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ERASING THE PAST: DESTRUCTION AND PRESERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Part I

by Igor Ordev

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INTRODUCTION

The armed conflict in former Yugoslavia is the longest lasting, most destructive and most complex crisis in Europe the international community had to deal with since World War II. The wars in former Yugoslavia have made a great impact on the whole community, in a negative as well as in positive sense: negative, of course, as we all know are the consequences of all wars that take a long time to be buried and forgotten. Human lives that have ended before their time and the trauma to the ones that survived the tragic incidents is something that is irreplaceable. The positive results, as much as they are hard to find, are the lessons learned after everything that took place in these ten years of violence and destruction in the Balkan region.

Hundreds of objects with different purpose have been a part of the "cleaning of the land" campaigns, which have taken place in these newly formed countries. Most of the influential countries and international organizations in the world became involved in the attempt to bring the conflict under control but in most of the cases the results were partial.

Many religious and other types of objects such as the Oriental Institute in Bosnia and other important museums throughout the conflict areas were targeted on purpose by the armies or the people themselves from every side of the conflicts. A major result of the conflicts culture was that it has suffered the greatest shock in its history.

I am going to focus my attention on this cultural aspect of the war, the destruction of the cultural heritage of each of the ethnic groups that were brought up together in former Yugoslavia in the history of the last fifteen or so years. All of it was done in order to gain territory--something that has been very popular in the nineties in the Balkans,. A lot of unique, priceless churches, monasteries, mosques, shrines and other religious objects dating from past centuries, as well as non-religious objects were harmed or destroyed. In the war planning, or at least the theory behind such destruction, is the idea that a new page of history is to start from here, and the old one was about to be erased.

This paper assesses a presentation of three case studies that were both complex and fascinating. It starts with the preservation of cultural heritage in general by explaining its characteristics. Then the examples of Bosnia, Kosovo and at the end finishing with the case of Macedonia will conditions shaping these countries and their peoples. By trying to capture all the aspects of the situation, meaning the history of the relations between the two sides, the governing bodies at the time of the conflict and some other characteristics I will try to show most aspects of the issue.

My working hypothesis is that what happened in the Balkan region in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century has played a crucial role in transforming Yugoslavia into many small,

quite nationalistic countries with a territory cleansed from any traces of the previous inhabitants. Despite all the efforts of the external factors from Europe and the United States of America, an essential piece of the history is now missing to support the facts and myths about this area. It has been a great lecture for everyone to learn, and indeed a painful one.

I. PRESERVATION IN GENERAL

As we are focusing primarily on the preservation of the cultural heritage of a certain groups or ethnicities, we must emphasize some basic characteristics related to the topic. It's important to capture all the aspects of the thesis by answering some basic questions.

I. 1. *What is heritage?*

Heritage is defined by the New Oxford Dictionary as:

That which is or may be inherited: fig. the portion allotted to a specified person, group, etc. b. Property consisting of land etc. that devolved on the heir at law as opposed to the executor. 2. The fact of inheriting; hereditary succession. 3. A gift which constitutes a proper possession... 4. Inherited circumstances or benefits.

'Heritage', in our present context, certainly implies a gift for future generations and benefits for the community. These definitions may, perhaps, reflect a 'western' preoccupation with economic rationalism, and a view that the land and material possessions are to be used for generating wealth, either now or in the future, through speculation or investment.¹ The term "cultural heritage" meanwhile, implies a certain gift and a path to the next generations which are obliged to follow the tradition and customs of the previous generations.

There are two kinds of cultural heritage, **tangible** and **intangible**. Tangible are the ones that are made from a certain material such as buildings, houses, religious monuments, different types of shrines etc. They can be historical, political, statues of leaders, areas of battle and so on. The intangible are the ones that bring back the memory of a certain historical event or person. They can be names of cities, toponyms, names of streets, or an historical personality such as Skenderbeg.

I. 2. *What is the reason for their destruction?*

There are various reasons for destruction of historical or cultural artifacts. Sometimes the official reason for destruction is only a cover up for some other purpose. It can be a religious, nationalistic, political reason. Also because of property reasons such as to who should a certain piece of land belong. A change of sovereignty is another case where by removing everything that reminds people of the former owner focuses on teaching the younger generations a different aspect of history.

I. 3. *How does this happen?*

Terrorizing is one way of erasing the evidence of the past, but there are other ways also, such as gradual transformation of the monuments into objects that would serve another purpose. Sometimes there is no need to destroy them or change their use but simply leave them to decay. Without the regular maintenance, it will be a matter of time when these objects will collapse.

I. 4. *Why preserve heritage?*

If conserving heritage is likely to be both expensive and difficult, why should we do it? There are many reasons. Cultural heritage can preserve aspects of our culture and history and add to our sense of belonging and group identity. All forms of heritage can help define and maintain a sense of identity at local, regional, national, and global scales. In fact, heritage items are part of

¹ Graeme Aplin, *Heritage: Identification, Conservation and Management*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 13.

the context that makes us human.² It says a lot about who we think we are and explains our behavior and roots of our character.

If it's useful for the society today and in the future to be able to show and prove that a certain event has really taken place, in that certain way and no other, then every object connected to that fact can serve as documentation-which results in the society's will to preserve that object.³

Shared heritage allows us to see ourselves as members of a group or society, not just as an individual in a sea of individuals. It helps impart a sense of a group in the minds of both group members and others; in other words, it helps define both internal self-image and external images held by others.

Heritage thus helps differentiate group from group, and place from place. Just as we each have a personal definition of heritage, so heritage helps define our personalities, our places of residence, work and play, and the groups to which we belong.⁴

I. 5. How do we save it?

Everything is connected to the social aspect and the kind of society that we have. If we have a democratic society then preservation would be respected through building a social and legal framework. In a number of countries, the only actor traditionally involved in heritage preservation is the state itself, but in other countries there is a richer network of individuals and organizations, many of which are nongovernmental and nonprofit.⁵ These organizations are playing increasing roles in the preservation process in recent history. Other institutions that are involved in this process are the external organizations such as UNESCO, UN, EU and the local NGO's.

I. 6. What has been done in that field?

The destruction of numerous historic monuments during the Second World War and the weakness of legal procedures for the protection of cultural property were the reasons for the initiative taken to improve protection immediately after 1945. Right after the WWII several initiatives were taken in order to bring proper legislation for the protection of the cultural heritage in the world.

There can be no doubt that The Hague Convention of 14 May 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the Regulations for its Execution, which form an integral part of it, and the Protocol of The Hague of 14 May 1954 for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict constitute the most important instruments for the protection of cultural property in contemporary international law. They form a true code for cultural property.

The convention is based on the idea that the preservation of the cultural heritage is not only a matter for the State on whose territory it is located but 'is of great importance for all peoples of the world and that it is important that this heritage should receive international protection.'⁶

I. 7. Financial assistance

It is important for the international organizations such as UNESCO and others to help the governments that are willing to promote coexistence and understanding among people by preservation and reconstruction of the cultural heritage of the dominant group as well as the heritage of the minorities in the country. If governments cannot sustain the cultural heritage of their

² Ibid., p. 4

³ Stevan Tomic, *Legal Protection of Cultural Monuments in Yugoslavia*, (Belgrade: Vojno Stamparsko Preduzece, 1958), p. 104.

⁴ Aplin, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

⁵ J. Mark Schuster, "Choosing the Right Tool(s) for the Task" in *Preserving the Built Heritage* edited by J. Mark Schuster, (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1997), p.131.

⁶ Ibid., p. 24.

countries independently, then they must provide mechanisms by which partnerships can be established with community organizations.

This is much harder to achieve in countries where there has been fundamental social and political change and where the pressures of personal survival in daily life must take priority. These countries suffer collateral damage throughout their lands and their economy doesn't allow the government to spend the needed financial assistance for the survival of the cultural heritage. In those situations loans in form of grants are the best solution for the problem. The most common direct incentive comes in the form of grants.

I. 8. Proper education

One thing that every governing body should concentrate is a proper education of young people about the value of the cultural heritage, not only its financial aspects. Is it possible for schools in multi-cultural polities to educate youths in way that respects the various cultures, yet simultaneously instills the common values and requisite skills that are necessary to function in the society at large? Can an educated program which must recognize youths to roles in a mass society do so without undermining local cultures and communities or causing youths to become alienated from them?⁷ Especially in places such as the countries of former Yugoslavia where there is a mix of cultures, religions and mentalities, this way of educating people could be crucial for the future interaction among these groups. It's important to create a learning environment such that the students identify with local community values and norms and develop concern for the welfare of their fellow students at the school. Equally important is to create an atmosphere in which the student feels at home, but is also challenged to contribute to something that is larger than oneself.⁸

In the following sections I will describe the process of "cultural cleansing" in the cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Macedonia by presenting the important aspects of the thorny issue.

II. THE CASE OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

So much has been said and written in the recent past about the war in B&H that it seems that every aspect of it was covered and thoroughly examined. However, that is not entirely true. Not much has been said about the beautiful, priceless architecture that suffered substantial damage during the beginning of the 1990s. Much has been talked about the number of victims who lost their lives, but not much about the number of architectural victims of this war.

The architecture of churches, monasteries, and mosques is most certainly connected to the history of the Bosnian people it embodies, their cultures and religions. These three words are maybe the most important ones in this whole story: history, culture and religion. Further perhaps this is where we should look for the solution of the "problem of Bosnia."

Bosnia-Herzegovina has existed culturally, historically, and indeed politically, for more than 1,000 years, while former Yugoslavia was a historically short-lived collection of different, separate identities, joined in a fundamentally artificial way and thus liable to disintegrate.⁹ That means that despite how the Serbian and Croatian states or peoples feel about the Bosnian people, and their relations towards them, the Bosnian state and its people have been present in the Balkan region for centuries.

⁷ Timothy Ready, "Learning to Participate: Humanistic and Pragmatic Education for a Multicultural Community, Polity and World" in *Relations between Cultures* edited by George F. McLean and John Kromkowski, The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1991, p. 279

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 288

⁹ Rasmir Mahmutcehajic, "The Road to War" in *The War in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina 1991-1995* edited by Branka Magas and Ivo Zanic, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), p. 149.

Alone in medieval Europe, the Kingdom of Bosnia was a place where not one but three Christian churches—Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and a schismatic local Bosnian Church—existed side by side. While the leaders of all three churches were called upon by medieval Bosnian rulers to witness acts of state, the state did not regularly favor one church over others.¹⁰ Historically, we can see how all three churches were functioning side by side without having one dominate over the others. So the next question is how is it possible for these three churches to cohabitate together for so long and suddenly to feel threatened by each others presence? We have to draw the conclusion that other factors besides differences in religious faith and practice caused the current difficulties. While this war developed due to completely different reasons and has other causes, nevertheless, it is true that the war has been dressed in religious clothing in order to disguise its real motives.¹¹

II. 1. THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN THE BOSNIAN CONFLICT

Religion did play an important role in the recent tragedies in the Balkan region. As never before, the answer to the question: to which of the three religions does one belong has been a question closely connected to one's future.

The first part of the explanation of the relations among religions takes us back to the issue of the status of religion in the former Yugoslavia. In the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia there was freedom of expression of religion: however, there were important limitations to such expression. No public display of religious beliefs or rituals was permitted, and devoutness was not compatible with holding membership in the Yugoslav Communist Party.¹²

With the break up of Yugoslavia and the fall of communism, a new order has arrived. Religious practice has increased in recent years with the end of communism. Even more important politically was the use of religion as part of the ethnomobilization strategy of Slobodan Milosevic, Franjo Tudjman, Alija Izetbegovic and other politicians. Many people identify themselves as Muslim, Orthodox, and Catholic even though they do not profess or practice any religion. Yet, given the insane logic of ethnic cleansing, their life might depend on whether they are Muslim atheist, Orthodox atheist, or Catholic atheist. At this point, religious identity has lost its religious meaning; religion has been reduced to little more than an artifact, another way of describing cultural, ethnic or national differences.¹³ But it is perhaps THE essential artifact in the political calculation.

The public and open display of religious celebrations was a sign of new democratic times, when both political and religious beliefs could be expressed openly.¹⁴ Thus, the church and religion found its freedom to intervene in every sphere of the community beginning from the top, the government going down to every person individually. National awakening has taken place; in that awakening religion and its leaders helped create the separation among people with almost the same language and ethnic makeup.

Nationalism goes on hand-in-hand with religious revival. Nationalism does not function as an alternative to religion, entering when and where religion weakens, but they advance both mutually, reinforcing one another with the same dynamics and the same trends, penetrating

¹⁰ Andras Riedlmayer, "From the Ashes: The Past and Future of Bosnia's Cultural Heritage" in *Islam and Bosnia, Conflict Resolution and Foreign Policy in Multi-Ethnic States* edited by Maya Shatzmiller, (Ithaca: McGill-Queens University Press 2002), p. 100.

¹¹ Paul Mojzes, ed. *Religion and the War in Bosnia*, (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998), p. 133.

¹² Riedlmayer, *op.cit.*, p. 28.

¹³ Mojzes, *op.cit.*, p. 223

¹⁴ Riedlmayer, *op.cit.*, p. 29.

together. Nationalist reawakening and religious revivals seem to be complementary today.¹⁵

Even though all three religions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Muslim) have redeveloped rapidly, it has to be said that the Serbian Orthodox Church has probably been far more influential than any other church or religion in the region. It has been the loudest in giving support to the Serbian people living outside Serbia in their attempt to achieve their goals. The Serbian Orthodox Church has justified their actions because of the past, because of the tremendous suffering they claim for the Serbian Orthodox people over the centuries. "The church has contributed to the war, therefore, not in creating aggressive and chauvinistic Serb nationalism but in validating its claims of national rights and myths of victimization, and giving it theological and religious legitimacy."¹⁶ In practice, the church shaped the Serbian interpretation of its actions, including genocide, or ethnic cleansing, and in that way gave individual fighters motivation and support for actions which they otherwise might have resisted.

The church's nationalist vision is rooted in two related concerns. First, the church defines the Serbian nation as a natural entity, an organic body that cannot survive and flourish if it is divided or if it is separated from its religious, specifically Orthodox, roots. There is a strong sense that one who is not Orthodox is not Serb, and that all Serbian Orthodox peoples should live in the same state or nation. Second, the church shares with many Serbs a deep sense of insecurity growing out of a history of victimization: by Turks during the Ottoman Empire, by Tito's communism in the post-War period, and especially, by the *Ustashe* during World War II. This sense of victimization has been an overriding factor in the church's response to the Yugoslav crisis.¹⁷ This deep-rooted perception of victimization has given birth to the idea of revenge in the community and at the same time, has given the proper justification for action. As Paul Mojzes says, the Serbian Orthodox Church sees itself as a defender of Orthodoxy at the frontier of Islam's assault on Europe and Roman Catholicism's assault on Eastern Orthodoxy.

As for Islam, even though it has been present in Bosnia for centuries, it isn't as influential in the sphere of religious practice as is Orthodoxy for the Serbs. In Bosnia, many people from all social and religious backgrounds—more than half the population by the 1700s—adopted the triumphant faith of the Islamic conquerors. A distinctive Bosnian-Muslim culture took form, with its own architecture, literature, social customs, and folklore.¹⁸ Because of the power of the Ottoman Empire and its significance in the world, a basically secular version of Islam became the dominant culture in Bosnia.

In comparison with Islamic, the spheres of high culture in the Catholic-Croat and especially in the Orthodox-Serb component were much poorer, which is understandable considering their position in the Turkish Islamic state. Despite Islamic tolerance in principle of other monotheistic religions, in practice their members were second-rate citizens.¹⁹ It was during the period in which religion played a large part in public life when a lot of the architecture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially mosques and other types of shrines were built, so under the Turks in the Ottoman era, Bosnia has become an Islamic state. "Mythology" obscures the politically sensitive question of the ethnic identification of today's Muslims prior to the conversion to Islam, whether originally Serb or Croat, most of these Muslims clearly have Slavic and Christian origins.²⁰

The question of the ethnic and religious origins of Bosnians was formally addressed in a

¹⁵ Mojzes, *op.cit.*, p. 117.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹⁸ Riedlmayer, *op.cit.*, p. 102.

¹⁹ Ivan Lovrenovic, *A Cultural History*, (New York: New York University Press, 2001), p. 218.

²⁰ Mojzes, *op.cit.*, p. 100.

document produced by the First Session of the Country-wide Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, enacted during the night of November 25–26 1943, at Mrkonjić-Grad, said: “Bosnia-Herzegovina is not Serbian nor Croatian nor Muslim, but Serbian and Croatian and Muslim.”²¹

Following the Second World War, cultural and religious buildings resumed: In Bosnia alone, some 400 new mosques were built between 1945 and 1985, and some 380 mosques were renovated. By 1986, there were some 3.000 mosques in former Yugoslavia as a whole.²² Even though Islam has not taken a radical position in the past in Bosnia, in fact, quite the contrary, it had mixed quite well with other cultures and religions, and by the 1990s, it had become a distinctive mark for the Bosnian people. The sense of religious belonging became quite strong and as it grew at the same pace as nationalism. More and more people became devoted to their faith: visiting the holy places regularly, worshiping the saints as never before, and at the same time, gaining a sense of disrespect for the ‘others.’ As the situation in Bosnia grew more desperate, some Muslims began to speak in terms of a *jihad*, which combined with the increasing visibility and power of specifically Islamic military units within the Bosnian military contributed to a sense that the conflict was a holy war.²³ This meant that there was no possibility of a reasonable solution or even of turning back and leaving everything as it was. New history had to be written, and it had to be done effectively. As one way to do that was to erase everything that had been built in the area, ever, that reminded people of how the past really was. It is religious buildings—mosques, churches, monasteries—that serve as the most potent markers of a community's presence.²⁴

Thus hundreds of churches and mosques have been intentionally destroyed, appeals to religion in official propaganda were ubiquitous, and the use of religious symbols in torture were just some of the ways the conflict has been defined according to a complex relationship between national and religious identity.²⁵

II. 2. THE “CULTURAL CLEANSING” IN B&H

As the communist era was coming to an end, new states were arising from nowhere. The first one was Slovenia, which on the path to independence had almost no negative experience. Then it was Croatia that moved in the same direction as Slovenia. There was only one thing that differed: everyone had to go along with the vision of an independent Croatia, and, as always, someone objected.

The Serbs of Bosnia, in undisguised close cooperation with Serbs elsewhere in Croatia and Serbia, held their own referendum in late 1991 to justify a refusal to go along with a prospective move by Bosnia's Croats and Muslims to withdraw from Yugoslavia.²⁶ It was a clear signal sent to the nationalists back at home, who were waiting for a sign or cry for help, perhaps, in order to go along and peruse their long term goal: Greater Serbia.

On April 6, 1992, the day the EC's recognition of Bosnia's independence took effect, Serbian snipers in the top floors of the Holiday Inn in Sarajevo sprayed peace demonstrators with machine-gun fire. By that time over 1.300 people had been killed in the burgeoning war that

²¹ Lovrenovic, *op.cit.*, p. 225.

²² Sabrina Petra Ramet, *Balkan Babel: The Desintegration of Yugoslavia from the Death of Tito to Ethnic War*, Second Edition, (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996), p. 191.

²³ Mojzes, *op.cit.*, p. 233.

²⁴ Riedlmayer, *op.cit.*, pp.114-115.

²⁵ Mojzes, *op.cit.*, p. 219.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

rapidly engulfed the nascent Bosnian state.²⁷ This was the beginning of the horrifying times that the people of Bosnia had to witness. It was the continuation of the terrifying developments that were a part of the Croatian fight for independence. The country of Bosnia has suffered in every sense of the word: physically, psychologically, economically, politically, and every other form that one can think of. The country was attacked from two sides, by the Serbs and the Croats, with the only difference being that the Croats became the allies throughout the war and the Serbs with the help of JNA (the Yugoslav National Army) stuck to their positions to the end.

More than one thousand of Bosnia's mosques, hundreds of Catholic churches, and scores of Orthodox churches, monasteries, private and public libraries, archives, and museums were shelled, burned, and dynamited, and in many cases even the ruins were removed by nationalist extremists in order to complete the cultural and religious "cleansing" of the land they had seized.²⁸ This destruction was mostly done with specific plans and orders previously decided by the heads of the Armies. Even though an atmosphere was created to think that all these places were accidentally damaged or destroyed, evidence shows that these places were their military objectives. "Mosques and Catholic churches were destroyed in areas where there was no fighting while under Bosnian Serb control: they alone were targeted. The surrounding buildings showed no damage."²⁹

Targets included: the National Library in Sarajevo, the Regional Archives in Mostar, local and national museums, the Academy of Music, the National Gallery, entire historic districts, Muslim and Jewish cemeteries, and above all, the places of worship of ethnic and religious groups that were singled out for what was euphemistically called "ethnic cleansing."³⁰ In brief, everything that represented a sign that such a nation had existed, had to be removed. It is a process of "cultural cleansing." The armies and the equipment that the three sides had were significantly disproportional. The Yugoslav Army had about 90,000 troops in Bosnia: it controlled most armories and munitions stockpiles and could rely on over forty fighter planes, hundreds of tanks and heavy artillery, and many thousands more troops stationed in Serbia. Bosnians possessed only a single tank. The Bosnian army was so poorly prepared partly because Izetbegovic had clung until the last moment to the hope of a political settlement.³¹ The Croats had support from the Croatian President Franjo Tudjman, and artillery was brought illegally from the neighboring countries and of course, Croatia. Unlike the Croatian side, the Bosnians, who did not have neighbors who were not participating in the war, could not have been less prepared for the war.

In 1993, emboldened by the Western powers' endorsement of ethnic partition, Croatian nationalists launched an all-out war to carve an ethnically pure "homeland" out of Herzegovina and part of central Bosnia. There had been ominous signs the year before, in the first months of the war, following the devastating April-June 1992 siege of Mostar by the Serb-led Yugoslav National Army (JNA), in which most of the city's historic monuments—including seventeen of its nineteen mosques and all three of Mostar's Catholic churches—had been damaged or destroyed by JNA shelling.³²

An hour after sunset on the evening of 25 August 1992, the National Library was

²⁷ J Robert Donia, and John V.A. Fine, Jr., *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed*, (London: Churst and Co. Ltd, 1994), p. 238.

²⁸ Riedlmayer, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

²⁹ Riedlmayer, Expert Testimony, *International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia*, Milosevic Trial – The Hague – Court Room One; Day 213, 08 July 2003, Retrieved 31 August 2006 from the www.bosnia.org.uk/news/news_body.cfm?newsid=1782

³⁰ Riedlmayer, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

³¹ Donia and Fine, *op.cit.*, p. 239.

³² Riedlmayer, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

bombarded and set ablaze by a tightly targeted barrage of incendiary shells fired from Serb nationalist positions on the heights overlooking the building. The library was located in the center of Sarajevo's old town, at the bottom of a deep valley.

An estimated 1.5 million volumes were consumed by the flames in this, the largest single incident of deliberate book-burning in modern history.³³ Before it was burned, the National Library held 155,000 rare books, unique special collections and archives, 478 manuscripts codices, more than 600 runs of periodicals, the national collection of record of all the books, newspapers, and journals published in Bosnia since the mid-nineteenth century, as well as the main research collections of the University of Sarajevo. With the destruction of this very important center for the people of Bosnia, and for historians as well, no concrete evidence exists any longer about the history in this half a century and the architecture which was being built in that time. So not only were the objects such as mosques destroyed, the evidence that they had existed, was also destroyed. There was no use to destroy something that could be rebuilt according to the plans and sketches found in books and other materials which showed exactly how the mosques had looked.

Three months earlier, the Serbian gunners' target had been Sarajevo's Oriental Institute, which housed the country's largest collection of Islamic manuscript texts and the former Ottoman provincial archives. It was shelled and burned with all of its contents on May 1992.³⁴ The losses at the Oriental Institute included, "the country's richest collection of Islamic manuscripts (5,263 codices in Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, Persian and Bosnian), many of them unique, the products of five centuries of Bosnian Muslim cultural history."³⁵ It also included a collection of Ottoman-era provincial archives and a nineteenth-century cadastral registers recording the ownership of land in Bosnia at the end of Ottoman rule. This was a critical "disappearance:" important in order that a new restructuring of the land could take place. Everything was brought to a "new beginning" status. It is noteworthy how, in such a mixed area as Bosnia was a process of "cleaning" everything and separating cultures that were indivisible occurred as all came down to "One nation, one culture, one state."³⁶

As the war rapidly developed, more and more holy places suffered damage. In the territory seized by Bosnian Serb forces during the war, out of many hundreds of mosques, only one escaped destruction.³⁷ A small town called Foca on the Drina, east of Sarajevo, serves as an example of what occurred. In April 1992, Foca was overrun by Serb nationalist militia, who killed or expelled the town's majority Bosnian-Muslim population, set up a rape camp for Muslim women in the local sports arena, and then blew up Foca's sixteen ancient mosques. Among them was the Aladza Mosque, built in 1557, once one of the loveliest examples of Islamic religious architecture in the Balkans. "Cleansed" of its mosques and Muslims, Foca has been renamed Srbinje ("Serb Town") to celebrate its new ethnically pure identity.³⁸ Today, nothing can connect the long historically significant town for Islam and Bosnia itself to the present, pure, in every sense of the word, Serbian community. It is very clear that what happened there took a long time to prepare and organize. It's interesting to hear a comment from Simo Drljaca, Bosnian Serb police chief in the Prijedor area: "With their mosques, you must not just break the minarets....You've got to shake up the foundations because that means they cannot build another. Do that, and they'll want to go. They'll just leave by

³³ Ibid., p. 111.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 112.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Mojzes, *op.cit.*, p. 116.

³⁷ Riedlmayer, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

³⁸ Ibid.

themselves.”³⁹ That was the strategy used by the Bosnian Serbs in order to “get rid” of the Muslims once and for all. Nor was the tactic something new in this kind of situations. It has been used a lot of times before, as for example in the Greek–Turkish wars among many others throughout the world.

In 1993 there was the deliberate destruction of mosques throughout the entire country. In Trebinje, on the night of 27 January 1993, Serb nationalist militiamen celebrated the feast of St. Sava, the medieval founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church, by burning down the town's oldest mosque and expelling thousands of Trebinje's Bosnian–Muslim residents.⁴⁰ In the Serb–occupied town of Bijelina in eastern Bosnia, in the beginning of the year six mosques were blown up in a single night. There are some reported cases where people, Bosnian Muslims were also burned while visiting the mosques. More than 30 members of the Muslim congregation were reportedly burned alive when the mosque of Hanifici in Kotor Varos was destroyed.⁴¹

Not only Bosnian Serbs were involved in massive destruction of the old and priceless objects throughout Bosnia. The Bosnian Croats were “cleaning” the other part of the country, Herzegovina. An example is Fojnica, a town in the mountainous area west of Sarajevo with a mixed Muslim and Croatian population. In an effort to recapture Fojnica, Croatian forces counterattacked on November 10, 1993. They burned two mosques in a town to the east; Muslims retaliated by burning a Catholic church in a nearby village. When Muslim forces of the Bosnian government appeared to be losing ground to the Croatian assault, rumors spread among Fojnica's Muslims that the Franciscan monastery harbored a radio transmitter and was being used as a storehouse of weapons for the Croatian forces. Four Muslim soldiers of the Bosnian Army entered the monastery grounds on November 13, to witness with their own eyes the soldiers ruthlessly executed the monastery's two leading clerics.⁴²

As we can see, no party was “innocent” in the process of destruction, or better to say, nobody is totally innocent in a time of war. To conclude, all three sides took part in the deliberate destruction of holy places; the question is simply who was the initiator of the whole process?

A famous researcher in this field Andras Riedlmayer was, and still is, one of the few who did a study of the number of damaged and destroyed important buildings and religious places in Bosnia and Kosovo. Riedlmayer studied 392 cultural and religious heritage sites in 19 municipalities in Bosnia, in a broad arc from Visegrad and Zvornik in the east to Prijedor in the northwest and Nevesinje in the south. He found that 92% of the 277 Islamic mosques were either heavily damaged or destroyed. The same was true for other Islamic religious monuments, such as *turbes* (shrines) and *tekkes* (dervish lodges). “Virtually no minarets survived the 1992–1996 war intact in the parts of Bosnia controlled by Bosnian Serb forces,” he concluded in his report filed with the court.⁴³ His testimony was objective and based on thorough research, enough so that it was taken as evidence in the court of law in Hague. In fact, if it were not for his books dealing with this subject, not much would be known, recognizing that the Bosnian Muslims haven't spent much time writing about it and the Serbs, of course, are not too eager to write about their destruction of the religious, cultural, and historical past.

A table made by Riedlmayer⁴⁴ also dealing with the subject is instructive:

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Donia and Fine, *op.cit.*, p. 255.

⁴³ Riedlmayer, *op.cit.*,

⁴⁴ Riedlmayer, *op.cit.*, p. 99.

Destruction of Islamic religious buildings in Bosnia 1992 – 1995

Building type	Total No. Before War	Total Destroyed or Damaged	Percentage Destroyed or Damaged
Congregation mosques (Dzamije)	1,149	927	80.68
Small neighborhood mosques (Mesdzidi)	557	259	46.50
Total no. of mosques	1,706	1,186	69.52
Qur'an schools (Maktebi)	954	87	9.12
Dervish lodges (Tekije)	15	9	60.00
Mausolea, shrines (Turbe)	90	44	48.89
Bldgs of religious endowments (Vakuf)	1.425	554	38.88

South of Sarajevo lies the city of Mostar, which owes its name (“Bridge – keeper”) and prosperity to the graceful Ottoman bridge that joined the banks of the Neretva River.⁴⁵ It’s a place that was well known, and quite often visited by tourists coming from all parts of the world. On November 9, 1993, sustained artillery barrage by Croatian forces destroyed the elegant white marble Mostar bridge spanning the Neretva river, an act of senseless and deliberate destruction on a par with Yugoslav army’s bombardment of Dubrovnik. Dating from 1556, the Mostar bridge was treasured by members of all three ethnic groups and by millions of foreign tourists who had visited it over the years. Along with the physical suffering inflicted on Mostar’s civilians and the nearly total devastation of the city, the mindless destruction of the Mostar bridge deepened the despair of those who still hoped to preserve pluralism and a multiethnic society in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴⁶

The political reality in the rest of modern Europe, especially the developing European Union, is a totally different picture that what is being attempted in the Balkans. Many nationalities, many cultures, many races are connected and scrambled in a world without borders and boundaries. The most ironic thing is that these Balkan countries are eager to achieve the same thing, to become a part of that mixed Europe one day, hopefully in the near future.

II. 3. THE END OF THE CONFLICT

Now the three governments have a lot of work in order to preserve what is left untouched and undestroyed. People are willing to forget and move on with their lives, but they also want the same comfort in their lives as before. Even though in different ways, help has been asked from international organizations in order to try to rebuild the destroyed mosques in the (now) mostly Serb and Croatian towns and villages. The effect is not yet apparent. The will of the people, who are now living in those places to turn back to the things as they were, is very low, or even nonexistent. A Muslim citizen of Banja Luka has said: “It is as though they have torn our hearts out. They wanted us to understand we had no place here.”⁴⁷

The fight for a piece of land is not a recent idea. It has taken place before and will be repeated in the future many more times. As long as there are leaders with “great” ideas, there will

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

⁴⁶ Donia, and.Fine, *op.cit.*, p. 253.

⁴⁷ Riedlmayer

be wars and devastation. To put it simply, the war in B&H is the necessary result of a nationalist political philosophy and functioning nationalist political strategies, dominated thus far in transnational processes but with contrasting fundamental political objectives. The basic political idea that is being followed is best expressed by the formula of G. Mazzini: "Every nation one state. Only one state for every nation."⁴⁸

Not everyone was in favor of this option, but a lot of soldiers had to follow the given orders and go against their personal beliefs. "Never in the history of the Serbian people has there been as much desertion as during this most recent war"⁴⁹ as Hoare says, meaning that not everyone believed in what they were fighting for. The lucky ones escaped, some were forced to go through it, and others really believed in the vision that was offered to them.

On February 5, 1994, a single mortar shell landed in a busy downtown Sarajevo marketplace, killing sixty-eight people and wounding two hundreds others. Although the attack was one of hundreds that had killed and maimed civilians since the war began, the concentrated and highly publicized slaughter crossed an imaginary threshold of the world's toleration for violence. American and French leaders who had feuded publicly about Bosnia only days before, quickly reached an agreement aimed at ending the killing of civilians in Sarajevo. The French agreed that NATO should be prepared to employ air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs. In exchange, the Americans promised to become more actively involved in the Geneva negotiations. UN secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali authorized the use of air strikes, and NATO issued an ultimatum to all parties (directed principally at Bosnian Serbs) demanding that all heavy weapons be brought under UN control or withdrawn from a 20-kilometer zone around Sarajevo by February 21.⁵⁰ The war was coming to an end.

During 1994 Milosevic clearly came to recognize that the culminating point had been reached and that it was in the Serbs interest to see the war end.⁵¹ This decision was not received warmly by the ones who were living for this dream to turn to reality. It was so close, yet so far. The one side that really had something against the current situation was the church. The Serbian Orthodox Church strongly opposed Milosevic's acquiescence to the international community's demands that Serbia end support for the Bosnian Serbs and give up the idea of a Greater Serbia.⁵² Unfortunately for those who opposed it, the international pressure was too great to be ignored. Croatia was taking the risk of being put under an embargo in terms of export and import of products. Serbia was also in a hard position; that's why President Slobodan Milosevic decided to step back from what was happening.

II. 4. THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

The three leaders around whom everything gravitated were Alija Izetbegovic, Franjo Tudzman and Slobodan Milosevic. All of them were hard core nationalists and known for their visions about the sizes of their counties. It was a fight for land and all sorts of means were used to justify the attacks. One key component of controversy and inter-ethnic hostilities was the charge that a Muslim-led state in Bosnia would mean the establishment of a radical Islamic fundamentalist regime. Suspicion centered on the figure elected in 1990 to the Bosnian presidency, Alija Izetbegovic. He had been put on trial in 1983, by the Communist authorities on political charges, stemming primarily from his unpublished manifesto circulating since 1970 as "The Islamic

⁴⁸ Mojzes, *op.cit.*, p. 110.

⁴⁹ Magas and Zanic, *op.cit.*, p. 213.

⁵⁰ Donia and Fine, *op.cit.*, p. 268.

⁵¹ Magas and Zanic, *op.cit.*, p. 218.

⁵² Mojzes, *op.cit.*, p. 236.

Declaration".⁵³ Critics take the deepest offense at the claims of The Islamic Declaration in the specific references, regarding "the incompatibility of Islam with non-Islamic systems. There can be neither peace nor coexistence between the Islamic religion and non-Islamic social and political institutions." Islam, the Manifesto, declares, is only strong if it completely rejects accommodation to western (Western) socio-political norms and structures.⁵⁴ So the vision that Izetbegovic had about the building of an Islamic state in Bosnia once the Muslim population became majority has been a subject of considerable controversy. This situation also helped the other two sides in their quest for a good rationale for their deeds . . . even though they will never be justifiable. Radical Islam has always been a threat to the Western world; that threat was well used by the other two parties in order to get sympathy for their action, and they did. The "powerful" states were fully involved after years of suffering and devastation. This does not mean that they understood that the Bosnian Muslims had also suffered, but they probably thought that the situation would calm down sooner rather than later.

II. 5. PRESERVING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE

The presence of the international bodies and organizations in Bosnia were rarely mentioned in books and other materials, especially in the context of cultural heritage preservation. The lack of interest of these organizations to commit and enter earlier in the process of putting a stop to the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage has made a great difference in a country which now has little historical evidence of its past. While paying little attention to the problem and leaving the initiative to the EC, the United States continued in principle to support Yugoslavism until early 1992.⁵⁵ There were some initiatives to calm the situation once and for all by getting all three parties to talk and negotiate with each other, but those ideas were never realized.

The European leaders invited leaders of all three parties—Serbs, Muslims and Croat—to Lisbon in late February 1992, prior to the scheduled referendum on independence, in a last-minute effort to negotiate an agreement to "cantonize" or partition the republic.⁵⁶ They were unsuccessful mostly because of the Serbian side which was looking for independence of the Serb part of Bosnia, Republika Srpska and any other alternative was not a solution in their eyes. There were other proposals such as the Vance–Owen and Owen–Stoltenberg plans, but they were all turned down by the Bosnian Serbs.

In June 1992, the UN augmented forces in the former Yugoslavia with UNPROFOR troops assigned specifically to Bosnia.⁵⁷ This was a sign that the US was ready to participate in the negotiations for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even though the European Union and the UN had other views and visions about the situation, they merged during the London Conference in August 1992. Despite the eagerness of the US and the EC to recognize the pluralistic, multiethnic Bosnian state, Western words were not backed by the means necessary to secure the Bosnian republic against the threats of those who aspired to dismember it.⁵⁸ As this was the case, it couldn't be expected that the cultural sights of the country would be saved, not by the state, not by anyone.

The only thing that can be done is now, in the aftermath of the war. One of the most important ways in which governmental and international agencies can support the work of cultural reconstruction is through sponsoring programs for training and technical and material assistance

⁵³ Ibid., p. 104.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Donia and Fine, *op.cit.*, p. 230.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 235.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 258.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 236.

that can help bolster the capability of the local institutions in Bosnia. It's a good thing that people are getting more and more aware of the significance of these historical sites and are looking for a way to preserve the ones that are still existing. Various kinds of NGO's and other kind of institutions and organizations are involved, foreign as well as domestic. At the local level, where most authority now resides, there is a serious shortage of expertise and resources for dealing with the cultural catastrophe wrought by the war.⁵⁹

With the implementation of the Dayton peace agreement in 1995, the war was officially over and many organizations were able to help the locals in their efforts to stabilize the situation on every level of the society. One of the features of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement is a clause (Annex 8) establishing a Commission to Preserve National Monuments, which, along with the Commission on Human Rights (consisting of the Office of the Ombudsman and the Human Rights Chamber), is among the few governmental bodies granted jurisdiction in both the Federation and the Republika Srpska, the two entities that together comprise postwar Bosnia–Herzegovina. However, more than five years after Dayton, the Commission to Preserve National Monuments remains mired in disputes about procedural issues and has yet to undertake any meaningful measures for the protection of Bosnia's cultural heritage.⁶⁰ Even though there is a strong will by the international players to be of some help in this complicated situation, the problem still remains in the deep rooted hatred among the three sides.

There are cases where people are willing to come back to their homes and continue their old life, but the ones who are now residents are opposed to such a possibility. More than a year after the end of the war, in January 1997, United Nations police monitors escorted two busloads of Bosnian–Muslim refugees seeking to return to their homes in Stolac. They were turned back on the outskirts of town by a stone–throwing mob organized by the Croat nationalist mayor of Stolac. As the refugees and their UN escorts retreated under a hail of eggs and stones, the mob chanted: “No more Muslims, no more mosques, no more bowing prayers.”⁶¹ The sites where the mosques once stood have been reserved for public parks and other uses according to the bureau of urban planning, which has declared reconstruction of the mosques to be out of the question.

In frustration, the Islamic Community of Bosnia, acting on behalf of the few thousand Muslims who still remain in Banja Luka and the tens of thousands of exiled Banja Lukan Muslims who want to return, turned to the Human Rights Chamber for redress. In July 1999, the Human Rights Chamber ruled that the Government of the Republika Srpska had denied the right of the Islamic community to freedom of religion by refusing to allow the reconstruction of mosques destroyed in the war. The chamber specifically established that the Islamic community had property rights to fifteen sites of destroyed mosques and the right to enclose the properties. According to the decision, the Government of the Republika Srpska may not allow other construction on these sites and must issue any construction permits necessary to rebuild mosques on seven of the sites.⁶² As it seems, this unpleasant situation will last for a long time and it won't be settled until everyone puts their negative feelings for each other away. Even then, no one will want to mention anything about this period, so it seems there will be no major changes in near future.

⁵⁹ Riedlmayer, *op cit.*, p. 128.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 126.