Albania, a European Union (EU) candidate country since 2014, has struggled with a turbulent post-communist period (1991-present) defined by civil unrest, political corruption, a struggling economy, and extremes in socio-economic inequalities. The built environment of the entire Albanian landscape has held no exception to such social and political mayhem. Albania’s heritage landscape in particular has been subject to diverging episodes of destruction and material manipulation, each dependent on current political needs and visions to enforce a national narrative of prosperity and democratic success. This dissertation is concerned with Albania’s process of Europeanization and cultural heritage’s role within it. In this dissertation I argue that the Albanian government has been negotiating its cultural heritage, from its archaeological sites to its memorials and museums, in a dramatic and tumultuous process of heritage erasure, promulgation, and reconfiguration; yet, it is doing so not only as part of a need to create a new Albanian narrative, but as a response to growing international pressures to shape its socio-political system into one that is democratic to Western standards, economically thriving, and socially stable with tight political borders that protect Europe from a growing immigration crisis. Yet, as Albania’s heritage landscape is altered, the communities that are connected to that landscape are impinged upon as well. While this dissertation explores how the Albanian government manages its material past within its ever-present Europeanization process, it also investigates the social consequences of such a heritage negotiation at the whim of international agendas and global tensions.

Examining diverse types of heritage, including museums, memorials, religious buildings, and archaeological sites, as well as investigating heritage from several periods of Albania’s past, be it the remains of its Roman or communist periods, this research underscores Albania’s struggle with managing a past that has been largely defined by foreign occupations. Based upon more than 24 months of ethnographic fieldwork, my research shows that the valorization of cultural heritage in Albania comes almost exclusively from the outside, from international agencies and nation-states that the Albanian government holds in its highest esteem and may even seek to emulate. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that in order for Albania to shed a past of foreign dependencies, Albania will need to own its past.