

'Bridging the Gap' post Symbolic Violence:
Stari Most, Bosnia & Herzegovina



MA Development & Emergency Planning
Essay

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List of Acronyms & Abbreviations

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| ABiH: | Armed Forces of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| BiH: | Bosnia and Herzegovina |
| (the) HV: | Army of the Republic of Croatia |
| (the) HVO: | Croatian Defence Council (army of BiH Croats) |
| ICTY: | International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia |
| UNESCO: | United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| JNA: | Yugoslav People's Army |

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Introduction

“[...] the built environment is both the means of violation and a source of evidence that can bear witness to the events that traversed it.” Weizman, Tavares, Schuppli, Studio, 2010

This paper will discuss relationship of architecture to society; how architecture surpasses from built-form to multifaceted force integral to society's existence. It will explore how it becomes a target for annihilation, leading to 'symbolic violence' for total social domination. Destruction of Stari Most during the Bosnian War, will lastly question whether post war, identical reconstruction of the bridge successfully restored relationships, and whether principle of identical reconstruction is an appropriate solution for reconciliation. A variety of resources are used for the essay, further augmented by the author's visit to Mostar.¹

Architecture in Conflict

“[...] architecture has been the primary means of expression and communication of the ideas, values, beliefs, and value systems of a culture” Emmons, Hendrix and Lomholt, 2012

Architecture, blueprint of a city, narrates history, and is a connection with the past, present, future memories; a stolid witness to life. It retains vast knowledge of its peoples, their economic, cultural and traditional beliefs. Architecture is a mark left by ancestors, which 'outlasts human span'² and forms a familiar political and cultural dialogue.

Every society identifies itself through the physical form of architecture. Ruskin's sentiments on artefacts³ can be applied to architecture- that architecture too '*belongs partly to those who built it, and partly to all the generations of mankind who are to follow...*' 'The Seven Lamps of Architecture'⁴ stipulates that the foundations of a building contribute to society's mental health, power and pleasure; informing culture, bringing a sense of pride and belonging.

Every society is made of complex layers of people, traditions, cultures, resources, surroundings, activities, and built environment. It is a dynamic confluence with life of its own, complementing and prevailing a subtle balance. These layers are continually evolving, '*bridging gaps*' between communities with sophisticated poise and panache that could tip the balance if disturbed. Layers retain memories, transported categorically through years.

“[...] as soon as it (built form) is distinguished from the simple building, it represents something other than itself: the social structure, the power of the King and so on.” Marche & Tschumi, 1995

During conflict, architecture becomes an important target to achieve supremacy. The adversary seeks to 'erase' this symbol thereby erasing its opponents' memories, identities, and its sole existence. This deliberate destruction aims for unchallenged authority over the region and people. It inflicts trauma and fear in the people leaving them vulnerable and weak, thereby relatively easy to be manipulated.⁵

Bourdieu defined this as 'Symbolic Violence', an invisible, 'soft' violence, which aims specifically to disrupt roots, grounded values and symbolic expression of a group of people. It's argued that conflict is inherent in society, and should be understood as a transformative process where root causes are social problems; inequalities or injustices that often go challenged.⁶

¹ Part of 'Common Grounds' SummerLab Workshop 2015, Development Planning Unit (DPU), Bartlett, University of Central London

² Bevan, R. (2006). *The destruction of memory*. London: Reaktion

³ Sparrow, J. (2014). *If great architecture belongs to humanity, do we have a responsibility to save it in wartimes?*. the Guardian.

⁴ Ruskin, J. (2001). *The Seven lamps of architecture*. London: Electric Book Co.

⁵ Bevan, R. (2006). *The destruction of memory*. London: Reaktion

⁶ Piquard, B. and Swenarton, M. (2011). *Learning from architecture and conflict*. The Journal of Architecture, 16(1), pp.1-13.

Klein explores wars and catastrophic events⁷ arguing that adversaries take advantage and exploit people during traumatic periods to stamp out their ideologies, cultural and social ideals to impose their own. Architectural destruction thereby becomes the first political and cultural trigger.

War against architecture is an obliteration of cultural artefacts by methods of control, threat, isolation or elimination to destroy memory and achieve adversaries' goals. These means become strategic intentions for ethnic cleansing, terror, conquest, revolution, and partition.⁸

Stari Most, Mostar, BiH

'The historic part of Mostar is a result of interaction between the natural phenomena and human creativity throughout a long historical period. The essence of centuries-long cultural continuity is represented by the universal synthesis of life phenomena [...] A specific regional architecture was thus created and left behind a series of unique architectural achievements, mostly modest by physical dimensions, but of considerable importance for the cultural history of its people. The creative process produced a constant flow of various cultural influences that, like streams merging into a single river, became more than a mere sum of the individual contributing elements.'

UNESCO's narrative for Stari Most, Mostar

The Chronicles

Mostar, divided by the Neretva River, has been known for being cosmopolitan with mixed population. Stari Most, built at the height of the Ottoman Empire, is an architectural wonder with technology significantly advanced for its time. It connected the city physically, symbolizing confluence of different nationalities and ethnicities.

The bridge, swathed in memories, became an inseparable part of the Mostarians who were in constant 'contact' with it. It was fuelled by myths like the designer, terrified it would not hold, fled before the scaffolding came down; another tells of two lovers buried within. It became a subject of poetry and paintings; central point for socialising, romance, rite of passage for youths jumping off the bridge, backdrop for married couples.⁹

As a resident of the city said: 'It is something that the people have – when you are born in Mostar, you don't have a choice. The Old Bridge is always present. The whole city is equated to the Old Bridge.'

Krishnamurthy, 2012

The Demise

Stari Most, a victim of symbolic violence,¹⁰ survived for 429 years; the most loved and revered symbols had mercilessly destroyed the 'perceived' everlasting bond between factions.

1991 census showed diverse population;¹¹ the Siege of Mostar,¹² prolonged power struggle and nationalistic sentiments changed political landscape and intensified war; Bosnian Croats and Muslims fought each other, truly dividing the city into the 'Muslim east' and the 'Croat west'

⁷ Tatum, J. (2009). The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism by Naomi Klein. *Antipode*, 41(1), pp.214-215.

⁸ Bevan, R. (2006). *The destruction of memory*. London: Reaktion

⁹ Krishnamurthy, S. (2012). Memory and Form: An Exploration of the Stari Most, Mostar (BiH). *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*

¹⁰ Destroyed by the HVO on the 9th November 1993

¹¹ Ethnicities included Croats 17.3%, Muslims 43%, and Serbs 31% and the rest are other ethnic groups; Fzs.ba, (2015). *POPULATION GROUPED ACCORDING TO ETHNICITY, BY CENSUSES 1961 - 1991*.

¹² Involving the HVO and the ARBiH fighting against the JNA after BiH declared independence

parallel along the Boulevard.¹³ Serb population reduced post war and further separated from the other two.

Sitting between the two factions, the destroyed bridge was larger than life symbol and a phenomenon of its own. The Croatian general, Slobodan Praljak, deemed the main responsible, had declared that '*those stones*' (the bridge) had no value.¹⁴ Praljak and others were charged for destruction of Stari Most¹⁵.

In May 2013, six political and military Bosnian Croat leaders were sentenced to 20 years for persecution of Muslims during Bosnian war. The judges said that Bosnian Croat forces carried out what is widely viewed as one of the signature acts of cultural vandalism of the entire Bosnian war, the destruction of Mostar's centuries-old bridge over the Neretva River in 1993 [...] They said that although the bridge was a legitimate military target [...], "*its destruction constituted disproportionate damage for the Muslim civilian population of Mostar*" Mike Corder, 2013.

Academics have always argued that the bridge held little strategic value and it is an example of deliberate cultural destruction. Riedlmayer termed it as an act of, '*killing memory*' of collective cultural heritage and peaceful coexistence.¹⁶

The ICTY Office Prosecutor persecuted senior civilian and military leaders for the destruction of numerous cultural, educational and religious institutions during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, including the destruction of the Stari Most. As Prosecutor Brammertz emphasized, "*Attacks against cultural monuments and institutions are war crimes, and often part of broader ethnic cleansing campaigns. To protect our common heritage, the perpetrators must be held accountable.*" lcty.org, 2015

This devastation of architecture led Herscher to describe 'Warchitecture', a tool to critique dominant accounts of wartime architectural destruction.¹⁷

Reconstruction, Reconciliation, Retribution for Peace

With assistance from UNESCO, an exact replica of the bridge was reconstructed in 2004. Stari Most, once poetically compared to a '*rainbow rising up to the Milky Way*',¹⁸ was declared 'World Heritage Site' in 2005. The essence of the bridge, meeting and linking, now became a true testament to the persistence and courage of the Mostarians, a symbol for diversity and tolerance.

"The Old Bridge area, [...], is an outstanding example of a multicultural urban settlement. The reconstructed Old Bridge [...] is a symbol of reconciliation, international co-operation and of the coexistence of diverse cultural, ethnic and religious communities." UNESCO

However, Stari Most still remains a fundamental divide between ethnic groups. Residents' interviews give a harrowing picture of loss of hope. The bridge's function now remains as a tourist attraction only.¹⁹

¹³ War front during the Siege of Mostar

¹⁴ Caucaso, O. (2013). *Mostar: the Old One, twenty years later*. [online] Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso.

¹⁵ Under the International Tribunal for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law - Case IT-04-74-T Prosecutor v. J Prlic, B. Stojic, S. Praljak, M. Petkovic, V. Coric, B. Pusic, I [2007] D3-1/30142 BIS

¹⁶ Wikipedia, (2015). *Siege of Mostar*.

¹⁷ Lebbus Woods, (2011). *WAR AND ARCHITECTURE*

¹⁸ Vitez, R. (1993). *Croats destroy Mostar's historic bridge*. [online] The Independent.

¹⁹ Krishnamurthy, S. (2012). Memory and Form: An Exploration of the Stari Most, Mostar (BIH). *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe* and Appendix 1

It's been noted that Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks do not live together nor interact. Stari Most no longer joins, but has become the opposite metaphor, enlightening hatred and inhumanity.²⁰ The society is synonymous to the riverbanks that never meet, physically and metaphorically. Croatian Mostar is well maintained with little damage, while the Muslim Bosniak is largely destroyed.

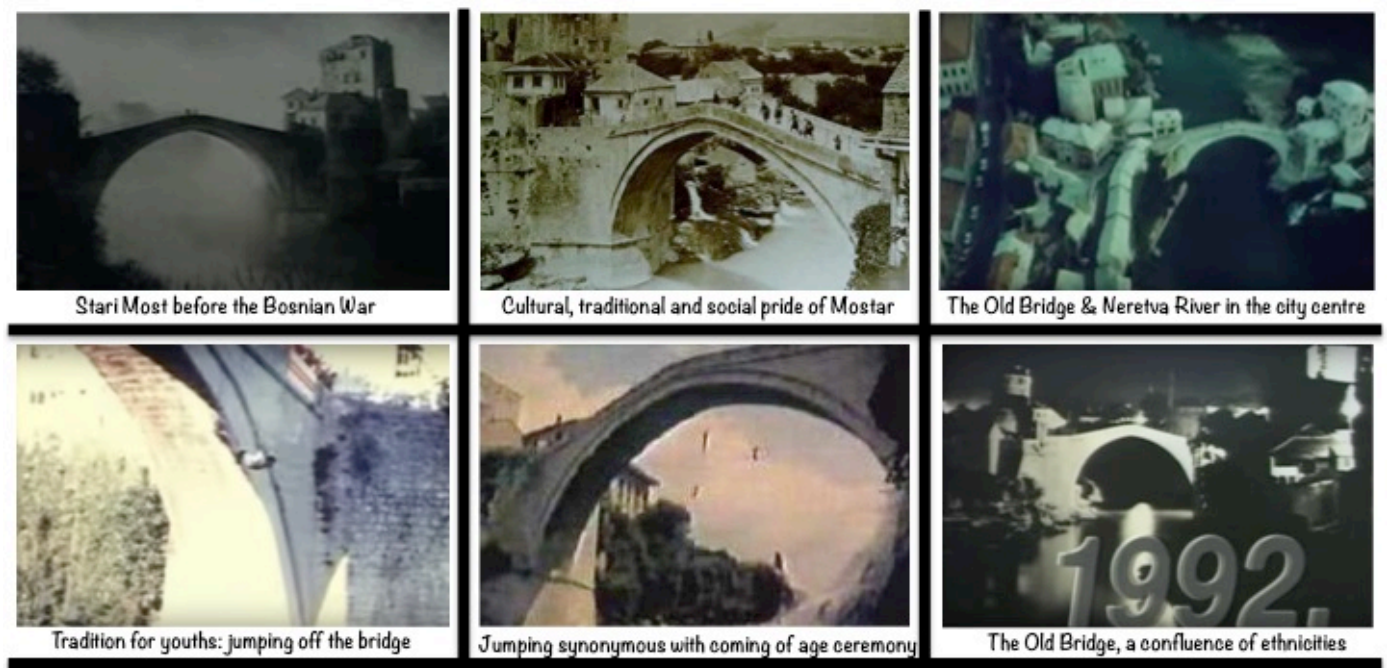
Art organisations such as Abart aim to bridge these gaps via the marriage of art and built form. However, they mostly target youths and children; the older generation, the victims of war, are not actively engaged.²¹ Though there are on-going programmes initiated by the UN for peace, retribution and reconciliation, little progress is seen. The programmes are obstructed further by the current political instability; though Mostar has a Mayor, there is very little understanding and tolerance between the councillors of different political parties, which represent the three factions.²² The victims and the people that actually witnessed the war, and were marred by its violence are unfortunately and frequently not involved in the peace building.

'War & Architecture' considers three principals: firstly to '*restore what has been lost to its pre-war condition*', secondly '*demolish the damaged and destroyed buildings and build something entirely new*', and thirdly '*the post-war city must create the new from the damaged old*'.²³ The first has been fulfilled for Mostar, while the second and the third are as yet far from being realised; this is because the on-going peace and retribution seem all but hollow echoes to recreate the original functions for the bridge.

The Picturebook Chronicles

Observed through compilation of photos from a documentary²⁴ and the author's visit to Mostar.

Figure 1: The Picturebook Chronicles, Stari Most



²⁰ Caucaso, O. (2013). *Mostar: the Old One, twenty years later*. [online] Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso.

²¹ Abartmain.blogspot.co.uk, (2015). *Abart*. [online]

²² Wikipedia, (2015). *Siege of Mostar*.

²³ Lebbus Woods, (2011). *WAR AND ARCHITECTURE*

²⁴ YouTube, (2012). *Stari Most - Before and After the War Bosnia*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kEFi7L9rCCU> [Accessed 17 Oct. 2015].



Act of Symbolic Violence on 9th November 1993



It is said that more than 60 shells were fired



The HVO was held responsible



Power struggle destroyed Mostar's icon of life



S. Praljak, Croat General deemed responsible



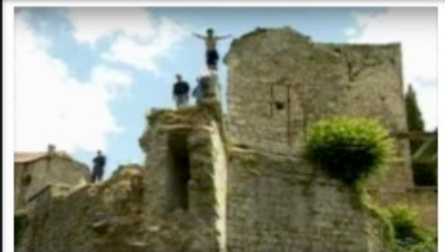
Praljak allegedly said 'these stone have no value'



We have built this new Bridge
Temporary bridge was named 'Inat (Defying) Most'

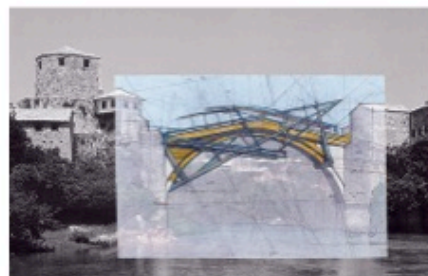


Mostarians try to go back to life before the war



Jumping tradition continued hoping for normalcy

Stari Most Chronicles: The past



W. M. Pühringer's project for the new bridge



Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks are proud of this moment and wish
UNESCO supports BiH over reconstruction



Rebuilding links by persistence, hope and courage



Tourism has entirely taken over the area



Still a fundamental divide between ethnic groups



Jumping tradition now merely a tourist attraction

Stari Most Chronicles: The present

Conclusions

Restoring architecture does not resolve conflict as emotional connections are lost causing cultural damage.²⁵ Human-induced acts of symbolic violence send tremors of detrimental effects on collective memory and heritage. By reducing the places to rubble and turning them into battlegrounds of human aggression they aim to discriminate and marginalise deep social, cultural, and religious ties, and to kill morale of the people. The act is synonymous with 'psychological warfare' toying with individual and collective emotions and values simultaneously, defeating their will.

Simply replicating destroyed symbols is certainly not the solution to bring harmony within a wronged and injured society. The old and the treasured has been destroyed, and the new, though may look familiar, does not bring together the wounded and prejudiced society. The affection and passion for the old symbol was developed over centuries; the new symbol has enormous competitive hurdles to conquer before it can demand the same attention.

The fragile society of Mostar conceals hidden physical and emotional scars; twenty years on, the perpetrators are still being tried.²⁶ The society is in a transitional period where 'closure' is not yet in sight; the Croat-Bosniak-Serb divide is still evident. The unwillingness to forget and move forward, and the overall political chaos impales restorative development. The replica bridge has not facilitated Mostarians to go back to their old lives that were without prejudices. The replica instead further intensifies the trauma and re-awakens distressing memories without healing old wounds.

Mostar may selectively and independently need to relinquish the past, and redefine space, its relationships to the new generation and the victims of war. The concept of peace and reconciliation needs to be grasped nationwide to be successful. Resonating Woods' 'Third Principle', one possibility could be to visualise a new image and identity for the reconstructed bridge. Re-imaging Stari Most through sports and art type 'humanities lens' could revive it as a living component of the city, instead of a tourism wallflower. The lifeless replica now needs a new beginning and a new story to successfully re-blend groups over common and mutually agreeable grounds.

²⁵ Bevan, R. (2006). *The destruction of memory*. London: Reaktion

²⁶ Case IT-04-74-T *Prosecutor v. J Prlic, B. Stojic, S. Praljak, M. Petkovic, V. Coric, B. Pusic, I* [2013] D3-1/30142 BIS

Appendix I: Published news and interviews of Stari Most

The Independent reported the following on 10th November 1993 (a day after the bridge was destroyed) news (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/croats-destroy-mostars-historic-bridge-1503338.html>).

'For at least 25,000 Bosnians trapped on the city's east side the collapse is a disaster - a tremendous blow to morale and a strategic victory for the Croats. The bridge was the only access to a source of drinking water which people retrieved by scurrying across at night under threat of sniper fire. It was also the main route to the places where the front line crossed into west 'Croatian' Mostar [...] Veso Vegar, the spokesman for the Bosnian Croat Defence Council (HVO) in Mostar, said it probably collapsed on its own...The only bridge now connecting east and west Mostar is a rickety rope and wood plank suspension affair close to Croatian positions and within easy range of snipers. Some Croatian sources said the Stari Most was destroyed in response to a string of defeats the Bosnian army has inflicted on the HVO in central Bosnia.'

Following interviews were undertaken following reconstruction of the Stari Most in 2004 (Krishnamurthy, 2010)

'There is a big difference between the old bridge and the new old bridge, before it was a historic monument. As the city was a small one, everyone knew each other and the old bridge was almost like a family member! Now, it's not comfortable anymore, not like it used to be anyway; it is more commercial as well. It used to be everyone's bridge, now it is not that way. With the reconstruction they said it will bring us all together, how can we all come together? [...] It is not family any more really [...]

'But the question is, you can forgive - but how can you? For the Bosnians how can we expect that? I cannot forgive someone who has harmed my mother, it would be very hard, or my sister. If my father has disappeared... how can I? [...] Just because you rebuild, you cannot forget.'

'I do not understand why they decided to build it again. Probably because there was no political unification, they focused on the Bridge [...] People were killing each other and they were supposed to stop and suddenly forget everything that happened...Although even now people are in clutches - it is a pretence - we are all living normally, driving cars - I do not know how! It was a sense of normalcy, even though it is east side and west side.'

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