



Partipative reconstruction as a healing process in Bosnia

by Amra Hadžimuhamedović*

Abstract:

The destruction of cultural heritage in Bosnia was not simply a collateral outcome of the 1990s war. It was large-scale, systematic and co-orchestrated with other forms of human suffering. Post-war rehabilitation of cultural heritage in Bosnia was charged with the mission to mitigate the consequences of ethnic cleansing and the tremendous physical losses in Bosnian historic landscapes. Amra Hadžimuhamedović explores how post-war trauma healing and heritage restoration processes spontaneously became some of the most influential factors in the peace settlement and its sustainability in Bosnia, and the returnee's claims for - and restoration of - their heimats (homelands).

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Introduction

The war in Bosnia came to an end with the international conflict resolution agreement, the Dayton Peace Accords¹. Its 11 annexes contain stipulations concerning both military and civil issues. The very heart of the agreements – annexes 6, 7 and 8 – address the mutually interconnected issues of, respectively, human rights, the return of refugees and displaced persons, and cultural heritage.

Annex 8 of the Dayton Peace Accords 'Agreement on the Commission to Preserve National Monuments' is significant due to the fact that cultural heritage was recognized – for the first time in modern international conflict resolution policy – as one of 11 paramount agents for establishing sustainable peace. Annex 8 is a relatively short and general document. Some of its terminology and phrasing, such as 'national', 'monument' or 'commission to preserve', for example, could be deemed outdated today and discordant to 1990s doctrine relating to cultural heritage. However, the Annex provided an important framework to develop institutional and legal capacities for the integration of cultural heritage into the gradual post-war re-establishment of mutual trust and confidence among civilians.

¹ The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, also known as the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) or Dayton Accords, is the peace agreement reached at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, United States, in November 1995, and formally signed in Paris on 14 December 1995 after more than three and half years of war.

'Violent efforts to remake the world in another image' through cultural heritage destruction

The destruction of cultural heritage in Bosnia was not simply a collateral outcome of the 1990s war. It was large-scale, systematic and co-orchestrated with other forms of human suffering, such as expulsions, torture, rape, civilian detention and mass killings. 'The purpose of this destruction is to eradicate cultural, social and religious traces that identify the ethnic and religious groups²'. The destruction of cultural heritage was a method of ethnic cleansing³. Furthermore, phrases such as 'cultural and economic cleansing',

² UN Security Council. 1994. *Final Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992)*, S/1994/674. s.l., United Nations.

³ Ethnic cleansing is not established as a crime by any international law. There is not a conventional definition of ethnic cleansing. However, the term has been used in UN documents since 1992. See: UN General Assembly. 1992. "Ethnic cleansing" and racial hatred, A/RES/47/80. New York, United Nations. Later UN documents reporting on acts of violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, have stated that acts of ethnic cleansing 'constitute crimes against humanity and can be assimilated to specific war crimes'. Furthermore, such acts could also fall within the meaning of the Genocide Convention. UN document S/1994/674 defines ethnic cleansing as: '... a purposeful policy designed by one ethnic or religious group to remove by violent and terror-inspiring means the civilian population of another ethnic or religious group from certain geographic areas'. See: UN Security Council. 1994. *Final Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992)*, S/1994/674. s.l., United Nations.

'the major cultural catastrophe',⁴ 'architectural cleansing', 'cultural genocide'⁵ – as well as similar, increasingly idiomatic expressions used by other authors discussing the Bosnian heritage destruction – continually built upon the United Nations definition of 'ethnic cleansing' and insisted on the consonance of crimes against people and cultural heritage.

Adams defines the destruction of cultural heritage in Bosnia as the 'violent efforts to remake the world in another image'.⁶ 'Cultural genocide' is performed through the destruction of one's place of belonging in the world, what the German language refers to as *heimat*,⁷ a nest of memory and an anchorage of culture. The destruction of home and homeland was also carried out through rape and the destruction of domestic architecture.⁸ The persistence of cultural memory through the symbolic and physical forms of the house, house-related rituals and the women's role therein, is a noticeable characteristic of the Bosnian landscape. The systematic violations of both women and houses were some of the major manifestations of nationalist programmes and their associated virulent masculinity.



Figures 1 and 2. Two of hundreds of historic houses destroyed in Stolac in 1993.
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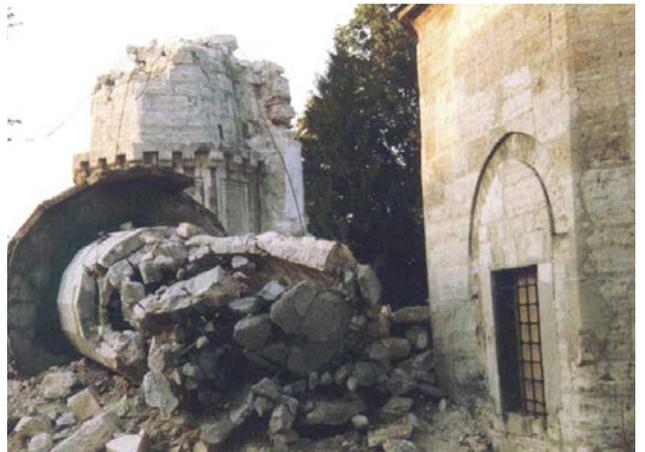


Figure 3. Ferhadija Mosque (sixteenth century) in Banja Luka, destroyed on 6 May, 1993.
© Aleksandar Ravlić



Figure 4. Site of the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka in 2002. All fragments were removed and thrown into a lake and dumping site.
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Figures 5 and 6. Fragments of some of the 16 mosques destroyed in Banja Luka, including the Ferhadija Mosque discovered at the local dumping site.
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4 Council of Europe. 1993. *Report on war damage to the cultural heritage in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Strasbourg, Council of Europe.

5 Adams, N. 1993. Architecture as the Target. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 52, No. 4. Oakland (CA), University of California Press, pp. 389-390.

6 Ibid.

7 *Heimat* is a German term, with neither the Latin-based languages nor the eastern languages such as Chinese offering any exact synonyms. *Zavičaj* is a very close translation in Bosnian. On 'zavičaj' see: Halilovich, H. 2013. *Places of Pain: Forced Displacement, Popular Memory and Trans-local Identities in Bosnian War-torn Communities*. New York, Berghahn Books. Ratter and Gee (2012) suggest that 'homescape' or 'homeland' are the nearest English approximations, although it is difficult to translate it due to multiple semantic layers of the term. See: Ratter, B.M.W. and Gee, K. 2012. *Heimat – A German concept of regional perception and identity as a basis for coastal management in the Wadden Sea. Ocean and Coastal Management*, Vol. 68. s.l., Elsevier, pp. 127-137. The word *Heimat* in this text is used to replace the complex explanation of phenomenon of positive emotional attachment of one to the place that is center of one's world - spatial and social experiences, or the point zero in the life geographies, which influences identity, mentality and perception of the world of each human being.

8 Adams, N. 1993. Architecture as the Target. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 52, No. 4. Oakland (CA), University of California Press, pp. 389-390.



Figure 7. Debris with fragments of frescos of the St. Nicholas Eastern Orthodox Church (1534) in the Trijebanj village.
© Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Figures 8 and 9. Fragments of the Aladža Mosque (1549) in Foča, found during the excavation of a mass grave.
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There are a number of reports on the statistics of cultural heritage destruction in Bosnia.⁹ If detached from the holistic descriptions of warscapes and human destinies, the figures in these records give an elusive and deficient

9 See, for example: State Commission for the Collection of Facts on War Crimes in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1992. *Bilten: Činjenice o ratnim zločinima Sarajevo* [Bulletin: War Crimes Facts Sarajevo]. Sarajevo, State Commission for the Collection of Facts on War Crimes in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (In Bosnian.); Mileusić, S. 1994. *Duhovni genocid: pregled porušenih, oštećenih i obesvećenih crkava, manastira i drugih crkvenih objekata u ratu 1991-1993* [Spiritual genocide: an overview of the demolished, damaged and enlightened churches, monasteries and other church buildings in the 1991-1993 war]. Belgrade, Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church. (In Bosnian.); Institute for the Protection of the Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 1995. *Izveštaj o devastaciji kulturno-historijskog i prirodnog naslijeđa Bosne i Hercegovine* [Report on the Destruction of the Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina]. *Naše starine*, Vol. 21. (In Bosnian.); Živković, I. (ed). 1997. *Raspeta crkva u Bosni i Hercegovini: uništavanje katoličkih sakralnih objekata u Bosni i Hercegovini (1991.-1996.)* [The Wounded Church in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Destruction of Catholic Sacral Objects in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991-1996)]. Banja Luka, Mostar and Sarajevo, the Bishop's Conference of Bosnia and Herzegovina. (In Bosnian.); Hadžimuhamedović, A. 1998. *Razaranje kao dio graditeljskog naslijeđa Bosne i Hercegovine, s posebnim osvrtom na razdoblje od 1991-1995* [Destruction as a part of the architectural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with special reference to the period 1991-1995]. s.l., Faculty of Architecture, University of Sarajevo. (In Bosnian.); Riedlmayer, A.J. 2002. *Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1992-1996: A Post-War Survey of Selected Municipalities*. Cambridge (MA), s.n. Available at: <https://archnet.org/collections/22/publications/3481> (Accessed 12 December 2018.); Walasek, H., Carlton, R., Hadžimuhamedović, A., Perry, V. and Wik, T. 2015. *Bosnia and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage*. Furnham/Burlington, Ashgate Publishing.

portrayal of the destruction that was planned, selective, imbued with pseudo-ritual character and performed in proximity. After the destruction, in many cases, the blasted or burnt remains were removed from the sites of destroyed buildings, and thrown into 'cultural heritage mass graves', which were usually hard to access. In several cases, the remains of cultural heritage made up the upper stratum of a mass grave, thrown over the human bodies.¹⁰

This image, more than any other, stands as a stark reminder of the nature of destruction during the 1990s: to speak of cultural heritage destruction in the Bosnian case is to speak of genocide. The targets of destruction were firstly the sites of highest symbolic and cultural significance – monuments, religious buildings, museums, galleries, libraries, archives, schools, graveyards and mausoleums. However, the targets were not just single buildings, but also entire urban ensembles, townscapes and vernacular architecture, particularly traditional houses. This targeting speaks of sophisticated knowledge in charting the war. It begs the question: would the knowledge of post-war heritage restoration be as sophisticated and systematic?



Figure 10. Remains of the Old Bridge in Mostar (1566) after its destruction on 9 November 1993.
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10 Hadžimuhamedović, A. 2015. *Naslijeđe, rat i mir* [Heritage, war and peace]. Sarajevo, University of Sarajevo. (In Bosnian.)

Rehabilitation of shared cultural values – the restoration of civic trust

Post-war rehabilitation of cultural heritage in Bosnia was charged with the mission to mitigate the consequences of ethnic cleansing and the tremendous physical losses in Bosnian historic landscapes. However, post-war trauma healing and reconciling the capacity of the heritage restoration process spontaneously became some of the most influential factors in the peace settlement and its sustainability in Bosnia.

After the cessation of the armed conflict, it took five years to begin the efficient implementation of Annexes 6, 7 and 8 of the Dayton Accords. The early post-war years were still permeated with tension, fear, distrust and confusion. Warlords, including the prominent masterminds of the war crimes, were still ruling, albeit usually behind the scenes of public policy. The process of the return of refugees and displaced persons was gridlocked. People did not feel safe to go back even when they were offered international or foreign aid to restore their homes. They expected security and justice, which were not provided to them at the time (and to which some are still not fully entitled). Furthermore, the places of their return were so systematically destroyed that they could not recognize them as their *heimat*.

The hardliner nationalists did everything to prevent the return process. In addition to threats to the security of returnees, they also began plans to reconfigure the sites of the most significant destroyed monuments by imposing new exclusivist meanings to them. The power of



Figure 11. Collecting fragments of the Old Bridge in Mostar from the Neretva River in 1997.
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symbols, such as triumphal crosses, gigantic church belfries or minarets, concrete crosses and new churches were built at the sites of destroyed mosques, as well as massive new constructions of towering religious buildings in eclectic styles, which were statements of 'pure national' or 'pure religious' revivalism. It converted war-destroyed Bosnian historic landscapes into battlefields where symbols of triumphalism and exclusivism were 'shooting at each other'.

Such was the environment in which the Commission to Preserve National Monuments began its operations to integrate cultural heritage into the peace process. UNESCO supported its work from the end of 1995 to 2001, during which two UNESCO experts, Azedine Beschaouch and Léon Pressouyre, served as members of the Commission. During this period, the UNESCO Antenna Office in Sarajevo performed the duties of the technical secretariat of the Commission.

During the first five years after the war, the members of the Commission kept their discussions and documents concealed. Protecting their disclosure minimized the risk that a list of national monuments could be used as a reference for further destructions by the nationalists. The result of the five years' work was a list of 777 heritage sites designated as national monuments. The list might be considered as a reflection of the political negotiations between Bosnian members of the Commission. While all other institutions established under the Dayton Accords were presenting proof of their progress, the Commission maintained an isolated, low profile, and was the least significant segment of the peace structure until 2001.

The turning point was marked by a number of events, and fuelled by the demands of returnees who claimed rights to rehabilitate their *heimats*.

Firstly, the Director-General of UNESCO, the President of the World Bank Group and the Mayor of Mostar signed a global partnership agreement for the reconstruction of the Old Bridge in Mostar, whose preparatory process began in 1998. This global commitment to restoring the site of high symbolic value encouraged the war-torn communities to look for less visible ruins of heritage – their own 'metaphoric bridges' – that could be restored and would bring them back to their safe homes. The public felt involved and that their emotions were respected. Expert and

academic dissonance over authenticity issues – such as whether the tangible or intangible significance of destroyed sites prevails, whether emotion should be interdicted in post-war heritage policy definition, and many others – were brought to a close with the global consensus on the reconstruction of the Old Bridge.



Figures 12 (left) and 13 (right). Work with the community in the historic town of Počitelj (1998) and the Monastery in Žitomislići (2001).
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Figures 14 (left) and 15 (right). Awareness-raising on heritage.
© A. Hadžimuhamedović (Figure 14)
© Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Figure 15)

Secondly, a human rights-based approach and the return process acquired greater symbolism - and was largely made possible - only after the most visible features of houses were restored. In 2001, the return process to several problematic areas where grave war crimes had been committed began to align with the returnees' requests for the restoration of local, iconic heritage sites. For example, when returnees to Banja Luka (where 16 mosques were destroyed during the war) were celebrating the beginning of restoring the sixteenth century Ferhadija mosque, nationalists stoned them, burned the buses in which they arrived, and killed an elderly man. The pattern was repeated in several other places. It was clear that heritage issues had to be addressed in a systematic and appropriate way, and that Annex 8 of the Dayton Accords had to be implemented. Responsibility for the work of the Commission to Preserve National

Monuments was transferred to the highest level of Bosnian authority.

The strategy of implementation was based on the following principles:

1. The Commission to Preserve National Monuments had to be an independent public institution with a regular budget, reporting directly to the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
2. Members of the Commission, designated by the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, had to be politically independent, distinguished scholars and experts in the heritage field. The Commission consisted of three Bosnians from three different ethnic groups, and two foreigners.
3. The Technical Secretariat of the Commission had to be composed of experts in all relevant fields.
4. Criteria had to be enforced for the designation of national monuments, the Act on applying the Commission's decisions, and the set of regulations for the project implementation strategy.
5. All of the Commission's decisions had to be based on detailed documentation, including precise records of the condition of the heritage, and an analytical approach to conservation, interpretation and management. Furthermore, the Commission was endowed with the highest possible authority to enforce and monitor the implementation of its decisions.
6. Anyone could start the procedure of designating a property as a national monument. The massive response of Bosnian citizens to this opportunity demonstrated their awareness of cultural heritage and their understanding of its importance to a comprehensive peace process. The discussions had to be open to all interested persons, and any decisions had to be made public. The governments of the two Bosnian entities and the Brčko District were responsible for providing the technical, financial, legal, and administrative conditions to implement the decisions.

When this new heritage-focused, post-war recovery process started in 2001, the Commission defined a strategy of an inclusive, open and participatory approach to the promotion, protection and rehabilitation of cultural heritage. To achieve the goals of integrating cultural heritage into post-war recovery, the Commission

emphasized that the work of experts should align to public opinion and demands, guided by the idea that heritage atrophies in the absence of public support.¹¹



Figures 16 (left) and 17 (right). Reconstruction process at the site and remains of the sixteenth century Eastern Orthodox Monastery in Žitomislíci.
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Aside from the documentation, assessment and designation of national monuments, numerous other fields of action were identified. Raising awareness of heritage - its shared values, capacity as a development resource, and the responsibilities towards its safeguarding through field work - was central to the Commission's actions in public relations, exhibitions and its work with children and youth. Awareness-raising initiatives were further supported through fundraising for heritage and implementing participatory projects.

Some dilemmas and disputes

Site and remains

One of the first challenges of the Commission was: do destroyed monuments still exist? Is it possible to assess a non-existent property? The dispute was solved through research on the reception of heritage by local communities. In a war-torn environment, when the historic landscapes and their landmarks have been destroyed, communities live in a state of virtual reality that provides them structure. They refer to the missing monuments as if they were intact in their integral expression. This is why the Commission

11 Lowenthal, D. 1999. Heritage Stewardship and Amateur Tradition. *APT Bulletin: The Journal of Preservation Technology*, Vol. 30, No. 2/3, pp. 7-9. Fredericksburg (VA), Association for Preservation Technology.

introduced a new category of heritage 'site and remains'. The category is different from archaeological sites as it refers specifically to the sites of monuments destroyed during the 1992-1996 war. Sixty-six 'sites and remains' were designated between 2001 and April 2018. For all loci designated as 'site and remains', the possibility of reconstruction was stipulated, and based on available documentation.

Reconstructed buildings

As the process of post-war reconstruction continues, and will do so for some time, the number of reconstructed monuments on the protected 'site and remains' list is gradually changing. The associated challenges have largely been focused on issues of authenticity and its analysis vis-à-vis the post-war milieu, for example, contextual and associative authenticity. In all these cases, a test of authenticity is carried out to evaluate intangible values, form and design, location and setting, material and



Figure 18. Reconstructed houses in the historic core of Jajce.
© Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina



Figure 19. St. Ivo Catholic Church in Podmilačje after reconstruction
© Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina

methods, as well as use and function. Besides the Old Bridge in Mostar, a number of monuments and ensembles have maintained national monument status, the first being the Čaršijska Mosque in Stolac, the Eastern Orthodox Monastery in Žitomislići and the Catholic Church of Sveti Ivo in Podmilačje.

However, several newly-reconstructed buildings have not qualified, and some national monuments have been de-listed due to a loss of authenticity through reconstruction. Bearing in mind that authenticity is an ever-evolving concept, the reconstructed buildings have responded to a people-centred approach to post-war restoration. Rituals, traditions, associations and, above all, new narrative attributes that testify to both the destruction and the reconstruction, have been key in considering the reconstructed buildings not merely as replicas but as authentic monuments.

Contested sites

One of the main risks in 2001 was that a war of symbols could transform into a battle for the invisible - and sometimes invented - layers of heritage at the sites of destroyed monuments. To whom does a heritage site belong? This question loomed over each of the cultural heritage sites like a sword of Damocles. Claims to conducting archaeological excavations at the sites of

destroyed mosques occurred in several cases: Bijeljina, Stolac, Trebinje, Banja Luka and Foča. Often these claims were not motivated by an interest in the archaeological layers of the places where the destruction occurred, but rather the continuation of nationalist programmes. Their goal was to prevent the reconstruction of destroyed sites and the return of uprooted people.

This particular challenge was addressed with the clear statement that the last known shape of the building is the only one that can be reconstructed. However, if found, any archaeological remains would be the responsibility of the owner of the site. The responsibility of each person for each monument, and the shared values of heritage were central features of these cases. Since the first cases were resolved, there have been no contested sites, and it seems that there is consensus on shared values and responsibilities.

The power of heritage in post-war recovery

Since 2001, cultural heritage has become a key formative factor of the peace process in Bosnia. The strategy of reviving mental maps through the reconstruction of buildings and complexes of strong symbolic and associative value has centred people around shared values and memory. Post-war recovery always takes place in the context of a strong need for belonging to

Figure 20 (below). Počitelj after reconstruction.
© Commission to Preserve National Monuments of Bosnia and Herzegovina



a collective and for maintaining the thread of continuity – as both are under threat. Heritage crystallizes the communal values and links and, at the same time, provides the much-needed cornerstones of continuity. In the end, let me recapitulate with a fragment of Sigmund Freud's correspondence with Albert Einstein, on the question 'Why war?' The Bosnian case, like others, confirms that 'whatever makes for cultural development is working also against war'.¹²

¹² Freud, S. 1932. *The Einstein-Freud Correspondence (1931-1932)*. Available at: <http://www.public.asu.edu/~jmlync/273/documents/FreudEinstein.pdf> (Accessed 12 December 2018.)

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