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Tobias Strahl Architecture as a Weapon

»Despite information gaps, it can be affirmed that the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina have produced a European cultural catastrophe of terrible proportions.«

Before the death of Yugoslavia's longtime President Josip Broz Tito (1945–1980) in 1980 and the breakdown of the socialist federation, the political discourse among its member states had already shifted from the Yugoslav communists' doctrine of »Bratsvo i Jedinstvo» (brotherhood and unity) to the opposite: nationalism and separatism. Although vigorously suppressed after Tito's accession to power, nationalism survived in communist Yugoslavia within its traditional strongholds, the different churches and national academies, kept alive among the intellectuals in the member states of the federation.

Alert observers could have already noticed the growing importance of cultural objects as markers of affiliation and difference as Serbia's president Slobodan Milošević served Serbian nationalism with his speech on Saint Vitus Day (Serb.: »Vidovdan«), on 28 June, 1989, on the occasion of the 600° anniversary of the battle at the »Kosovo Polje,« the very core of the Serbian national myth, in front of the »Gazimestan,« the memorial of the battle.

During the development of a specific national consciousness in the Balkans starting in the second half of the eighteenth century, cultural objects, first and foremost structures which could be identified with the different religious affiliations of the Balkan ethnicities, again became the symbols of a constructed difference in a commonly shared history.

In the later attempt to re-design history, starting with the redesign of the common calendar with national holidays and memorial days,² a dramatic transformation of the memorial landscape by violence came about. Five different major stages of destruction of architecture can be observed in this conflict.



Fig. 1 Fresco of the Holy Mother with the Divine Infant and the Honey Pot (14th c.) at a column in the Southern aisle of the Church Bogorodica Ljeviška in Prizren, Kosovo damaged by hammering during the anti Serbian riots in Kosovo on 17./18. March, 2004 and the Southern aisle of the Church with traces of smoke

I. Terror and Expansion

The wars in the Balkans from 1991 to 1999 are: the war in Slovenia in 1991, the war in Croatia from 1991 to 1995, the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995, and the war in Kosovo in 1998/99.

What, in the beginning, was portrayed by international media as a civil war equally engaged in by all involved parties, appears in the much sharper focus of last year's research to be the Serbian attempt to form a smaller version of Yugoslavia (or Greater Serbia). The project was planned and conducted by Serbian former communist politicians, the Serbian secret service and Serbian military officers, intellectually backed by influential members of the Serbian Academy of Science and Art (SASA), and strongly supported by some members of the clergy of the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC).³

The main purpose of the project was to unite Central Serbia with the regions in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina that were inhabited by strong minorities of Serbs. The aim of the war in Kosovo in 1998/99 was to achieve exclusive sovereignty over the whole of Kosovo, through massive suppression of the Albanian majority and simultaneous control of public life.

All destruction of architecture at this stage took place at these war theaters. The shelling and bombardment of cities and villages and thereby the destruction of whole urban totalities were a acentral element« of the war.⁶ Cities like Vukovar in Croatia, Sarajevo and Mostar in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Djakovica (Serb.)/Gjakova (Alb.) in Kosovo became symbols of the fate of architecture during war. The strategy was aimed at unfolding the greatest possible terror to choke potential resistance from the beginning and to force the non-Serbian population to escape from the region under threat.⁶

The underlying procedure was approved in its basic characteristics for the first time with the attack on the village of Kijevo, near Knin in Croatia on 26 August, 1991. As a first step, the Serbian population of the targeted region was warned; then the respective city or village was extensively shelled by artillery, mortars and tanks. Thereafter, military and paramilitary units were sent into the city or village to seize control. The practice of rape, torture and murder by these units was not meant to entirely extinguish the other ethnicity, but to establish a reign of terror to accelerate the ethnic cleansing by causing a massive refugee movement among the non-Serbian population and for that purpose a good number of random killings in cold blood would suffice.

Colin Kaiser, who investigated the destruction of cultural heritage on behalf of the Council of Europe (CoE) in Croatia and later in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was the first who recognized the coincidence of ethnic and cultural cleansing.*

In June 1992, the Croatian authorities had already listed 236 historical sites and 683 individual monuments as damaged or destroyed. For Bosnia and Herzegovina Kaiser's report of 1993 refers to 172 sites and individual objects that were entirely destroyed or damaged in several stages.

The numbers of damaged or destroyed heritage would steadily grow over the next few years. At the end of the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, the Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina lists 1,874 different individual objects as damaged or entirely destroyed. Similar numbers are reported from the Catholic Church in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In Kosovo, where the Islamic Community reported 218 mosques as damaged or destroyed by Serbian forces in 1998/99,¹² only six [sic!] of them were investigated by a UNESCO mission in 2003.¹³

One of the most prominent losses of heritage in this phase of the conflict is the National Library of Sarajevo, where 90 per cent of the inventory of 3,000,000 books and documents were burned after the deliberate shelling of the Austro-Hungarian building by Serbian forces on the evening of 25 August, 1992. In Djakovica/Gjakova in Kosovo, the *Hadum* mosque (1595), shelled and burned by Serbian forces in March 1999, lost its library as well. In Prishtina (Alb.)/Priština (Serb.), the capital of Kosovo, the burning of books continued with the central archive of the Islamic community. Other bitter losses were the destruction of parts of the old town of Dubrovnik, the Palais Eltz in Vukovar, and the old town of Mostar which was shelled by both Serbian forces in April and May 1992 and Croatian forces after the break of the Bosnian-Croatian alliance in 1993.

However, the libraries of Sarajevo and Prishtina are only examples of dozens of libraries of greater or lesser importance that were robbed, burned and destroyed on the territory of former Yugoslavia during the wars.¹⁶

II. Recapture and Revenge

A number of serious reprisals were committed by Bosnian und Croatian forces when they gained strength in the course of the war and the recapture of territory from the Serbian forces succeeded. The reprisals continued during the Croatian Operations »Oluja« (Storm) and »Blješak« (Lightning) in 1995 in Serbian »Krajina« and western Slavonia.

The members of the Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (UÇK) began to take revenge on Serbian civilians and Serbian heritage as soon as the Nato troops had established their presence in Kosovo and the Serbian forces were withdrawn in 1999.

The Serbian village of Ivanica in Bosnia and Herzegovina was burned down by Croatian forces in 1992.¹⁷ The Orthodox Monastery of Žitomislić near Mostar, built in the 16th century, was dynamited by Croatian-Herzegovian forces in June 1992,¹⁸ and the new orthodox church of Mostar (1873) was blown up by Herzegovian forces in the same year.¹⁹

In 1997, the Museum of the Orthodox Church in Belgrade published a book with a list of destroyed and damaged Serbian heritage in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina which refers to 212 destroyed and 367 damaged churches, as well as to 218 destroyed and damaged parish homes and other buildings.²⁰

For Kosovo, similar publications by different Serbian sources do exist, giving a confusing image of the destruction of Serbian heritage in Kosovo. From the different publications edited since 1999, the numbers of either 124 or 133 destroyed or damaged objects of Serbian religious heritage can be abstracted.²¹

One of the serious reprisals against Serbian heritage in Kosovo targeted the Church Bogorodica Ljeviška in Prizren, in the South of Kosovo. The church, which in 2006 was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List and simultaneously to the List of World Heritage in Danger, was built in its present appearance in the 14th century by the Serbian King Milutin who incorporated an older Byzantine basilica into a new and larger building. In 1455, after the conquest of Prizren by the expanding Ottoman empire, the church was transformed into the Mosque of the Holy Friday. After the withdrawal of the last Ottoman units from Prizren in 1912, the mosque was finally re-transformed into a church in 1923. During the anti-Serbian riots in Kosovo in 2004, the church was torched on 17 March. With the attacks on the Church Bogorodica Ljeviška, its famous 14th century fresco of the Blessed Mother (the Bogorodica) with the Divine Infant and the Honey Pot suffered severe damage (fig. 1).



Fig. 2 Aladža (multicolored) Mosque (1550) in Foča in the South of Bosnia and Herzegovina before the war and condition of the site today

As a reaction to the destruction of Serbian heritage in Kosovo, in 2004 the last remaining mosque in Belgrade, the Bajrakli Mosque (1555 (1688)), and the mosque in Niš in Southern Serbia were vandalized and set on fire.²²

By 2001 the Kosovo Liberation Army had already carried the conflict across the border to Macedonia where a strong Albanian minority lives. Amongst other objects, the Orthodox Athanasius-Church in the of Monastery of Lešok near the city of Tetovo was entirely destroyed in August 2001, in the context of this conflict. In revenge, the »Čaršije« Mosque in Prilep was burned by a Macedonian crowd.

However, neither the lists provided by the Serbian Orthodox Church regarding damaged and destroyed Serbian heritage in Croatia and Bosnian and Herzegovina, nor those referring to objects in Kosovo have been entirely verified by independent institutions.

III. Systematic Obliteration

With the Dayton-agreement in 1995, the Serbian strategy of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina de facto found its consolidation. The districts around the cities of Prijedor, Doboj, Vlasenica, Rogatica and Višegrad had been likewise inhabited by Bosnian Muslims and Serbs before the war. Once ethnically cleansed in the course of war and, with the Dayton-agreement, confirmed as part of the territory of the autonomous Republika Srpskak they have stayed ethnically scleans ever since. In Doboj, eighteen of twenty-two mosques were reported to be destroyed by Serbian forces; of twenty-eight mosques existing in Kozarac and Prijedor before the war, twenty-six met the same fate, as most of the mosques in Vlasenica were destroyed; sixteen of seventeen mosques in Rogatica are reported to be destroyed and seven of nine mosques in Višegrad, too.²³

The city of Foča in the South of Bosnia and Herzegovina is a striking example of the Serbian policy of ethnic cleansing. Before the outburst of the war in 1992, the city of Foča and the Foča region were inhabited by an approximately equal percentage of Bosnian Muslims and Serbs. During the war, the Muslim inhabitants were expelled or murdered. All eighteen mosques of the city, among them the »Careva« mosque (1500) and the »Mehmet Pasha Kukavica« Mosque (1751), were destroyed. The »Aladža« (multicolored) Mosque, built in 1550, was destroyed by a controled demolition in 1992 (fig. 2). The site was bulldozed, and the remains of the building were dumped with the bodies of the killed members of the Muslim community in a mass grave, near the River Cehotinja which runs through Foča.²⁴ This practice of the Serbian forces was observed in the city of Brčko, in the East of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well.²⁵

The systematic obliteration of Serbian heritage in Kosovo on the other hand took place in two major waves. The first has already started in 1999 despite Nato troop presence. The second was unleashed on 17 and 18 March, 2004 with the death of two Albanian children allegedly drowned by Serbs in the River Ibar in the region of Kosovska Mitrovica in the North of Kosovo. The demolition of many objects with explosives was conducted with engineering skills and indicates determined planning. Among the destroyed objects are the Monastery St. Uroš in Uroševac of 1371 and the Church of the Holy Mother Hodegetria in Mušutište of 1315, both entirely demolished (fig. 3).

During thirteen years of international presence in Kosovo, neither the actual damage to and destruction of the Albanian and Ottoman nor the Serbian heritage has been appropriately noted and investigated by independent institutions. The two UNESCO missions in 2003 and 2004 investigated only a fifth of the 124 or, respectively, 133 objects which were reportedly damaged or destroyed, according to the publications of the SOC.²⁶

IV. The symbolic continuation of the conflict

A more complex situation emerges in regions where ethnic diversity was retained after the war.

The destruction of mosques in Banja Luka in the north of Bosnia had already begun in 1918, immediately after the First World War. From 1918 until 1959, twenty-three mosques, four madrassas and several Islamic elementary schools were demolished. During the war in 1993, another fifteen mosques and six Ottoman mausoleums were destroyed.²⁷ The Ferhat Pascha Mosque (1579) was dynamited on 7 May, 1993. Its reconstruction which began in 2001 is controverted by local Serbs of Banja Luka and still causes riots and outrages on a regular basis.

The Orthodox Cathedral of the Holy Trinity is located in the center of Banja Luka. An earlier Orthodox cathedral was built in 1939 at this site, but was damaged by a German bomb in 1941, and soon after was completely demolished. In the year of the destruction of the Ferhat Pascha Mosque in 1993, while the war was still ongoing, permission for the reconstruction of the church was given by Serbian authorities. The building was completed in 2009.

Some parts of the remains of the former church are exposed today to the public in the center of Banja Luka next to the new church building. The fate of the building is explained in Serbo-Croatian as well as in English and German on a plague. It tells of the destruction



Fig. 3 Images taken after the destruction of the church of St. Nicholas in Prizren (1857) indicate the systematic planning of the destruction

of the church by Croats in the Second World War and the murder of its parish priest. The sacrifice is seen in parallel with the ongoing destruction of buildings of the Islamic and Ottoman heritage.

The situation in the center of Prishtina is even more controversial. The university library of Prishtina, among the Kosovo-Albanians a symbol of the intellectual opposition against the Serbian oppression, was built between the two main streets of the city in 1982. In 1995, however, the Serbian Orthodox Church began to build a new church, which hid the university library in the visual axis from the main street Ramiz Sadiku (today Agim Ramadani) in such a way that the library literally disappeared behind the church. Because of the war, however, the building has never been completed.

In 2005, the work for a new Catholic cathedral with gigantic dimensions began at the main street Marshal Tito (today George Bush). According to Fatmir Sejdiu, the former President of Kosovo, the building should be a symbolic reminder that »Kosovo is a mosaic of religious, cultural and ethnic groups which have lived together in harmony for hundreds of years.«⁷⁸

During recent years, the Islamic community of Kosovo has fought a fierce struggle with the authorities in Kosovo for building ground for a new mosque in the center of Prishtina, only a stone's throw away from the Catholic Cathedral and the unfinished Orthodox Church. The controversy escalated on 27 June, 2011 when a number of young Muslims attempted to illegally build the mosque in the Center of Prishtina. Meanwhile the Islamic Community of Kosovo has announced the laying of the foundation stone for a mosque in the center of Prishtina on 8 October, 2012.²⁹

V. Overwriting

After zero hour, i. e. after the breakup of the socialist federation and the wars, a new draft of national mythology seemed to be neccessary for all participants. Architecture, too, has a significant meaning at this stage.

Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, although almost entirely reconstructed, has attained, through various media, the virtual, almost religious existence of a mythical city in ruins due to its almost complete annihilation during the war. With public monuments like the cemetery "Sehidsko Mezarje« in the center of Sarajevo with its stela bearing the names of the Bosnian muslims killed during the siege of the city, the Memorial for the Killed Children During the Siege of Sarajevo 1992 to 1995, or the Roses of Sarajevo (mortar-craters filled with red artificial resin) at the "Čaršija," the old market place in the center of the city, the countless bulletholes still visible in the buildings and finally with hundreds of books, maps and documents, 10 the fate of the city is repeated infinitely.

Ironically, something similar happened in Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. Despite the responsibility of Serbia for the recent wars on the Balkans which is beyond all question, the ruins of the *General-stab* in the center of Belgrade destroyed by Nato bombs in 1999 and the accidently bombed Chinese embassy became prominent monuments for the alleged Nato aggression towards Serbia and the country's victimization. Maps of the Nato bombing in 1999 are sold as souvenirs, and the official internet presentation of the city provides its visitors with a chronology of the bombing.

In 1998, the Serbian army and police launched an attack in the townlet of Prekaz in the north west of Kosovo on the farmhouse of Adem Jashari, supposedly one of the founders of the Kosovo Liberation Army, UÇK. Fifty-six members of the Jashari family were killed in the attack. Since the war the farmhouse has been conserved as memorial. From 1999 the development of Prekaz as the major memorial site in Kosovo constantly continues (fig. 4).

Although the actual role of Adem Jashari is highly controversial - war hero or ordinary murderer of Serbian police officers - the

myth of Jashari has been enforced and institutionalized by Kosovo's politicians to keep the cult of the UÇK alive, as hundreds of monuments across this country of just half the size of the German Federal State of Hessen give evidence. Memorial architecture here serves the creation of a new national myth and the support of a certain dynasty of politicians who have almost lost their popularity among the ordinary citizens of Kosovo.

Conclusion

This conflict has seen not one, but a multitude of ways of destruction, for different reasons and circumstances. The lists of destroyed or damaged heritage provided by the warring parties already existed during the war, but have never been fully and independently investigated. Another disturbing observation is that the international military mandate in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially in Kosovo, has almost completely failed to protect the cultural heritage of the different ethnicities.

After the treaties of Dayton and Rambouilett, which officially suspended violence, the silent war of meaning, in which architecture works as a weapon in the figurative meaning of the word, started again. This war is still being waged.

Notes

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- 5 Malcolm 1996 (note 3), p. 246.
- 6 The destruction by war...1993 (note 1), Appendix B, Point 13, 14.
- 7 Rathfelder 2007 (note 3), p. 347.
- 8 Malcolm 1996 (note 3), p. 236. For the application of the strategy of extensive shelling and ethnic cleansing in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina see: Rathfelder 2007 (note 3), pp. 347, 349, 353. The destruction by war...1993 (note 1), Appendix B, Point 12. Gow 2007 (note 3), pp. 363, 369, 370. Karl Kaser: Das ethnische Engineering, In: Melčić 2007 (note 3), pp. 401–414, esp. 409. Malcolm 1996 (note 3), pp. 226, 236, 237. For Kosovo see: Gow 2007 (note 3), p. 375. András J, Riedlmayer: Crimes of War, Crimes of Peace: Destruction of Libraries during and after the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. In: Preserving Cultural Heritage (~ Library Trends, 56,1). Ed. by Michèle Cloonan/Ross Harvey. Baltimore 2007, pp. 107–132.
- 9 The destruction by war...1993 (note 1), Appendix B, Point 13, 14, 15.
- 10 The destruction by war...1993 (note 1), Appendix B, Point 20-22.
- 11 Muharem Omerdić: Prilozi Izučavanju Genocida nad Bošnjacima (1992–1995). Sarajevo 1999.



Fig. 4 The conservated farm house of Adem Jashari in the North West of Kosovo in the village of Prekaz is today a memorial center and the core of the new national myth of Kosovo

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- 13 Cultural Heritage in South-east Europe: Kosovo. Ed. by UNESCO. Venice 2003.
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- 15 Riedlmayer 2007 (note 8), p. 124.
- 16 On the destruction of libraries and the deliberate burning of books: Golob 1996 (note 14). – Riedlmayer 2007 (note 8).
- 17 The destruction by war...1993 (note 1), Appendix B, Point 99.
- 18 The destruction by war... 1993 (note 1), Appendix B, Point 120.
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- 22 Maliqi/Melčić 2007 (note 3), p. 135. Riedlmayer 2007 (note 8), p. 135.
- 23 Omerdić 1999 (note 11).
- 24 Bevan 2006 (note 3), p. 45.
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