy for its beliefs, “many of the activists (in Kosovo) were also aware of the difficulty to separate their personal beliefs and perceptions with that of the movement…” (Banjska, 2012, p 16). Gamson expounds this claim with his own analysis of group identity in resistance movements (although this time referring to ‘queer’ activism) by saying, “the impulse to build a collective identity with distinct group boundaries has been met by opposing logic…: to take apart the identity categories and blur group boundaries” (Gamson, 2007, p.770). Therefore, it is the seemingly hypocritical duty of a group to both form an identity and to conform to that of its constituents, to adhere to the will of the group while creating a new unified goal.

The writings of Paul F. Whitely, Alastair Clark, David Meyer and Kelsy Kretchmer expound this hypocritical nature of a group’s duty to both conform and create by describing the exclusion that occurs when group members are unwilling to evolve with a group in transition. Whitely, in particular, argues that as an organization draws closer to a political system, its central message may change in order to fit into the parameters set up by the government in which it is trying to participate. This, in turn, changes the collective identity of the group, effectively excluding those who disagree with the evolving message and tightening the circle of people who are willing to actively participate in the group’s activities. Kretchmer backs up this argument with her own analysis of the difficulty organizations face in defying institutionalization. Thus,
political status brings with it at least some sense of institutionalization, leading to apathy towards activism from those excluded from the new message.

In the case of VETËVENDOSJE!’s own political history and identity formation, several scholars have indeed performed in depth research on the movement’s collective reality regarding the international presence in Kosovo as its strategies in promoting political action. Of particular interest in this regard is the argument of Alma Vardari-Kesler, who claims: “the activists of the movement construe and legitimize their collective action through the … adoption of non-institutionalized forms of political action” (Vadari-Kesler, 2012, p. 3). Written two years after the movement’s transition into a political party, this is directly refuted by the work of Ghazal Delafrouz, who looks specifically at how political opportunity structures influence the daily activities of VETËVENDOSJE!. She claims “political opportunities, organizational traditions and newly shaped contentious expressions affect the appearance, course and form that a social movement will take” (Delafrouz, 2012, p.5). In other words, political opportunities such as the chance to become involved in parliamentary debate and politics will affect the course of action and activities, and perhaps the message of, a particular political movement. In this way, VETËVENDOSJE! may indeed have become institutionalized in their forms of political action, depending on the course of action it has decided to take since becoming an active part of the parliamentary body.

Drawing together these contradictory opinions are the writings of Gezim Visoka, who supports Vardari-Kesler in refuting the institutionalization of the movement’s message, and makes the claim that VETËVENDOSJE has not structurally changed since the group’s evolution. However, he also makes the assertion that there are dire consequences that come with transition, including institutionalization of ethnic boundaries supported by individual political entities such
as a politicized VETËVENDOSJE!. The movement’s attempts to spur active citizenry and public participation among its constituents have and will lead to greater partition of Kosovar politics through the greater institutionalization of ethnically inclined political parties (Visoka, 2011).

Finally, with such contradictory opinions surrounding my topic of research, perhaps the most pertinent—if not the most unbiased—sources of information regarding the movement’s history, identity formation and political mobilization have come from its own published documents. However, while political action may well be documented, several important pieces of their transitional puzzle have been left out, including recent mergers with political parties as well as much mention of its actions within the political sphere. This paper aims, therefore, to give a more personalized perspective into the reasons for such a lack of information regarding the organization’s transition into Parliament, as well as the controversial and contradictory opinions regarding VETËVENDOSJE! since 2010.

**METHODOLOGY**

The methodology used to conduct my research has consisted of eight semi-structured interviews with individuals all located in Pristina, Kosovo. The participants came from a wide variety of backgrounds, all of whom have a connection with VETËVENDOSJE!—either by being a part of the group, formerly part of the group or an outsider with knowledge of the group’s message. Four of the participants came from the movement itself—one Member of Parliament, two prominent members with leadership positions within the organization, and one lay member, or young activist. Another three participants were former members of the organization, two of whom were ‘high profile’ former activists, whose departure from the group was highly publicized. And finally, one participant is a member of the greater Pristina community, a university student engaged with a political organization other than
VETËVENDOSJE!. All the interviewees were under the age of 40 and speak Albanian as their first language; however, the interviews were all conducted in English, in which each was fluent. Living in Pristina for a month also allowed ample time for observation of political activism in the city, and numerous ‘informal’ conversations were had about this specific topic. These conversations are not documented in this essay, but did have an effect on the interpretation and analysis of VETËVENDOSJE! presented in this examination.

A Note on Terminology

Before the analysis begins, it must be noted that Kosovo is a multi-lingual, politically and ethnically divided country, and the way in which people refer to its name, as well as the names of its cities and regional divisions, is often personally motivated; names become a reflection of an individual’s worldview, his or her upbringing, political leanings and personal identities. All the interviews conducted for this examination were with individuals who view Kosovo as an independent republic, and, being Albanian speakers, referred to the country through that linguistic lens. These linguistic terms are reflected in the direct quotations used in this essay. However, for the purpose of this examination, and as an American student with English as my main language, I will refer to the country and city names the way in which I have been taught in my home country, which is to say, as “Kosovo” and “Pristina” as opposed to “Kosova” and “Prishtina” or “Priština.” While I admit that my own biases color my interpretation of this examination (see section below), these spelling and linguistic distinctions are to remove this examination from a political discussion of Kosovo’s status other than that deemed necessary to further the analysis of this paper.

A Note on Positionality
I come to this research project as a politically active American student involved in several politically oriented opposition organizations based in the United States. As a student of US foreign policy and international politics, I have always been drawn to the negative concept of neo-colonialism and its seemingly contradictory political opponent, the responsibility to protect during times of mass atrocities. As a result of my academic understanding of the extremely confusing controversies surrounding international intervention and administration, I find myself sympathetic to the message of VETËVENDOSJE!—a group trying to make sense of its own country’s declaration of independence, recognition and continued lack of self-governance. My choice to be involved in several political opposition movements in the United States is a direct link to my belief that all governmental action should be looked at with a critical eye—and it is not only the responsibility of a government, but of the people who give that government legitimacy, to engage in political action against those governmental actions with which they disagree. In this sense, my sympathy with the political action and movement into the political sphere of VETËVENDOSJE! is expounded as I find myself valuing their continued motivation in bringing about their own state.

However, my political beliefs regarding political action against oppressive administrative actions (in Kosovo, at least) are in direct controversy with the physical location of my citizenship. My identity as a tax paying citizen of the United States places me in an interesting position regarding Kosovo’s self-governance. The interests of the United States regarding Kosovo and its continued presence there invariably become my own, regardless of how well informed I am of the actions we are taking there, and an unanswerable (at least for now) question comes to mind when I look at the United States’ reasoning behind continued action in Kosovo: How far are countries expected to take the ‘responsibility to protect,’ and are we shirking our
duty if even part of the population requires our assistance? In my mind, I am fully aware that as an American conducting research in Kosovo that I am no mere outsider looking in, but an active (if not somewhat ignorant) player who is very invested in the actions of the United States—after all, it does affect me personally, if only because my taxes are funding a government who has a rather large hand in Kosovar politics.

At the same time, however, I am also fully aware that I have never lived in Kosovo, nor have I been in contact long term with a Kosovar citizen. As a result, I have been the recipient of almost entirely (with the exception of that historical and political knowledge received on my current study abroad program) second-hand information about the region, steeped with its own biases. In particular, secondary familial interaction with Kosovo has brought with it an almost entirely black and white image of the political situation in the new state. This brings into focus the ignorance I have regarding the myriad opinions and political leanings of individual citizens in the new state, as well as the hope I have in this examination’s ability to expunge that ignorance.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL: VETEVENDOSJE AS A MOVEMENT

“The term ‘movement’ has become so au courant and loosely used in current discourse as to become almost devoid of meaning.”

-S. Batliwala (2002, p. 393)

In order to understand just how perceptions of VETËVENDOSJE! have changed throughout its transition from political movement to legal political entity, it is necessary to enter into a somewhat philosophically and theoretically oriented discussion in order to define and analyze what exactly it is these organizational categories are. However, it must also be noted that terms such as ‘movement’ and ‘party’ do not have static definitions—rather, their meanings and purposes are vulnerable to evolution with not only the passage of time, but also with personal
interpretation by members of said movement or political entity. Therefore, this examination will
now shift from the brief historical background of the group’s formation to an analytical
discussion of VETËVENOSJE! as a political movement and the many meanings that come
with such a label. Using a framework provided by social movement and political opportunity
theories, the next sections of this examination will attempt to explain the two distinct definitions
of ‘movement’ used by those within and without VETËVENOSJE! itself and their potential
effects on its membership and public perceptions of the group.

“MOVEMENT” WITHIN SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND POLITICAL
OPPORTUNITY THEORY

Social movement theory, or the study of why social mobilization occurs and groups like
VETËVENOSJE! form, like any theory, is controversial and up for personal interpretation by
those who study it. However, the similar interpretations of classic social movement theory by
authors such as David S. Meyer, Debra C. Minkoff and Srilatha Batliwala provide this
examination with a model for a classic and academically accepted definition of a ‘movement.’
Quoting scholar Ann Florini, author Srilatha Batliwala describes the panorama of citizen
formations in modern times—or, in other words, movements—as a “loose agglomeration of
unelected activists,” each of whom “enjoy varying levels of power and privilege in shaping the
debate, speaking for the affected, and gaining entry into the policy-making arena” (Batliwala,

Each aspect of this definition has very important implications for what can and cannot be
considered a movement within the realm of social movement theory. First, a movement is a
‘loose agglomeration;’ it is a group of people with a similar goal or wish, but the motives behind
this goal and the means with which to achieve it may differ for each member. Individuality,
therefore, is one of the defining characteristics of such a group. Members of a movement may or
may not know each other—it is an idea that binds them together, not necessarily specific action
and perhaps not even specific details of a particular goal. The fact that the activists are
‘unelected’ expounds this individuality. The goal, while well known to those in the movement, is
not subjected to the rules of election or government; decisions on how to achieve their goal is left
up to each individual member without interference or regulation from others. Finally, being
individuals, each person who ascribes to the goal in question has a varying amount of power in
making their motives and means of achievement the primary way in which to realize it.

When those with lesser power to achieve their goals begin to rely on those with more
power, a more organized group rather than agglomeration of people may be formed, many times
with a more nuanced goal in mind and with a particular way to achieve it; this seems to be the
case with VETËVENDOSJE!, a group which began as a collection of people with a similar goal
for self-determination and then over time seems to have morphed into a more formalized
political entity with tiers of political representation throughout the political system. According to
the definition described above, groups like VETËVENDOSJE! which go through such a process
can no longer be considered ‘movements,’ but must be seen as something else entirely. What
exactly it is that it should be seen as is up to the (formerly considered as a) movement’s
members, its former members and members of the community.

However, in light of the above quote from Batliwala about the au courant meaning of
‘movement’ in current discourse, it must be noted that ‘movement’ no longer refers only to an
idea shared by individual, concerned members of the community, but over time has come to refer
to the types of political action taken on by groups of such individuals. This is outlined in what is
known as ‘political opportunity theory,’ which attempts to explain the interaction of activist
efforts within movements and more mainstream institutional politics (Meyer, 2004, p. 1458). Protests, boycotts, demonstrations—such grassroots mechanisms of opposition have come to characterize current notions of the ‘movement.’ Yet even these seemingly straightforward, non-institutionalized means of protest do not secure a place for VETËVENDOSJE! within the theoretical structures of a movement—political opportunity theory claims that “protest outside mainstream political institutions [political parties] is closely related to more conventional political activity within,” or in other words, oppositional action of groups such as VETËVENDOSJE! often mirror actions taken by more conventional political parties (Meyer, 2004, 1458). This idea, surprisingly, is backed up by one of the VETËVENDOSJE! members themselves, who states:

“There are parties and movements that could be both using the same means. A party and a movement can both use demonstrations institutions, political actions, spoken word, boycotts and so on… Those distinctions are not true distinctions between movement and a party.” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 15/11/2013).

A movement, therefore, cannot often be told from other political groups—in this case, political parties. In addition, according to social movement theory and political opportunity theory, VETËVENDOSJE! in its current state—that being part of an elected body as well as a utilizer of popular protest and grassroots activities—cannot be determined to be movement or party based merely on academic discourse, but rather must be determined to be one or the other based on their own perceptions and the perceptions of others outside of the group. The fact remains, however that Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE!, the Self-Determination Movement, does indeed consider itself as existing under that categorical structure—or at least attempts to evoke a specific thought process through the use of the term ‘movement’ in its title. Members of the
group themselves, therefore, must have their own views as to what defines a ‘movement’—the
details of which lie below.

“MOVEMENT” WITHIN VETËVENDOSJE!

In terms of the group’s own interpretation of movement-hood, all of the
VETËVENDOSJE! members interviewed for this examination agreed—or at least recognized
that general consensus within the group agrees—that VÊTEVENDOSJE! does indeed consider
itself a movement. What exactly that means, even within this small sphere of people, however, is
a bit confusing. Interestingly, none of the three members of the group described
VETËVENDOSJE!’s status as a movement in the afore determined ‘classical’ sense—in terms
of the types of political action and activism with which individual group members engage or the
issue that binds these members together—but rather in terms of how its political ideals and
platform differs from that of other political entities, or parties, in Parliament. This definition
makes one thing certain: a political movement is not a political party. One member, for instance,
describes VETËVENDOSJE!’s movement status as follows:

“Parties deal with issues of some part of the population: you have conservative
parties, green parties. Movements usually come from the people and gather(s)
people. …Vetevendosje is the only movement. There are some other parties here
who are called movements, but even our structure is different from a party. Parties
usually make decisions at the hierarchy, but we have a direct democracy in our
movement…” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 15/11/2013)

This comparison of movement to party has the inadvertent result of defining a movement as an
entity that is not mutually exclusive from political parties. Instead, a movement is necessarily
created from the inadequacy of such political parties, which tend to focus on only one highly
publicized political issue and make important political decisions based on the opinions of the
party elite. This definition, though not directly stated, makes a certain amount sense in light of
VETËVENDOSJE!’s history; the group began in an effort to define, in a broader sense than mere independence, self-determination for the people of Kosovo by attempting to stop the current government’s negotiations with Serbia. VETËVENDOSJE!, therefore, was a gathering of non-institutionalized, politically oriented people against what they believed (and still believe) was and is a highly corrupted government body made up of a number of political parties.

However, now that VETËVENDOSJE! is represented within the Assembly of Kosovo and can therefore be considered as somewhat of an institutionalized political entity unto itself, this definition of political movement based on the inadequacy of political parties lacks a certain basis in current affairs. The fact that all of the interviewed members of VETËVENDOSJE! gave some degree of credence to this seemingly outdated definition is a testament to the group’s attempt to distance itself from association with the inadequacy and corruption of the existing political parties—at least those with which they disagree. This is backed up in the group’s June 2010 newsletter, in which it describes its decision to become involved in institutionalized politics: “We have decided to participate in elections after five months of internal and democratic debate. This does not mean we will become a political party. On the contrary, we remain a political movement, with the same objective and using the same methods” (VETËVENDOSJE!, 2010, np, emphasis added). The idea of becoming a political party is something to which the group does not aspire, yet is one of the reasons to become involved in politics—to offer an alternative to the corruption which makes a political party a party. A clear divide, then, is made between the group’s objective to participate in elections and its will to remain untouched from what is seen as the corrupt institutionalization of party politics.

The young activist of the group who joined after VETËVENDOSJE!’s transition into Parliament explains this divide most succinctly:
“There is this ambiguity because we are an institution, but we do not accept the institutions that are existing right now. This might be really confusing to people that come from outside…but [being described as a ‘movement’] makes a conceptual change in how people view it (VETËVENDOSJE!).” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 21/11/2013).

Just the mere phrasing of VETËVENDOSJE!’s title as a movement, therefore, helps to distinguish it as separate from governmental institutionalization, as well as from popular notions of the ‘political party,’ whatever these notions may be. While this doesn’t necessarily define VETËVENDOSJE! as a ‘movement’ per say, the use of the word movement emphasizes a nobler, perhaps more innocent impression of a political subject—ideals which would not be construed among potential members with the use of the word ‘party.’

Despite this need to use the notion of ‘movement’ to disassociate from the corruption of the current government and the parties that make it up, it is with this point that VETËVENDOSJE!’s role as a ‘movement’ is explained and defined by its members. This definition is not quite what one would expect: VETËVENDOSJE! is not a movement, contrary to the members’ spoken beliefs otherwise. However, this notion isn’t quite as circular as it sounds. One prominent member stated:

“Our organization is an organization for the movement of self-determination for the Albanian people—which we did not start. …“I don’t think there would be a self-determination movement [VETËVENDOSJE!] in Kosova, were it not for the [existing] movement for self-determination…those two are intertwined, creating a new synthesis of the idea and the actual work on the ground. And that synthesis is our organization.” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 12/11/2013).

In this way, VETËVENDOSJE! itself is not a movement, but becomes a safe-house for a movement. It is an organization; it is the means by which a centuries old national struggle, fought for since before Albanian independence and carried through with entities such as the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), can continue. The goal of such an organization, therefore, is to “provoke” the movement—to allow what has already begun to carry on, to spread a message of
self-determination and to work to make sure that those who believe in the message attain that goal. The people who ascribe to the message of this organization, therefore, do indeed fulfill the many of the requirements for the classic definition of a movement—they are individuals, each with their own role within the organization—and their own amount of power—and each with their own goal of achieving self-determination, whatever it is that may mean to them.

**VETEVENDOSJE’S Definition and Parliamentary Involvement**

When looked at through this particular lens, the organization of those who wish for self-determination into a tightly knit political body does not oppose the idea of a movement in the classical sense—and neither does involvement in the political sphere. Parliamentary involvement for such an organization becomes a means by which this goal of self-determination can be reached, adding yet another tool in the movement’s toolbox, aided by other mechanisms supported by the organization. As another member states, “We need institutions to give power to the movement…Parliament just gave us more tools” (Interview with the author, Prishtina, 15/11/2013). Self-determination, therefore, need not only be achieved by Parliament, but each member of the movement regardless of their position now has the opportunity to use this new mechanism to achieve their own goals. In this way, institutionalization of the movement within a bureaucratic party system (and therefore the transition from movement to political party) is impossible—it is the organization that will be affected, and not the movement itself. However, this statement brings with it a definite sense of controversy; to many outside VETËVENDOSJE!, the organization has become virtually synonymous with the movement for self-determination. With such a view comes a different definition of ‘movement’—one that may (and has) lead to a sense of disillusionment when held up to that of VETËVENDOSJE!’s.

**“MOVEMENT” OUTSIDE OF VETEVENDOSJE!**
In a similar way to current members of VETËVENDOSJE!, former members have also defined a ‘movement’ in relation to political parties. However, rather than comparing the two ideas in terms of their political platforms or ideals, these interviewees described the term as dissimilar from such institutionalized political entities as a result of the types of activism that a movement performs—as described in the afore mentioned political opportunity theory. One of the prominent former members who left several years after VETËVENDOSJE!’s entrance into Parliament put it this way:

“There is a difference between a political party and a political subject in our political system. You can be a political subject, which means—just entering the Parliament doesn’t mean that you are political. This is happening in Kosovo all the time. … Even when we got into Parliament, VETEVENDOSJE! was a movement. We were doing actions” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 20/11/2013).

Action, therefore, is what differentiates a movement from a party. A former Parliament member for VETËVENDOSJE! backs up this statement, and claims that protests, boycotts and, in this member’s words, “other such bad behavior” are what is making the group a movement rather than a political party, despite the group’s involvement in Parliament (Interview with the author, Pristina, 21/11/2013). A movement, therefore, according to these former members, is a political subject embodied by a group of like-minded people who engage in group-based oppositional activities, or ‘actions.’ These actions are not seen as the activities of specific individuals, but reflect upon the political subject as a whole; VETËVENDOSJE! is a political subject, not a group of political subjects. Members of the movement, as seen above, are referred to collectively—as “we.”

Contrary to the definition provided by social movement theory, this view of a ‘movement’ actually diminishes the individuality of movement members. That is to say, a movement cannot function only as an idea possessed by like-minded individuals, but needs the
collective support and unified action of many people for the idea to come to fruition. An example of this need was given by the previously quoted prominent former member, describing VETËVENDOSJE!’s current inadequacy in promoting group action: “You cannot stop Parliament proceedings [a previous goal of VETËVENDOSJE!] with only two or three hundred protestors. You cannot change the system this way. It is not enough. It is impossible” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 20/11/13). Large amounts of like-minded people, working in an organized and collective manner toward a single unified goal (in this case, self-determination for Kosovo) are needed to “change the system” which prevents Kosovo from becoming a sovereign state. In light of this particular definition of ‘movement’—a large, organized body of members working in collective actions such as protests and boycotts in order to promote its goal—VETËVENDOSJE! can indeed be seen as a movement in itself and not necessarily just a house organization for individuals with a common goal.

While this status as a movement assigns VETËVENDOSJE! a large, cohesive membership with a common objective, it also assumes that it has a collectively accepted means with which to achieve that goal—otherwise known as an agenda; large groups necessarily require direction in order to attain an aim. The existence of a unified agenda brings with it a number of complications regarding VETËVENDOSJE!’s own definition of movement-hood as described above. First of all, if VETËVENDOSJE! is a movement by former members’ standards, then claiming the group has a basis in historical understanding is somewhat inaccurate. For instance, a former member who left prior to parliamentary involvement believes that VETËVENDOSJE! is not the continuation of a historical self-determination movement carried out by the KLA but is running on an outdated definition of self-determination, using its own political platform. All the former members of the group interviewed, as well as all the
members of the group interviewed stated that self-determination for Kosovo meant union with Albania. However, in terms of VETËVENDOSJE!’s historical basis for this goal, this former member states that at the beginning, the KLA was indeed for unification with Albania. Yet when the United States and the international community worked with the KLA to disengage Kosovo from Serbia, the liberation army changed its stance from union with Albania to independence for Kosovo. “This is not history’s agenda—they [VETËVENDOSJE!] represent the KLA’s old message” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 19/11/2013). With this statement, then, VETËVENDOSJE! is its own distinct and current movement with its own political, non-historically affiliated (at least not in the way it imagines) agenda.

Viewing a movement in this way has an effect of making movements more exclusive than inclusive in the public eye; a formalized political agenda makes individualization in means of goal achievement virtually impossible. The various roles within VETËVENDOSJE! that were discussed in the previous section, for example, support this idea of a single political agenda and therefore, exclusive movement-hood for the group. For some of the former members, the roles that each person plays in VETËVENDOSJE! became a hierarchy of idea, a winning of one means of self-determination over another and not necessarily the individualistic action of collaborative members, as is described in social movement theory or VETËVENDOSJE!’s definition of ‘movement.’ For example, criticism of movement leaders or their views of the group’s political agenda, according to one former member, was “impossible, due to the people that surrounded them” (interview with the author, 19/11/2013), and the former youth member claimed:

“I [spoke to] the different hierarchical groups of VETËVENDOSJE! and I said that we have to work with our citizens as our base, with our members more than we are doing. We have to stop doing things outside while we are ready inside. They said ‘yes you are right’ all the time, but nothing happened in that direction. I
saw that maybe this is not someone’s interest there…” (Interview with the author, 21/11/2013).

In this sense, the interest of several members in the VETËVENDOSJE! movement took over the interest of others, including the interests of potential movement members. There is not necessarily an equality of opinion, as is necessary for social movement theory or VETËVENDOSJE!’s standards of a ‘movement.’ VETËVENDOSJE!’s political agenda (supposedly created by those whose interests are most important) can be either supported or not supported—one can be either for what the movement stands for, or against it—which is reflected in a person’s willingness to become one of its members.

Former Member’s Definition and Parliamentary Involvement

VETËVENDOSJE!’s status as a movement in this sense makes Parliamentary involvement somewhat problematic for former members in terms of maintaining its action-oriented movement-hood. Such involvement becomes not just a tool for individual members of a movement to utilize, but the primary means by which the group attempts to change the system—for like other actions, parliamentary involvement must also be taken on by the group as a whole in order to have an effect on ‘the system.’ Yet Parliamentary involvement, by its very nature, cannot truly be a collective effort. While the group may make decisions on a democratic level, with the wishes of all its members taken into account, it is ultimately up to the Members of Parliament to decide how and on what they will vote. Unless VETËVENDOSJE! retains the amount of other actions—like protests and boycotts—at the same level they were before Parliamentary elections in 2010, movement-hood begins to collapse, and the group—which already had a set goal and agenda—makes the relatively easy leap from action-based movement to institutionalized party. To some former members, this seems to be exactly what happened. According to one of the prominent former members, actions have really died down since 2010:
“…it seems to me that they [VETËVENDOSJE!] are totally in the system, and they are just looking out at the streets and the protests. Even though they still do some actions, they don’t have serious purposes” (Interview with the author, Pristina 20/11/2013).

This statement is again backed up by another former member, who says protests have ended since “people don’t take you seriously when you’re in Parliament and have protests” (Interview with author, Pristina, 19/11/2013). Parliament, therefore, has become a more important means for goal achievement than other, more collective political actions which are what made VETËVENDOSJE! into a movement in the first place. With the organization itself as the political movement rather than a house organization for an individualistic movement, VETËVENDOSJE! indeed has the potential to lose itself in political institutionalism; to many of its former members, with such political activism on the decline, VETËVENDOSJE! is losing not only its status as a movement but many of its original activists. As such, it is becoming easier for the group to turn into what it said in 2010 it never would: a political party.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF MOVEMENT-HOOD ON MEMBERSHIP

It must be emphasized, of course, that none of the three definitions of movement presented above—social movement and political opportunity theories and perceptions within and without VETËVENDOSJE!—can be considered either “right” or “wrong” in terms of creating meaning for the term. To be clear on this point, the analysis presented above was also ‘conditionalized’ by both a member of VETËVENDOSJE! and a former member, each of whom stated (in so many words) that if someone else in their shoes was asked similar questions about the nature of parties and movements, a different answer would probably be given. Such statements serve to individualize the perceptions given within this paper as well as problematize the philosophical underpinnings the question: “what is a movement?” by making a practical
definition virtually impossible. One member of the group described this dilemma by stating:

“The way I see [the distinction of VETËVENDOSJE! as a movement]…this is more a theoretical question than a practical dilemma” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 12/11/2013). Yet, the argument about whether or not VETËVENDOSJE! is, is not or was a movement, while seemingly philosophical in nature, has serious and practical implications for how it is seen as a political entity, despite its current involvement in Parliament.

First and foremost, if the word ‘movement’ can bring about a whole host of understandings within VETËVENDOSJE! itself as well as its former members, then just as many understandings must be found within the thoughts of the group’s potential members and voters. As was stated earlier, one member of VETËVENDOSJE! believed the mere mention of the word ‘movement’ within the title of VETËVENDOSJE! has the potential to change the perception of a person towards the intentions of the group. Two interviewees—one of the prominent members within VETËVENDOSJE! and the former youth leader without—spoke of Kosovo’s current lack of not only political education, but a “weakened education system” in general (Interview with the author, Pristina, 15/11/2013). Many potential members and voters for the group “cannot read, and rely on news from their TVs or friends for information about political groups” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 21/11/2013). As such, the way in which the group presents itself—as an outspoken movement rather than an institutionalized party—becomes vital in attracting potential supporters who may not have the means to fully understand the group’s political agenda. This is not to say that once in the group a member will not have the chance to educate him or herself about the group’s platform, but such a presentation of the group is one way to draw in ordinary people to make that first step of support.
Another practical implication of the ‘movement’ debate is the potential entrenchment of a particular meaning of ‘self-determination’ and the ways in which to achieve it. If VETËVENDOSJE! is actually a house organization for the historical self-determination movement, then its former members are still considered part of this movement, just without using the tools provided by the group. These former members may still be considered as working toward self-determination despite varying opinions what this may mean. Opinions among these former members did indeed vary. While all three viewed self-determination as an eventual union with Albania, means of how to achieve this were wildly different—from creating economic ties through (for example) means of electricity, to maintaining cultural ties through the use of language and other ‘traditional’ cultural forms, to full-on realignment of Kosovo’s southern border. If, however, VETËVENDOSJE! is a movement within itself, then former members are considered outside of the movement’s agenda, and their means have the potential to take away from VETËVENDOSJE!’s more formalized version of union with Albania (in this case, a state-wide referendum on official union with Albania). Whether or not VETËVENDOSJE! is seen as a movement or an organization is the difference between whether or VETËVENDOSJE! can garner support from those with a more generalized view of self-determination or will lose it to other, smaller self-determination movements.

The question of if VETËVENDOSJE! can be considered a movement may, of course, never have a universally accepted answer. Ironically, the implications of the debate of VETËVENDOSJE!’s movement-hood can really only be viewed in light of its recent transition into Parliament and considerations of whether the group can be viewed as a ‘political party.’ Whether VETËVENDOSJE!’s proposed referendum will come to pass as opposed to other means of self-determination—supported by other, smaller movements—depends on its popular
support within future state and municipal elections. This support, in turn, may rely in some part on how the public views the definition of VETÊVENDOSJE! as a ‘movement’ and whether or not they agree with its institutionalized political platform—or even its decision to enter into Parliament in the first place. While only the passage of time will bring any clarity to these hypotheses regarding the group’s movement- hood, its transition into the governmental sphere is having some very real and very current effects on public perceptions of the group as an institutionalized political entity.

THE PRACTICAL: VETEVENDOSJE AS A PARTY

“... among the many varieties of grassroots political movements... are those that have opted for a politics of partnership—partnership, that is, between traditionally opposed groups, such as states, corporations and workers.”
-A. Appadurai (2002, p.2)

Like political movements, the connotations that make up personal perceptions of a ‘political party’ are many and varied. Unlike movements, however, which may or may not be governmentally involved depending on how they are defined, political parties carry with them very real responsibilities to and regulations by the state which serve to shape their perception within public opinion. These regulations and responsibilities come in many forms, including in state funding and financial guidelines, how and when a party leader or candidate can be advertised and promoted and codes of conduct in relation to other parties and during state functions, to name a few. When VETÊVENDOSJE! decided in 2010 to promote its message through a partnership with the state and involvement with government institutions, these responsibilities and regulations had to be incorporated into its mandate. This had the perhaps inadvertent effect of forming the group into a political subject that must conform in some ways to the behavioral and structural ideals of state institutions.
Such a decision to enter into Parliament (and therefore to take on these state ideals and regulations) came as quite a shock to many of both the group’s supporters and critics, and caused it to both gain and lose members. According to a former member, VETËVENDOSJE!’s longtime leader Alban Kurti had been particularly adamant about not entering into elections, claiming that “if you take part in the system, you take part in privatization and other things they [VETËVENDOSJE!] don’t agree with” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 19/11/2013). Despite claims that it would not turn into a political party, the question still remains: has VETËVENDOSJE! truly taken “part in the system” and how? And how, in particular, has Parliamentary involvement affected peoples’ willingness to take part in its actions? While it is not denied that group did indeed change—particularly in the amount of people ascribing to its beliefs—since opting for the politics of governmental partnership, the extent of the conformity into Kosovar governmental ideals is up for debate among its members and those who left the group as a result. To map the types of change that occurred within the group since its election in 2010, this examination will now move to an assessment of the definition and functions of political parties as opposed to those of political movements. Thus these functions will serve as a basis for the practical implications of VETËVENDOSJE!’s transition into Parliament. In particular, these next sections will focus on alterations in VETËVENDOSJE!’s membership since its entrance into the government and the effects of this change on the group’s organizational structure and political platform.

VETËVENDOSJE! AND THE FUNCTIONS OF POLITICAL PARTIES

As was discussed earlier, both movements and parties can be political in nature, and can use the same means to promote a political message. However, it became clear through the previous analysis of the term ‘movement’ that there are many things—several with negative
connotations—that are connected with the idea of a ‘political party.’ For example, in light of the
interviewee’s answers about what differentiates a political party from a movement (as described
above), a political party has four distinct features: it has members within the established
government, it has a hierarchical structure, it tends to focus on one particular issue and it does
not usually use collective confrontational action to promote its message. These features are not
particularly helpful in determining whether or not the group has indeed become institutionalized;
they have been used by both members of VETËVENDOSJE! to deny accusations that it has
become a political party and by its critics to say that it has. One thing is for certain, however;
political parties, in the realm of Kosovar politics, are not seen as beneficial for Kosovar society.
This can not only be seen in the fact that VETËVENDOSJE! is trying hard to separate itself from
such a title, but in the remarks of its critics. As one young community member stated, “[political
parties] aim to become rich and to have authority” (Interview with the author, Pristina,
20/11/2013). Such a sentiment is backed up by a former member, who said parties are “part of
the system…this system is very dangerous, and is ruining society” (Interview with the author,
Pristina, 21/11/2013).

In addition to the qualifications members, former members and community observers
have consigned to the establishment of political parties, there are also certain, more academically
and theoretically established functions a party must perform that serve to differentiate it from the
more all-encompassing and looser notion of a political movement. In their article “Unthinkable
Democracy: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies,” authors Russell Dalton and
Martin Wattenberg outline six necessary capacities needed for a political entity to be considered
a political party. While this list is not all-encompassing in itself, it does give a less biased view of
the definition of political parties—at least in terms of Kosovar politics and the political system—
that can help determine whether or not VETËVENDOSJE! should be considered as such a political entity. The functions these two academics have supplied are: the articulation of specific public wants to the political system, the selection and presentation of members as political candidates, the development of a political program and agenda, the creation of a link between the political system and the citizens of whom they have garnered support, the participation in elections as a means of occupying positions of political power and the contribution to the legitimacy of the political system (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002).

When held up to these basic standards, VETËVENDOSJE! does indeed seem to be a political party. It has a rather large base of supporters (around 17,000) whose message of self-determination is reflected in its political program and agenda.\(^3\) In addition, it has taken place in elections since 2010, with several elected members in the Assembly of Kosovo who (see next section) serve as a link between citizen activists and the government of Kosovo. It is the last point in Dalton and Wattenberg’s list, however, with which members of the group and those who have left have the highest levels of disagreement. In deciding to take part in the 2010 elections, VETËVENDOSJE! did indeed lend a certain degree of legitimacy to the political system; it acknowledged Kosovar governmental processes as an acceptable means of democracy for the new state. But by making such an acknowledgement, the former member who left prior to Parliamentary elections claims that VETËVENDOSJE! lent itself to “institutionalized bureaucracy” and is “ready to be corrupted” (interview with the author, Pristina, 19/11/2013). A current member of VETËVENDOSJE!, however, claims otherwise. This member states that agreeing to be part of the system merely gives the group the means “to transform Parliament” and to change the way in which the political system works (interview with the author, Pristina, 15/11/2013).

\(^3\) Number obtained during an interview with a VETEVENDOSJE! member, Pristina, 15/11/2013
Thus, the debate as to whether or not VETËVENDOSJE! is a political party in the eyes of its members, former members and members of the public depends on the amount of governmental institutionalization the group has gone through since its induction into Parliament and its conformity to particular bureaucratic political ideals. Such institutional changes are not necessarily difficult to see, and can manifest themselves in the small alterations (particularly in terms of membership) that occur in the natural transition from a populace-controlled group to a more regulated political body.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION IN ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND MEMBERSHIP

According to one of the current prominent members of the group, VETËVENDOSJE! began as a collaboration of several close friends with a unified goal. Over the next five years, that group grew from around 150 members to about 500, with seven movement offices around the country. It was not until 2010, however, when the group decided to enter into Parliament that the number of members began to grow exponentially. In the period of almost three years since its first members were elected, the group has gained thousands of supporters, with around 17,000 citizens of Kosovo now considered card-holding members and 29 official centers throughout the state (Interview with the author, Pristina, 12/11/2013). As one youth member of the group stated, “We grew a lot. We developed our organization. We have structures that deal with villages, so we grew everywhere in Kosova” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 15/11/2013).

While this growing support as a result of Parliament is beneficial in terms of electoral gains and the spreading of the group’s message of self-determination, it may also have come at an expense. With a smaller organizational body, decisions, information and ideas can be circulated on a person-to-person basis. This is not necessarily true with such large amounts of
people spread throughout the country; in order to maintain a cohesive organization, a system for
the spread of information and responsibility must be formed. In other words, structures must be
created. One former member described the creation of the structures as follows:

“When we [grew], when the movement grew after 2010, we needed structures to
structure those people… have them in some group which are called “committees
and secretariats” because you cannot have these people and just talk with them.
You have to give them some specific responsibilities for them to be active. So we
were aware that all of those new people that came to VETËVENDOSJE! were not
up on the situation, or had the urge to be active like some of us were. So we knew
that we had to make something. But that turned into something very bureaucratic”
(Interview with the author, Pristina, 20/11/2013).

Thus these structures, while necessary at first, became controversial the longer the organization
was involved in governmental politics. They became bureaucratic and inflexible, which, as this
former member went on to say, was the “reason I …[and] others left” (Interview with the author, Pritina, 20/11/2013). This description of the bureaucratic nature of the structures created tells a
story about the changing nature of the organization after its induction into Parliament. First, the
types of people that were joining VETËVENDOSJE! in the aftermath of its election were
deficient in two things: they were not as motivated to be as active in the group as many of the
initial members, and they were not particularly conscious of the specific details of the group’s
message.

This lack of motivation is backed up by a statement made by a current youth
VETËVENDOSJE! activist: “…those members who join for enthusiasm—they tend to leave
VETËVENDOSJE! earlier because their membership is based on emotions and not on the
understanding of the concepts” (Interview with the author, Pritina, 21/11/2013). As a result, a
hierarchy of members is needed to motivate these new activists into action, and to ‘give them
some specific responsibilities.’ Such hierarchical structures are reminiscent of more traditional
and institutionalized political parties in Kosovo—which is one of the reasons for the
“bureaucratic” title assigned to the group’s new structures. One youth community member and activist for the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), the oldest political party in Kosovo, described the structure of her party as one with decision making and responsibility-delegating leaders on the top. The system of decision making within such a body is accordingly tiered; lower level activists vote on an issue, which is then passed to higher up members—who then hand the ultimate vote to the “top members” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 20/11/2013).

The newfound hierarchy in VETËVENDOSJE!’s case is reflected in the creation of similar such tiered committees and secretariats, each of which have various decision-making powers and distinct responsibilities. The formation of these hierarchical structures, according to the prominent former member, led to the changes in behavior of many of the activists:

“Once people got in their offices—because, in the beginning we didn’t have offices, we didn’t have computers for all of us, people started to change their behavior. My activists –close activists—started to behave differently and not in line with the beginning principles of VETËVENDOSJE!” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 20/11/2013).

Not only, however, did the growing number of people create a need for more so-called bureaucratic, institutionalized structures—and thus a sense of hierarchy and behavioral change within the group—but many of these new members did not, and do not, understand the platform of the party. Prior to the elections, for instance, VETËVENDOSJE! recruited new members sympathetic with its cause in order to help it prepare for Parliament. Two of those interviewed came to the group as a result of this recruitment—one who remained and has a great understanding of the group, and another, a former VETËVENDOSJE! Parliamentary Member—who did not fully understand all of the principles behind which the group stood, and thus left, disillusioned. Members like the latter, according to the group’s former members as well as some of its current activists, are not particularly hard to come by. As one former member states,
“We had people that completely misunderstood what we stood for, and they don’t represent the VETËVENOSJE! platform, but they are representatives of VETËVENOSJE! in a lot of cities in Kosovo. There is a big discrepancy between VETËVENOSJE! [hierarchy] and its members, how they see it” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 20/11/2013).

A member of the group also stated that she does “not believe that everyone understands the concept of VETËVENOSJE!” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 21/11/2013). As a result, a lot of time and energy must be spent on group education, including the creation of a ‘school’ that teaches the principles of the group to VETËVENOSJE! members, weekly meetings, petitions, debates. All of these things are needed to keep the growing body of members up to date on the inner workings of VETËVENOSJE!.

However, several former members feel that these attempts at group education may not be quite enough. Still not enough time is spent on updating new members of the group, and the platform of the organization is expanding rapidly into “small details” that are not truly understood by everyone (Interview with the author, 15/11/2013). Despite the fact that both members and former members agree that political decisions are made on a democratic basis, with all political issues brought up by the leaders (hierarchy) and voted on by all members around the country, the lack of complete understanding among members makes decision making more and more dependent upon VETËVENOSJE!’s Members of Parliament and those other organizational structures that work closer with the governmental system. Thus a certain sense of institutionalization in terms of organizational structure has been created since 2010, and since the group has increased in membership by 3400 percent. Those working closest to the governmental system and who are most influenced by its workings have a stronger hold on the ultimate future of the group while those lower tiered members, who may or may not have the time or capacity to learn about the group’s specific platform must then rely on these governmentally influenced members to keep their best interests in mind.
To further the understanding of why bureaucratic structures are needed for the control and knowledge of new group members, an analysis of what has happened to VETËVENDOSJE!’s message and political platform since induction into Parliament is required. One former member claimed that the expansion of VETËVENDOSJE!’s platform is a crucial reason behind many members’ lack of knowledge of the group’s principles:

“Not at all [do the members understand VETËVENDOSJE!’s political platform]. I always said we had to stop our activities that were outside VETËVENDOSJE!, and to work with our people. We had people that completely misunderstood what we stood for” (Interview with author, Pristina, 20/11/2013, emphasis added).

According to this former member, the group began to engage in activities that were outside of its original mandate, outside the scope of for what VETËVENDOSJE! stood. But is this true? It is of course necessary, when entering into Parliament, for a group to define and expand its message—after all, many of the things on which VETËVENDOSJE! Members of Parliament will be voting are issues that are perhaps not defined in the group’s original mandate. This has indeed been the case, and one current member explains that the message of the group merely “went wider and deeper” to incorporate such issues since its induction into Parliament (Interview with the author, Pristina, 13/11/2013). What does inclusion of such details mean for the message of a group such as VETËVENDOSJE! and how does the group decide on its opinion of the details? Interviews with members and former members have led to the determination of two natural processes of governmental institutionalization that have led to the widening and changing of VETËVENDOSJE!’s message: the inclusion of more details into current VETËVENDOSJE! discourse and the creation of a coalition within the governmental system.

*Inclusion of More Details*
VETËVENDOSJE! has always been involved with activities and discourse on many facets of Kosovo political life having to do with self-determination and Kosovo society, whether economic, cultural or political. This is, of course, still true today, and issues of referendum on the union with Albania, ending negotiations with Serbia and privatization are still very important in the group’s Parliamentary discourse. However, VETËVENDOSJE!’s movement into Parliament has also forced it to refine and define its stance on issues with which it had not previously grappled on a public level—issues like whether or not religion should be taught in schools or at what age women should be allowed to wear the headscarf. These issues, while important in the discourse of current Kosovar politics are, in the words of the current VETËVENDOSJE! youth activist, “not what VETËVENDOSJE! was started for” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 21/11/2013). In fact, one member claimed that VETËVENDOSJE! was the only group in Parliament to be asked to refine their stance on these issues—a political ploy used by other parties to take away from VETËVENDOSJE!’s true message (Interview with the author, Pristina, 12/11/2013). However, despite possible annoyance with such issues and political ploys, VETËVENDOSJE! members recognize that these issues are a necessary part of governmental life. The youth activist, for example, claims that these small issues have not changed the concept behind VETËVENDOSJE! as a whole, but “I think that there is this flexibility that the movement should have considering the…reality that is surrounding it” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 21/11/2013).

In this case, the reality for VETËVENDOSJE! is the necessity to take a unified stance on these issues of somewhat secondary importance, even at the cost of losing supporters. Since

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4 These issues were brought up in great detail with two current members of VETËVENDOSJE! (Interview with the author, Pristina, 21/11/2013 and 12/11/2013). Other smaller issues aside from religious freedom that are separate from self-determination were indeed mentioned, however for the purpose of this examinations length and topic are not mentioned here. See [www.vetevendosje.org](http://www.vetevendosje.org) for more details.
making a statement on the use of headscarves (a woman should be able to decide whether or not she wants to wear it at the age of 16), VETËVENDOSJE! lost the backing of one of its own Parliamentary members, who claims its stance on the subject constituted “a flirt with radical Islam” (interview with the author, Pristina, 21/11/2013). To curb such loss of support—or at least to make sure potential members know exactly for what it stands—VETËVENDOSJE! has erected what it calls “pillars” in its political discourse to encompass such controversial, non-mandated issues in its message. As a current VETËVENDOSJE! Member of Parliament states,

“There are three pillars… justice state [rule of law], development and social state. …all the pillars are linked. VETËVENDOSJE! has not always had these pillars. VETËVENDOSJE! was formed in 2005, around a subject which was decentralization.--the only organization that was against political and ethnical decentralization. …Those three pillars were established after it became parliamentary” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 15/11/2013).

These three pillars encompass a wide variety of political discourse, from negotiation with Serbia, to pension plans to yes, religious freedom. They also provide a mechanism for understanding the group’s basic principles—one need only know the idea behind the three pillars to get a basic idea of how the group will act on certain political issues.

At the same time, however, the solidification of secondary issues into the three pillars of VETËVENDOSJE! discourse may also have the effect of both drawing in and pushing out one-issue voters, or those people who vote based on one particular problem and withdraw or provide their support based on the party’s (or movement’s) stance. While one issue voters can help pass legislation on some issues of importance, their support is unreliable at best and can even be detrimental to the group’s cause by radicalizing the group’s position toward one particular problem of interest. Hence, it became important to the prominent former member mentioned at the beginning of this section that “activities outside of VETËVENDOSJE!” be dismissed—at
least for the time being—until the new current members truly understand all the principles behind the group’s message (Interview with the author, Pristina, 20/11/2013).

As of right now, however, it is up to the voters themselves to become fully educated about the principles of VETËVENDOSJE! using the means the group already provides. The current youth activist of the group puts it succinctly when she says:

“The concept of VETËVENDOSJE!, we have principles, and our concept is based on these principles. I don’t care if anyone leaves VETËVENDOSJE! because they did not understand those principles. So when VETËVENDOSJE! has a statement on the scarf, which was based on the principles on which VETËVENDOSJE! was built, then I don’t care if anyone leaves it because they did not have an understanding of what they signed up for” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 21/11/2013).

Thus, the necessity of the group to take a stance on such controversial issues and add them to its mandate has an effect on the types of people who join and the amount of knowledge they have on the group’s overall message. This, in turn, has an effect on the way leaders of the group see its supporters—as members of a cohesive movement or as short-term supporters and party voters.

Creation of Coalitions

In addition to the creation of the pillars and the refining of particular political stances, there has been one other development that has had an effect on VETËVENDOSJE!’s political platform and membership: its merger with several political parties, in particular the Partia Fryma e Re (FER), or, in English, the New Spirit Party. By all accounts, VETËVENDOSJE! is a liberalist, left-oriented party, traditionally made up of a younger, poorer and mostly rural Kosovar population. At the end of March 2011, however, the group officially invited FER to merge into its ranks, a year after the smaller party couldn’t pass the five percent threshold needed to enter into Parliament. According to one former member, this merger was a bit disorienting:

“New Spirit (which in Albanian means New Breath or Spirit), FER, they were kind of urban elite that was not involved in the system and in the government yet. They were totally right [oriented].
VETËVENDOSJE! is more left” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 20/11/2013). Another former member claimed that VETËVENDOSJE!’s merger with FER was “very offensive,” as FER differs on privatization, education and the role of UNMIK and EULEX (Interview with the author, 19/11/2013). A question therefore arises: if the two groups are so fundamentally different, how can they work together to form a unified organization and how will this affect membership of the group?

Apparently, VETËVENDOSJE! has not remained unchanged; almost two and a half years later, the merger of the two groups has had several effects on VETËVENDOSJE!’s platform and acceptance in the public eye. According to a former member of the group, “…a part of VETËVENDOSJE!’s discourse has been moderated by New Spirit discourse… also you see now VETËVENDOSJE! public events are more moderate and are more in FER style” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 20/11/2013). Another former member commented on this change to more moderate activism levels by claiming that despite the fact there are “a lot of Serbian politicians” in Kosovo, there are no protests (Interview with the author, Pristina, 19/11/2013). To this particular former member, the lack of protests has a lot to do with FER’s traditional support from the international community. VETËVENDOSJE!’s outspoken stance against the international community from the very beginning has been assuaged by its association with an organization that has a more favorable outlook towards its presence. While it cannot be said by any means that FER’s presence has changed the group’s stance on the international community to a more favorable position, it may have had an effect on the way in which members of the group as well as the greater Kosovar community are willing to protest or act out against it.
The extent of FER’s influence on VETËVENDOSJE!’s political platform may have yet to reach its peak, however. The current vice president of VETËVENDOSJE! is Sphend Ahmedi, a former leader of FER and current electorate of Mayor of Pristina under VETËVENDOSJE!’s ticket. While as of right now Ahmedi has changed his own, more conservative discourse (reflective of his past party) to match that of more mainstream VETËVENDOSJE! political jargon, there is the question of what will happen to the platform of the group (and its effect on its membership) now that he has become mayor. One of the former members claims that the mayor of Pristina is one of the most powerful positions in Kosovar politics, and since Ahmedi has taken on that position, he now has more power to push through his own political agenda—an agenda distinct from that of VETËVENDOSJE!. Whether or not this will cause the group to lose members or gain them is up for debate—however, given the different types of people that FER and VETËVENDOSJE! attract, there may very well be a shift in the makeup of VETËVENDOSJE! membership if not in its numbers. In addition, as current vice-president of VETËVENDOSJE!, Ahmedi is in a very good position to become its next leader. According to the VETËVENDOSJE! statute, there is a time limit on the number of years a leader of the group is allowed to maintain his authority. With Alban Kurti’s time coming to an end, Ahmedi may be put into yet another position to alter VETËVENDOSJE! discourse. However, both of these potential platform and membership changing events rely on democratic processes and could come out in a negative way for the former leader of FER.

Although there have been a number of things that have had a widening and deepening effect on VETËVENDOSJE!’s platform, all eight of those interviewed for this examination had one very important thing to say: when it comes to the fundamentals of the group, VETËVENDOSJE!’s message has not changed one bit. As a concept, self-determination for
Kosovo and the Albanian people (whether it be through referendum or another way) remains the number one point on the group’s agenda. What has changed, however, is the means by which this message is communicated. New aspects to its political platform as a result of governmental involvement have altered the types and number of people that join the group. While this does not change the group’s overall message of self-determination, it does project an image of the organization to the public as well as creates a kind of discrepancy between the intention of the organization and the wants of its supporters. As such, when it comes to determining whether or not VETËVENDOSJE! has been institutionalized to a particular bureaucratic form of government involvement, like the notion of its status as a movement, personal perception takes center stage. It cannot be denied, however, that there have indeed been practical implications of VETËVENDOSJE!’s involvement in Parliament and that these implications have had an impact on how the group interacts with its members, former members, and the government as a whole.

THE END: CONCLUSIONS DRAWN

“There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.”
-Aldous Huxley (Huxley, 1990, p 32)

It must be admitted that this examination of VETËVENDOSJE! was not particularly conclusive on whether or not the group can or should be considered a political movement or a political party—nor was it this paper’s intention to make such a judgment. Rather, the aim of this analysis was to determine whether a group can indeed wear the hat of both political categories and how such a determination affects a persons’ willingness to join the group. In VETËVENDOSJE!’s case, the answer is yes—but not in the most obvious way, that is, it is not socially accepted by all to be both movement and party. Rather, it is simultaneously movement and party based only on the individual perceptions of the public, who seem to be split into
factions of ‘movement’ and ‘party’ as a result of their past and present experiences with the group. In this way, there can be no true consensus on whether or not the controversial group can be considered a movement or a party; no two peoples’ perceptions of the two categories is ever quite alike. While the distinction between movement and party seems rather pointless when the myriad viewpoints of hundreds of people are stacked on top of each other, it is actually of vital importance. How one views a movement versus a party can make the difference between whether or not one decides to ascribe to its beliefs. After all, movements and parties are made up of people, and with an organization as new as VETËVENDOSJE!, support is what makes or breaks its success in the political realm.

Despite this lack of consensus on political category, however, an agreement has arisen by virtually all members of Kosovar society that VETËVENDOSJE! has experienced a number of changes since its induction into Parliament, the vast majority of which seem to do with the large amounts of people rushing to join its ranks. In fact, the institutionalizing effects of Parliament on which many former members focus their complaints appear to be caused mainly by changes in membership. This is a rather interesting development, for in most people’s eyes a growing membership could only be seen as a good prospect for a movement making the transition into the governmental system. Such growing membership often legitimizes a group and gives it the power to truly make a difference in the community and system in which it is working. In some ways, VETËVENDOSJE! has indeed experienced this legitimacy. What is generally less understood, however, are the polarizing effects of a rapidly expanding membership in such a short amount of time. Administrative structures now have the potential morph into bureaucratic mechanisms of organizational control and the spread of information becomes harder and harder—made even more difficult in a country like Kosovo, where a rebounding education
system makes access to literature hard for older members of society. VETËVENDOSJE!’s experiences with both the negative and positive sides of membership growth prove to be a good model for other grassroots movements around the globe looking for more influence in their respective governmental spheres.

While such effects of institutionalization and membership growth can already be seen in the short run, the future of the group and its overall effect on Kosovar politics and Parliament is uncertain. For sure it has already made great progress in promoting its message on a more official level; as a former member puts it, “When VETËVENDOSJE! joined the elections, they changed the political discourse of both Kosovo and Albania” (Interview with the author, Pristina, 20/11/2013). In the opinions of many interviewed, the group brought popular nationalist discourse to the forefront of Kosovar politics, making a referendum for union with Albania a viable alternative to talks with Serbia. Yet despite its success at diverting popular political discourse to fit its agenda, and despite the fact that its members are reaching for more and more positions of power (read, Shpend Ahmedi and the run for mayor of Pristina), VETËVENDOSJE! has been, in fact, losing support, dropping down to eight percent from twelve in the most recent national assembly elections.

Much of this loss of support may indeed have to do with the very discourse it brought to the country. For a country trying so hard to build a state, such nationalist ideals at so uncertain a time may prove to be the group’s downfall. International presence is still very much a factor in Kosovar daily life—OSCE, EULEX, UNMIK, the US Ambassador; while controversial, these international administrations are still seen by many as the means by which Kosovo was freed from Serbia’s grasp. They are the means by which Kosovo will enter into that collection of recognized states known as the European Union and be freed from Serbia’s long shadow. Groups
such as VETEVENDOSJE!, therefore, that promote a nationalist discourse (at least in terms of ending talks with Serbia and promoting union with Albania) and try to stem the ever present tide of international administration in the area may find themselves eventually (if not already) at odds with current popular notions of with whom Kosovo’s allegiance should lie—to its own strength and the ‘nation of Albanians’ that make up the majority of the country, or to a collection of powerful states who have the power to micromanage yet moderate political discourse in the burgeoning state.\(^5\)

As with most political decisions, there is no right or wrong, good or bad that can be associated with VETEVENDOSJE!’s transition from movement-hood (or continuance of movement-hood) into the political system. There are only consequences, and opinions as to whether these consequences are good or bad, as with most political decisions, will be fiercely debated, most likely with no particular consensus in and of themselves. Although it has been almost three years since it was first elected to Parliament, it is still too early to tell what those consequences might be. Notwithstanding such uncertainty, VETEVENDOSJE! truly is an entity worthy of discussion in today’s discourse on the future of Kosovo—whether it will remain relevant, however, is up to its members, former members, and of course, members of the community. Unfortunately, like the definition of movement and party, as well as perceptions of VETEVENDOSJE!’s political consequences, relevance, too, is up to personal opinion.

\(^5\) Titles such as “nation” and “Albanian” are controversial when talking about Kosovo, for ‘nation’ in itself has no distinct definition and ‘Albanian,’ too must be seen through distinct social, cultural and political lenses. As union with Albania has been a discussed topic within this examination, and virtually all those interviewed described Kosovo as made up of a historical and cultural collectivity of people ascribing themselves to the Albanian ethnicity, the term ‘nation of Albanians’ is used to describe one of the viewpoints of VETEVENDOSJE! regarding their position on the debate of Kosovo’s independence. It is in no way meant to agree with or give credence to such a viewpoint, but rather to underscore the polarizing nature of some of VETEVENDOSJE!’s discourse in the grand scheme of international politics. For more information on this topic, see Visoka, G. (2011). “International Governance and Local Resistance in Kosovo: The Thin Line between Ethical, Emancipatory and Exclusionary Politics.” *Irish Studies in International Affairs*. 22(22), 99-125.
As stated at the beginning of this examination, it is important to understand that political parties and movements, like VETËVENDOSJE! are made up of a variety of individuals, all of whom have their opinions—many of which were unable to be discussed in this examination. Due to time restrictions and contact difficulties, the people represented in this examination of VETËVENDOSJE! do not make up the entirety of political understanding within and without VETËVENDOSJE! For instance, because my initial contacts were within VETËVENDOSJE!, I had an easier time communicating and setting up interviews within the group itself. Most members were unaware of (or perhaps unwilling to set me up with) former members or people who were against the VETËVENDOSJE! cause. As a result, my amount of communication with dissident or former members was limited at best, and my analysis of the thoughts of former members relies heavily on the perceptions of one or two people.

Language limitations also restricted the amount of former and current members with whom I was able to communicate. While the subjects interviewed were all proficient at the English language, there were times when they may have been unable to adequately describe a situation or idea to their satisfaction due to personal limitations with the language of interview. This may have had the effect of making the words the used to describe their personal interpretations either more or less extreme than they may have otherwise wanted, or forced them to ignore an important part of their own interpretation of the questions due to an inability to explain what exactly it was they believed. As a result, some of the analysis described in this paper may reflect an inaccurate view of such personal interpretation, taking it to the extreme
when lighter words would have sufficed or ignoring important aspects of personal perceptions that may have given a more nuanced view of the group’s transition. In addition, as described in the literature review, my own lack of knowledge regarding the Albanian language played a role in the amount of background information I was able to receive on the group. I became more or less dependent on oral history and analysis of the group’s transition, which, again, may not have allowed for a completely nuanced view of the movements origins or current means of activism. That being said, background readings came almost entirely from outside of VETËVENDOSJE!’s analysis, lending bias and outside interpretation to my examination of the group.

Finally, time and area restrictions also may have colored my analysis of this group. While I did have free access to the whole of Kosovo, the limited amount of time I had in the area kept me in Pristina to conduct my interviews. As a result, those interviewed from the group all had close access to VETËVENDOSJE! leaders, Parliamentary members, and headquarters of the movement. Close access to such resources may give members of the group in Pristina very different outlooks on the group’s transition than those members in villages or other parts of the country. While this is outlined in the “Recommendations for Further Study” section of this examination, it is worth mentioning that an inability to speak to members of the group (or former members of the group) in areas outside the capital hindered my ability to be a full-participant observer or comprehend political nuances that occur in the rural/urban divide within the political movement.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Although this paper attempts to be as all-encompassing as possible, studying a political group like VETËVENDOSJE! often brought up more questions than answers—most of which could not be answered in an examination with such a limited research topic. For instance, after
interviewing a number of VETËVENDOSJE!’s members, I found a strong link between their views of self-determination and their view of Kosovar history, particularly regarding the directives of the Kosovo Liberation Army. Understanding the role of the KLA in the formation of VETËVENDOSJE! would give an important insight for not only the reasons behind the group’s member and message formation, but would also give a valuable comparison between VETËVENDOSJE!’s interpretation of self-determination and that of the other prominent political parties in Kosovo. This, in turn, can help further describe whether or not VETËVENDOSJE! went through a certain degree of message institutionalization during their transition into a political entity, as well as outline dissident opinions within the group regarding the group’s history and member stance on Kosovar history and future state-building preparations.

It would also be worth studying the differences in opinion or thought between members of VETËVENDOSJE! in large urban centers like Pristina and those members who reside in small towns and villages away from resources like the Parliament, headquarters or urban political centers. An urban/rural divide within a political party is a research topic unto itself, but finding out differences in age, reasons for membership and methods of activism in rural centers could help further answer this research paper’s question of how political groups are institutionalized within a specific political system and whether or not rural or urban members of the group are more willing to accept the new types of activism that come with such institutionalization.

Finally, further research should also be done on polarization within VETËVENDOSJE!’s parliamentary politics. VETËVENDOSJE! has very specific ideas on who constitutes the majority and the types of rights minority groups should be allowed within the new, independent state system. Author Gezim Visoka has expressed a fear that VETËVENDOSJE!’s involvement in parliamentary politics will further ethnicize politics in Kosovo, leading to a situation which
stagnates talks with Serbia and could lead to further violence. How current activists who are not involved with Parliament view ethnicity and nationalism within Kosovo versus how Parliamentary members view ethnicity and nationalism could further any research that has been done in this examination of whether or not members of VETËVENDOSJE! are willing to get involved with party politics and the cementation of their message into an institutionalized (and perhaps “ethnicized”) platform.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY


