

Chapter 3

THE OLD BRIDGE

One is only blasé about this masterly bridge before seeing it. The perfection of its arch, once it is there before one's eyes, has one in instant submission, perhaps because it epitomizes the highly strung beauty of Mostar.

- Brian W. Aldiss, 1966¹

The image and meaning of the Old Bridge embodied the meaning and spirit of all Bosnia. The essence of the bridge is meeting and linking, the opposite of separation and division. That is why the fate of this bridge and this country is one and the same.

– Ivan Lovrenović, 1995²

Aldiss and Lovrenović are far from alone in their assessments of the meaning and significance of Mostar's sixteenth-century Old Bridge, whose importance has resonated far beyond its city and county. Of all the debates about architecture and urban planning in postwar Mostar, or anywhere in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this particular site, which was destroyed in 1993, has caught and kept the world's attention more than any other. Internationally, the Old Bridge's rebuilding has been ubiquitously associated with reuniting the city of Mostar and with multicultural reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The discussion surrounding the reconstruction of this one iconic site has therefore demonstrated both the competition between Mostar's unifying and divisive tendencies as well as between Bosnia's shared and particularist identities.

¹ Aldiss, *Cities and Stones: A Traveler's Yugoslavia* (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1966), 106-107.

² Lovrenović, "Svijet bez Mosta" [The World without the Bridge] *Most* 91 (November -December 1995), <http://www.most.ba/002/046.htm>.

The New Old Bridge, as the recently completed replica is known locally, is a site whose multivalence can only be revealed through an understanding of recent history, how this has been perceived by different constituencies within Bosnia-Herzegovina and in the international community, and how these perceptions have shaped understandings of architectural sites. The Old Bridge and its meanings have often been noted, but the symbolism of this complex, layered site is usually reduced to clichés, while the reality is much more nuanced and complicated.

This chapter will explain why this particular piece of Bosnian heritage has been reinterpreted in the ways it has been and the possible motivations of those making these associations. It will do this by examining the very public and popular discussion of the Old Bridge and its meanings in the past decade. In short, this chapter will explore the very process of symbol-making by tracing the recent evolution of the Old Bridge's meanings and the mechanisms by which they changed. It will also challenge the basic underlying assumptions implied in the Old Bridge's new meanings. It is neither clear whether the multiculturalism the Old Bridge is said to represent really exists nor whether the unification and reconciliation its reconstruction is said to symbolize is really complete. But understanding the New Old Bridge as not only the *reconstruction* of a monument of lost heritage, but also as the *construction* of a monument in a more narrowly defined sense, can facilitate accepting and celebrating its multivalence rather than oversimplifying its interpretation.

SYMBOLISM

Even before the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Old Bridge was Mostar's most widely known and acclaimed architectural site. Because of its international

reputation and local significance, its purposeful destruction by the HVO in November 1993 created a symbol of wartime attacks on Bosnian heritage. In its absence it also became a powerful symbol of Bosnian multiculturalism since its destruction was understood as an attack on Bosnia's pluralistic tradition. The New Old Bridge has also become a symbol of peace and reconciliation because its reconstruction has been compared to the rebuilding of metaphoric bridges between Bosnia's divided peoples. But these are new meanings for an old symbol, and it is best to begin with a description of the bridge's historical associations before addressing how its destruction and reconstruction have added new layers of meaning.

Historical Meanings

Before its destruction, the Old Bridge's meaning centered on its historical and cultural significance to its city and its region. Its long-standing symbolic importance to Mostar is irrefutable, as the histories of the city and its bridge are inseparable. Mostar was founded by the Ottomans because of a pre-existing wooden bridge at the site. That original bridge was replaced with a more-substantial timber one by 1481, which in turn was replaced in 1566 by the single-arched stone bridge that stood until 1993.³

Thus the Old Bridge we speak of today was built after the city had flourished for a century due to its key river crossing. Initially this stone bridge was simply a piece of

³ During the Austrian administration of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late nineteenth century, the sides of the bridge were raised to make the roadway less steep. The entrances of the adjacent shops on the east side were raised an entire story to meet the new street level. In the 1950s and 1960s the Austrian-era additions were removed and the bridge's pavement was restored, its vault was consolidated, and its foundations were reinforced. Bozidar Jezernik, "Quadret Kemer: A Bridge between Barbarity and Civilization" *SEER* 73 (July 1993); Amir Pasic, *The Old Bridge (Stari Most) in Mostar* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 1994), 30-36; Džemal Čelić and Mehmed Mujezinović, *Stari Mostovi U Bosni i Hercegovini* [Old Bridges in Bosnia-Herzegovina] (Sarajevo: Biblioteka Kulturno Nasljede, 1998).

strategic infrastructure commissioned by the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent during his prosperous reign, and built at an integral river crossing on the trade route connecting the inland Balkans to the Adriatic Sea. Its architect was Mimar Hajrudin the Younger, the son of the designer of the Bayazid II Mosque in Istanbul, and a student of Mimar Sinan, the most renowned Ottoman architect who designed the Suleiman Mosque in Istanbul and numerous projects throughout the empire.

Construction of the stone bridge began by direct order of the Sultan rather than of a local authority as was more common for Ottoman building projects in the Balkans. Thus the bridge at Mostar was known as Sultan Suleiman's bridge to locals and to the Ottoman officials. As new bridges were built in Mostar by subsequent authorities, it was known as the Turkish Bridge and later simply as the Old Bridge, or *Stari Most*. Beginning in the nineteenth century it was also called the Roman Bridge by western European travelers, who condescendingly thought that because of its beauty, quality of workmanship, and the breadth of its span, that it had to be of Roman construction and could not possibly be Turkish (fig. 26).

Bozidar Jezernik relates its history as the Roman Bridge, arguing this Orientalist interpretation was first attributed by an officer in Napoleon's armies.⁴ Throughout the nineteenth century, this assessment was often repeated and widely accepted, even by reputable British archaeologists such as Arthur Evans and John Gardner Wilkinson.⁵ Wilkinson even measured and analyzed the Old Bridge and attributed it to the time of

⁴ Charles Pertusier, *La Bosnie Considérée dans Rapports avec l'Empire Ottoman* [Bosnia Considered in Relations with the Ottoman Empire] (Paris 1822) as quoted in Jezernik "Qudret Kemer," 475.

⁵ Evans, *Through Bosnia and Hercegovina during the Insurrection in 1875 by Foot* (London: 1892): 348-49; and Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro: With a Journey to Mostar in Herzegovina and Remarks on the Slavonic Nations* (London: John Murray, 1848): 59-60.

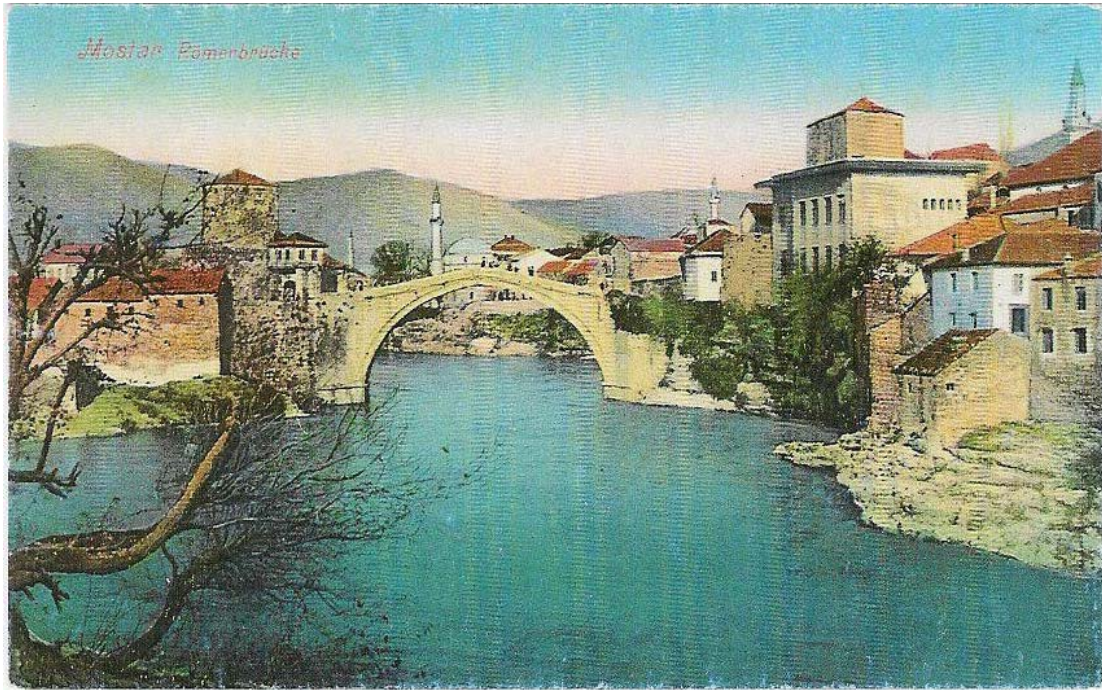


Figure 26: Late Nineteenth-Century Austrian Postcard labeling the Old Bridge as the *Römenbrücke* or “Roman Bridge,” 1912, reprint 1996. (image: Hermes, Sarajevo).

some of the original masonry with later additions.⁶ Continued assertions by the locals and the Ottoman authorities that Suleiman the Magnificent had built the bridge were overruled by prejudices in Europe, peaking when a French painter described the bridge as rising “in the midst of Turkish barbarity as a marvelous remnant of Latin civilization.”⁷ This appellation continues almost to the present: a 1984 German history of bridge construction contains the contradictory sentence “the *Roman* Bridge in Mostar, Yugoslavia gives eloquent testimony to the *Turkish* art of bridge building.”⁸

⁶ Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro*, 58-60.

⁷ Charlotte de Lazen, *L'Hercegovine et le Pont de Mostar* as quoted in Jezernik “Qudret Kemer,” 478. Jezernik argues the theory of Roman origins was first challenged in 1877, but long after it was accepted as Ottoman, many continued to call it the Roman Bridge and others began arguing it was built on the site of an earlier Roman bridge or that it had been built by Dalmatian-Italian architects. For examples see: Lovett Edwards *Introducing Yugoslavia* (London: Methuen and Co., 1954), 205 and J.A. Cuddon *The Companion Guide to Yugoslavia*, 2nd ed.n (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 340.

⁸ Hans Wittfoht, *Building Bridges: History, Technology, Construction* (Düsseldorf: Beton-Verlag, 1984), 27 (emphasis added).

For locals, the Old Bridge's importance can be traced through its place in folklore and its central role in the social life of the city. Many legends surround its construction: most include stories about the Sultans motivations for commissioning it or the architect's experiences while building it.⁹ As is common practice for any important site in the Balkans, various generic regional myths have also been applied to the Old Bridge. For example, one common myth suggests that a pair of lovers were built one each into the two opposing embankments to create an intrinsic will within the sides of the bridge to reach for one other. In more recent times, the Old Bridge also played a significant role in the personal memories of Mostar's residents; it was the landmark where people agreed to meet, the romantic spot where lovers strolled, and diving from it into the river below was a local right of passage. Its importance to the city is also witnessed through the naming of many local businesses and organizations after it – everything from a radio station to a youth group to a literary magazine in Mostar is called Bridge (*Most*).

For outsiders, the Old Bridge's significance can be traced through the descriptions of Ottoman and western European dignitaries, travelers, historians and journalists and through the depictions of centuries of painters and engravers.¹⁰ It inspired these foreign writers and artists, as well as local ones, because of its striking setting across

⁹ For summary discussions of the Old Bridge's history, legends and descriptions see: Čelić and Mujezinović, *Stari Mostovi*; Pašić, *The Stari Most*; Bozidar Jezernik, "Quadret Kemerli"; and Svein Monnesland, *1001 Days: Bosnia and Hercegovina in Pictures and Words through the Centuries* (Oslo: Syppress Verlag, 2001).

¹⁰ For examples see: Aldiss, *Cities and Stones*; Janos Asboth, *An Official Tour Through Bosnia and Hercegovina* (London, 1890); Otto Blau, *Reisen in Bosnien und der Hertzegovina* [Travels in Bosnia and Hercegovina] (Berlin, 1877); Cuddon, *Companion Guide to Jugoslavia*; Edwards, *Introducing Yugoslavia*; Evans, *Through Bosnia and Hercegovina*; Albert Fortis, *Travels into Dalmatia* (New York: Arno Press, 1971); Frances Kinsley Hutchinson, *Motoring in the Balkans* (Chicago: McClurg & Co., 1909); Fareed Jafri, *Yugoslavia Today* (Pakistan, n.d.), de Lazen, *L'Hercegovine*; Robert Michel *Fahrten in den Reichslanden: Bilder und Skizzen aus Bosnien und der Hercegovina* [Journeys into the Province: Paintings and Drawings from Bosnia and Hercegovina] (Vienna / Leipzig, 1912); George Oor, *Yugoslavia Today* (Paris: Editions J.A., 1977); Ernest C. Peixotto, *By Italian Seas* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1907); Pertusier, *La*



Figure 27: “The Bridge on Neretva in Mostar,” J.J. Kirchner, 1878. (image: Hartlebend, Vienna)

the deep river canyon and because of the beauty of its daring thin span and robust anchoring towers. Many depictions, such as J.J. Kirchner’s 1878 etching, exaggerate these qualities (fig. 27). Through the centuries, few foreigners seemed ever to have seen the Old Bridge and failed to describe it as the best of some category: of bridges, architecture, its style, its era, its region, or in the world.

As a result of its local importance and international reputation, the Old Bridge has always served as Mostar’s icon. Its image is without exception privileged on local guides, maps, and histories and depicted on postcards, key chains, and other tourist trinkets (fig. 28).¹¹ Its image has also always been used on everything officially linked

Bosnie Considérée; Edmund Stillman, *The Balkans: LIFE World Library* (New York: Time Incorporated, 1964); Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia* (New York: Viking Press, 1941); and Wilkinson, *Dalmatia and Montenegro*.

¹¹ For examples see: *Baedekers Yugoslavia* (Stuttgart: various); *Fodor’s Yugoslavia* (New York: Fodor’s Travel Guides, 1983); *Hercegovina* (Zagreb: Privredni Vječnik, 1985); John Mason and Anne Mason, *Letts Go To Yugoslavia* (London: Charles Letts and Co., 1972); Ljubo Mihić, *Turistički Motivi i Objecti u Hercegovini* [Tourist Motives and Sites in Hercegovina] (Belgrade:



Figure 28: The Old Bridge depicted on maps, postcards, and other tourist paraphernalia. (image: author).

to the city, from Mostar's coat of arms to its soccer team's logo (fig. 29).¹² It is important to note that it was a shared symbol, used by institutions and organizations which can now be considered exclusively Bosnian Croat, including the Catholic Church, which formerly depicted the Old Bridge on the Bishop of Mostar's mitre. Ironically, alongside the pilgrimage site of Međjugorje, the Old Bridge's image was even used on a 1992 recruiting poster for the HVO, the Bosnian Croat militia that later destroyed it (fig. 30).¹³

Turistička Stampa, 1968); *Mostar* (Zagreb: Turistkomerc, before 1992); *Mostar and Its Surroundings* (Zagreb: Turistkomerc, 1985); *Mostar and Its Surroundings* (Zagreb: Turistička Naklada, 2001); *Mostar: 99 Pictures* (Mostar: Microbook, 1998); Salih Rajković, *Mostar: Photoguides "Jugoslavija."* (Belgrade: Izdavački Zavod "Jugoslavija", 1965); *Mostar: Plan Grada / City Map* (Mostar: IC Stamparija, after 1995); and *Treasures of Yugoslavia: An Encyclopedic Touring Guide* (Belgrade: Yugoslaviapublic, c1980).

¹² Its placement on the Bishop's Miter is particularly significant considering the chauvinist Croat nationalism of the Bishop of Mostar during and following the war.

¹³ Daoud Sarhandi and Alina Boboc *Evil Doesn't Live Here: Posters of the Bosnian War* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001), 115. Poster text translation: "Croatian Community of Herceg-Bosna first professional recruitment of the HVO Colonel 'Ante Bruno Bušić.' Every Croat, no matter in what part of the world he is, no matter what his personal political views are, past faults and misconceptions were, today wants to establish a sovereign, free state of Croatia."



Figure 29: The Old Bridge's outline incorporated into the logos of the Bishop of Mostar (before the war), the City of Mostar and the local soccer team, Velež. (images: *Oslobođenje*, Sarajevo; City of Mostar; and FK Velež, Mostar).

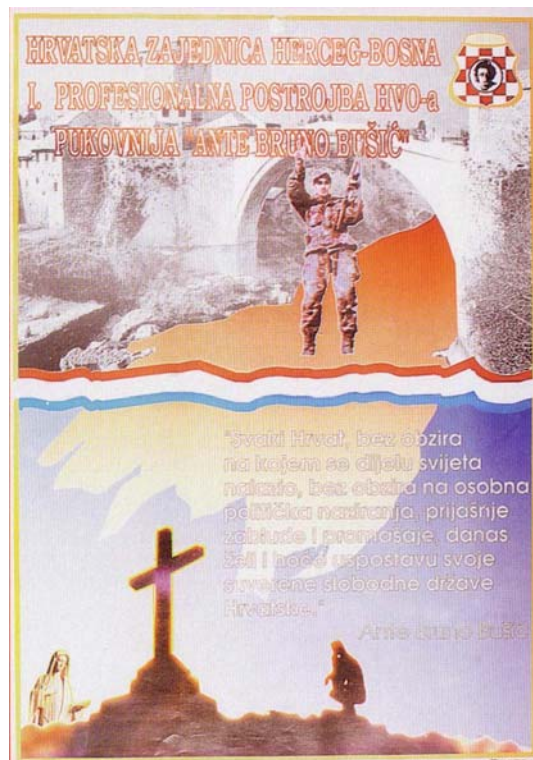


Figure 30: The Old Bridge with a view of the pilgrimage center Medjugorje on a recruitment poster for the HVO, the Bosnian Croat militia, c. 1992. The text encourages enlistment of all Croats to fight for the independence and liberation of Croatia. (image: Hrvatsko Vijeće Obrane, Mostar).



Figure 31: The Old Bridge depicted on an Austro-Hungarian stamp, with King Peter on a royal Yugoslav Dinar bank note, on a Federal Yugoslav stamp, and a stamp and Dinar note of the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. (images: public domain; PTT Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sarajevo; and *Ministvarstvo Financija Bosne i Hercegovine*, Sarajevo)

As the referenced place expands outward, to Herzegovina, Bosnia, or the Balkans, the Old Bridge remains one of the few sites typically called upon as representative and meaningful. It is the sort of symbol that has been depicted not only on tourist promotions, but also on the stamps and currency of whatever polity it has found itself within, from Austro-Hungary and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia to Federal Yugoslavia and today's independent Bosnia-Herzegovina (fig. 31).¹⁴

¹⁴ Bosnia-Herzegovina was administered by Austro-Hungary from 1878 to 1918, part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from 1921 to 1941 (called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after 1929), part of the Independent State of Croatia from 1941 to 1945, and one of the six constituent republics of SFR Yugoslavia from 1945 until declaring its independence in 1992. For examples of the use of the Old Bridge's image by these governments see: Karl Brownell, "1906 Pictorial Issue of Bosnia Herzegovina," *American Philatelist* (January 1978); Zelko Stojanović, *Papirni Novac Srbije i Jugoslavije* [Paper Money of Serbia and Yugoslavia] (Belgrade: Z. Stojanovic, 1996); and Herbert

Most pre-destruction references to the Old Bridge did not explicitly discuss its meaning, but rather focused on its appearance. But by observing the way its image has been used, we can infer that historically it was used to represent *places* – whether Mostar or Bosnia-Herzegovina or larger entities or regions. The Old Bridge continues to symbolize these places today along with the new, more abstracted layers of symbolism it has acquired. Because of the written and visual references to it by foreigners in the past few centuries as well as because of the prolific use of its image for twentieth-century tourist and political purposes, the Old Bridge was one of the most internationally known sites in Bosnia-Herzegovina before the recent war. Its pre-existing significance in foreign countries is particularly relevant because it is the European, Turkish, and now American communities who have focused on it in the postwar period.

Post-Destruction Meanings

Since its brutal destruction, the Old Bridge has been argued to represent the divisiveness of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina and of war in general, as well as to represent the destruction of cultural heritage in that war and more broadly.¹⁵ In the past decade however, the Old Bridge has most frequently been argued to represent Bosnia's supposed pluralistic tradition. It is not simply described as a symbol of Bosnia-Herzegovina because of its beauty and wide-reaching reputation, but also because of this one specific characteristic of Bosnian identity.

Fritzingler and Valentin Welzenbach, *Papiergeld aus dem Krieg in Bosnein-Herzegowina* [Paper Money during the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina] (Regenenstau: H Gietl, 1996).

¹⁵ For examples see: Roy Gutman and David Rieff, *Crimes of War: What the Public Should Know* (New York: Norton, 1999); Jean Loussier and Robin Langley Sommer, eds. *Lost Europe: Images of a Vanished World* (London: Grange, 1997); and Ismail Serageldin, Ephim Shluger and Joan Martin-Brown, eds., *Historic Cities and Sacred Sites: Cultural Roots for Urban Futures* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2001).

These new associations actually first appear shortly before the bridge's destruction, as it came under threat and as other significant pieces of Bosnian cultural heritage were lost. Escalating rhetoric about the Old Bridge's significance and pleas to the UN and UNESCO to intervene and save it paralleled its increasingly deliberate targeting.¹⁶ These acts may have been mutually reinforcing: not only did its defenders plead for it because it was at risk, but it was probably increasingly at risk as its importance kept being publicly argued.

When it was eventually destroyed, the Bosnian government assigned the West partial blame for their failure to act on the bridge's behalf in a public letter which argued that along with the bridge, Bosnia had also lost hope that the UN, UNESCO, the Council of Europe, or other Western institutions would, or could, save Bosnia's historic sites.¹⁷ This sentiment was epitomized in a political cartoon in *Oslobođenje*, the only daily newspaper published in Sarajevo at the time, which eagerly read by many still living in that besieged city. The cartoon, printed a few days after the Old Bridge's destruction, depicted UNESCO as falling along with the bridge's arch (fig. 32).¹⁸

The Old Bridge's vague new association with multiculturalism which had tentatively begun to emerge while it was under threat was firmly solidified with its actual destruction. The purposefulness of this act necessarily changed the bridge's meaning and importance, as happens with any deliberately targeted site. But in addition, the

¹⁶ "Grad bez Džamije" [City without Mosques], *Dani*, June 3, 1993, 48; "HVO Razara i Stari Most" [The HVO is also destroying the Old Bridge], *Oslobođenje*, July 7, 1993, 1; "Opet Pakao u Goraždu" [Hell Again in Goražda], *Oslobođenje*, November 9, 1993, 1; "Protest Generala Perišića" [Protesting General Perišić], *Dani*, July 20, 1993, 35; N. Salom "Ne Daj se, Stari" [Don't Give Up, Old Man], *Oslobođenje*, August 30, 1993, 4; "Dr. Silajdžić Poziva UN i UNESCO: Spasite Stari Most" [Dr. Silajdžić Calls to the UN and UNESCO: Save the Old Bridge], *Oslobođenje*, July 10, 1993, 8; and "Stari Most u Opasnosti" [The Old Bridge in Danger], *Oslobođenje*, June 23, 1993, 8.

¹⁷ "Pismo Vlade BiH: Srušena je Nada" [Letter from the BiH Government: Hope was Destroyed], *Oslobođenje*, November 10, 1993, 8.

¹⁸ "Pismo Vlade BiH," 8; and Božo Stefanović, "UNESKO" *Oslobođenje*, November 15, 1993, 2.

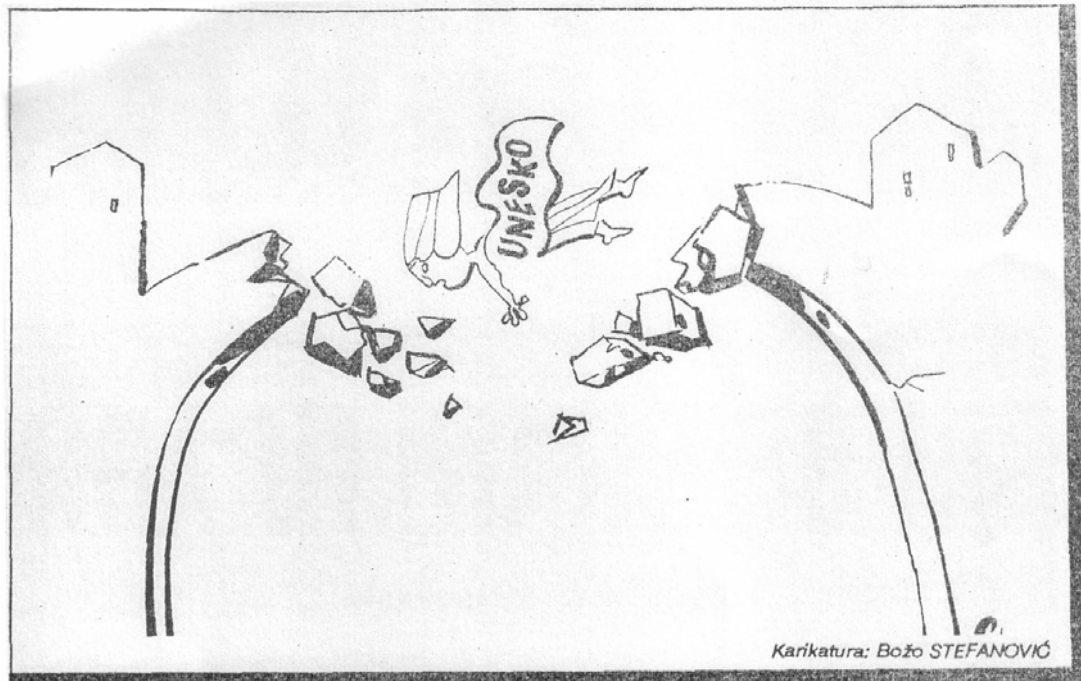


Figure 32: Political cartoon depicting UNESCO falling along with the stones of the Old Bridge, representing the international institution's failure to save this example of world cultural heritage, 1993. (image: Božo Stefanović).

specific new associations the Old Bridge developed are directly related to the specific circumstances surrounding its destruction.

These include first of all, the way in which the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia-Herzegovina has been interpreted by the international community. Their understanding of this war as being between particularists and pluralists, between those desiring culturally pure states and those desiring a multicultural state, is what interested international organizations and western governments and served as their justification for intervention in Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁹ These organizations, governments, and the

¹⁹ For examples see: Robert J. Donia and John V.A. Fine, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed* (New York: Columbia University, 1994); Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, *Bosnia the Good: Tolerance and Tradition* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2000) and *The Denial of Bosnia* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); and Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996). However most political scientists and international relations scholars do not stress this

international media therefore latched onto symbols representing Bosnian pluralism, the “side” the rhetoric of the western-based international community claimed to support. As one of the most widely known sites in Bosnia and one which had recently begun to be associated with such symbolism, the Old Bridge’s loss was noticed worldwide, further cementing its new associations, or as CBS news correspondent Morley Safer argued, “it was a symbol too good to pass up.”²⁰

The timing of this event within the war was also crucial to its specific new meaning. The Old Bridge survived the first of the two separate sieges of Mostar. The initial attackers, the Army of the *Republika Srpska* supported by the JNA, must have consciously decided not to destroy it since they systematically demolished all of Mostar’s other bridges within a two month period in the spring of 1992.²¹ Had the Old Bridge been destroyed then, its absence would not have coincided with the end of formal pluralism in Bosnia-Herzegovina so its present meaning might be different. At that time, most people in Bosnia were still cooperating and fighting together against a shared enemy, perceived as an outside aggressor. It is significant that the bridge was destroyed later by the HVO, whose clashes with the ABiH did represent the end formal inter-group cooperation within the country.

The Old Bridge seems to have been a target of the HVO from the very beginning of their assault on Mostar. An editorial in a combined wartime edition of the weeklies

approach to the war, focusing instead on different aspects of nationalism, including elite manipulation and the security dilemma, as well as external factors, including the end of the Cold War and the actions and inactions of the West.

²⁰ Safer, “Mostar: Nation Building.” *60 Minutes*, CBS, October 19, 2003, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/10/17/60minutes/main578648.shtml>.

²¹ Architectural Association of Mostar, *Mostar '92–Urbicid* [Mostar '92: Urbicide], edited by Krešimir Šego (Mostar: Hrvatsko Vijeće Odbrane Općine Mostar, 1993), 8-25; and Matej Škarica, “Glavobolja Zvana Stari Most” [A Headache called the Old Bridge], *bljesak.info*, March 10, 2006, <http://www.bljesak.info>.



Figure 33: View of the Old Bridge shortly before its destruction showing the structure of corrugated metal and car tires which was built to protect it from shelling, 1993. (image: Nigel Chandler, SYGMA, New York).

Slobodna Bosna and *Ljiljan* noted that in two and a half months of the JNA siege, the bridge was directly hit only once, yet in the first ten days of the HVO attack in July 1993, it was hit seven times.²² That summer, car tires were hung on the bridge in a futile attempt to protect it from shelling, and a corrugated metal roof was constructed to protect those who attempted to cross it during this second battle (fig. 33).²³ The HVO launched another intensive attack on the Old Bridge in late September, when

²² Senad Avdić, “Prvi Rat je Bio Bolji” [The First War was Better], *Slobodna Bosna/Ljiljan*, July 19, 1993, 17.

²³ The raised wooden scaffolding was intended to cause the “detonation of projectiles before they reach[ed] the bridge surface where the explosion would cause worse damage.” Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, “War Damage to the Cultural Heritage in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina,” prepared by Colin Kaiser, January 19, 1993, as Appendix C in “The Destruction by War of the Cultural Heritage in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina presented by the Committee on Cultural and Education,” report prepared by Jacques Baumel, Doc 6756, February 2, 1993, <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc93/EDOC6756.htm>.

thirty-eight anti-armor grenades were aimed at it in a single day, followed by thirty-two more hits the following day. Its survival of this intense battering was unbelievable even to war-hardened Mostar residents, many of whom came out to watch the shelling in disbelief.²⁴

Their to risk their lives to bear witness to the attacks on the Old Bridge, and their need to see for themselves after news of its destruction spread further indicates the importance of this architectural site to the citizens of Mostar. According to the memories of Emir Balić, an internationally acclaimed diver from Mostar:

I cried for days whenever I was left alone. I could not believe that I would live longer than the Old Bridge. It was our bridge. ... We spoke of it as our friend, the oldest Mostarian whom we all respected and were proud of. Many people were killed during the war, but it was when the bridge was destroyed that Mostarians spontaneously declared a day of mourning.²⁵

The order for the destruction of the Old Bridge is believed to have come from HVO commander Slobodan Praljak, a Hercegovina native who had studied and worked in Zagreb as a filmmaker as well as psychology and engineering professor, and who had joined the Croatian Army when it formed in 1991.²⁶ He had quickly been promoted to the rank of Major General, and once the war in Bosnia-Hercegovina was underway, he returned to Hercegovina at Croatian President Tuđman's request, first as Zagreb's senior defense representative to *Herceg-Bosnia* and from July 1994 as military commander of the HVO.

²⁴ Sejo Omeragić, "Salomljen je Ibrik, Uvelo je Cvijeće" [The Pitcher is Broken, the Flowers have Dried Out], *Slobodna Bosna / Ljiljan*, September 25, 1993, 16.

²⁵ "Mostar," *Time*, August 10, 2003, <http://www.time.com/time/europe/etan/mostar.html>.

²⁶ ICTY Case IT-04-74, indictment submitted March 2, 2004 by Carla del Ponte, prosecutor.

Though Praljak's role in the Old Bridge's destruction is widely acknowledged, one can only speculate on his motives because to this day he denies the allegation.²⁷ In very recent years, he has begun to talk about the destruction as justifiable, although still without claiming responsibility. In an interview in the Zagreb newspaper *Novi List*, he was quoted as having said that the "Old Bridge was a military object" that "in war, without regard to its cultural value, can be destroyed."²⁸ Though the only remaining bridge in Mostar at the time, and thus the only way to move from one half the city to the other, in all probability his goal was not entirely strategic.

Even assuming that like other targeting of cultural heritage during the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the destruction of Mostar's bridge was at least in part an attack on identity, it is unclear whether Praljak and his subordinates viewed the bridge as a symbol of multicultural Bosnia or specifically of Bosnian Muslims. It is actually far more likely that at that time, the HVO considered the bridge a symbol and physical reminder of Bosnia's Ottoman heritage. Ottoman heritage has played different roles in the historical myths and identity formations of various groups in Bosnia-Herzegovina; this aspect of Bosnia's past has become increasingly important to and celebrated by Bosnian Muslims and patriots, yet has been a source of vilification for Serb and Croat

²⁷ Jožo Pavković, "Slobodan Praljak: U Vrazju Mater, Objavit Konačno Svete Documente!" [Slobodan Praljak: To Hell, Finally Publish the Sacred Documents!], *Večernji List*, March 9, 2000, 2; Zoran Šagolj, "Jesam li kriv što nisam Bog?" [Is it my Fault I'm not God?], *Slobodna Dalmacija*, March 18, 2004, <http://archiv.slobodnadamacija.hr/20040318/temedana01.asp> ; Slobodan Praljak, "Moj Govor nije bio Dio Urote protiv Prlića: Intervju Slobodana Praljaka" [My Speech was not a Part of a Conspiracy against Prlić: Interview: Slobodan Praljak], by Alenko Zornija, *Hrvatska Riječ*, May 22, 2000, 13-15.; and "Šta Kažu Generali" [What the Generals Say], *Dani*, October 6, 2000, 33.

²⁸ Šagolj, "Jesam li Kriv." Praljak has also argued the Old Bridge's destruction is not a prosecutable war crime, because it was not an UNESCO designated World Heritage Site, however the Hague Convention clearly indicates that this is not a prerequisite for protection. Asaf Becirović, "Za Rušenje Starog Mosta do Dvadeset Godina Zatvora" [Up to Twenty Years in Prison for Destroying the Old Bridge], *Oslobodjenje*, December 19, 2003, http://www.oslobodjenje.com.ba/asp/printart.asp?art_id=36797 ; and Second Peace Conference at The Hague, *Convention Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land*, The Hague: October 18, 1907.

nationalists.²⁹ In the rhetoric of Croat nationalism, the Ottoman Era is considered a period of oppressive foreign occupation.³⁰ And during the war, Ottoman heritage was closely linked to Bosnia's contemporary Muslim population with whom they, including the HVO, were fighting. According to András Riedlmayer, an expert on the destruction of heritage in the former Yugoslavia, an HVO soldier interviewed shortly before the bridge's felling had claimed: "It is not enough to cleanse Mostar of the Muslims, the relics must also be destroyed."³¹

Regardless of destroyer's motives, this ambiguous local event was very quickly and very widely *interpreted* as an attack on Bosnia's tradition of multiculturalism.³² It caught the world's attention because the Old Bridge was already internationally known, but also because of this potential new meaning. Within days of its destruction, eulogies asserting this symbolism were printed in the world's major newspapers, including the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, which ran by-lined articles the very next morning detailing the Old Bridge's final hours and the significance of its

²⁹ Carl Grodach elucidates this argument and its relationship to Mostar's built heritage very interestingly in the article "Reconstituting Identity and History in Post-War Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina," *City* 6, no.1 (2002): 73-74.

³⁰ Mladen Ančić, "Historical Dimensions of the Croatian National Feeling in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Hercegbosna.org*, c2004, <http://www.hercegbosna.org/engleski/feeling.html> ; Tone Bringa "Islam and the Quest for Identity in Post-Communist Bosnia-Herzegovina" in *Islam and Bosnia*, ed. M. Shatzmiller (Montreal: McGill University, 2002), 27; Ive Mazuran, "Croats and the Ottoman Empire," *hercegbosna.org*, c2004, <http://www.hercegbosna.org/engleski/crootto.html> ; and Darko Zubrinčić, "Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Croatia: An Overview of its History, Culture and Science*, 1995, <http://www.hr/darko/etf/etfss.html>.

³¹ Riedlmayer, "Bosnia's Multicultural Heritage and its Destruction," in *Report on a Symposium on Destruction and Rebuilding of Architectural Treasures in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Held May 2, 1994 in Washington, D.C.* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1994), <http://www.kakaigi.net/manu/carnegie.htm>.

³² An early UN Report did acknowledge that the bridge was more important to Muslims. M. Keba M'Baye, "Destruction of Cultural Property Report," Annex XI to the *Final Report of the United Nations Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992)*, S/1994/674/Add.2/Vol.V, December 28, 1994, <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/comexpert/ANX/XI.htm>. See also: Jerrilynn Dodds, "Bridge over the Neretva," *Archaeology* (January/February 1998); Donia and Fine, *Tradition Betrayed*; Jezernik, "Qudret Kemer"; Pašić, *The Stari Most*; and Sells, *Bridge Betrayed*.

loss for Mostar and Bosnia-Herzegovina.³³ In the years since, this act has been widely argued to represent a watershed or defining moment of the conflict.³⁴

In addition to the nature of the war and the timing of its destruction, the Old Bridge's universal association with multiculturalism was reinforced by its location in the particular city of Mostar. Before the war Bosnia's three main peoples were evenly represented in the city's population and lived mixed together throughout Mostar, but the war changed the city's demographics dramatically. This can be said of most Bosnian cities. What is significant and different about Mostar is that following the war it was a *divided* city. Bosnian Muslims and Bosnian Croats lived in physically separate areas and most city's Serbs had left altogether. Though not actually marking the point of separation, the Old Bridge as a symbol of the peoples' former unity became particularly powerful once they were literally divided.

Any journalist or politician who has visited Mostar even for the briefest of intervals could not have helped but to realize that both ends of the Old Bridge are located completely within what is now the Muslim side of the city. Nonetheless, they have repeatedly espoused the idea that the bridge and the Neretva River it spans are the line

³³ For examples see: Alija Behram. "Ustaše Srušile Stari Most" [The Ustaše destroyed the Old Bridge], *Oslobođenje*, November 10, 1993, 1; Joel Brand, "Mostar's Ottoman Bridge, After Defying the Centuries, Succumbs to Croat Fire," *USA Today*, November 10, 1993, 13.; Slavenka Drakulić, "Falling Down: A Mostar Bridge Elegy," *The New Republic*, December 13, 1993, 14-15; "Fallen Arch," *U.S. News and World Report*, November 22, 1993 13; Jelena Lovrić. "The Bridge-Burners," *WarReport*, December 1993, 14-15; Predrag Matvejević, "Most" [The Bridge], *Feral Tribune*, November 1993 (reprinted in *Dani*, December 29, 1993, 10); "The Old Bridge of Mostar has been Destroyed," *Space and Society* (November 1993); 62-63.; Chuck Sudetic, "Mostar's Old Bridge Battered to Death," *The New York Times*, November 10, 1993, A18; "Le Vieux Pont de Mostar n'est plus" [The Old Bridge of Mostar is No More], *Le Monde*, November, 11, 1993.

³⁴ For examples see: Ivo Banac, "Separating History from Myth: An Interview with Ivo Banac." In *Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan War*, edited by Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz (Stony Creek, CT: The Pamphleteer's Press, 1993) ; and Paddy Ashdown, "Bosnia, the Balkans, Europe and Islam" (lecture, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, November 18, 2004), http://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/presso/presssp/default.asp?content_id=33523.

of division in their stories and rhetoric because it conveys the simple, easily graspable image of Mostar that they are trying to convey. Some scholars have even perpetuated this idea in their work because it fits nicely into their arguments.³⁵ Though one might argue its actual location is irrelevant when being invoked in this symbolic manner, repeating this misconception also demonstrates the superficiality of the international community's use of the Old Bridge as a symbol of division. According to Heiko Wimmen of the Heinrich Böll Foundation,

this popular image probably reveals more about the Western need to reduce complex and multilayered structures of ethnic interaction to clear-cut oppositions (which then can be, as it were, “bridged”), and also provides a symbol for easy media consumption, rather than reflecting actual local realities.³⁶

The Old Bridge's function also contributed to its new meaning. The international community and many Bosnians have seen it as a more appropriate choice to symbolize Bosnian multiculturalism than any of the numerous targeted mosques, monasteries, or churches. Mosques are overtly Muslim and churches are overtly Christian, but as infrastructure the Old Bridge has been perceived as transcending these divisions and capable of representing everyone.³⁷

The Old Bridge was a better candidate than other secular structures in Bosnia to be this new symbol of multiculturalism also simply because it is a bridge.³⁸ It is not an

³⁵ For example, Martin Coward describes the Old Bridge as “the last remaining bridge between the two halves of Mostar.” Coward, “Urbicide in Bosnia,” in *Cities, War and Terrorism: Towards an Urban Geopolitics*, ed. Stephen Graham (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 64.

³⁶ Heiko Wimmen, “New Nations, Imagined Borders: Engineering Public Space in Post-War Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina,” paper presented at the *Beirut Conference for Public Spheres*, Beirut, Lebanon, October 22-24, 2004.

³⁷ The World Bank, *Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Credit in the Amount of US\$4.0 Million Equivalent to Bosnia and Herzegovina for a Pilot Cultural Heritage Project*, Report No. 19115-BiH (Washington, DC: The World Bank, April 28, 1999), 3.

³⁸ The National Library in Sarajevo was perhaps Bosnia's only other targeted structure that was secular, significant and widely-known enough to have become this international symbol of multiculturalism in Bosnia. Its destruction was also immediately reacted to worldwide and was also

arbitrary symbol: there is an obvious, inherent connection between its form and meaning. It represents the idea of Bosnia as a multicultural place that *bridges* differences. As Bosnian noble prize winning author Ivo Andrić wrote in a 1933 essay on bridges, a theme with which he was fascinated and which he often linked to identities in Bosnia, bridges represent “the eternal, and eternally unsatisfied human desire to link, to reconcile, and join all that springs up before” them.³⁹ By saying the desire is both “eternal and eternally unsatisfied” Andrić was aware of the limitations of metaphoric bridges, suggesting their possible inability to fulfill their connecting roles and anticipating the symbolic complications the New Old Bridge would face.

The privileging of the Old Bridge’s image has increased dramatically in the past decade in parallel with its becoming a focal point for the international community’s postwar interest in Bosnia-Herzegovina. In recent years, publishing houses in Europe and the United States have selected Mostar’s Old Bridge, more often than every other site combined, as a cover image for any book remotely concerned with Mostar or Bosnia-Herzegovina and with notable frequency for books on the Balkan region in general or on the destruction and reconstruction of cultural heritage (fig. 34).⁴⁰

viewed as an attack on civilization and culture. Unfortunately, disagreement over its ownership and future function have complicated its restoration and the international community has shied away from it. See: Ellen Barry, “How the Vijećnica was Lost: All the Sympathy in the World Hasn’t Rebuilt the Sarajevo Library,” *Metropolis* (June 1999): 108-113, 141.

³⁹ Ivo Andrić, “Bridges,” in *Signs Bridges Conversations with Goya* (London: Menard Press, 1992), 27. Originally published in Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian as “Mostovi” in 1933.

⁴⁰ For examples see: Chris Agee, ed., *Scar in Stone: Contemporary Poetry from Bosnia* (Newcastle: Bloodaxe, 1998); Dušan I. Bjelić and Obrad Savić, *Balkan as Metaphor: Between Globalization and Fragmentation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity, and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Čelić and Mujezinović, *Stari Mostovi*; Donia and Fine, *Tradition Betrayed*; P.J. Emerson, *From Belfast to the Balkans: Was ‘Democracy’ Part of the Problem?* (Belfast: de Borda Institute, 1999); Fritzinger and Valentin, *Papiergeld aus dem Krieg*; Mahmućehajić, *Denial of Bosnia*; Christopher Merrill, *The Old Bridge: The Third Balkan War and the Age of the Refugee* (Minneapolis: Milkweed, 1995); Monnesland, *1001 Days*; Amir Pašić, *Islamic Architecture of Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Istanbul: IRCICA, 1994); Sells, *Bridge Betrayed*; and Susan Woodward, *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 1995).

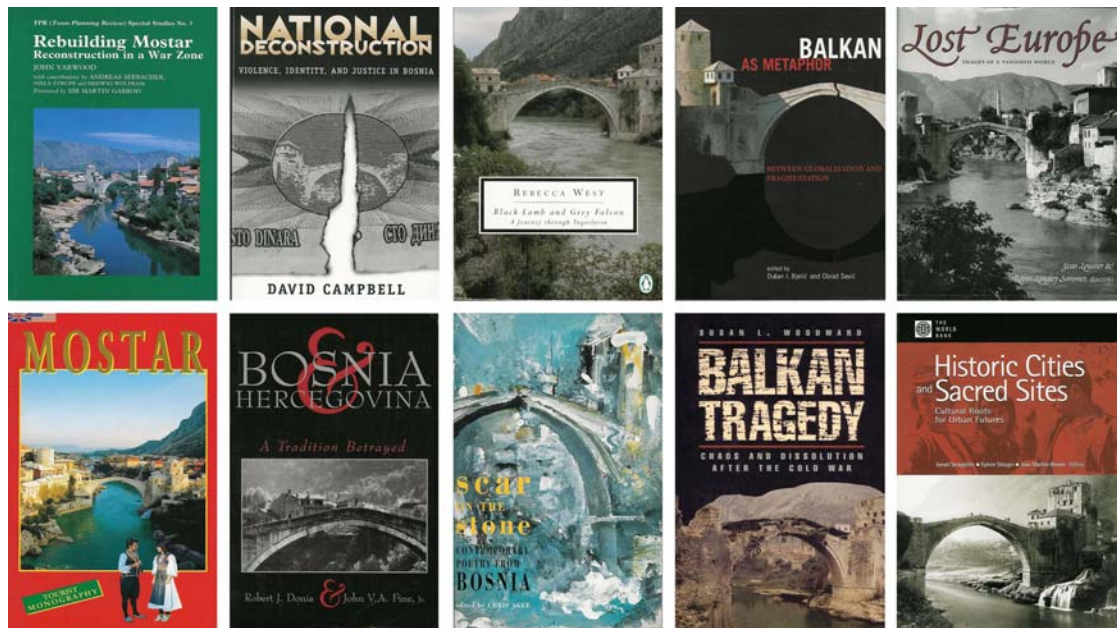


Figure 34: The Old Bridge as cover image for foreign books published since the early 1990s about Mostar, Bosnia-Hercegovina, the former Yugoslavia and the Balkans as well as about the destruction and reconstruction of cultural heritage. (images: Liverpool University Press, Liverpool; University of Minnesota, Minneapolis; Penguin Books, London; MIT Press, Cambridge, MA; Grange Books, Kent, UK; Turistički Naklada, Zagreb, Croatia; Columbia University Press, New York; Bloodaxe Books, Highgreen, UK; Brookings Institution, Washington, DC; and The World Bank, Washington, DC).

This particular iconic image of the bridge has been chosen for the same reasons it was so frequently depicted historically: because of its picturesque qualities and general familiarity. However, in the past decade, it has also been privileged because it has become the favored symbol of the characteristic the international community chooses to celebrate about Bosnia: its multiculturalism.

The Reconstruction Process and Its Meanings

In the same way that the Old Bridge's symbolism of multiculturalism was first noted by local authorities but quickly adopted and championed by the international community, the interconnected new meanings associated with its reconstruction were

also locally proclaimed and internationally appropriated. The belief that reconstructing Mostar's Old Bridge would lead to reuniting the city and the country was first articulated very optimistically by east Mostar mayor Safet Oručević before the war had even ended. Oručević suggested its rebuilding would: "Symbolize the restoration of [Bosnia] and the reconciliation of its people who will come together to rebuild the Old Bridge, and all Mostar's bridges, to link them as a people once again."⁴¹

This message linking reconstruction with reconciliation resonated with the European and American supporters who had already been attracted to the related idea that the Old Bridge symbolized Bosnian multiculturalism. For these international organizations and governments, rebuilding the Old Bridge became synonymous with the greater process of rebuilding a peaceful, pluralistic Bosnia-Herzegovina. Most tellingly, during the official UN Year for Cultural Heritage in 2002, which focused on the role of cultural heritage in reconciliation, the exemplary project mentioned in every UNESCO press briefing and discussed in every report was Mostar's Old Bridge.⁴² In a 2004 essay titled "Why We Need the Old Bridge at Mostar," the UNESCO Director-General for Culture, Koichiro Matsuura, argued it represented the "important role of cultural heritage in the reconstruction of a culture of peace."⁴³

These new associations and the bridge's neutrality as infrastructure led to the international community's overwhelming financial and political support for its reconstruction, while simultaneously ignoring most other destroyed and damaged

⁴¹ Safet Oručević (speech, Mostar 2004 Workshop, Mostar, 1994).

⁴² UNESCO. Protect Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. Information Kit. Paris: UNESCO, 2004.

⁴³ Koichiro Matsuura, "Why We Need the Old Bridge at Mostar," *International Herald Tribune*, July 6, 2004, http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=21633&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html).

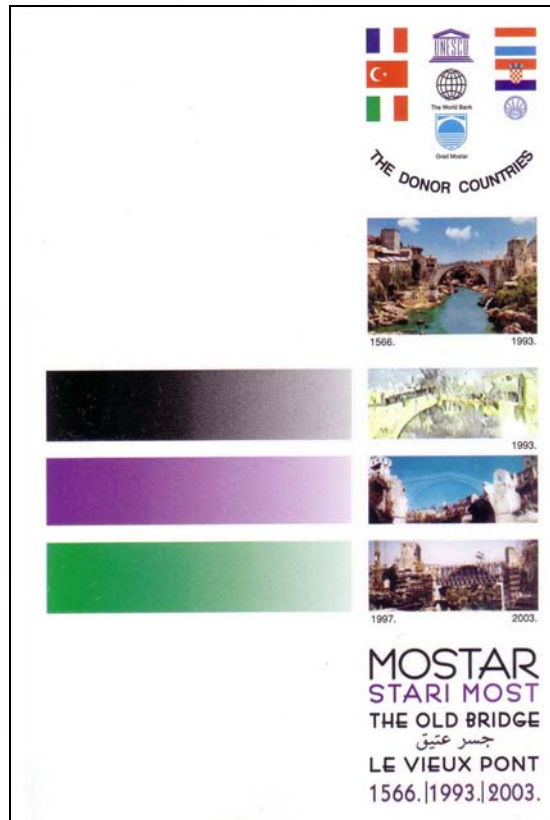


Figure 35: Locally produced postcard available for sale in Mostar advertising the countries and international organizations which have contributed to the reconstruction of the Old Bridge, c.2004. (image: Filateliški Klub Mostar).

historic sites in Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁴⁴ In fact, international organizations and foreign governments scrambled to contribute to and participate in the Old Bridge's reconstruction and proudly announced their involvement in any public forum possible, including large signs throughout the city. Locals also celebrated this attention, even producing postcards that listed the donor countries and organizations (fig. 35).

The efforts of the World Monuments Fund and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture contributed to the initial impetus and organization for the bridge's reconstruction; however, it was the World Bank that took the lead in establishing the financing

⁴⁴ Barry, "How the Vijećnica was Lost," 112.

structure to support the project.⁴⁵ Cultural heritage has not been an area historically funded by the World Bank, a UN affiliated agency that focuses on investment in less-developed countries to encourage the sustainable reduction of poverty through technical assistance, grants, and low or no interest loans.⁴⁶ In the past decade however, cultural heritage has received more attention from all international organizations, including the World Bank, as the connection between heritage and development have been argued alongside those between heritage and reconciliation.

In 1998 and 1999, the World Bank took on its first cultural heritage projects to promote tourism and stimulate economic growth, and the reconstruction of the Old Town and Old Bridge in Mostar was included in this initial group.⁴⁷ The World Bank gave a low-interest loan of four million US dollars to the City of Mostar and set up a fund to which others could contribute for the city and the bridge's reconstruction. Mostar's City Council allotted some funds, but resources came from neither the Federation nor the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Donations did come from numerous foreign governments, including The Netherlands, France, Italy, and the European Union. The list of foreign donor countries also included Turkey, the

⁴⁵ The World Bank, *World Bank Reconstruction and Development Program in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Progress Update* (Washington, DC: The World Bank June 2003).

⁴⁶ Like the UN, the World Bank is composed of member countries who decide collectively how it acquires and spends its money. The name World Bank Group actually refers to five institutions: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), the International Finance Corporation, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes.

⁴⁷ Other cultural heritage projects funded by this first surge of World Bank interest were in Georgia, Azerbaijan, Palestine, Morocco and Romania. Since cultural heritage does not fall under any of the traditional World Bank sector categories, such as agriculture, transportation, communications or water and sanitation, these projects have been funded and run out of different sectors. The reconstruction of the Old Bridge, under the title Mostar Pilot Cultural Heritage Project, was overseen by the World Bank's Europe and Central Asia Division and fell within the Law, Justice and Public Administration as well as the Social Services Sectors. The World Bank, "Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cultural Heritage Pilot, Contract Award Information," <http://web.worldbank.org/external/projects/main?Projectid=P059763&menuPK=228440&theSitePK=40941&pagePK=233764&piPK=23376>.

successor state of the Ottoman's who built the bridge centuries ago, as well as Croatia, the government that supported those who destroyed it a decade ago.⁴⁸

While the World Bank organized the financing, they also established a local Project Coordination Unit (PCU) to oversee the day to day operations of the Old Bridge's reconstruction. UNESCO was called upon to provide technical expertise, since unlike the World Bank, it had extensive experience with the conservation and restoration of damaged and destroyed architectural heritage. Before funding had even been secured, UNESCO had completed a conditions survey of the bridge and its surroundings which included schematic recommendations.⁴⁹ During the reconstruction process, UNESCO organized an Expert Team of international scholars and practitioners to advise the PCU and donors on the technical aspects of the reconstruction to ensure the site's previous appearance and historical building methods would be replicated.

Hungarian divers from the Engineering Contingent of their NATO peacekeepers in Bosnia-Herzegovina removed pieces of the destroyed bridge from the river, which were then measured and analyzed by the Italian geophysical engineering firm General Engineering SISCAM (fig. 36). In the end, very few of these old stones were used in the reconstruction process because of their compromised structural conditions. However the tenelija limestone used for the New Old Bridge was taken from the same

⁴⁸ Miroslav Landenka, "I Hrvatska će Pomoći u Obnovi Staroga Mosta" [And Croatia will Help in the Reconstruction of the Old Bridge], *Slobodna BiH*, March 25, 1999, 7; UNESCO, "Reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge to Begin in June," Paris: UNESCO, June 5, 2002, http://portal0.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=4692&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html ; Julie Poucher Harbin, "Reconstruction of Old Bridge in Mostar Starts on June 7," *Today*, Washington: The World Bank, June 7, 2001, <http://www.seerecon.org/news/n20020103.htm> ; "Vlada RH Sufinancira Obnovu Starog Mosta" [The Government of Croatia is Co-Financing the Reconstruction of the Old Bridge], *Dnevni List*, April 18, 2002, 16.

⁴⁹ UNESCO, *Mostar: Urban Heritage Map and Rehabilitation Plan of Stari Grad* (Florence: Angelo Pontecorvoli Editore, 1997).



Figure 36: NATO peacekeepers removing the stones from the Old Bridge's arch from the Neretva River, 1999. (image: NATO, Brussels).



Figure 37: View of the scaffolding and first layer of the arch of the New Old Bridge during the reconstruction process. The prominent display of signage advertising the firms - and donors - working on the Old Bridge was a common feature throughout each phase of the project. (image: author).

nearby quarry used for the original bridge stones. In addition, the construction method employed by the Turkish engineering firm Er-Bu, specialists in Ottoman-era bridges, meticulously replicated the techniques used in the sixteenth century (fig. 37). Another Turkish construction firm, Yapi Merkazi, had completed the investigation and consolidation of the foundations of the Old Bridge in 2001 and 2002.⁵⁰

The bridge's anchoring Tara and Halebija towers were also reconstructed as part of the World Bank organized project. They were transformed into galleries and observation platforms. Architects for this project were OMEGA Engineering of Croatia; archeological investigations were carried out by another Croatian firm, Grasa; and actual reconstruction work was completed by a joint venture of three Bosnian construction companies: Gradjevinar Fajić, HP Investing, and Kara-Drvo.⁵¹

Thus in addition to its portfolio of foreign investors, the companies and experts involved in the actual rebuilding of the Old Bridge represented a similarly international force. Each of these organizations, firms, and foreign governments explicitly described the bridge's symbolism of Bosnian multiculturalism and its reconciliatory role as motivating their funding or participation in the project.⁵²

⁵⁰ World Bank, "Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cultural Heritage Pilot." Information on the involvement of these firms in the Old Bridge's reconstruction was also available on most of their websites; however, this information is no longer available online.

⁵¹ World Bank, "Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cultural Heritage Pilot."

⁵² "Stari Most: Rehabilitation of the Old Bridge in Mostar," General Engineering, <http://www.gen-eng.florence.it/starimost>; UNESCO, "Reconciliation and Shared Heritage," (Paris: June 27, 2002), http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=1599&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html; UNESCO, "Reconstruction of the Mostar Bridge to Begin in June," UN, General Assembly, 58th Session, Official Records, *United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage*. Resolution A/RES/58/124. 2001, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/502/02/PDF/N0350202.pdf?OpenElement>; The World Bank, "UNESCO and The World Bank to Assist City of Mostar in Rebuilding Its Old Bridge," Press Statement 073098 (Paris: July 30, 1998), <http://www.unesco.org/opi2/mostar/pressunesco.htm>; and The World Bank, *World Bank Reconstruction and Development Program in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Progress Update* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, January 2004), 34.

According to Suleyman Demirel, former President of Turkey, the Old Bridge was “a lasting monument of peace and harmony,” and for French President Jacques Chirac, it was “a symbol of peace and multiethnic society.”⁵³ The World Bank identified the primary goal of the Old Bridge’s reconstruction as improving “the climate for reconciliation among the peoples in the country through recognition and rehabilitation of their common cultural heritage.”⁵⁴ The stress on these new symbolic associations in documentation and media coverage of the bridge’s reconstruction is all the more obvious when compared to reports on the rehabilitation of the Old Bridge in the 1950s and 1960s as well as of the Old Town in the late 1980s, none of which mention multiculturalism or reconciliation or any similarly abstract symbolisms.⁵⁵

Because of the number of organizations and governments involved, every step in the reconstruction process was marked by very public, international celebrations. Ceremonies were organized for the raising of the first stone from the river in August 1997, the start of work on the consolidation of the foundations in June 2001, the start of work on actual reconstruction in July 2002, the placement of the first stone of the

⁵³ Suleyman Demirel to Alija Izetbegović, Ankara, November 28, 1997, in *Important Dates and Documents in Connection with the Old Bridge Reconstruction* (Mostar, n.d.); and “Sirakovo Pismo Oručeviću: Pomoć u Obnovi Starog Mosta” [Chirac’s letter to Oručević: Help for Restoring the Old Bridge], *Oslobođenje*, March 21, 1998.

⁵⁴ The World Bank, “Documents and Reports: Bosnia and Herzegovina – Pilot Cultural Heritage Project: Project Appraisal Document,” Report No. 19115, (Washington, DC: The World Bank, June 14, 1999, http://www-wds.worldbank.org/servlet/WDS_IBank_Servlet?pcont=details&eid=000094946_9908040530471).

⁵⁵ “Conservation of Mostar Old Town, Mostar, Yugoslavia” *Architectural Record* (January 1987): 98-99; “Conservation of Mostar Old Town, Yugoslavia, 1979” *Mimar* (June 1987): 40-43; Juraj Neidhardt, “Stari Most u Mostaru” [The Old Bridge in Mostar] *Arhitektura* 7, no. 4 (1953): 21-22; Juraj Neidhardt, and Džemal Čelić, “Stari Most u Mostaru” [The Old Bridge in Mostar], *Naše Starine* 1 (1953): 133-140; Ranko Findrik, “Mostar,” *Arhitektura Urbanizam* 1, no. 4 (1960): 17-19; Ranko Findrik, “Uređenje Kule Starog Mosta u Mostaru” [Ordering the Towers of the Old Bridge in Mostar], *Naše Starine* 6 (1959): 183-189; D. Krsmanović, H. Dolarović and Z. Langof. “Sanacija Starog Mosta u Mostaru” [Cleaning of the Old Bridge in Mostar], *Naše Starine* 11 (1967): 5-23; Mirko Kujačić, “Konzervacija Starog Mosta u Mostaru” [Conservation of the Old Bridge in Mostar], *Naše Starine* 7 (1960): 207-210; and Ivan Zdravković, “Opravka Kula Kod Starog Mosta u Mostaru” [Repair of the Towers of the Old Bridge in Mostar], *Naše Starine* 1 (1953), 141-143.



Figure 38: Ceremonies marking the removal of the first stone of the Old Bridge from the river on September 9, 1997 and marking the placement of the keystone of the New Old Bridge on August 23, 2003. (images: Dubravko Kakarigi and Project Coordination Unit, Mostar).

arch in April 2003, the placement of the keystone of the arch in August 2003, and of course the reopening of the bridge itself in July 2004 (fig. 38).⁵⁶

These events were not without controversy as officials, both locally and internationally, clamored to participate. The highest profile of these conflicts was the alleged rift between Italy and Turkey which resulted from Italian President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi's involvement in the July 2002 ceremony marking the commencement of reconstruction. The Turkish Ambassador to Bosnia-Herzegovina was quoted on the front page of local newspapers as refusing to attend the ceremony since the Turkish President had not been invited, and the incident was allegedly reported in popular Turkish dailies as a "scandal."⁵⁷ Perhaps to make amends, the

⁵⁶ Harbin, "Reconstruction of Old Bridge"; Šemsudin Serdarevič, "Stari Most Ponovo Spoji Obale Neretve" [The Old Bridge Again Connects the Banks of the Neretva], *Oslobođenje*, August 23, 2003, 1, 7; Jelana Dalipagić, "Postavljen Prvi Kamen Luka Starog Mosta" [The First Stone of the Arch of the Old Bridge in Place], *Dnevni List*, April 15, 2003, 1, 12; OHR, "The Reconstruction of the Old Bridge in Mostar Started," *BiH Media Round-Up*, June 28, 2002, http://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/preso/bh-media-rep/round-ups/default.asp?content_id=9291 ; "World Briefing: Europe: Bosnia: Historic Bridge Rising" *New York Times*, August 23, 2003, A4.

⁵⁷ "Talijani Počelia Obnovu, Turci Uvrijeđeni" [Italians Start Reconstruction, Turks Insulted], *Oslobođenje*, June 28, 2002, 1.

Turkish Minister of Public Works and Housing was invited by the PCU to ceremoniously lay the keystone of the arch in August 2003.⁵⁸ And both the Turkish and Italian Presidents were invited guests at the Old Bridge's Opening Ceremony in July 2004.

The Italians and the Turks have been among the most intimately involved in the reconstruction of the Old Bridge, and in cultural heritage issues throughout South-Eastern Europe. Perhaps both these countries are eager to be involved in this area which had been within their spheres of influence at different times historically. Turkish interest in the Balkans in general and Bosnia-Herzegovina specifically has been articulated much more clearly: the Old Bridge's reconstruction coincided with an increased interest by Turkey in all things Ottoman. In 1996, Turkish President Demirel visited Mostar and declared that "we built it once and we shall again" while pledging financial support for the bridge's reconstruction.⁵⁹ The Turkish Minister of Culture took this one step further two years later by urging Turkish companies to physically participate in the project.⁶⁰ Indeed, Turkish construction firms did win contracts for both phases of the construction work. However it was the Italian government who was by far the greatest financial donor, giving over three million US dollars while Turkey gave only one million.⁶¹ In addition, UNESCO's scientific advisory team of experts was organized through its Venice office, and included numerous Italian specialists.

⁵⁸ Anadolu Agency, "Public Works and Settlement Minister Ergezen Leaves for Sarajevo," *News in English*, August 11, 2003, <http://www.anadolujansi.com.tr> and <http://www.hri.org/news/turkey/anadolu/2003/03-08-11.anadolu.html>.

⁵⁹ Demirel to Izetbegović.

⁶⁰ "Talay Urges Companies to Help Rebuild Mostar Bridge," *Turkish Daily News*, (March 20, 1998).

⁶¹ Sources and amounts of funding: Council of Europe (1 US\$ million grant), Croatia (0.5 US\$ million grant), Italy (3.1 US\$ million grant), City of Mostar (2 US\$ million), The Netherlands (2.0 US\$ million grant), Turkey (1 US\$ million grant), The World Bank (4 US\$ million soft loan). World Bank, *World Bank Reconstruction and Development Program*, 34.

The slight to Turkey when the Italian President started the reconstruction of the Old Bridge was certainly blown out of proportion, but the local media in particular has been quick to jump on any potential controversies and problems surrounding the project. For example, in *Dnevni List*, a Bosnian Croat daily published in Mostar, an article reported that the reconstruction of the Old Bridge was actually illegal since the contractors and supervisors had not applied for and acquired building permits from various levels of government.⁶² Federation building inspectors assured the community that they would not obstruct the building process; however, they did request the PCU obtain the proper documentation and licenses for the bridge's reconstruction, which indeed, they had not. Illegal construction has been an enormous problem in Bosnia-Herzegovina in recent years during the post-socialist, post-conflict transition when both property ownership and authority have been in question. When forced to acquire building permits after the fact, the participants in the high-profile and glamorous reconstruction of the Old Bridge were reminded of the mundane realities of their project, and that the international community organizing it was not above the law.

Another of the passing controversies surrounding the Old Bridge's reconstruction concerned Croatia's financial contribution. While the symbolic importance of their donation was noted and appreciated by Mostar residents and the international community alike, others were quick to point out that the actual initial offer was fairly miniscule. Even some Croat newspapers suggested that the sum was "peanuts" considering "the role played by Croatian forces in the destruction of Mostar."⁶³ In the

⁶² Vera Soldo, "Izgradnja Staroga Mosta po Zakonima BiH Nelagalna!" [Building of the Old Bridge Illegal under BiH Law], *Dnevni List*, June 11, 2003, 1, 3.

⁶³ Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Croatia Offering 'Peanuts' to Mostar?" *Newsline*, 4, no. 220, November 28, 2000, <http://www.hri.org/news/balkans/rferl/2000/00-11-28.rferl.html>.

end, Croatia gave more than half a million US dollars, which considering the relative state of its economy, was not an insignificant amount. The local press covered this increased donation far less extensively though, showing their interest in reporting controversies more than the complete story.⁶⁴ Considerably wealthier foreign governments, such as the European Union and Turkey, gave one million each, and no one accused them of being parsimonious.

Not everything about the Old Bridge's reconstruction was embroiled in controversy, however. For example, it was celebrated in a major regional exhibition organized by the Center for Peace and Multiethnic Cooperation, a Mostar non-profit organized by the city's former mayor Safet Oručević, who had initiated the bridge's reconstruction process during the war and been among the first to publicly associate it with multiculturalism. The exhibit was called "The Old Bridge: Monument to Peace," thus the names of both the exhibition and its organizers reinforced the idea that this bridge, and its city, had also taken on associations with multiethnic cooperation and peace, and therefore reconciliation.

The exhibition traveled to six cities in 2003 and 2004, and was displayed in important venues such as the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul and the Theseus Temple in Vienna where it was held over for a month because of its popularity (fig. 39).⁶⁵ Its multimedia displays introduced the history of the Old Bridge, included photographs and paintings of it by acclaimed local artists, and documented the reconstruction process.

⁶⁴ Lucía Iglesias Kuntz, "Mostar, A Bridge to Peace," *The New Courier*, May 2002, 17.

⁶⁵ Center for Peace and Multiethnic Cooperation, "Exhibition 'The Old Bridge: Monument to Peace'," *Centar za Mir*, c2004, <http://www.centarzamir.org.ba/eng/izlo/izlozba.html>.



Figure 39: Images of the exhibition “The Old Bridge: Monument to Peace” at the Theseus Temple in Vienna, in Istanbul’s Hagia Sophia, in Zagreb’s Mimara, and Belgrade’s Museum of Yugoslav History, 2003-2004. (images: Centar za Mir, Mostar)

SYMBOLIC DISREPERNCIES AND ARCHITECTURE DRIVING POLITICS

The minor controversies surrounding the reconstruction of the Old Bridge were incidents inflated and exaggerated by journalists and an attentive public trying to find a new angle for stories on a project everyone was reporting on almost daily. The smallest problems with the bridge, like those of most celebrities, became scandals. On the other hand, the weaknesses inherent in the interrelated, underlying assumptions of the Old Bridge’s widely asserted new symbolisms are more significant problems that received considerably less attention until the very end of the reconstruction process.

The obtuseness of the Old Bridge's new meanings, and in particular its symbolism of Bosnia's pluralism, has been succinctly summed up by Dutch cultural commentator Paul Treanor, who argued:

There are five claims implicit in the Mostar bridge metaphor and its use in the West. First, that a bridge can symbolize multi-ethnicity; second, that this applies to specific bridges only; third, that the Mostar bridge was one of these; fourth, that this symbolism was generally accepted in Bosnia; and fifth, that this was the reason it was attacked.⁶⁶

Despite the validity of Treanor's argument about the irrationality of this new symbolism, Mostar's Old Bridge has in fact taken on this meaning for many people in the postwar period. But when carried to a sixth claim that Treanor does not include – that rebuilding the bridge will lead to reconciliation among the peoples of Mostar and therefore of Bosnia-Herzegovina – more complications arise.

The political and social reality of Mostar today immediately calls into question how the New Old Bridge actually unites the city's residents or Bosnia's peoples physically or psychologically, as well as if there is any unity to be represented. These new associations are undermined by the question whether the reconciliation the Old Bridge's reconstruction is said to symbolize is actually occurring, by the reconstruction process' alienation of parts of the local population, and by the ongoing need for justice concerning the bridge's destruction. The city remains divided in most respects, local interest in the bridge project has not always reflected that of the international community, and the circumstances surrounding the bridge's destruction remain un-dealt with in a publicly meaningful manner.

⁶⁶ Paul Treanor, "The Logic of the War in Bosnia," 2002, <http://web.inter.nl.net/users/Paul.Treanor/bosnia.html>.

Continued Division

Mostar today may no longer be technically divided since it is now a single political entity. But unlike reunited Berlin, the new organization of Mostar resulted not from the democratic process or even the initiative of local politicians. The political unification of Mostar occurred only as a result of a series of orders by the OHR, and the psychological division and the polarization of identities within the city can not be so easily undone.⁶⁷ An independent poll taken at the time of unification alleged that 72% of Mostar's public supported the *idea* of reunification and felt that the time was right for it.⁶⁸ Yet despite this theoretical support, the actual new organization was almost universally disapproved of. The Croat HDZ controlled Municipal Council of Mostar's Southeast Municipality passed a resolution noting that the OHR decision was "against the will of the people, therefore anti-constitutional and illegitimate."⁶⁹ The Muslim SDA controlled Mostar North Municipality considered holding an organized referendum to demonstrate the public's opposition to the new statute.⁷⁰

Though an important and concrete step, the unification of the city government, like the reconstruction of the Old Bridge, was a much celebrated, yet superficial symbol of

⁶⁷ OHR, "Decision on the Implementation of the Reorganization of the City of Mostar," Decision 186/04, January 28, 2004, http://www.ohr.int/decisions/mo-hncantdec/default.asp?content_id=31725; and Ian Traynor, "Bridge Opens but Mostar Remains a Divided City," *The Guardian*, July 24, 2004, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,1267238,00.html>.

⁶⁸ Partner Agencija, "Mišljenje Javnosti: Šta Misle Građani Mostara o Budućnosti Grada" [Public Opinion: What do Citizens of Mostar think about the Future of the City] (January 26, 2004). <http://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/presso/pic/mostar-one-city/doc/mostar-polling-27Jan04.doc>; OHR, "Mostar," *Weekend Round-Up*, January 3 -February 1, 2004, http://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/presso/bh-media-rep/round-ups/default.asp?content_id=32112.

⁶⁹ "Odbijena Ashdownova odluka o novom ustroju Mostara" [Ashdown's Decision on the New Structure of Mostar Rejected], *Dnevni List*, February 25, 2004, 16; and OHR, "Mostar Issue," BiH Media Round-Up, February 25, 2004, http://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/presso/bh-media-rep/round-ups/default.asp?content_id=31905.

⁷⁰ V. Klajić, "Novi Referendum u Općini Mostar Sjever!?" [New Referendum in Mostar Municipality North!], *Dnevni List*, February 25, 2004, 7; and OHR, "Mostar Issue."

unity that glossed-over and oversimplified the complex and still divided city. This is a fact that the typically positive international media coverage of the New Old Bridge noted. Doubts were clearly revealed in some headlines published on the occasion of the bridge's reconstruction, including: "Bridge over Still-Troubled Waters," "Famed Bridge Reunites but Does not Reconcile," and "Bridge Opens but Mostar Remains a Divided City."⁷¹

Even High Representative Paddy Ashdown revealed a more sophisticated than usual understanding of Mostar's Old Bridge by noting that the metaphor of bridging "acknowledges the fact of division and partition, whilst simultaneously proposing a means of connection and resolution."⁷² Months after the bridge had reopened and the city had been reunited, Ashdown thus subtly admitted – as Ivo Andrić had three-quarters of a century beforehand – that dividing, as well as uniting, was an inherent component of bridges, metaphorical and physical. Similarly, in its final assessment report, The World Bank noted that their original objective had cautiously been worded as hoping only "to improve the climate of reconciliation" and recognizing that "the project could not be, and was not, the only instrument promoting reconciliation" in the city.⁷³ Thus, after the fact, The World Bank tempered their formerly optimistic rhetoric and noted the limited role the Old Bridge was playing in Mostar and Bosnia-Herzegovina's reunion.

⁷¹ Daniel Williams, "Bridge Over Still-Troubled Waters Rises Anew in Split Bosnian City," *Washington Post*, July 22, 2004, A12; Vesna Perić Aimonijić, "Politics-Bosnia: A Famed Bridge Reunites but does not Reconcile," *Global Information Network*, July 26, 2004, 1; and Traynor, "Bridge Opens But Mostar Remains a Divided City."

⁷² Ashdown, "Bosnia, the Balkans, Europe and Islam."

⁷³ The report went on to argue that since the Old Bridge's reconstruction has led to economic revitalization in the city, which further promotes reconciliation, the project has indirectly supported its original goal of "improving the climate" for reconciliation. World Bank, *Implementation Completion Report on a Credit in the Amount of US\$4.0 Million to Bosnia and Herzegovina for a Cultural Heritage Pilot Project*, Report No. 32713 (Washington, DC: The World Bank, June 22, 2005), 2.

Other international sources have also commented on the bridge's possibly empty symbolism. A 2003 International Crisis Group report on Mostar refers to the reconstruction of the Old Bridge as a "Potemkin Village, designed to create the illusion of inter-party, cross-national cooperation, rather than as a manifestation of the real thing."⁷⁴ In a 2002 *New York Times Magazine* article, political scientist Michael Ignatieff suggested that when politicians from the city's two sides shook hands on the bridge it was an empty gesture staged only because "they have learned that funds for Mostar will dry up unless displays of multiethnic cooperation are forthcoming."⁷⁵

The reconstruction of the Old Bridge served as a force driving politics in the city, clearly speeding up Mostar's political reunification. Without a doubt, the drafting and implementing of the new city Statute reunifying the city within months of the Bridge's opening was also inspired by the glaring discrepancy between the unifying rhetoric and symbolism associated with the Old Bridge's reconstruction and Mostar's divided reality.

Though never explicitly stated as such, the OHR's decision to make Mostar's political unity a priority in 2003 was driven by the reconstruction of the Old Bridge and the idea that Mostar would be whole again in 2004 when its bridge returned. A few years earlier, an essay by Bogdan Bogdanović in the local literary journal *Most* had asked "Can the city exist without its bridge? Can the bridge exist without its city?"⁷⁶ His

⁷⁴ ICG, *Building Bridges in Mostar*. Europe Report No.150. Brussels: ICG, November 20, 2003, 5.

⁷⁵ Michael Ignatieff, "When a Bridge is not a Bridge," *New York Times Magazine*, October 27, 2002, 58. The directors of the local agency coordinating the bridge project responded immediately claiming many in Mostar have "contributed tirelessly to this work." Rusmir Ćisić and Tihomir Rosić, "Letters to the Editor," *New York Times*, December 15, 2002, 34.

⁷⁶ Bogdan Bogdanović, "Može li Grad Bez Svog Mosta, Može li Most bez Svog Grada?" [Can the City Be Without its Bridge, Can the Bridge Be without its City?], *Most* 139 (June 2001): <http://www.most.ba/050/010.htm>.

article reminded everyone of the indivisibility of the city and its bridge, in essence taking the accepted idea that the city of Mostar was incomplete until its beloved bridge was reconstructed, and adding the parallel idea that the New Old Bridge was incomplete until its surrounding city was one again. The bridge's reconstruction did inspire the rapid reunification of the city: but the reunification was ordered by representatives of the international community attempting to help the city keep up with the symbol they were building to represent it.

Despite its political wholeness, the separatist attitudes that characterized nationalist Croat action during the war and resulted in Mostar's division persist today. More than once since the Dayton Agreement, Croat officials in Mostar and Sarajevo have threatened or attempted to re-declare the wartime mini-state *Herceg-Bosna* as a semi-autonomous "third entity" in Bosnia-Herzegovina.⁷⁷ Many Bosnian Croats still feel that they deserve such an entity and that they are unsafe physically and culturally without a status comparable to Bosnian Serbs in the *Republika Srpska*. These actions and beliefs clearly represent continued separatist, not reconciliatory, tendencies among Mostar's Croat community.

Compared to the global concern for the Old Bridge's reconstruction, a parallel local effort has seemed lacking from the Croat side. The international community took special care to ensure that representatives of the city's Muslims, Croats, and even

⁷⁷ Vinko D. Lasić, *Herceg-Bosna ili ...* [Herceg-Bosna or ...] (Mostar: Ziral, 1996); Seid Smajkić, "Intervju: Mostarski Muftija Seid ef. Smajkić: Hrvati već Imaju Treći Entitet: Mostar im Treba kao 'Stolni' Grad" [Interview: Mostar Mufti Seid Smajkić: Croats already have a Third Entity: They Need Mostar as a Capital], by Tarik Lazović, *Saff*, August 2003, 24; Stjepan Mičković, "Ako bude samo 'Bosna' bit će onda i 'Herceg-Bosna'!!!" [If it will be just "Bosnia," then there will also be "Herceg-Bosna"], *Hrvatska Riječ*, April 21, 1997, 8; Karlo Papić, "Herceg-Bosna, Istočni Grijeh Hrvatske Politke" [Herceg-Bosna, Eastern Sin of Croatian Politics], *Hrvatski Riječ*, August 27, 1996, 9; and Ljudevit Pravdić, "Hrvati se Opravdano Pitanju: Podučava li im se to Osporiti njihov Nacionalni Identitet?" [Croats Legitimately Ask: Are they Attempting to Challenge their National Identity?], *Hrvatski Riječ*, February 20, 1999, 12-13.

Serbs were involved in every step of the reconstruction process.⁷⁸ However Mostar's residents did not actually come together as smoothly and altruistically as the project's promoters claim they have. Most of the Croat population of the city subtly obstructed or simply ignored the whole reconstruction process. Sincere sentiments have been expressed by some public officials from the Croat side, including former Mayor Nevin Tomić and PCU Deputy Director Tihomir Rozić. But many other Mostar Croats who suggest this project is a means towards reconciliation appear only to have been paying lip service to the international community.⁷⁹

Instances suggesting Croat cooperation was forced mostly consisted of small actions aimed at delaying or complicating the process, such as failing to show up at important meetings. Occasionally these obstructions included more significant acts of sabotage, such as opening an upstream dam and flooding the Neretva River to prevent actual work from progressing.⁸⁰ In 2004, then Croat member of the Bosnian Presidency, Dragan Čović, a Mostar native, indicated that even if the bridge could be considered an example of "successful" cooperation between Mostar's different communities – which he did not think it was – it would be the only one of which he was aware.⁸¹

In addition to the lack of interest from Mostar's Croats in the reconstruction process, many of them have not agreed with the popular interpretation of the New Old Bridge. In particular, Croat members of the city's political leadership and general population are much more likely to say the bridge is simply a symbol of Mostar.⁸² Rather than

⁷⁸ UNESCO, "Reconciliation and Shared Heritage"; World Bank, "UNESCO and The World Bank to Assist City of Mostar"; and UN, General Assembly, "United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage."

⁷⁹ ICG, "Building Bridges in Mostar," 3.

⁸⁰ "Fokusirano" [Focusing], *Dani*, July 23, 1999, 12; and ICG, *Reunifying Mostar: Opportunities for Progress*. Balkans Report No.90. Brussels: ICG, April 19, 2000, 1-2.

⁸¹ ICG, "Building Bridges," 5.

⁸² Nick Hawton, "Celebrations Symbolize Mostar's Hopes," *BBC News Online*, July 24, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3922233.stm>.

agreeing with the wartime and postwar layers of meaning, they revert to a prewar representation of place to allow themselves a continued connection with the bridge by selectively forgetting developments of the past decade.

Local Alienation

Other Mostar Croats find any continued connection with the Old Bridge problematic. For some, including one of the early postwar mayors, Mijo Brajković, the glorification of the Old Bridge in the postwar period and the lavishing of international attention on it was something from which they wished to distance themselves, even though they had previously acknowledged the bridge as their own.⁸³ It is perhaps disagreement with the ubiquitously suggested multicultural meanings that have discouraged their interest in the project. For Brajković and other Mostar Croats, the Old Bridge is understood as having been appropriated by the international community, but also as belonging to the local, specifically Muslim, community. The city's Catholic Bishop Ratko Perić, for example, refused to attend the bridge's opening ceremony since Mostar's Muslims had not publicly approved of his recently built cross, implying the New Old Bridge was *their* project, not shared with or belonging to the Catholic Croat community he represented.⁸⁴

⁸³ Mijo Brajković "Vi Taj Most Toliko Glorificirate: Intervju Miko Brajkovića" [You Glorify that Bridge Too Much: Interview with Mijo Brajković], by Snježana Mulić, *Dani*, February 1996, 30-31.

⁸⁴ Ivan Lovrenović, "On Bishop Perić's Refusal to Attend the Ceremonial Reopening of the Stari Most." *Feral Tribune*, July 30, 2004. Trans. and reprinted in *Bosnia Report*, August-September 2004, http://www.bosna.org.uk/bosrep/report_format.cfm?articleid=1138&reportid=165; and Mario Marusić, "Biskup Ratko Perić uputio pismo čelnicima Mostara" [Bishop Ratko Perić Directed a Letter to the Representatives of Mostar], *Večernji List*, July 24, 2004, 2.

The idea that the Croat population of Mostar views the Bridge as co-opted by the Muslim community is not completely unfounded. Its Ottoman provenance and the fact that it was reconstructed by Turkish firms have not gone unnoticed by either side. As noted, both historically and today, Bosnia-Herzegovina's Ottoman heritage has been associated with its Muslim population. However in the past two decades, Turks have also formed a special relationship with the Bosnian Muslims.

Though there was a conspicuous absence of any Bosnian state or shared symbols at the New Old Bridge's opening ceremony, Turkish identifiers seemed impossible to miss. For example, while Bosnian flags were hard to come by that day, Turkish flags were everywhere. Though not involved in the official ceremony, hundreds of small, paper handheld flags had been distributed as souvenirs and were waved and held throughout the city. In addition, many Bosnian Muslims carried larger-sized Turkish flags with them that day and others were hung in cafes where locals gathered to watch the ceremony. This display conflating the Ottoman-ness of the bridge with Turkishness, and stressing this aspect, was presumably alienating for many local Croats. It reinforced connections between Bosnian Muslims and Turks in their mind, as well as between Muslims, Ottomans, and the bridge.

It is not only Mostar's Croats who have begun to see the bridge as taken over by foreigners. However, for some Muslims and Bosnian nationalists, it is the international community as a whole that has appropriated the Old Bridge. A 2003 political cartoon in the Sarajevo daily *Oslobođenje*, published six months before the opening ceremony, illustrated the local sentiment that the New Old Bridge had become the international community's project rather than that of Mostar's inhabitants.



Figure 40: Political cartoon depicting the OHR as the New Old Bridge, 2003. (image: Đoko Ninković).

In the Cartoon, the bridge is labeled OHR for the Office of the High Representative, and the two river banks are labeled SDA and HDZ for the Muslim nationalist and Croat nationalist political parties in power in Mostar and throughout Bosnia-Herzegovina at the time (fig. 40).⁸⁵ According to the cartoon, the bridge represented neither of Mostar's two separate communities individually, nor them collectively, but rather the international community. Though the title of the cartoon is the "New Bridge in Mostar" (*Novi Most u Mostaru*), it references more than the literal bridge. Published

⁸⁵ Đoko Ninković, "To je To: Novi Most u Mostaru" [That's That: The New Bridge in Mostar], *Dnevni Avaz*, October 6, 2003, 2.



Figure 41: View of the concert and fireworks of the Opening Ceremony for the New Old Bridge, as well as of the photo shoot for visiting dignitaries the following day, July 2004. (images: General Engineering, Florence).

at the time when the new city Statute was being debated, the cartoon indicates that it was the OHR who brokered the deal bridging Mostar's divided communities, not the communities themselves. It calls into question whether there are genuine local sentiments of cooperation behind either the actual reuniting of the city or the reconstruction of the bridge as a symbol of this reunification.

The New Old Bridge's opening ceremony confirmed the argument that the project and its symbolism belonged to the international community and their vision of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Speakers included a World Bank official, the High Representative, and the Chairman of the Bosnian Presidency, but no one from Mostar.⁸⁶ Mostar was also underrepresented in the performances which took place during the ceremony: international dance troops and musicians as well as the Sarajevo Philharmonic Orchestra performed, but only in the backdrop of the large-scale finale did anonymous local children and divers participate (fig. 41).

⁸⁶ "Stari Most Ponovo Rođen" [The Old Bridge is Born Again], *Oslobođenje*, July 24, 2004, 1, 4-5; and "Pobjeda Mira" [Victory for Peace], *Dnevni Avaz*, July 24, 2004, 1, 2-5.

In addition, for security reasons, nearly all citizens of the city were forbidden to come within a few blocks of the Old Bridge the night of the opening and were thus unable to see the ceremony live, even though the speeches repeated over and over that it was *their* night to be proud and celebrate *their* progress.⁸⁷ While delegations of princes, presidents, ambassadors, and foreign experts filled up the seats, Mostar's residents watched the opening ceremony on television at home and on screens set up in cafes at a safe distance from the dignitaries near the New Old Bridge itself.

Need for Justice

In addition to the city remaining divided in essence and its citizens not having cooperated fully on the bridge's reconstruction, a far deeper concern has prevented many in Mostar from seeing the New Old Bridge as a symbol of reconciliation. For them, the past has not been adequately dealt with: to borrow an expression from psychology, the traumas of the war have not been worked-through. In postwar contexts, dealing with the atrocities committed and achieving reconciliation usually comes in two forms: truth and justice.⁸⁸ The former includes admissions of responsibility, acknowledgment of victim's suffering and public apologies; the later includes restitution and criminal prosecution. Neither of these approaches have been successfully or completely taken in Mostar. The Old Bridge has been returned to its

⁸⁷ Paddy Ashdown, "Remarks by High Representative Paddy Ashdown on the Occasion of the Re-Opening of Mostar Old Bridge," Mostar, BiH, July 23, 2004, http://www.ohr.int/ohr-dept/press/presssp/default.asp?content_id=33002 ; and Sulejman Tihić, "Obraćanje Predsjedavajućeg Predsjedništva BiH Sulejmana Tihića na ceremoniji otvaranja Starog Mosta" [Remarks of the President of the Presidency of BiH Sulejman Tihić at the Opening Ceremony of the Old Bridge], Mostar, BiH, July 23, 2004; <http://www.tihic.ba/Tekst/Govori/Stari%20most%20otvaranje.htm>.

⁸⁸ Susan Dwyer, "Reconciliation for Realists," *Ethics and International Affairs* 13 (1999): 89-98; Michael Pugh, ed., *Regeneration in War-Torn Societies* (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 2000); and Paul van Tongeren, Hans van de Veen, and Juliette Verhoeven, *Searching for Peace in Europe and Eurasia* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002).

city, but those who destroyed it have not taken responsibility and were not among those supporting or contributing to its reconstruction.

The highly public and politicized reconstruction process of the Old Bridge continuously glossed over the question of agency regarding its destruction. In hopes of smoothing out relations with both Mostar's Muslim and Croat communities, this sore spot between them is hardly mentioned by the international organizations, governments, and firms involved in rebuilding the bridge. The Bosnian Croat periodicals covering the reconstruction process usually discussed it without reference to why it needed repair.⁸⁹ International, Bosnian Muslim, and allegedly independent local coverage were also quiet on this subject.⁹⁰ Though they occasionally blame the

⁸⁹ For example, of 10 articles from 2002 and 2003 on the reconstruction of the Old Bridge in *Dnevni List*, one of the most moderate Bosnian Croat oriented newspapers in BiH, none mention who destroyed the bridge and only one mentions the bridge's alleged symbolism of reuniting the city, in a quote from a UNESCO official. See: Stana Bandur, "Potpisan Ugovor o Izgradnji Starog Mosta," [Agreement about Building the Old Bridge Signed], *Dnevni List*, April 18, 2002, 5; Sanja Bjelica, "Bilo je Ovdje Mostova i Prije Starog Mosta" [There were Bridges here Before the Old Bridge], *Dnevni List*, November 20, 2002, 14; Jelana Dalipagić, "Izronit će Stari za One Koji ga Vole'," [They will Bring the Old Guy Up for those who Love Him], *Dnevni List*, August 19, 2002, 13; Jelana Dalipagić, "Stari Most Dobio Supervizora" [The Old Bridge Gets a Supervisor], *Dnevni List*, July 6, 2002, 13; Sanela Kovačević, "Uskoro Počinje Gradnja Luka Starog Mosta" [Soon Building the Arch of the Old Bridge will Begin], *Dnevni List*, October 11, 2002, 15; "Rekonstrukcija Starog Mosta u Mostaru" [Reconstruction of the Old Bridge in Mostar], *Dnevni List*, June 7, 2002, 2; Vera Soldo, "U Tijeku Radovi Izgradnje Okolnih Objekata" [Time for Works on the Building of Surrounding Buildings], *Dnevni List*, December 13, 2002, 15; "Stari Most Obnavljaju Turci" [Turks will Resotre the Old Bridge], *Dnevni List*, February 22, 2002, 5; Josipa Tezić, "Gradu Mostova Vraća se Duša" [Building Bridge Returns Its Soul], *Dnevni List*, August 26, 2002, 1, 24; and "Vlada RH Sufinancira Obnovu," *Dnevni List*, 16.

⁹⁰ For example, of 16 articles from 2002 and 2003 in *Oslobođenje*, *Slobodna Bosna*, *Dnevni Avaz* and *Hercegovačke Novine*, all independent or Muslim oriented newspapers and news magazines, only four mentioned the bridge's destruction, with none elaborating on the circumstances. See: Nermin Bise, "Tabu o Starom Mostu je Razbio Stjepan Mesić" [Stjepan Mesić Breaks a Taboo about the Old Bridge], *Oslobođenje*, October 18, 2003, 11; Nermin Bise, "Novo Ruho za Kule" [New Clothes for the Towers], *Oslobođenje*, October 18, 2003, 14; Hasan Eminović, "Dama Među Mimarima" [Woman Among Architects], *Hercegovačke Novine*, July 5, 2003, 3-5; Hasan Eminović, "Iskustvo Ljubavlju Ugrađuju u Most" [Building their Experience Lovingly into the Bridge] *Hercegovačke Novine*, August 2, 2003, 6-8; Hasan Eminović, "Povratak Kamenom Osmijehu" [Return of the Stone Smile] *Hercegovačke Novine*, May 17, 2003, 4; Nedim Hasić, "Drveni Most nad Neretvom" [Wooden Bridge over the Neretva], *Slobodna Bosna*, February 6, 2002, 56-57; N. Hu., "Dobili Odobrenje za Produženje Radova do 31. Decembra 2004" [Permission Granted to Extend Work until December 31, 2004], *Dnevni Avaz*, September 18, 2003,

HVO for the bridge's destruction, this is almost always as an abstraction, without reference to the command structure involved or the links between the HDZ and HVO.

The day before the opening ceremony for the New Old Bridge, which was attended by the Croatian President and Foreign Minister, there was speculation in Bosnian newspapers about possible apologies from Croatia for the role of its previous administration in the Old Bridge's destruction.⁹¹ That possibility was precluded by statements made that same day by local Croat officials in Mostar, which indicated they would walk out of the opening ceremony if any blame was placed on "Croats" or Croat institutions.⁹² Obviously all Croat people should not have to accept collective responsibility for the destructive actions of the HDZ and HVO during the war; however, many public officials at that time were members of the same HDZ party, whose platform has only slightly changed since when the bridge was destroyed.⁹³ And these politicians had been repeatedly re-elected by a majority of the local Croat people.

7; N. Hu., "Klesanje Kamena za Kaldrmu" [Carving Stones for the Roadway] *Dnevni Avaz*, October 25, 2003, 7; N. Hu., "Ugrađeni Senzori za Praćenje Promjena" [Building Sensors for Monitoring Change] *Dnevni Avaz*, September 12, 2003, 6; Marko Šagolj, "Novi Stari Most" [New Old Bridge], *Oslobođenje*, June 29, 2002; Šemsudin Serdarević, "Prve Skele za Stari Most" [First Scaffolding for the Old Bridge], *Oslobođenje*, August 15, 2002; Šemsudin Serdarević, "Stari Most Ponovo Spojio Obale Neretve" [The Old Bridge Again Connecting the Shores of the Neretva], *Oslobođenje*, August 23, 2003, 1, 7; Rusmir Smajilhodžić, "Stari Most Moramo Graditi kao da Živimo u XVI. Vijeku" [The Old Bridge Must be Built as we are Living in the 16th Century], *Slobodna Bosna*, December 5, 2002, 37-39; "Talijani Počeli Obnovu," *Oslobođenje*, 1, 6; "Turci na Starom Mostu" [Turks on the Old Bridge], *Slobodna Bosna*, February 28, 2002, 58; and V. Zivak, "Dragocjeni Amanet za Obnovu Zajedničkog Pamćenja" [Precious Inheritance for Reconstruction of Collective Memory], *Oslobođenje*, June 28, 2002.

⁹¹ "Bešlić neće Dopustiti da Optuže Hrvate" [Bešlić will not Allow Anyone to Accuse the Croats], *Oslobođenje*, July 23, 2004, 4; "Premijer Sanader Uvijek je Dobrodošao" [Premier Sanader is always Welcome], *Dnevni Avaz*, July 23, 2004, 2.

⁹² "Bešlić neće dopustiti da optuže Hrvate," 4; "Bešlić: i Hrvati će doći" [Bešlić and the Croats will Come], *Dnevni Avaz*, July 23, 2004, 2.

⁹³ The party's platform has gradually become moderate enough that some of the hardline nationalists have left, including in April 2006, when a splinter group – called the HDZ 1990 – broke off because it felt party was no longer true to some of the values on which the party had been founded. Marija Arnautovic, "'New' HDZ Bids for Bosnian Croat Hearts," *Balkan Insight*, April 20, 2006, http://www.iwpr.net/?p=brn&s=f&o=261297&apc_state=henpbrn.

In addition to speculating about possible apologies from Croatia in the period before the Old Bridge's re-opening, Bosnian newspapers also focused on Zlatan Stipišić Gibonni's refusal to perform his hit song "Sorry" (*Oprosti*) at the ceremony. Allegedly, the organizer's had asked Gibonni, one of the biggest Croatian pop stars, to sing this song whose chorus repeated the phrase "it can be easier to die than for people to say sorry." Despite the appropriateness of the lyrics for the occasion in the opinions of many, according to its author, it was written as a love song, not a commentary on regional politics. Gibonni was disinclined to politicize his music in this way, which would undoubtedly have alienated many of his Croat fans, but his disinterest was interpreted as a collective refusal of Croats to feel remorse or publicly apologize for their role in the destruction of Mostar and its bridge.⁹⁴

In the end, for the City of Mostar and the Bosnian authorities who organized the Opening Ceremony, this was not a time for signs of division and so vagueness about the past was preferable to assumptions and accusations of culpability. The ceremony's speeches were quiet on the subject of destruction, concentrating on more forward-looking and positive messages.⁹⁵ A video of the shelling and collapse of the Old Bridge in 1993 was played during the ceremony and broadcast on local television; however, it was accompanied only by music, not commentary. Again, the destruction was referenced, yet abstracted, and responsibility was ignored.

More important than any apologies from neighboring Croatia or the Croat collective, many have long believed that the local individuals responsible for the Old Bridge's

⁹⁴ Zlatan Stipišić Gibonni, "Moglo bi Bit da BiH Lakše Umro nego Uvrijedo Ljude u BiH!" [It Can Be Easier for BiH to Die, than to Offend People in BiH!], interview by Dino Bajramovic, *Slobodna Bosna*, July 15, 2005, 50-51.

⁹⁵ Ashdown, "Remarks by High Representative"; and Tihić, "Obraćanje Predsjedavajućeg Predsjedništva BiH."

destruction should be held accountable before the reconstruction can begin to represent progress. The New Old Bridge has little symbolic validity without justice for the former bridge.

Two years after its destruction and under international pressure, the HDZ had conducted an inquiry into the circumstances of its felling. They had concluded that this had been caused by three to five HVO artillerymen acting “on their own initiative, without orders from their superiors.”⁹⁶ Though few believed the inquiry was impartial or complete, especially since the soldiers were never tried, the international community was apparently satisfied.⁹⁷ The issue was not raised again for almost a decade throughout most of the highly publicized and politicized reconstruction process.

While the HVO soldiers were blamed, HVO General Slobodan Praljak’s role in ordering the destruction was also widely known both locally and internationally. It was simply not discussed politically or officially for many years. He was replaced as Chief of Staff of the HVO just three days after the bridge’s destruction, surely in relation to his role in this event, and his removal from office may have diffused any attempts to hold either the HVO or the HDZ responsible for the bridge’s destruction at that time.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Almasa Bajrić, “Pravda za Stari Most” [Justice for the Old Bridge], *Dnevni Avaz*, October 27, 2003, 3; and M’Baye, “Destruction of Cultural Property Report.”

⁹⁷ M’Baye, “Destruction of Cultural Property Report.”

⁹⁸ On approximately November 12, 1993 Croatian army General Ante Roso replaced Praljak as Chief of Staff of the HVO according to *Herceg-Bosna* president Boban’s orders, on November 23, Tuđman confirmed this. Praljak has often argued he “stepped down” on November 8, and therefore was not in command at the time the Bridge was destroyed. Boris Pavelić, “Tuđman Nobilu: Rušenje Starog Mosta Naredio je Slobodan Praljak” [Tuđman to Nobila: The Destruction of the Old Bridge was Ordered by Slobodan Praljak], *Novi List*, August 11, 2004, <http://www.novolist.hr/Default.asp?WCI=Rubrike&WCU=28592859286328602863285A28582858285C286328962897289E286328632859285828602861285D285D28632863286328582863B> ; Šagolj, “Jesam li kriv”; and D. Zadravec, “Rušenje Organizirale Strane Obavjestanjne Službe”

In the course of the proceedings of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), it was revealed that Croatian President Tuđman had in 1997 described the Old Bridge's destruction as a "stupidity," and that he believed Praljak was responsible.⁹⁹ Though Tuđman's statement was not made public until 2004, it and Praljak's rapid demise have indirectly separated the Croatian government and army from responsibility for the bridge's destruction and directed the blame solely on the Bosnian Croat *Herceg Bosna* government and its military forces.

Though relieved of his military command, Praljak was not forced into early retirement or publicly shamed, but rather remained popular and active in politics in Mostar. Though most of the world and half the city considered him a war criminal, after the war he remained a celebrated and respected member of the west Mostar and wider Bosnian Croat community. For example, he was the invited keynote speaker at the HDZ Sixth Party Congress in Sarajevo in 2000 and he took the ceremonial first swim at the reopening of a public pool in Mostar the year before.¹⁰⁰

There were those in Bosnia-Herzegovina who continued to question the public and official silence on the question of responsibility for the bridge's destruction, and attention to this issue increased as its reconstruction neared completion.¹⁰¹ The Sarajevo daily newspaper *Dnevni Avaz* published an editorial in October 2003, shortly

[Destruction Organized by Foreign Information Agencies], *Oslobođenje*, March 26, 2004, <http://www.oslobodjenje.com.ba/asp/print>.

⁹⁹ Because Tuđman's statement was made in private to a lawyer four years after the fact, it can be questioned whether he truly believed Praljak was responsible or if he was just trying to clear himself. Pavelić, "Tuđman Nobilu"; and Zadravec, "Rušenje Organizirale Službe."

¹⁰⁰ Sumatra Bose, *Bosnia after Dayton: Nationalist Partition and International Intervention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 143; Ivana Brkić, "Sezonu Kupanja Otvorio Slobodan Praljak" [Swim Season Opened by Slobodan Praljak], *Slobodna BiH*, July 3, 1999, 15; Pavković, "Slobodan Praljak," 2; "Šta Kažu Generali;" and Praljak, "Moj Govor," 13.

¹⁰¹ Bajrić, "Pravda za Stari Most," 3; and Mehmed Rajković, "Kako Ujediniti Mostar" [How to Unify Mostar], *Oslobođenje* October 18, 2003, 19.

before the tenth anniversary of the bridge's destruction, in which the author suggested that if neither those who ordered, nor those who carried out this act were brought to justice by the time of the Opening Ceremony, a "dark shadow" would hang over the New Old Bridge.¹⁰² The editorial even predicted that many of those who could be found guilty would be standing and applauding in the audience, perhaps even on the podium. This possibility further called into question the event's and the bridge's meaning.

Praljak and other wartime HDZ and HVO leaders were in fact unexpectedly indicted by the ICTY and surrendered to The Hague in the spring of 2004, just a few months before the completion of the New Old Bridge.¹⁰³ Undoubtedly the ICTY had been working on these cases for many years before the indictments were actually made, but their timing in publicizing them just before the bridge's opening ceremony and following the repeated editorial and public calls for justice is not a complete coincidence. Therefore, the administrative reunification of Mostar partly because of the glaring discrepancy between the rhetoric about the Old Bridge as a symbol of unity and the city's divided reality was not the only example of how the reconstruction of this significant piece of architectural heritage acted as a driving force for politics in Mostar. The incongruity of celebrating the renewal of the bridge and the city without holding anyone accountable for its destruction also encouraged the arresting of those responsible.

¹⁰² Bajrić, "Pravda za Stari Most," 3. Another editorial went further than calling for justice as a prerequisite for reuniting the city, but also believed those accountable should pay restitution for the damage. Rajković, "Kako Ujediniti Mostar," 19.

¹⁰³ ICTY Case IT-04-74.

Though some rest easier knowing Praljak and the other *Herceg-Bosna* leaders are now on trial, the destruction of the Old Bridge was not actually specifically listed in the counts of their criminal indictment, only mentioned in the “statement of the case.” Though not listed individually as a crime for which the defendants are accused, the destruction of the bridge can be considered covered by Count 20: “wanton destruction of cities, towns, or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity.”¹⁰⁴ Thus even if Praljak and his colleagues are convicted of having wantonly destroyed Mostar, their role specifically in the Old Bridge’s destruction will remain unclear. Again, responsibility for the bridge’s destruction is only implied in the abstract.

This inconclusively has given rise to doubts and alternative theories as to the bridge’s fate. For example, while the *Herceg-Bosna* leaders stand trial in The Hague, three Zagreb engineers published a new “expert” analysis of the video footage of the Old Bridge’s destruction which they argued conclusively demonstrated that it was brought down by a mine explosion activated by the city’s Muslims, rather than by shells from an HVO tank.¹⁰⁵ As bizarre and unlikely as this claim may seem, variations on this theme have actually been argued for years and mirror a common reversal of accusations that has occurred throughout and since the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ ICTY Case IT-04-74. In contrast, those allegedly responsible for the destruction of the other significant sites during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia have been held accountable for specific acts of destruction: Yugoslav Army and Navy Generals were indicted for the shelling of the World Heritage City of Dubrovnik, and Miodrag Jokić has been convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison for his role in this attack. ICTY Case IT-01-42, Indictment submitted February 22, 2001 by Carla del Ponte, prosecutor. In addition, at-large indictees Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić have been accused specifically of the destruction of Banja Luka’s Ferhadija mosque and numerous other religious structures. ICTY Case IT-95-5, Indictment submitted July 24, 1995 by Richard J. Goldstone, prosecutor.

¹⁰⁵ Željko Rogošić, “Experts Claim: The Bridge was not Destroyed by HVO,” *Nacional*, February 23, 2006, <http://nacional.hr/en/articles/view/23364/>. The book, co-authored by Muhamed Sućeska, Aco Šikanić and Slobodan Janković, is forthcoming from Pavičić and Oktavijan publishing houses in Zagreb.

¹⁰⁶ “Početak,” *Ljiljan*, December 1, 1993, 34; and “Piropćenje Hrvatske Akademije Znanosti i Umjetnosti povodom Urušavanja Starog Mosta u Mostaru” [Announcement of the Croatian



Figure 42: Cover of the Split based *Feral Tribune* depicting HVO General Slobodan Praljak with a headscarf and a headline reading: “The Muslim who Destroyed the Old Bridge,” February 23, 2006. (image: *Feral Tribune*, Split).

This new theory on the Old Bridge’s destruction probably will not be widely accepted, even among Croats in Bosnia and Croatia. The Croatian weekly magazine *Feral Tribune*, notorious both for its tabloidesque photoshopped cover images as well as for its internationally recognized independent journalism, responded to the news of the new book with a cover depiction of General Praljak in a turban with a large headline identifying him as “The Muslim who Destroyed the Old Bridge” (fig. 42).¹⁰⁷

Academy of Sciences and Arts on the Occasion of the Implosion of the Old Bridge in Mostar], *Dani*, December 29, 1993, 34.

¹⁰⁷ “Musliman Koji je Srušio Stari Most” [The Muslim who Destroyed the Old Bridge], *Feral Tribune*, February 23, 2006, 1.

CONCLUSION: THE NEW OLD BRIDGE: A MULTIVALENT MONUMENT

The main reason the reconstructed bridge is called the New Old Bridge locally is because for many Mostar residents, it is not the same as the Old Bridge physically or in spirit. The stones of the Old Bridge were not used in the construction of the New Old Bridge, whose recently chiseled perfect stones do not show the signs of the passage of time and the centuries of continuous use that its predecessor did. The feeling evoked by the weathered, grey Old Bridge is not the same as that of this new, glistening white monument. About the New Old Bridge, the famed local diver Emir Balić said “I’m proud, of course. But, you know, I still feel that something has been murdered here. The Old Bridge had its recognizable patina. These builders do care, but this won’t be *that* old bridge.”¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, on the paradox of the bridge’s simultaneous oldness and newness, a local artist argued that The Old One (*Stari*) is an earned title reserved for those that endure, which though not yet applicable to the current bridge is not beyond its grasp someday.¹⁰⁹

Though there is no danger that those who experienced it and who lived through the war in Mostar will forget the original Old Bridge, for visitors to the city and future generations, the exhibit about the history of the bridge and its destruction and reconstruction which traveled around central and southeastern Europe has found a permanent home in Mostar. Thus alongside the New Old Bridge, one can learn about the Old Bridge.

The memory of the Old Bridge in the city is also reinforced by a small sign painted on a stone which reads “Don’t Forget.” Erected in 1997 when there was no bridge at all,

¹⁰⁸ “Mostar,” *Time*. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁹ Marin Topić, “New or Old,” in *The Old Bridge in Mostar*, ed. by Šemsudin Serdarević (Mostar: Center for Peace and Multiethnic Cooperation, 2004).



Figure 43: View of the “Don’t Forget” sign and missing Old Bridge, c.1999. (image: Douglas Long).

the stone was placed so that it would become visible to pedestrians at almost exactly the same time the view of the missing bridge opened up from between the buildings of the dense Ottoman Old Town (fig. 43). Due to the narrowness of the street and the controllability of this vantage point, even today viewers of the New Old Bridge are confronted by this reminder of the lost bridge, especially because this represents one of only three ways of approaching the bridge.

How the meaning of the present bridge differs from that of the historic bridge can also be understood by thinking of the Old Bridge as having been a *milieu de memoire* before its destruction: it was the focal point of the city and a site significant in the daily lives of its inhabitants.¹¹⁰ But through its destruction and reconstruction as the New Old Bridge, it has become a *lieu de memoire* – a designated place of memory. The Old

¹¹⁰ Pierre Nora, “General Introduction: Between Memory and History.” In *Realms of Memory*. Ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

Bridge was also an unintentional monument significant for its cultural, artistic, historic, and age values; however, the New Old Bridge is an *intentional* monument to an alleged Bosnian multicultural identity and to the former bridge.¹¹¹

These distinctions suggest the Old Bridge's meaning has been condensed from the broadest definition of a monument – anything revealing the passage of time, to the narrowest – something meant to recall a specific moment or idea. This terminology is useful for explaining the Old Bridge's changing meanings, but these classifications are also overly restrictive. The New Old Bridge is still actively used, its place in collective and personal memories will never be eclipsed, and its symbolism will never really be reduced to a single meaning.

It can be useful however to also think of Mostar's New Old Bridge as a monument to Bosnian identity rather than only as reconstructed heritage. As such it can be questioned in the same way all state sponsored national monuments are criticized. If thought of as a monument, it is not surprising to learn that by celebrating an identity rooted in the idea that Bosnia was, and should be, multicultural, it in fact represents an idealized, imagined sense of Bosnia, a narrative based in history but also socially constructed to serve the needs of the present. Nor is it surprising to learn it selectively represents the peoples of Bosnia by advancing this interpretation as universal when it really equates the values of those in power (the OHR and the international community) with the values of the whole population. It is also no surprise to learn that some selective forgetting of old associations and the details of history is necessary in order to advocate these new meanings.

¹¹¹ Alois Riegl, "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Origins," *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982): 23-24. (Originally published in German in 1903).

Though the multicultural idea of Bosnia-Herzegovina that the New Old Bridge purports to represent may not reflect everyone's desired version of Bosnia, it is still clearly an important symbolic site for most people in the country. As its reconstruction progressed throughout 2003 and 2004, state-wide news media discussed it multiple times each week, and numerous websites tracked the process with live web-cameras and daily update photographs.¹¹² Bosnia-Herzegovina's most widely-circulated newspaper, *Dnevni Avaz*, ran a countdown on its front page for the two months before the opening ceremony. When the New Old Bridge was finally complete, all of Bosnia's peoples did seem universally proud, and universally happy to have the world's attention for a positive reason for the first time in decades.

The influence of the New Old Bridge and its symbolism, however problematic, on politics in Mostar and beyond have also been impressive. As a result of its destruction, west countries and western-based international organizations found a symbol on which to focus their understanding of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the HVO Commander was relieved of his duty, and some have even suggested the process of signing of a cease-fire between Croat and Muslim forces within Bosnia was accelerated. As a result of its reconstruction, those responsible for Mostar's destruction are finally being held accountable for their crimes, and the deeply divided city of Mostar has been politically reunited. Perhaps as far as architectural symbolism goes, the Old Bridge's impact on politics has been surpassed in recent years only by the affects of the symbolism associated with the destruction of the World Trade Center and Pentagon on US foreign policy and therefore on world events.

¹¹² The pictures from these web cameras are viewable online at <http://www.pcu.starimost.ba> and <http://www.starimost.telecom.ba>.

Despite the limitations of its meanings and its differences from the Old Bridge, the New Old Bridge is still a particularly powerful and pervasive symbol in and of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in part because it is less arbitrary than other current representations of the country. Mostar's bridge seems to be one of the very few prewar Bosnian symbols that can be reused and can be accepted as important on some level by most people in Bosnia. Though those rebuilding it continuously repeated oversimplified meanings, those opposed or indifferent toward the idea of a multicultural Bosnia have accepted the New Old Bridge simply by focusing on another layer of its meaning, on one of its pre-war associations, or by seeing it simply as a monument to the Old Bridge. So perhaps the New Old Bridge can represent reconciliation in Bosnia, but not in the way this is traditionally argued: rather than symbolizing agreement on Bosnian identity it can symbolize acceptance of the coexistence of simultaneous multiple interpretations of Bosnia.