

Bridges as symbols of cultural identity: Bosnia-Herzegovina

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Interesting geopolitical situation of Bosnia-Herzegovina as a part of the Western Balkans marked forever its turbulent history and duality of its identity. It was and still is a multi-ethnic and a multicultural country, where West meets East and where civilizations clash and co-exist at the same time.

Bosnia and Herzegovina as the most western province of the Ottoman Empire during 500 years of occupation, developed a strong visual identity, strongly marked by Islamic elements. Certainly, one of the highest achievements of Ottoman architecture aesthetically in Bosnia-Herzegovina is bridges. As during the course of history they had a vital role in the exchange of goods among cities, they became symbols of co-existence of the three main ethnonational groups (Bosnian Croats, Serbs and Muslims), both during the Ottoman occupation, and the communist regime.

However, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, when the war took place in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995), Ottoman monuments turned into symbols of division and reminders of oppression of the Islamic regime for the Bosnian Christians (Croats and Serbs), while for the Bosnian Muslims they became essential part of their cultural identity.

The aim of this work is to analyze current narratives in Bosnia-Herzegovina on the example of two Bosnian-Herzegovinian bridges from the Ottoman period which are on the UNESCO Heritage List- Mehmed Pasa Sokolovic Bridge in Visegrad, on the list from 2007, and the Old Bridge in Mostar, on the list of 2005.

This work also makes reference to the peace-building processes and the role of international institutions in the post war Bosnia-Herzegovina, often criticized for their inability to understand complexity of the Bosnian conflict, for example, when imposing the newly reconstructed Old Bridge in Mostar as a symbol of reconciliation only a few years after the war, when memories of the conflict were still too vivid in the city torn apart by suffering.

Key words: cultural heritage, dissonant narratives, cultural memory, cultural identity, Bosnia-Herzegovina, peace-building processes