

Old Bridge in Mostar:  
*A Bridge Between Muslims and Croats?*

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### **Abstract**

One city in Bosnia-Herzegovina can be seen as a microcosm of a greater ethnic and religious conflict. The city of Mostar has drawn much attention from the international community not only because of its position in Bosnia but because of a small bridge over the Neretva River. This bridge has evolved into an international symbol of hope and reconciliation while at the same time embodying segregation and destruction. This thesis aims to analyse this old bridge in Mostar as a symbol of cultural intervention by the international community. The successes and failures that the bridge encompasses speak to the tumultuous time the international community at large has had in reunifying the war-torn city of Mostar and in extension the country of Bosnia. The bridge has become more than a path over water, but a reflection of the mood and culture of an entire city.

### **Abstrait**

Une ville de Bosnie-Herzégovine peut être considérée un microcosme d'un conflit ethnique et religieux plus grand. La ville de Mostar a attiré beaucoup d'attention de la communauté internationale, non seulement à cause de sa position en Bosnie, mais aussi à cause d'un petit pont qui chevauche la rivière Neretva. Ce pont a évolué pour devenir un symbole international d'espoir et de réconciliation tout en concrétisant en même temps la ségrégation et la destruction. Cette thèse se veut une analyse de ce vieux pont dans Mostar en tant que symbole de l'intervention culturelle par la communauté internationale. Les succès et les défaillances que le pont incorpore expriment les tumultes que la communauté internationale en général a subis en réunifiant la ville de Mostar ravagée par la guerre et par extension le pays nommé Bosnie. Le pont est devenu plus qu'un chemin par-dessus l'eau, mais une réflexion de l'état d'âme et de la culture d'une ville entière.

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## **Introduction**

Since the signing of the Dayton Accords in 1995, Bosnia has been under intense international scrutiny to rebuild and reunify its divided country. Mostar, being an integral city in present day Bosnia-Herzegovina and the historical capital of Herzegovina, is playing a pivotal role in this process. The city of Mostar, prior to 1991, was home to an ethnically diverse population, 35% Muslim, 34% Croatian, 20% Serbian, and 11% Yugoslavian which coexisted relatively peacefully.<sup>1</sup> However, present day Mostar tells the story of a recent past filled with religious intolerance and ethnic conflict. This ethnic conflict pitted three main groups against each other as the country of Yugoslavia disintegrated around them. Fighting the advances driven by nationalism and the hopes of a 'Greater Serbia' as well as the expansion of Croatia, Bosnians found themselves in the early 1990s taking up arms against their neighbours in an effort to keep their country outside the grasps of their expansionist neighbours. The countries fought roughly four years of war in the Balkans. After western brokered peace agreements were established culminating with the Dayton Accords, Bosnia found itself at the centre of an international peacebuilding effort. And Mostar has become a microcosm of what the international community hopes to achieve within greater Bosnia, the reconciliation of a divided population.

Mostar felt most intensely the antagonism between the Croats and the Muslims. These two groups over time migrated to separate sides of the Neretva River, the Muslims on the east banks and the Croats on the west. Bridging this divide between the two communities is an old bridge over the Neretva River. This old bridge in Mostar has come to symbolise the city before, during, and after the Bosnian conflict as its changing role became reflective of the tensions the city was feeling at each stage of the conflict. Built by the Ottomans in 1556, the bridge symbolised a connection between the distinct cultures and religions, and its demise in 1993 during the war reflected the gaping distance between those once harmonious communities. Ultimately, the bridge's adoption by the international community as a peacebuilding and post-conflict development tool demonstrated the bridge's symbolism as the city began the reconstruction of their town.

This thesis has scaled down the topic of ethnic conflict and reconciliation to focus on an emerging element of peacebuilding and post-conflict development, intervention through cultural and political symbolism. Through the subsequent four chapters, the role that a cultural and political symbol, the old bridge over the Neretva River, has played and still is playing in reuniting Mostar after the conflict will be analysed. First, the history of the bridge will be presented, followed by a historical analysis of the development of the bridge's symbolism throughout the different stages of the war. Finally, an analysis of the bridge's use by the international community for peacebuilding and development will be examined in

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<sup>1</sup> Sumantra Bose. "Mostar, International Intervention in a Divided Bosnian Town, 1994-2001" *International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995* edited by Peter Siani-Davies (London: Routledge, 2003) 68.



order to understand how a cultural and political symbol can play a role in reunification after conflict.

Chapter one focuses on the historical development of the bridge from its original construction by the Ottoman Empire, and the role it took on after its construction within Mostar's community. This chapter will also present the outlines and foundations for the theories, which will be used to analyse the effectiveness of the bridge as a peacebuilding and post-conflict development tool. The concept of symbolism will also be examined in order to understand how the bridge emerged as a symbol and what it means to the city, as well as what role a symbol can play in Mostar. Then, theories of peacebuilding and post-conflict development will be discussed to set the basis for the analysis of the bridge as a tool for these strategies to reconcile and reconstruct Mostar.

Chapter two will discuss the Bosnian conflict of the early 1990s. It will examine the role of religion during the conflict, and trace the development of the bridge as a political symbol within the city throughout the onset of war. This chapter elaborates on how religious and ethnic conflicts exacerbated identity tensions within the city. Furthermore, it shows how the bridge was used as a political symbol to represent these tensions as the battle lines for war were drawn and conflict ensued. For decades under Josip Broz Tito's leadership these ethnic and religious differences were held in check, but as aggressive leadership and nationalism threatened Yugoslavia, ethnic conflict spread from Serbia outward. This chapter will show this progression and also argue that the bridge was used as

a symbol and it reflected the animosity that grew throughout the course of the war between Croats and Muslims in Mostar.

Chapter three focuses on the aftermath of the war and the role the international community played in the reconstruction of Mostar. Issues such as what international organisations do when they intervene culturally, and the role they play in attempting to reunify divided populations are discussed. I will also address the adoption of the bridge by the international community as a cultural symbol for reconciliation, the endorsement and financing of the reconstruction project, and the results of cultural intervention. While the international community deemed the adoption of the bridge a success through many speeches and press releases, even after the opening of the reconstructed bridge in 2004, Mostar still remains a divided city. The results are not as clear-cut as some international organisations are presenting, and I would argue that the international community has instead failed to reunite the city. This failure of reunification stems from many places, including the international community's lack of co-ordination and poor financing decisions.

Chapter four draws the analysis to a conclusion by assessing how successful the bridge was as a tool for reconciliation. The reasons why the bridge was unable to reconnect the gulf between the Croatian and the Muslim citizens will be addressed. Furthermore, the role that symbols can have in policy implications for future conflicts and reconstruction efforts is also discussed. Lessons can be learned from Mostar that will be applicable to future sites of cultural intervention. The historical development of the bridge culminates in this

chapter as I assess the role it has played in intervention and what the future may hold for Mostar and its bridge.

This case study of Mostar was chosen because of its pivotal role within Bosnia's overall reconstruction process. Moreover, the existence of this heritage site, the old bridge, provides an excellent case study from which to discuss how cultural symbolism can be applied after ethnic conflict. The bridge's changing roles will be analysed through modern research on religion, symbolism, peacebuilding, and post-conflict development. Fitting all of these ideas together, the role that symbols can play in bridging partitions created by conflict will become apparent. Primary source material from the United Nations, European Union, journals and newspapers provides first hand accounts of how the bridge was used in peacebuilding and development. These sources help provide material and support for a meaningful and in-depth analysis.

The significance of this research is manifold. By addressing the emerging role of symbols in peacebuilding and development, the thesis will analyse this distinctive avenue from which to approach reconciliation. Taking the lessons derived from the international community's adoption of the old bridge in Mostar, future work on reconciliation and intervention can benefit from this research. Moreover, this thesis will build on the current available literature on culture and symbols in peacebuilding and reconciliation, which have particular importance in our world today when many other countries are struggling with the aftermath of war and how to reconcile their divided populations. This case study was chosen because of the questions surrounding its success or failure, and it provides lessons

from which all parties concerned can learn. The world has no shortage of conflict, and this research takes a different approach to understanding one way in which the city of Mostar, in co-ordination with the international community, picked up the pieces and used a bridge to facilitate the process of moving forward.

## **Chapter One**

### **Before the War:**

#### **Building of the Old Bridge in Mostar**

Bridging religious and ethnic rifts in present day Bosnia-Herzegovina is a challenge, which confronts not only the citizens of the country, but also the entire international community. Ending animosity between conflicting religious and ethnic groups is not limited to Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Yugoslavia, and the implications of reaching a lasting peace spread beyond one country's borders impacting the entire international community. Countries around the world are facing the same challenges and thus it becomes all the more significant to find ways of closing the gaps and bringing together religions and ethnicities in order to establish lasting peace and coexistence in these war-torn countries.

Scaling down the daunting task of addressing the role of religion in the Bosnian conflict, this thesis will address those religious and ethnic divides that tore apart the city of Mostar which once lived in relative harmony with many religions within its city limits. Within Mostar there exists a world famous bridge that tells the tale of a city where Christians, Jews, and Muslims once united under the Ottoman rule, which is now bitterly divided from years of ethnic and religious conflict. This bridge will lead this thesis through its discussion and analysis of symbolism, peacebuilding, and post-conflict development because of its precarious and crucial position as a bridge over devastation to the hope of a future

with a peaceful coexistence once again. This small edifice over the Neretva River encompasses all that possibility and is a reminder of what the country was once capable of and with a consorted effort by all parties, could be capable of once again.

To begin the analysis, the pre-war history of the old bridge in Mostar, its construction by the Ottomans and the position it encompassed within Ottoman Mostar society must be addressed. The bridge's functional role was as an architectural structure allowing the citizens to travel from one side of their city to the other. The bridge's more symbolic role was as a meeting place of religions at the banks of the Neretva River. This bridge demonstrates how the residents of Mostar in the fifteenth century were able to overcome their religious and ethnic differences which, it seems, citizens of twenty-first century Mostar are not. By understanding the historic role of the bridge, the role it played in the Bosnian conflict of the 1990s, and its role as an intervention tool, the bridge's historical development can be put into context. Eventually, the bridge will not only serve as a symbol of the crumbling relations between the citizens of Mostar, but it will serve as a symbol of the rebuilding of the city and in extension, perhaps the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This chapter will also address the more theoretical ideas of how a bridge can be a device through which to establish and cultivate peacebuilding and post-conflict development within the country. Therefore, the ideas of political symbolism will be studied, as well as how the bridge became a political symbol from the time of its inception and has remained a political symbol after the war.

The specific roles it has embodied throughout its history will be discussed further as the different roles of the bridge unfold in each subsequent chapter. First, it is necessary to understand the definition of a symbol, and how symbols can be used to influence people and provide them with a sense of community and personal identity. From this study of symbols, the bridge as a tangible symbol of what Mostar once was, and what the international community wants to re-establish within the city and greater Bosnia becomes apparent. The bridge can also be seen as a political tool to be manipulated. Thus, the foundations of what role a symbol can play in a country will be laid out in order to follow the bridge's symbolic development during the war and through to its reconstruction.

After establishing that the bridge was and remains a political symbol, it is then possible to address theories of peacebuilding and post-conflict development and how a symbol can be an integral component in the intervention process. These theories of peacebuilding and post-conflict development will have greater significance after the war; however, it is necessary to establish their foundation in this chapter in order to have a firm basis from which to analyse them later. As the bridge was constructed, so was the role it will encompass in building peace and post-war development centuries after the first stones were laid. Its original purpose was to bridge communities, and that is the role which needs to be rejuvenated more than five hundred years later if contemporary Mostar is to bridge the gaps that it faces now.

## **Building of the Bridge**

The Ottoman Empire expanded its borders to include the Balkan Peninsula in the mid-fourteenth century. They conquered the peninsula and subsequently Bosnia-Herzegovina found itself a part of the Ottoman State like so many other countries during the height of Ottoman rule. With the Ottoman rule came the Islamisation of the Balkans. A predominantly Christian region, which had previously been ruled by the Byzantine Empire, the Balkans entered a new era in their history, which would significantly change the cultural landscape of their region. Many citizens of the Balkan Peninsula chose to convert to Islam for several reasons, “because they could continue to possess their lands under Turkish aegis or that the indigenous schismatic Christians saw the Islamic Turks as a lesser evil than the intolerant Roman Catholics. Early Islam appeared to be more tolerant with more equitable laws than Christianity” while others remained with their respective religion.<sup>2</sup> Either way, the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina was being ethnically and religiously divided by groups. These different groups, however, managed to coexist relatively peacefully under the Ottomans. The Ottomans allowed much religious freedom throughout their empire, and ruled from afar so the citizens of Bosnia-Herzegovina were able to practice their individual religions throughout the Ottoman reign.

[Bosnia]... Had much in common with other regions of the empire, its religious and cultural plurality, tolerance, patriotism, and influence at the imperial court in Istanbul also distinguished it from among the

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<sup>2</sup> Francine Friedman. *The Bosnian Muslims: Denial of a Nation* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996) 17.



others. Mosques, churches, and synagogues existed side by side, signifying that in Bosnia, Catholic Croats with their Western European culture, and Eastern Orthodox Serbs with their elements of Byzantine culture, and Sephardic Jews who came to Bosnia after their expulsion from Spain in 1492 continued to live together with the Muslims for more than four centuries.<sup>3</sup>

The Bosnian countryside was filled with towns, which were home to divergent populations that lived peacefully amongst each other for centuries.

One of those towns was the city of Mostar, which was and still remains a pivotal city within present day Bosnia-Herzegovina. The city reflects much of the country as a whole as Mostar was home to communities of Croats, Serbs and Muslims prior to war in the 1990s. Thus, it is apparent that the city endured in a state of peaceful coexistence between ethnicities inside a shared space. Within Mostar, the Ottomans, in an attempt to connect the city over the Neretva River, constructed a bridge known as the Stari Most to link the separated sections of Mostar. The wooden bridge was quickly worn out and thus it became necessary to replace the bridge with a sturdier and longer lasting version of the original one. “Because of the strategic importance of this crossing over the Neretva, the bridge was replaced sometime before 1481, in the reign of Mehmet the Conqueror by a new timber one. The city also became the centre of culture and education in that part of the Ottoman State.”<sup>4</sup> This new bridge over the river became “the gravity-

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<sup>3</sup> Amir Pasic. *The Old Bridge (Stari Most) in Mostar* (Istanbul: Research Center for Islamic History, Art and Culture, 1995) 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 7.

defying masterpiece of Ottoman Turk architecture erected in 1566”<sup>5</sup> and stood for over four hundred years.

Addressing the physical appearance, structure, and construction of the bridge, it was “flanked by two fortified towers, the single hump-backed Ottoman arch...constructed of 456 white stone blocks between 1557 and 1566” according to United Nation sources.<sup>6</sup> The measurements of the structure, according to Amir Pasic were: “The Old Bridge at Mostar consisted of one stone arch with a span of twenty-eight point seven meters. The supporting vault was seventy-seven centimetres thick, four meters wide, and its height in summer when the water was low was about twenty meters.”<sup>7</sup> The bridge was vaulted to allow for the changing level of the water in the river by season, and consisted of limestone that demonstrated its longevity and strength by serving the city for so many centuries after its original construction. When the bridge was destroyed by the Croats centuries later, divers would dredge these original stones up from the bottom of the river to be used in its reconstruction. The falling of the bridge, which had stood for so long, symbolised the crumbling of relations between Mostar’s citizens and also the end of an era in its history.

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<sup>5</sup> Ian Traynor. “Bridge Opens but Mostar Remains a Divided City.” *The Guardian* (23 July 2004. 12 January 2006 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,4976924-103681,00.html>)

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<sup>6</sup> EuropaWorld. “Rebuilt Bridge At Mostar to Be Reopened As Symbol Of Balkan Reconciliation.” *EuropaWorld.com* (16 July 2004, 26 October 2005 <http://www.europaworld.org/week186/rebuiltbridge16704.htm>).

<sup>7</sup> Amir Pasic, *The Old Bridge (Stari Most) in Mostar*, 14.

Constructed along with the bridge was a symbolic meaning; the bridge served its community for centuries as the centre of bazaar life and as a meeting place of distinct ethnic and religious communities. It not only bridged the communities on separate banks of the river, but it became the centre of their lives and interactions with one another symbolising their harmonious cohabitation of Mostar. Amir Pasic uses old manuscripts and travel accounts to reconstruct what the bridge meant to the city in its early days. He states, “The bazaar in Mostar lined both sides of the Old Bridge, on the left bank from behind the Halebija tower in the south to the clock tower in the east, and the Sinan Pasina Mosque in the north. The mosques, inns, and the public baths, together with the Stari Most and its fortifications dominated the bazaar.”<sup>8</sup> It is apparent that many citizens of Mostar irrespective of their faith or ethnic origins conducted daily life along the banks of the river and across bridge. “Christians and Jews lived and worked in the bazaar together with Muslims and shared with them an almost identical lifestyle.”<sup>9</sup> Regardless of religion, life in Mostar under the Ottomans was much the same for all its citizens and the bridge was a link between communities for economic prosperity and communal living.

The old bridge in Mostar then, can be seen as an architectural structure which stood the test of time and served its people until they no longer sought its usefulness in connecting the separated sections of the city. From the time of its construction, it was a symbol of what Bosnia-Herzegovina was capable of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 11.

creating and sustaining both in terms of constructing lasting structures and creating a peaceful coexistence with their neighbours. The Ottomans created an environment, which allowed for religious freedom and agreement and they demonstrated this by bridging communities and cultivating the exchange of goods and services to improve life within Mostar. It was not until centuries later that Mostar would revert from this way of life to one of animosity, and at the centre of that change was a bridge. Therefore, before the Bosnian conflict of the 1990s, the bridge symbolised all the differences it was able to overcome between its citizens, eliminating the gaps between them, which could easily have triumphed because of their divergent ethnic and religious allegiances. Mostar's pre-war history consists of an architectural accomplishment which was admired the world over and the coexistence of its diverse population which too was noticed beyond their own borders.

### **Political Symbolism Theory**

After having addressed the construction of the bridge from its composition to its early role in Mostar, it is now possible to speak to the development of its symbolic role. Before addressing how the bridge became a symbol, it is first appropriate to define what a symbol is. There are many definitions of what constitutes a symbol; however, I found the definition by Elder and Cobb most useful as it addresses symbolism in its basic form. According to Charles D. Elder and Roger W. Cobb in their important work *The Political Uses of Symbols* (1983) a symbol can be defined as “any object used by human beings to index meanings

that are not inherent in, nor discernible from, the object itself.”<sup>10</sup> It is also, “a human invention and arises from the process of attributing meaning to an object.”<sup>11</sup> The bridge fits this definition of a symbol because its meaning in Mostar went far beyond its physical and architectural functions. The bridge derived meaning from its symbolism as a connection between different communities in Mostar and for its ability to link cultures which otherwise would have remained self-contained in their distinct sections of Mostar.

Lisa Schirch in her book *Ritual and Symbols in Peacebuilding* (2005) asserts a second useful definition as she speaks about attaching meaning to symbols from a person’s experiences. She defines symbols as “significant elements in the meaning-making process. Individuals perceive and understand their environment through symbols that attach meaning to experiences.”<sup>12</sup> From this definition, the bridge became a symbol as the people of Mostar attached meaning to their bridge as a passage over cultural divides. Later the international community would build upon this symbolism in order to re-establish that broken link after the war. Presently, the international community would like to attach further meaning to the bridge by asserting a shared experience and culture for the Croats and the Muslims in Mostar.

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<sup>10</sup> Charles D. Elder and Roger W. Cobb. *The Political Use of Symbols* (New York, NY: Longman Inc., 1983) 28.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Lisa Schirch. *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press Inc., 2005) 81.

Roger Mac Ginty gives yet another definition of the key aspects of symbols and their political use in his edited book with John Darby, *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence, and Peace Processes* (2003) where he states, “A key feature of political and group symbols is their ability to embody multiple meanings. This ambiguity of symbols is often a key factor in their contribution to conflict, with antagonists holding varying perceptions of the same symbols.”<sup>13</sup> Mac Ginty sees the defining of a symbol as a problematic and difficult process in that a symbol can be fluid in meaning.<sup>14</sup> Yet, it is this very fluidness that gives symbols longevity and provides them with the voice to speak to varying communities at the same time.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Mostar, both the Croats and the Muslims can assign different meanings to the bridge, which becomes a source of conflict during the war and culminates in producing varying amounts of enthusiasm in seeing the bridge rebuilt after the war. Thus, it is essential to address symbols and their definitions when studying motivating factors for ethnic conflict as well as identity.

Building on these definitions of symbols, why symbols are created and what purpose they are created to serve are necessary to study next. Elder and Cobb assert in their work that symbols arise because of three needs: first, when people are confronted with new circumstances and need to summarise or index that knowledge, second, with the need for communication, symbols will provide

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<sup>13</sup> Roger Mac Ginty. “The Role of Symbols in Peacemaking” *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence, and Peace Processes* edited by John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 236.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 237.

common reference points, and third, the need to distinguish between people and to affirm social identities.<sup>16</sup> When applied to the old bridge in Mostar, these three factors describe how the bridge became a symbol and what the purpose of this symbolism was. The people of Mostar were experiencing new changes with the arrival of the Ottomans and the linking of communities so the bridge's role as a symbol began to take shape. From there, the bridge was a common point for communication and understanding as it was a link both to a shared past and shared future. The citizens of Mostar after the war saw it as a symbol of varying things, but nevertheless it remained a common reference point. After the war, different identities have supported varying views on reconstruction and thus the bridge's symbolism is still providing an identity to gather around for group solidarity. Thus, the bridge affirmed social identities and solidified group identity in support of the group's stance regarding the bridge.

In addition, the purpose of symbols and their role in society in terms of political strategy and manoeuvring are important. Considering that ethnic and religious groups as well as international organisations have used the bridge for the political advancement of their distinct agendas, this thesis must take into account the old bridge in Mostar in terms of its political symbolism for each of these distinct groups. Generally speaking, this will be analysed in chapter three in greater detail; however, the international community including the United Nations, European Union and NATO sought to bridge differences between the Croats and Muslims in Mostar which stemmed from their opposition in the

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<sup>16</sup> Elder and Cobb, *The Political Uses of Symbols*, 31-32.

conflict. In doing this, the international community sought to prove their capability in successfully implementing peacebuilding and post-conflict development plans in Bosnia. The Ottomans once used the bridge's symbolism to create peace and accord, and now centuries later different groups are using the bridge as a political symbol for much the same objective.

Political symbolism is what gives order to individuals in an ever changing and uncertain world, according to Rebecca E. Klatch. In her article "Of Meanings and Masters: Political Symbolism and Political Action" in *Polity* she writes,

Amidst the multitude of experiences and information, which confront the individual in the everyday world, symbols order social reality by categorising the world and infusing it with subjective meaning. In other words, political symbols orient the actor, helping her or him to make sense of the confusing and uncertain political world.<sup>17</sup>

She further argues that symbols give social solidarity and provide orientation for individuals within society.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Mostar, the bridge becomes a political symbol in that it orientates an individual towards a group in which they can find order and identity. And within those groups, they find social solidarity towards their opinion on the bridge. Muslims supported the efforts for reconstruction of the bridge, while the Croats did not see the reconstruction efforts in the same light. Meanwhile, the international community is moulding the bridge into a symbol of their desire for reconciliation and using the reconstruction as a measure of their progress. The bridge becomes a tool for their intervention through a

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<sup>17</sup> Rebecca E. Klatch. "Of Meanings and Masters: Political Symbolism and Political Action" *Polity* 21, 1 (1998): 140.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.



cultural heritage site. However, the question remains as to whether or not this bridge will become a true reflection of the community overcoming their divisions.

Political symbolism can also translate into political action. After identifying with a symbol and assigning it a particular meaning for the larger group, the symbolism can be translated into action. Two modern scholars, Harold Lasswell and Murray Edelman, associate symbols with political manoeuvring and a relief to public anxiety. Klatch has paraphrased these two men's ideas in such a way that they are pivotal to the application and study of the old bridge in Mostar and the communities tied to it: "Symbols reassure and placate people, thereby discouraging resistance. The symbolic action of elites pacifies the public, despite the fact that little substantive change has occurred. Without such symbols, inequalities and social problems would provoke rebellion."<sup>19</sup>

When the bridge was first constructed, it symbolised the joining of communities as well as the expansion of the Ottoman Empire. It further demonstrated the political and technical advancement of the Ottomans in the eyes of world, in that they constructed such a well-developed bridge. The bridge tamed the differences between the citizens of Mostar and provided the link they needed to have a shared symbol and thus mutual understanding. The bridge translated the merging of the Muslims in the Balkans into tangible action and created a new reality for the citizens of Mostar. Furthermore, the citizens of Mostar now had a shared symbol on which to base their understanding of this new reality and settle anxiety about shifting political situations.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 145.

Centuries later, if we consider the United Nations and other international organisations as the elites of which Lasswell and Edelman speak of in their theory, they would suggest that the United Nations embraced the bridge as a symbol in order to suppress and end the conflict. The international community wants to rebuild the bridge in order to bring reassurance and to discourage more animosity. Without the bridge, rebellions in regards to the social norms, which existed before the war, are allowed to continue. The goal of reconstructing the bridge then takes on political and cultural significance.

The questions that will be addressed later are exactly what Lasswell and Edelman suggest; has there been irrevocable change in Mostar or can a reconstructed bridge be used as a link between the Croats and the Muslims for reconciliation? Can the bridge be an example of the political use of a symbol to manufacture peace? Furthermore, can the bridge be a lasting symbol of peacebuilding and political action or is it just a means to avoid further social upheaval by the international community? Is the bridge a political symbol insomuch that it provides a sense of security and relief to the anxiety that surrounds the ethnic and religious conflicts within Bosnia? Without addressing these key questions in the subsequent analysis, the bridge can be no more than a bridge over water, not a link between opposing communities.

The theory of political symbolism is an important theory to address when considering the bridge as a symbol within Mostar. Having addressed the definitions and reasons why symbolism around the bridge was constructed and what the uses for symbols are, these ideas can be applied in a more concrete

sense. The definitions and purposes behind symbols explain how the bridge became a tool for political symbolism. Ultimately, the outcome of using the bridge as a symbol for peacebuilding and post-conflict development will unfold over the course of the thesis.

### **Peacebuilding**

Building upon the definitions of a symbol and the theory of political symbolism, the theories of peacebuilding and post-conflict development can be discussed. Peacebuilding and post-conflict development theories work to bring stability and reconciliation to regions torn apart by internal conflict, civil war, and interstate conflicts. Mostar and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as a city and a country respectively, lay in an unstable position as the international community and the country itself have tried and are continually trying to re-establish interdependence amongst the various groups living there, attempting to rebuild their destroyed country from the ground up. Using symbols to build this peace is a tactic being applied for the benefit of the country by various peacebuilding organisations. Through intervention it is hoped that a stable state will emerge and then post-conflict development ideas can be meaningfully grounded within the community and begin to take root in the society.

When the bridge was first built, it was seen as “the nucleus around which the city developed.”<sup>20</sup> It was a symbol of peace in that it brought new religious

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<sup>20</sup> Amir Pasic, *The Old Bridge (Stari Most) in Mostar*, 20.

leadership into the region through a relatively peaceful transition, and the city lived peacefully together for centuries. Overtime, “The new bridge was a powerful stimulus to the growth of the city.”<sup>21</sup> The bridge demonstrated the city’s ability to overcome differences and create a peaceful coexistence for its citizens. Its original role was as a symbol of peace, and that role solidified and strengthened over time until it took a dramatic turn that resulted in its total and literal collapse.

After the war there are many examples of various international organisations taking part in the reconstruction of the bridge, and this involvement speaks to the significance of the bridge as a symbol for peacebuilding within Mostar. According to news articles put out by the United Nations, “The Old Bridge was destroyed for its symbolic value and for this same reason the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) pledged to rebuild it.”<sup>22</sup> Here the United Nations is stating its own organisation’s role in rebuilding the bridge and it is confirming the significance of the bridge. They are assigning their own meaning to the symbol and demonstrating how a symbol can speak to varying groups at the same time. In addition, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Mr. Koichiro Matsuura gave a speech at the reopening ceremonies of the Old Bridge on 23 July 2004. As part of his speech he states,

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>22</sup> UN News Centre. “Destroyed Mostar Bridge Rebuilt with UN Aid as Symbol of Balkan Reconciliation”. *United Nations.org* (16 July 2004. 11 December 2005, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=11376&Cr=bosnia&Cr1=>) 1.

From the onset, the reconstruction of the Old Bridge has been a symbolic process. It represents, at one and the same time, an act of recovery and a commitment to the future. The destruction of the bridge was also symbolic, of course, and was aimed at uprooting the shared cultural foundations of this society. The bridge had been a potent symbol of the ability of different communities to live together over many centuries. The rebuilding of the Old Bridge, therefore, is suffused with significance, and most of all it represents a desire for peace and hope for a better future.<sup>23</sup>

Again, the bridge is seen as a symbolic vehicle for peacemaking and peacebuilding in Mostar after the war.

Roger Mac Ginty argues that symbols play key roles- both positive and negative- in contemporary peace processes and transitions. Moreover, he argues that most peace processes are based on two broad principles- separation and integration.<sup>24</sup> For that reason, symbols can be used to separate or integrate society within the confines of peacebuilding. These are the issues, which will be explored in peacebuilding and post-conflict development. They are elaborated on in further detail in the concluding chapter; however they will be briefly described in this chapter in order to introduce the general concepts behind them. The peace process in Mostar as seen through the symbolism of the bridge was and still is a complicated and multifaceted situation. However, MacGinty sees it as a process of separation and integration. For him, peacebuilding theory constitutes separating groups in order to end the immediate threat to life, and integrating

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<sup>23</sup> Koichiro Matsuura. *UNESCO Address at the Occasion of the Inauguration of the Old Bridge in Mostar* (New York, NY: UNESCO, 23 July 2004) 2.

<sup>24</sup> Mac Ginty. "The Role of Symbols in Peacemaking" *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence, and Peace Processes*, 235.

conflicting groups in order to cultivate sustainable institutions in which to build a foundation for enduring peace.<sup>25</sup> Richard Brown also brings up these ideas,

The post-Dayton Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina represents an uneasy mix of the separation and integration models...it is a case of separation within integration, with a macro-level peace accord promoting a single political entity, but significant separation persisting within it. Separate Bosnian Muslim/Croat and Serb political entities coexist under a central government and rotating presidency.<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, the bridge's symbolism can be employed by organisations and groups to further their visions on reconciliation and peace. For Mostar, that peacebuilding means a mix of both of these ideas, segregation and integration, though segregation seems to be prevailing at the current time.

Shifting the focus now to post-conflict development, this theory will add depth to our understanding of how Mostar is attempting to rebuild itself after the war and what steps it needs to take in order to be successful. Moreover, the bridge and its role in development will become apparent. An important work in the subject area of post-conflict development is *Post-Conflict Development: Meeting New Challenges* (2005) edited by Gerd Junne and Willemijn Verkoren, and much of the analysis will be drawn from its extensive and thought-provoking insight on the topic.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 235.

<sup>26</sup> Richard H. Brown. "Reconstructing Infrastructure" *Post-Conflict Development: Meeting New Challenges* edited by Gerd Junne and Willemijn Verkoren (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers Inc., 2005) 241.

## **Post-Conflict Development**

In terms of post-conflict development the concepts of reconstructing infrastructure, financing reconstruction, and cultural/religion are all relevant when addressing the old bridge. Reconstructing infrastructure is crucial because of the need to restore order and stability to the region when its basic functions have been torn apart by war. Richard H. Brown states that there are two objectives to consider when studying reconstruction, “(1) an assurance that its provision is an investment in the process for building peace, and (2) the creation of a legacy for sustainability.”<sup>27</sup> With reconstruction, the process needs to be done with regards to the parallel construction of peace, and keeping in mind the ability to sustain the rebuilding and peace efforts. The building of the bridge is an exercise in development in that in theory it should be a bridge of peace and one that creates a lasting legacy of sustainability after the war.

When addressing the old bridge in Mostar, it is a pivotal structure for the city not only in terms of crossing of the river but because of its historic meaning as well. “In the right circumstances infrastructure can reconnect divided communities and become the catalyst for gradual reconciliation (effectively a peace tool). Infrastructure links that conform to real or notional boundaries can of course have quite the opposite effect.”<sup>28</sup> The bridge, if reconstructed with sensitivity to the situation and conflict lines, can be a symbol of peace as well as development. Emphasis must be placed on considering the environment and sides

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 102.

of the conflict and the sustainability of the reconstruction. However, reconstructing the bridge could also have an opposite effect, of further dividing the city and thus constructing a symbol of that division. The existence of the bridge speaks loudly to the fact that even though the infrastructure has been rebuilt; the connections between the communities do not automatically coincide. Unfortunately, this is what seems to be unfolding in the case of Mostar.

The financing of the bridge is another key element as various international organisations, individual countries, and groups within Mostar have played roles in providing the necessary funds. The World Bank and United Nations both adopted the bridge as a cultural heritage site and thus adopted its reconstruction. These projects speak to the goals each organisation has in bringing peace to Mostar, but also in creating sustainable development, which embody a unified Mostar. Overall though, the financing also has had a negative impact as the urgency to rebuild led to putting money into the wrong hands, causing misuses, in order to get the reconstruction process underway quickly. This idea will be developed further in chapters three and four. However, it should be noted here that the financing of development, as with so many other elements of post-conflict development, can have both positive and negative impacts.

In post-conflict development, culture and religion also need to be taken into consideration. The lines of religion have played a key role in Mostar for centuries. The bridge brought together the Ottomans and the native Bosnians. Later, it would be religion and ethnicity that tore them apart. To put the country back together it is vital to consider the culture and religion of the region or the



efforts would be imposed on and not internalised by the citizens and would remain superficial. According to Junne and Willemijn, “If culture does not receive enough attention, it will not be possible to understand how formal political structures and institutions work.”<sup>29</sup> The interests, identities, and priorities of the citizens within Mostar must be addressed in order to cultivate an effective course of development and lasting peace. Religion and culture surround the heritage of the old bridge so an understanding of the roles they play in the lives of Mostar’s citizens needs to be considered. In part, it was culture and religion that drove them apart so they need to play an integral role in reuniting the city if reunification is to be meaningful and not just on the surface.

Peacebuilding and post-conflict development are significant theories when addressing what role the old bridge in Mostar will play in the future of the city. Symbolism as well as intervention through segregation and integration methods are important to peacebuilding, and for post-conflict development one must consider infrastructure and its financing, as well as culture, in order to grasp the whole picture of development during reconstruction. Because of the long history contained in the bridge, it is understandable why the international community chose the bridge through which to implement peacebuilding and post-conflict development strategies. For peacebuilding the symbolism of the bridge could integrate or divide the citizens, and for development the bridge is of symbolic significance for infrastructure rebuilding, financing, and culture. In the

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<sup>29</sup> Gerd Junne and Willemijn Verkoren editors. *Postconflict Development: Meeting New Challenges* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2005) 10.

proceeding chapters these ideas will be expanded on in regards to the bridge's changing role during the war and its aftermath.

## **Conclusion**

The use of symbols in peacebuilding and post-conflict development is the focus of the remainder of this thesis. By laying the foundations here as to the definitions and ideas surrounding symbolism, peacebuilding, and post-conflict development, it becomes possible to apply them when addressing the role of the bridge in the Bosnian conflict and after in the attempts for the reunification of Mostar. Understanding that symbolism infuses meaning to the bridge that varies according to different groups is important in understanding why the bridge was destroyed and who wants to see it rebuilt. Understanding peacebuilding and the role of cultural/political symbols in this process helps illustrate why the international community would adopt the bridge after the war as a tool for peaceful development.

The city of Mostar has not been able to bridge the gaps, which were created during the war but an attempt was made by a number of international organisations to use the bridge to facilitate this process. In order to understand and ultimately dissect the international community's decision-making process; we must first understand the theories and definitions behind the various organisations' strategies. The historical impact of the bridge on Mostar shows that it has played a significant role within the city and in the lives of Mostar's population.

## **Chapter Two**

### **During the War:**

#### **Role of Religion and Symbolism**

The historical importance of the old bridge in Mostar put it in a very uncertain position as war broke out in Yugoslavia and eventually spreading to Bosnia itself in the early 1990s. In light of the previous chapter's discussion of the bridge's historical importance and the symbolic role it played throughout the Ottoman reign in the Balkans, this chapter builds on this and analyses the role of the bridge during the war. It will demonstrate how the bridge once stood as a bridge of peace and was at the very centre of a mutually beneficial relationship between its Croatian and Muslim inhabitants, and later developed into a bridge that no longer embodied this role. Thus, building on the earlier discussion as to the role of the bridge before the war, this chapter will show how during the war the bridge encompassed and spoke volumes to what was happening in the society surrounding it. It will become apparent that the bridge was a reflection of the ability of Mostar to function as an integrated city. The historical change of the bridge is key to understanding this change within the climate of the city. I will attempt to demonstrate that the bridge's position straddled between two religions and two different ethnicities made it possible for the bridge to assert its role as a political symbol as well as a cultural symbol for both the Croats and the Muslims within Mostar.

On the banks of either side of the bridge were the borderlines of Croatian existence and Muslim existence in Mostar, and via the old bridge they were able to exchange ideas, services, and relations for over four hundred years. This harmonious existence came to a crashing halt with the onset of ethnic divisions in the former Yugoslavia. This chapter will firstly address the role of religion in Mostar during that conflict. By looking at this relationship and the tensions it reflects, we can see that Mostar was a microcosm of the greater Bosnian conflict. Consequently, Mostar will fit into the context of the greater Bosnian conflict and then the role it played in this devastating ethnic strife will be apparent. Furthermore, by looking at Mostar we can assess how the strain between Croats and Muslims within the city limits resonates with the tensions in greater Yugoslavia. The focus will be on the role of religion and how the respective sides cultivated animosity and group identity around religion and ethnicity in order to garner support for their cause. Thus religion must be addressed, as it was pivotal in creating group distinction and identity throughout the conflict.

After the role of religion in the conflict is analysed, the bridge's symbolism and how it reflected those tensions will be discussed. Religion was an integral part of the citizens of Mostar's lives, and the bridge can reflect how the city changed over time reflecting the changing relations between Croats and Muslims. It is important to note, that this was a change in historical relations and that in fact for hundreds of years the religions and ethnic groups lived peacefully together making it hard to cite deep-seated antagonisms as the cause of the conflict, at least in Mostar. As I have shown earlier, in Mostar, the bridge was a

symbol of accord for the Ottomans, and its transformation by the end of the war into a pile of stones on the river's bed was a sad testament to the state of relations between Croats and Muslims. At the banks of the river, on one side were the Croats and across its expanse were the Muslims with the cultural link between the two crumbled at their feet; this scene epitomises how the country was left at the conclusion of the conflict. This scene of devastation can be mirrored throughout the former Yugoslavia as the country felt much of the same religious and ethnic strife throughout its territory. Hence, focusing on the old bridge in Mostar provides a small-scale depiction of the larger picture. In the midst of conflict, the bridge reflected the divide between the religions and ethnicities, and was a reminder of just how fragile the ties between communities can be even after centuries of stability. Their peaceful relations came crumbling down in what historically amounts to a mere matter of moments.

### **Religion Before and During the Bosnian Conflict**

In order to effectively assert that the bridge was a political and cultural symbol for both sides during the Bosnian conflict, it is necessary to first introduce the background of the conflict. An exhaustive study of the role of religion in the Bosnian conflict is beyond the scope of this paper; however, a brief introduction is necessary in order to assess the symbolism of the bridge during the war and attempts at reconciliation afterwards. To gain a comprehensive grasp as to how the bridge would be used by the international community in the reconciliation process in Mostar, it is vital to understand religion as a key aspect of ethnicity in

terms of what tore this country apart. Also, religion and ethnicity are vital to the understanding of what needs to be overcome in order to reunify the city. Building from this introduction as to the historical role of religion, an analysis of symbolism during the war and reconciliation after it becomes possible and fruitful.

Religious pluralism found its way into the Balkans in a significant form with the expansion of the Ottoman Empire encompassing the Balkans and its domains. The advent of Islam into the region previously dominated by Christian leadership began with the invasion and conquering of the region by the Ottoman Turks in the middle of the fourteenth century. The religious pluralism that engulfed the region did not from its onset create religious animosity. Mitja Velikonja asserts in her book *Religious Separatism and Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (2003), that the general passivity of the Ottoman Empire in regards to religions other than Islam, and the country's history of peaceful cohabitation of religions within their borders prior to the conflicts made it a time of relative harmony in Bosnia. "The history of Bosnia and Herzegovina reflects its mostly pluralistic and tolerant nature, long inhabited as it was by members of many religions"<sup>30</sup> It is also fact that the Ottoman Turks ruled with marked religious tolerance throughout their reign in Bosnia. "When compared to medieval and early Renaissance Europe and Balkan states after the Ottoman retreat, religious freedom and tolerance during this first period of Ottoman rule

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Mojzes. *Religion and the War in Bosnia* (Atlanta: American Academy of Religions, 1998) 2.

was at a much higher level.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time that the Ottomans were practising general religious tolerance, their implementation of the *millet* system within Bosnia contributed significantly to development of corresponding religious identities being tied to national identities.<sup>32</sup> “The emphasis on distinguishing between individual religious...groups prevented the mass conversion of the population to Islam. At the same time, it presented an obstacle to the evolution of specific national identities. However, it was on the very basis of the *millet* religious groups that they later sprang out.”<sup>33</sup> National identities would emerge out of the *millet* system.

The Ottoman rule lasted for roughly four hundred years, and with its demise in the nineteenth century, Bosnia found itself surged into an unstable future until its post World War I integration into Yugoslavia. However, even with Bosnia’s place confirmed within the conglomeration of Yugoslavia, its future was far less than certain. Sabrina Petra Ramet discusses Yugoslavia and its disintegration focusing from the end of the Tito era and afterward in her book *Balkan Babel* (1999). She states that “Yugoslavia had been beset with problems from the time of its establishment in 1918, of course, and one may quite accurately say that no sooner was the multiethnic state constituted than it started to fall apart.”<sup>34</sup> From this time of relative instability emerged the famous leader

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<sup>31</sup> Velikonja, *Religious Separatism and Political Intolerance in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 56.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>34</sup> Sabrina Petra Ramet. *Balkan Babel* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 3.

Josip Broz Tito, who would control the reigns of communism and attempt to pull the country together following World War II.

Tito's reign over Yugoslavia lasted nearly forty years; however, he was ultimately unable to create the unity he had envisioned. "Although Tito and his Communists comrades talked endlessly about the need to create "brotherhood and unity" and recognised quite clearly the dangers inherent in national and religious chauvinism, they lacked a clear vision of social tolerance, without which their efforts ultimately floundered."<sup>35</sup> The country was held together by the firm iron-fist ruling that became a hallmark of communist rule, with little individual expression or participation allowed within the state. "The early years followed the standard formula of arrests, show trials, forced collectivisation, attacks on Churches, and erection of a strict central planning system."<sup>36</sup> While communism ruled from the top down with little deviation from decrees being tolerated, Tito was able to keep the nation of Yugoslavia together, albeit with little economic success. Also, with his strict rule Tito tolerated little religious expression and thus the pluralistic society that was living together in one state was relatively peaceful. The differences between religions and translating ethnicities were stifled, hence making any ethnic conflict much less likely to occur. Consequently, from the time of the Ottoman entrance into the region, religion in the Balkans transformed from a time of religious pluralism marked by peaceful coexistence to religious pluralism marked by suppression under Tito.

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<sup>35</sup> Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



When communism fell in early 1990s, the countries that made up Yugoslavia began to declare their independence. Different ethnic and religious identities distinguished the nation-states, which would emerge out of the former Yugoslavia. It appeared that religious and ethnic tensions were ripe from decades of being stifled by Tito, setting the stage for Yugoslavian disintegration and the conflicts within the region during the early 1990s. First, it is important to briefly speak to the various conflicts before assessing in particular the Bosnian conflict and its impact on the city of Mostar as reflected through the bridge and the tensions the bridge encapsulated. While our focus is on the Bosnian conflict, it is important to understand the origins of the conflict stemming from earlier events, such as Milosevic and his ideas of a 'Greater Serbia', as well Croatian independence.

Milosevic was the sole facet of power in Serbia by 1991, and he was garnering support for a 'Greater Serbia' and his expansionist visions through a nationalist approach. According to some scholars, including V.P. Gagnon, Jr., "violent conflict along ethnic cleavages is provoked by elites in order to create a domestic political context where ethnicity is the only politically relevant identity."<sup>37</sup> Thus, Milosevic and the ruling elite within Serbia in an effort to remain in power posed ethnicity as a threat to Serbs in Kosovo to divert attention away from his failing economic policies.<sup>38</sup> Milosevic was able to direct focus to Serbian ethnicity questions not only in Kosovo but also in neighbouring Croatia.

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<sup>37</sup> V.P. Gagnon, JR. "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict" *International Security* 19, 3 (1995): 132.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

“Milosevic, in short, had succeeded in identifying the Serbian national cause with himself.”<sup>39</sup> By aligning Serbian identity with himself, Milosevic took the focus off of the failing economy which was creating tension and putting his leadership into jeopardy.

There were other threats to Serbia beyond the economic downfall, which served to make Milosevic uneasy such as Slovenia and Croatia distancing themselves from Serbia in the 1990 elections.<sup>40</sup> As the Yugoslavian country was quickly separating into distinct states based on their dominant ethnicities, it served to polarise the region, and these hostilities spilled over into Bosnia. Croatia would gain their independence rather quickly, and Bosnia declared its independence on March 3, 1992. The ensuing conflict in Bosnia was characterised by Serbian atrocities fuelled by ethnic and religious alignments in both countries. Thus Orthodox Christian Serbs, Roman Catholic Croats, and Muslim Bosnians were organised along religious and ethnic lines as was the nature of this conflict, and bitter struggles were felt outside the former Yugoslavia’s borders resonating around the world. This chapter is not meant to be a study of the war, but rather a brief outline to set up an in-depth analysis of religious conflict in Mostar as reflected by the bridge’s role in symbolising the lines of conflict.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, 155.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>41</sup> For further information about the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the conflicts involved in it see Sabrina Petra Ramet’s, *Balkan Babel*.

When addressing the role of religion and ethnicity in the conflict, there are opposing views of its importance. Robert Kaplan has asserted that in the former Yugoslavia, it was memory and the clashing of ethnicities and religions that were the roots of the conflict. Furthermore, it was through communism and the heavy handed rule enforced by Tito that these tensions were kept at bay.<sup>42</sup> In another approach to the conflict, John Mueller in his article “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War’” argues that in terms of the Bosnian conflict, it was not religion that enacted the bloody conflict between ethnicities “but rather from the actions of recently empowered and unpoliced thugs.”<sup>43</sup> Milosevic set criminals loose, and it was his manipulation of the ethnic and religious differences along with these uncontrolled criminals, which were important. Mueller further argues that ethnicity and religion are “important as an ordering device or principle, not as a crucial motivating factor.”<sup>44</sup>

Mueller’s explanation holds weight and does well to describe the situation that Yugoslavia and Bosnia found itself in. The fact that historians have pointed out the relative peaceful coexistence of religions in the Balkans under the Ottomans for centuries makes Kaplan harder to agree with. Focusing then on religion as the integral factor of identity formation and allegiance, this will help to describe how the citizens within the city of Mostar could have been aligning themselves during the conflict, and thus how the bridge symbolised the political

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Kaplan. *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> John Mueller. “The Banality of ‘Ethnic War’” *International Security* 25, 1 ( 2000): 47.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

motivations of the Croat and Muslim populations. Even though religion may not have motivated the start of the war, it was an important line along which the ethnic and religious communities ultimately ordered themselves. With this brief look at the introduction of religious pluralism into Bosnia-Herzegovina and how it may have ordered the citizens along religious and ethnic lines; this will serve to demonstrate the symbolism of the bridge standing between them. Standing at the banks of either side of the bridge, the conflicts of greater Yugoslavia can be summarised in the conflict that transpired along the banks of the Neretva River. Religions were at either bank and they faced off because of an unleashing of nationalist and ethnic flurry by a leader motivated by the desire to stay in power even with a failing economy crippling his country.

### **Old Bridge as a Political Symbol**

The war may have resonated to all parts of the world with its religious overtones, yet this thesis focuses on the historical capital of Herzegovina, Mostar. However briefly, the development of religious pluralism within the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina has been chronicled from the arrival of the Ottomans through to the disintegration of Yugoslavia. Now our focus will shift to the issue of the old bridge in Mostar and its significance with regards to its symbolism during the Bosnian conflict. This bridge will represent the religious and ethnic divides that were facing the ethnically and religiously divided city. The methodology will constitute critiquing the political and cultural symbolism of the bridge through the theories presented by Charles D. Elder and Roger W. Cobb in their book, *The*

*Political Uses of Symbols* (1983), and by Lisa Schirch in her book *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding* (2005). As we have seen, these works address the political and cultural importance of symbols.

The bridge can be analysed for its role as a political symbol, and for how culture is tied to this political symbol. “Because the meanings that people assign to symbols are conditioned by common social and cultural experiences,”<sup>45</sup> it is therefore important to understand culture and social conditions in terms of religion and ethnicity to understand how the bridge was used as a political symbol. The bridge demonstrates how symbolism cultivated meaning, political action, social solidarity, and group identity during the war. The Croats and Muslims each manifested the symbolism differently because of their divergent perceptions of the bridge. “As the human mind seeks to fulfil its need for meaning, it tries to order and make sense out of these experience”<sup>46</sup> Finally, the bridge can be seen as a metaphor for the declining relationship between Mostar’s Croatian and Muslim populations. Prior to the war, “Muslims, Serbs, and Croats had lived in peace for most of the five hundred years they cohabited Bosnia-Herzegovina.”<sup>47</sup> Yet that serene civilisation hastily unravelled as religious and ethnic tensions flared and the citizens began to fight for their survival. The city of Mostar would incorporate and mirror these strains.

First, the religious and ethnic divides, which existed in Mostar and were mirrored by the old bridge, will be analysed for their roles in the city. Recalling

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<sup>45</sup> Elder and Cobb, *The Political Use of Symbols*, 35.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Ramet, *Balkan Babel*, 202.

from chapter one that old bridge in Mostar was the central focus of the Ottoman City, it was a gathering place where the town congregated together for mutual exchange of goods and social interactions. The bridge then spanned Mostar's religious divide and linked the Croats and Muslims in their everyday lives. The river's distance was now a staging ground for combating the enemy. Croats and Muslims, who had combined forces to drive out the Serb offensive into Bosnia-Herzegovina in the summer of 1992, now found themselves at odds with each other.<sup>48</sup>

The joining of forces against the Serbs did not last long. As "A year later Mostar was at war again. This time it was a vicious struggle for control of the town between the erstwhile allies. The Croatian Defence Council (HVO)...had the upper hand in this battle against...Muslims fighting in the Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (Armija BiH). The HVO used its heavier guns to mercilessly pound the Muslim-led sector on the east bank of the Neretva"<sup>49</sup> The Muslims were then fighting with whatever they had, which admittedly was not much, from the east side of the river. They used buildings and rubble to hold their position along the banks of the Neretva. Obviously then, "the other Mostar-the large Croat zone on the West Bank"<sup>50</sup> served as the grounds for the Croatian Army fighting for a Croatian controlled city within Bosnia-Herzegovina.

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<sup>48</sup> Bose, "Mostar, International Intervention in a Divided Bosnian Town, 1994-2001" *International Intervention in the Balkans Since 1995*, 95.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 96.

The bridge that used to stand as the link between these two communities now demonstrated and symbolised what was no longer accessible. Because of this, the question of whether or not the bridge was a political symbol during this conflict needs to be addressed. By applying the theories of political symbolism, it is apparent that yes; the bridge was a political symbol for both sides in different ways. Through the historical development of the symbolism of the bridge, the Croat and the Muslim orientations towards the bridge were established and over time became divergent from each other. “A person’s affective orientation toward a symbol is simply the positive or negative sentiment he or she associates with that symbol and the intensity of that sentiment.”<sup>51</sup> Through the historical development of the bridge, this symbol had now become a point of division for the citizens of Mostar.

The bridge also encompassed political symbolism in that it cultivated group identity and social solidarity. It provided the Croats and the Muslims a direction in which to orient their individual identities towards a group identity and solidified their goals and agendas with their respective group’s agenda. When addressing how this group identity was cultivated, according to Lisa Schirch, we must look to culture. “Culture groups develop common ways of viewing, seeing and understanding conflict.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, groups were solidifying on either side of the conflict vis-à-vis the cultural symbol of the old bridge. The bridge symbolised how the once Muslim dominated sections of the city, by wars end had been

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<sup>51</sup> Elder and Cobb, *The Political Use of Symbols*, 38.

<sup>52</sup> Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, 45.

destroyed by the Croatian population as they battled forward. For example, “a huge Catholic cross on top of its Ottoman-era fortress since that time, an unmistakable signal of who dominates the area where a sizeable population of Muslims once lived.”<sup>53</sup> The Croats crossed over the river and the bridge and destroyed some sections of Muslim domination. This no doubt added to their group identity and solidified it as well.

This dimension of the conflict created yet another layer of group solidarity as the Croats identified with the Roman Catholics, and Bosnian Muslims obviously with Islam, and the bridge was a structure that manifested those religious ties. The Muslims sought to uphold their religious tradition and its historical dominance, and the Croats sought to usher in a new era for Mostar. For Lisa Schirch, she ties these dimensions of identity and worldview to a symbolic representation in the peoples’ every day lives. “People symbolically construct conflicts through their worldview, a dynamic lens to understand the world through senses, emotions, complicated perceptual dynamics, culture, values and identity.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the bridge becomes a cultural symbol for the worldview of each religious group creating a complex group dynamic that was a driving force behind the conflict within Mostar.

As established, the bridge was a political symbol which drove political action and provided the Croats and the Muslims with meaning, identity, and group solidarity. By applying the definitions of political symbolism, the bridge becomes

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<sup>53</sup> Bose, “Mostar, International Intervention in a Divided Bosnian Town, 1994-2001” *International Intervention in the Balkans Since 1995*, 102.

<sup>54</sup> Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, 38.



a tangible example of political symbolism within the Bosnian conflict. Finally, the last way to analyse the bridge is to critique it as a metaphor for the destruction of the relationship and once held alliance between these two religious and ethnic groups. As the bridge crumbled to the bottom of the Neretva River, so did the relationships between the Croat and Muslim communities. “[In] the single most notorious act of vandalism of the post-Yugoslav wars, the HVO targeted and destroyed, in November 1993, the symbol of Mostar, the graceful arched footbridge across the Neretva constructed in 1566 by an architect called Hajrudin on the orders of Ottoman Emperor Suleiman the Magnificent.”<sup>55</sup> The bridge had once linked the community together, and after the destructive ten-month war the Bridge was gone. Also gone was the alliance they once shared against the Serbs, and gone was the idea of peacefully sharing the city. The destruction of the bridge by the Croats was a punitive measure to punish Muslims and to make a statement of dominance over the Muslims. It also demonstrated that relations had reached an all time low, and repair would not be easy or fast in coming.

The bridge being a metaphor for destruction resonated beyond Bosnia, and was heard in Turkey where its Ottoman ties laid and to international organisations that saw the position the bridge had once held in the community. “Beyond this devastation, and the destruction of the Stari Most (Old Bridge) spanning the Neretva...profound changes had occurred in Mostar, altering the character of the city beyond recognition.”<sup>56</sup> The city of Mostar was destroyed along with its

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<sup>55</sup> Bose, “Mostar, International Intervention in a Divided Bosnian Town, 1994-2001” *International Intervention in the Balkans Since 1995*, 96.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 105.

cultural symbol, the old bridge, and so the city was now facing a daunting task of picking up the pieces and reconstructing after war. But could the relations of its citizens be repaired? This question will be explored in later chapters, but here we see that with the destruction of the bridge, the historical ties between the two communities were also destroyed.

Through this analysis of the bridge, it has become apparent that the old bridge in Mostar was a dynamic symbol during the Bosnian conflict as its symbolism was multifaceted. The old bridge was a symbol of religious antagonism as two religious identities faced each other within Mostar. The bridge was also used as a political symbol insofar as it was used to establish meaning for the group and promoted a group agenda, which was tied to the history of the bridge. Finally, the bridge was a metaphor and symbol for the destructive capacity of war. With the city in shambles, so were the cornerstones of its historic architecture and centuries old congenial associations were demolished as well. The old bridge in Mostar originally stood as a symbol to the marvel of Ottoman achievement, and with its destruction it spoke to the fracturing capacity of ethnic and religious strife.

## **Conclusion**

After having chronicled the development of religious identity leading up to Bosnian conflict, it is evident that religion was an integral ordering factor in the destruction of Yugoslavia and its subsequent wars. It is clear that in an effort to understand the alignments and sentiments engulfing the city of Mostar during the

Bosnian conflict, one can look to the symbolism of the old bridge to explain what transpired. In the overall analysis of the bridge's attributes, this chapter illustrates how analysing the bridge is a way to measure the changing sentiment in Mostar, as previously held religious partnerships fell apart in a bitter battle for ethnic and religious control of Mostar.

As was stated in chapter one, the bridge stood as a testament to the height of Ottoman accomplishment both in architecture and social policies. During their reign as conquerors of the Balkans, the Ottomans were able to maintain a high level of religious tolerance. However, through the analysis of this chapter culminating with the destruction of the bridge, we see how the annihilation of the bridge speaks as a testament to the destructive powers of religious conflict and ethnic intolerance. The city of Mostar and in a larger sense the country of Bosnia-Herzegovina had for centuries been able to live in a pluralistic society. Under Tito's leadership, the varying ethnicities and religious communities were held in check by strict central policies and planning. With the collapse of Yugoslavia, the religious and ethnic differences translated into national sentiment, perhaps due in part to the ordering process set in motion by Milosevic. These religious and ethnic sentiments spread to Bosnia from neighbouring Serbia and Croatia, and finally manifested itself in the city of Mostar. Mostar saw bitter battle lines emerge between Croats and Bosnian Muslims, effectively between Catholics and Muslims. A city's cosmopolitan history of peaceful coexistence collapsed along with its famous bridge at the end of a vicious ethnic battle.

The bridge was a discernible symbol of the conflict within Mostar, and was a reflection of the greater conflict that was transpiring throughout Yugoslavia. The bridge's political significance spoke to how each religion and each ethnicity understood its symbolic value. For the Croats, this meant that their ultimate victory needed to coincide with the bridge's ultimate destruction, for the Muslims it was important to preserve the bridge as a symbol of their power in history. Yet, as the city picks up the pieces after the conflict, questions still remain. What remains to be seen, is whether the bridge can be a testament to the power of culture and symbolism in reconciliation after such a divisive conflict. We know that Croats and Muslims assigned different social and cultural meanings to the symbolism of the bridge. And "It is this social variability in meaning that explains the peculiar potency of symbols to arouse and to reassure persons of diverse backgrounds, interests, and concerns."<sup>57</sup> Therefore, as the international community adopts the bridge in order to facilitate this reconciliation process, the question remains if Mostar will internalise this process.

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<sup>57</sup> Elder and Cobb, *The Political Use of Symbols*, 35.

## Chapter Three

### After the War:

#### Rebuilding Mostar and its Historic Old Bridge

“When the firing ended ten months later with the Washington Agreement (March, 1994) establishing the Muslim-Croat Federation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mostar was unrecognisable.”<sup>58</sup> The city and its old bridge lay in shambles. The country of Bosnia-Herzegovina was faring no better as it struggled to find its footing with the disintegration of Yugoslavia. With the future of Mostar and Bosnia-Herzegovina in serious question, the whole country had to re-evaluate its identity, or more accurately, its identities. Bosnia-Herzegovina historically had been a country of multiethnic co-operation, as was the city of Mostar. That came to a dramatic end culminating with the fall of Yugoslavia. The Bosnian conflict demonstrated how the old bridge in Mostar stood as a historic symbol with various cultural connotations. The bridge provided meaning and solidarity to groups and it translated the bridge into a political and cultural symbol throughout the war. The bridge’s fall marked the emotional conclusion of the war, and spoke to the cleavage that had been created between Croats and Muslims.

Considering the reconstruction effort, several questions arise and must be addressed in order to understand what role the bridge played after its destruction in reunifying Mostar both in terms of peacebuilding and post-conflict

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<sup>58</sup> Bose, “Mostar, International Intervention in a Divided Bosnian Town, 1994-2001” *International Intervention in the Balkans Since 1995*, 104.

development. First, why and in what form did the distinct communities adopt the old bridge after the conflict? Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and the international community all adopted the bridge's reconstruction in varying forms. These various forms are important to understand in order to clarify why each identity adopted the bridge post-war. This will also help to explain why the reconstruction efforts failed in reunifying the population. Second, how did these different communities go about financing and supporting the reconstruction and what impact did this have? Finally, what impact did cultural intervention through the bridge have on Mostar? All of these questions lay the foundation for the ultimate questions of this thesis, which is addressed, in the next chapter. Why did cultural intervention fail? And what can be learned from this case study of Mostar that is applicable for international community to understand for more successful cultural interventions for peacebuilding and post-conflict development in the future.

The reconstruction of the bridge invoked support from the various communities tied to the bridge in accordance with the investments they each had in seeing the bridge rebuilt. Many Muslims sought the rebuilding of the bridge as a testament to their Ottoman glory, and to demonstrate their ability to move forward by linking Mostar to its past, to a past in which Muslims dominated. For many Croats, the destruction of the bridge was the very symbol of their present domination and so they were not as anxious to see the bridge rebuilt. While addressing these two main identities, this paper will also focus on the added identity of the international community's adoption of the bridge. The multiplicity of identities tied to the bridge's reconstruction and how each community's

identity had a different investment in seeing the bridge rebuilt are vital to our understanding of the climate in Mostar during reconstruction. These identities also illustrate the historical development of the symbolism of the bridge and how important infrastructure can be in cultivating peace and for post-conflict development.

Each of these communities assisted in financially endorsing the reconstruction of the bridge, though the endorsement by the international community had the most profound impact on the city of Mostar during the reconstruction process. The international community became a significant force in reconstruction, and the financing of reconstruction played a large role in trying to overcome obstacles on the city's road to reunification. Thus it is especially important to understand this community's role. Through the international community's endorsements, some reasons as to why the reconciliation failed become apparent such as the pre-war and intra-war political structures being reinforced during the financing. Inadvertently, the financing caused a solidifying and legitimising of the wartime regimes in Mostar.

Finally, the results that have transpired because of the cultural intervention in Mostar must be analysed for their successes and failures in regards to peacebuilding and development. From this analysis it can be concluded with relative certainty that the bridge in Mostar has not been a unifying force in Mostar. Policy implications as well as suggestions for why this was the case can be drawn, and further the analysis can offer suggestions for changes to cultural intervention in future conflicts. I will assert that international organisations

intervened through cultural avenues in an effort to appease both sides by reinforcing a shared heritage, but this did not work as they did not take into consideration many factors, which ultimately worked against the creation of a reunified Mostar via the old bridge.

### **Adoption of the Old Bridge as a Symbol**

There were multiple identities tied to the reconstruction of the old bridge in Mostar, and these distinctive identities asserted different reason for adopting the bridge as a symbol for post-war Mostar. The focus in this analysis will be on the international community as they are an important angle from which to understand peacebuilding and international intervention after ethnic conflict. It is obvious why a town's own people would want to see to reconstruction, but less clear is why the international community would take such a visible role in Mostar with regards to its bridge. However, it is important to address the Muslim and Croat positions as well in order to get a well-rounded understanding of Mostar after Dayton, and the different communities at work within the city. There has not been much work done on the adoption of the old bridge in Mostar by the Croats and the Muslims respectively to cultivate their own post-war identity. However, an article written by Carl Grodach entitled "Reconstituting Identity and History in post-war Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina" discusses as its thesis, why the citizens of Mostar and international community adopted the bridge after its



destruction as a symbol for bridging cultural differences.<sup>59</sup> He asserts that earlier in the bridge's history it was not the cultural link that has been drawn out since its fall in 1994. Since then and during the conflict itself, the bridge has taken on a new level of symbolism, according to Grodach, that was not inherently a part of the bridge.

Grodach's article seems to assert that a revision of Mostar's history has taken place as people look to Mostar for lessons in reconstruction after war.<sup>60</sup> He comments that "In post-war Mostar, the Stari-Most was transformed from an outstanding relic of Ottoman architecture and engineering and symbol of local and national pride to representing a bridge between cultures."<sup>61</sup> I disagree with his argument that the bridge did not represent a link between cultures in the past, as it was a cultural link throughout the Ottoman time in Mostar. However, I do agree with him in that the bridge has not succeeded in fulfilling that peaceful role which it once held neither immediately after the war nor at the present time. I further agree with Grodach that since the war the bridge has taken on added significance, in one regard, because of the importance the international community has placed on it by using it for peacebuilding and reconstruction. In the post-war era, the bridge and its adoption by different identities speaks about the desire to bridge these ethnic differences by the international community, but

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<sup>59</sup> Carl Grodach. "Reconstructing Identity and History in Post-War Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina" *City: Analysis of Urban trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 6, 1 (2003): 61-82.

<sup>60</sup> Carl Grodach. "Reconstructing Identity and History in Post-War Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina" *City: Analysis of Urban trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 6, 1 (2003): 61-82.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

not as much by the citizens of Mostar itself. The bridge was adopted because of its historical significance, as well as the dramatic role it played in the war. It was a tangible symbol of what could be accomplished.

The bridge was no doubt adopted by such organisations as the United Nation, World Bank, and European Union to name a few, in an effort to reconcile the schism between Croats and Muslims. But why did the Muslim and Croat communities of Bosnia-Herzegovina adopt it? I would argue that they have not embraced the reconciliation process vis-à-vis the bridge or any other form for that matter, as the international community has so zealously attempted to do themselves and publicly declared as much. Identity is a key component when looking at why the situation is unfolding in Mostar after the Dayton Accords as it has been. While the Muslim and Croat communities no doubt have an ingrained animosity for one another stemming from the conflict, they seem to have shared traits in that they are asserting their religious and ethnic identities above all other identity traits. Their religious and ethnic identities have been activated creating ordering principles. These two communities when looking at adopting the bridge as a symbol after the war should have separate motives for its reconstruction. Neither group is actively embracing the idea of reconciliation, almost with the same tenacity that international organisations want to force it on them. Bose makes striking comments about life in post-war Mostar in Peter Siani-Davies's edited volume *International Intervention in the Balkans since 1995* (2003), which serves to support the idea that Mostar, when reflecting on the Muslim and Croat identities, is still highly segregated.

Mostar's cultural life is highly segmented. There are two sets of theatres, puppet theatres, cultural centres- indeed, even fashion shows and beauty contests come in duplicate versions, with the Croat-run Hotel Ero and the Bosniac- run Hotel Bristol providing the alternative venues...Perhaps the most striking aspect of Mostar's divided consists of visual symbols used to mark zones and boundaries of the space dominated and controlled by each community. The periphery of Muslim territory on the West Bank, of the eastern edges of the Boulevard, is demarcated by a long line of slender minarets of dzamije (mosques) erected since the war...<sup>62</sup>

It is apparent, through these statements that life is still transpiring along ethnic and religious lines years after the war has ended. Over the years since the war ended, Muslims and Croats have made little progress in terms of bridging these religious and ethnic gaps on their own accords.

Both Croats and Muslims do seem to recognise the powerful symbolism that the bridge encapsulates. The Croats made sure of its destruction and countries like Turkey and France were quick to aid in the reconstruction efforts in order to begin the restoration project and restore the bridge to its old splendour. Transitioning to the international community, these groups have taken a more active and assertive approach in supporting the bridge and ambitiously backing its cultural symbolism, as well as the role in which international organisations can take in supporting peacebuilding efforts in this divided city. The United Nations was one of the most prominent supporters of the restoration project declaring the Stari Most a 'cultural heritage site'. "We are present in Mostar in order to breathe fresh life into an exceptional heritage which, after having been used as a target, needs to become a rallying sign, a sign of recognition, the powerful symbol of a

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<sup>62</sup> Bose, "Mostar, International Intervention in a Divided Bosnian Town, 1994-2001" *International Intervention in the Balkans Since 1995*, 83.

plural identity founded on mutual trust,"<sup>63</sup> said UNESCO's Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura referring to the restoration of the Old Bridge.

Other international organisations have also rallied to adopt the symbolism of the bridge in order to facilitate the reconciliation process. According to the World Bank "It was a symbol of people connecting with each other, proof of human triumph over nature, and a stunning architectural achievement. In the eyes of local people, it had its own soul. Its return has come to signify a new beginning, not only for the city of Mostar but for the country of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well."<sup>64</sup> Therefore, the World Bank joined in the support of restoring the Stari Most. This was an unusual project for the World Bank; however, they saw the significant symbolism that engulfed the bridge and adopted it as well. The World Bank adopted the bridge as a cultural site and this gives the project added international credibility and demonstrates their desire for integration as part of their peacebuilding effort.

In addition to the United Nations and World Bank, the European Union also adopted the bridge and its symbolism. The EU is motivated to cultivate democracies and open markets in the Balkans, and thus views the bridge as a cultural avenue for implementing growth and reconstruction. Their peacebuilding strategy focusing on the integration process thereby someday bringing the

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<sup>63</sup> Traynor, "Bridge Opens but Mostar Remains a Divided City", 1.

<sup>64</sup> Srecko Latal. "Mostar's Old Bridge Rises Again." *The World Bank.com* (27 July 2004. 12 October 2005, <http://web.worldbank.org/BOSNIAHERZEXTN/0,contentMDK:20209357~pagePK:141137~piPK:141127~theSitePK:362026,00.html>).

Balkans into the EU system highlights how a symbol can be a part of this development process. According to European Commission, “This Bridge is the symbol of the city of Mostar and the opening ceremony coincides with the 10th anniversary of the start of the European Union reconstruction of Mostar.”<sup>65</sup> The EU collaborated with the UN and World Bank to jointly restore the bridge. Individual countries and non-governmental organisations would join these international organisations to complete the picture of international co-operation in restoration.

What conclusions can be drawn as to who adopted the bridge and why? The Muslim and Croat identities from within Mostar no doubt sought to see their city rebuilt and thus participated as such. However, ambiguities still remain as to their commitment to overcoming the segregation of the city. Still, more work needs to be done assessing these communities before a definitive conclusion can be drawn. Presently, evidence points to their divided enthusiasm, Muslims desiring the reconstruction in Mostar or indifferent, and Croats either indifferent or against it. As for international assistance, many recognised the importance of cultural sites in providing base support for rebuilding the city and for a show of joint support in the future. UNESCO perhaps stated it best:

From Bamyán to Jerusalem or Sarajevo, in the past few years cultural heritage has often been a military target or the flash point of political, ethnic and religious conflicts. But when peace returns, the rehabilitation and enhancement of these

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<sup>65</sup> European Union Commission. “Commissioner Patten to Visit Sarajevo and Mostar.” *European Union and the United Nations.com* (July 2004: 9 December 2005, [http://europa-eu-un.org/articles/lt/article\\_3688\\_lt.htm](http://europa-eu-un.org/articles/lt/article_3688_lt.htm)).

highly symbolic sites, as well as that of cultural spaces or forms of cultural expression belonging to the intangible heritage, can sometimes help to strengthen the process of national reconciliation and revive economic activity.<sup>66</sup>

The adoption of historically symbolic heritage sites has become a new focus for the international community. It explains why one aspect of international intervention took the form of cultural intervention in post-war Mostar. For the international community it is hoped that through cultural intervention via the bridge, they could advance their peacebuilding and post-conflict development strategies.

### **Endorsing and Financing Reconstruction**

Having addressed the adoption of the bridge and why specific identities and organisations were driven to support the bridge, how each group gave this support can be assessed. International financing and their overall endorsement of the bridge as a cultural symbol and heritage site are vital for understanding the reconstruction project. It is imperative to discern why international organisations endorse and finance certain projects in post-conflict development in order to assess the successes and failures of intervention in Mostar through a cultural symbol. This analysis will also help us to understand what international organisations actually do when they intervene through cultural symbols.

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<sup>66</sup> UNESCO Press. "United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage: Priority on Reconciliation and Development." *UNESCO.org* (2 April 2002; 12 October 2005, [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=2939&URL\\_DO=DO\\_PRINTPAGE&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=2939&URL_DO=DO_PRINTPAGE&URL_SECTION=201.html)).

In Mostar, “Ever since the war, the Croatian extremists of west Mostar and the ruling Bosnian Muslim party on the east bank have connived in the partition of the city, dividing the spoils between them and confounding all international attempts to reunite the city.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, international organisations sought a means to bridge this animosity and by adopting a seemingly universal symbol for the city, they thought they had found their avenue for reunification. The international community supported the reconstruction in several ways. As we have seen, prominent organisations such as the UN, World Bank, and EU championed the cause, and have been outspoken about both their ambitions and goals. They were not the only ones; individual countries had their own motivations to help to this end. For example, Turkey, desiring the restoration of its Ottoman architectural achievement, was quick to support the cause.

The World Bank website broke down the major contributors and from that it is possible to understand the roles played by different actors in this reconstruction process within Mostar. “Through a \$12.5 million project financed by the Bank and other donors, the city of Mostar moved to restore that tolerance by reconstructing the graceful arch and its towers ... Italy \$3 million, the Netherlands \$2 million, Croatia \$0.5 million and the Council of Europe Development Bank \$1 million.”<sup>68</sup> It is interesting to note that the World Bank contributed the bulk of the financial resources, yet other countries contributed monetarily as well. The motive behind Croatia may be their desire to appease the

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<sup>67</sup> Traynor, “Bridge Opens but Mostar Remains a Divided City”, 1.

<sup>68</sup> Latal, “Mostar’s Old Bridge Rises Again”, 1.

global community or increase their standing with the European Union as conditionality for future membership could come into play here as a motivating factor.

It is also important to note that internally, Mostar handled the disbursement of the money and they contributed to the project. “While the World Bank was responsible for the financial part of the project and the city of Mostar handled the disbursement of the funds, UNESCO's main task was to ensure the technical and scientific co-ordination.”<sup>69</sup> Croat and Muslim banks handled the daily operations concerning the money management. These two ethnic groups still strikingly separated in their own city were working together in at least one aspect of life in Mostar.

When considering the symbolism of the bridge, one of the most likely sources of support for its reconstruction was Turkey. According to NATO sources, “For several months, the workers of the Turkish Company ER-BU have begun reconstructing and reinforcing the foundations and the arch of the bridge.”<sup>70</sup> Consequently, the endorsement of the bridge by Turkey was not only through financial support, but its actual reconstruction as well. This is symbolic in that the Ottoman Turks were the original constructors of the bridge some four hundred years earlier. One of the stone-masters said, “Some parts of the bridge

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<sup>69</sup> United Nations News Centre, “Destroyed Mostar Bridge Rebuilt with UN Aid as Symbol of Balkan Reconciliation”, 1.

<sup>70</sup> Guner, 1Lt. Ender. “Mostar Bridge is Standing Up.” *Stabilization Force in Bosnia-Herzegovina.com*. (7 May 2003: 17 November 2005, <http://www.nato.int/sfor/indexinf/articles/030507a/t030507a.htm>>).



rescued from the river after its destruction have been used to rebuild the stone span. Now, we rebuild the arch of the bridge and use new stones extracted from quarry along the river. Our intention was to rebuild the bridge to match the original."<sup>71</sup> The Turks hoped to restore the bridge to its old beauty. It remains to be seen, however, whether the ultimate goal of restoring a peaceful balance to Mostar will accompany the construction of the bridge.

Ultimately, endorsement and funds for the bridge came from all over the world as the nations and organisations struggled to find an avenue to reconcile the divisions within Mostar, and make this city an example for the rest of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Using this bridge could also demonstrate the ability of cultural intervention to barter peace after ethnic conflict, and if using cultural symbols is a viable way to facilitate the adjustment process. Culture is a different angle from which to approach reconciliation as most intervention efforts are usually focused on military operations and diplomatic agreements.

### **Cultural Intervention**

After the adoption of the bridge as a cultural symbol for reconciliation, and after all the endorsements and provisions of funds were put to use, the bridge was reopened for the world and the city of Mostar to celebrate. But, were they celebrating the merging of a city's population rising above the residual effects of a war-torn society, or were they simply celebrating the reconstruction of an old bridge that at one time carried significance? For the most part, the success or

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

failure of the endeavour depends on who is commenting on the issue. With the opening of the bridge in July 2004, many claimed it was a testament to the perseverance of the city to overcome its divisions and celebrated how the world came together to accomplish this task. Yet, the city itself tells a different story. Assessing the bridge's success and failure through peacebuilding and post-conflict development strategies, it appears that the garnering of the bridge as a political symbol for post-war reconciliation did not bring about the desired results or any meaningful reconciliation. The bridge helped to draw international attention where it was needed in Mostar though by analysing it as a successful point of reconciliation demonstrates that the bridge could not bring the peace the international community sought for Mostar.

Well after the intervention into Bosnia-Herzegovina, there remains an animosity within the city showing that the bridge was unable to overcome the gaps from the conflict either through cultural intervention or development, though not everyone publicly recognises the remaining animosity. With the opening ceremonies of the bridge, many international leaders spoke about how far the city has come and emphasised the success of the bridge project. The Director-General of UNESCO Mr.Koichiro Matsuura gave this statement at the opening ceremonies on 23 July 2004.

Whereas at one time it was a focus of deep bitterness, cultural heritage can perform another function, that of helping to re-establish and maintain peaceful relations between different communities. I believe that the reconstruction of the Old Bridge at Mostar, as a process and as an outcome, reveals that questions of cultural heritage can bring opportunities for co-operation and sharing.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Matsuura, "Inaugural Address at the Opening of the Old Bridge in Mostar", 2.

UNESCO then deemed the project a success and is hopeful about the reconciliation that the existence of the bridge has and will bring. According to leaders at the World Bank, “There are strong links between this sublime cultural artefact (the bridge) and this country’s ability to meet its contemporary social and economic goals. In Mostar we are seeing the power of this linkage confirmed again as new opportunities and new hopes arise alongside the restored Stari Most.”<sup>73</sup> These international organisations are optimistic, perhaps too optimistic, about the role that the bridge has had in peacebuilding and development.

If we turn our attention to the situation within Mostar during the reconstruction project, we do not see a city overcoming the ethnic created from war. “In April 2001, UN officials took over a Mostar bank, widely believed to be the primary source of funding for the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), in retaliation to an HDZ campaign to establish a separate Croatian government in Bosnia. Take over of the bank prompted riots in Mostar”.<sup>74</sup> Situations such as this make it hard to believe that the bridge and its reconstruction project are bringing together the citizens of Mostar in an effort to get Croats and Muslims to work side by side and bring an end to the ethnic divisions. Instead it appears that both within Mostar and Bosnia-Herzegovina these divides are still prevalent, and that perhaps this peacebuilding project is segregating the society rather than integrating it. Thus we have an example which demonstrates that the city has

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<sup>73</sup> Latal, “Mostar’s Old Bridge Rises Again”, 2.

<sup>74</sup> Grodach, “Reconstructing Identity and History in Post-War Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina”, 81.

been unable, neither during the reconstruction project of the bridge nor after it has been completed, to reconcile their differences from the war.

This is not the only example of the animosity, which demonstrates how Mostar is still living a partitioned existence. According to the British Daily *The Guardian*, the divisions within the city are pervasive.

In a town where the takeaway pizza joint will not deliver to the Muslims across the river, where Croats and Muslims can be identified by their different mobile phone numbers and servers, where education from kindergarten to university is strictly segregated, and where you still cannot take a city bus across the old frontline from the Bosnian war.<sup>75</sup>

Clearly the divisions still significantly affect everyday life in Mostar. The political system is hampered by the fact that citizens seem to vote along ethnic and religious fault-lines undermining the international community's goal of having a unified government.<sup>76</sup> Further, one of the largest problems comes from the segregation found in the educational system. "The greatest long-term threat to those aspects of Mostar's heritage which derive from values of inter-group respect and coexistence lies in the segregated character of the post-war schooling system."<sup>77</sup> If time and the emergence of new generations of Mostar's citizens have any hope of dampening these ethnic hatreds, education is the best process to teach the new generations lessons of tolerance. The city of Mostar still fights the fallout from the war, and has a long way to go to overcome their ethnic and religious differences.

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<sup>75</sup> Traynor, "Bridge Opens but Mostar Remains a Divided City", 1.

<sup>76</sup> Sumantra Bose. *Bosnia after Dayton: Nationalist Partition and International Intervention* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002) 116.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

So, has the bridge succeeded as a form of cultural intervention? It is unfair to site the bridge as a complete failure because its symbolism could not overcome all the atrocities and animosities from the war. However, to deem it a success just because it was rebuilt is to ignore the fact that Mostar still remains decidedly segregated well after the bridge was reopened in 2004. In terms of peacebuilding, the bridge was able to bring together segments of society and the international community to work together in restoring heritage. The military intervention stopped the imminent threat to life within the country, and the cultural intervention was able to integrate some parts of society in Mostar though it was far from being universal and it did not stimulate any rallying effect within the city. Overall intervention did soften the crisis and end the immediate threat to life within Mostar, accomplishing a main goal of intervention strategies, but the efforts based on cultural symbolism ultimately did little.

However if we look specifically at the bridge's role as a political symbol, we can see that its symbolism has succeeded in some regards. The bridge, in post-war Mostar, provides group identity and meaning and gives political direction to the groups that invoke its symbolism. As Elder and Cobb state in their book, "When a person responds to a symbol, he is responding not simply to external reality but to his conception or interpretation of that reality. Thus, the meaning he gives to the symbol will be based on information and ideas he has stored away in his mind."<sup>78</sup> Applying this to the old bridge in Mostar, it explains how each ethnic and religious group can have a different interpretation of the

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<sup>78</sup> Elder and Cobb, *The Political Use of Symbols*, 40.

meaning that the bridge contains. The fact that the bridge has not succeeded in linking the communities could be because the groups are manifesting old animosities in their current symbolic understanding of the bridge. And until that is gone it can only be hoped that the bridge be a symbol of future reconciliation, and it will remain a symbol of what Mostar has gone through over the centuries since the bridge's original construction. As was pointed out in post-conflict development theory, culture and symbols have to be understood in order to be used properly for reconciliation. In this sense, the bridge's meaning was not understood clearly as it was able to divide as easily as the international community thought it could unite.

Regarding peacebuilding, there is still much work to be done by the international community and the city of Mostar itself. The intervention has been long and has taken many approaches. According to Bose, "Seven years of international presence and engagement have certainly not undone or substantially reversed the partitions of Mostar...in what is perhaps the single most difficult site for international state-building and democratisation project in post-war Bosnia"<sup>79</sup>, it just had a thawing effect. Perhaps the best conclusion that can be drawn about the success or failure of the old bridge in Mostar in terms of reconciliation is that it was not able to overcome the partition but it has moved the city in the direction of reconciliation, however small the increments have been. Grodach states his conclusion, "the future of the Stari Most bodes well neither as a 'bridge between cultures' nor as a solution to help negotiate post-war ethnic and religious

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<sup>79</sup> Bose, *Bosnia after Dayton: Nationalist Partition and International Intervention*, 146.

conflict.”<sup>80</sup> I agree in large part with his conclusion. The bridge does not seem to hold the same weight with the citizens of Mostar that the international community boasted it would in overcoming problems after the war. This could be because it is in fact only a bridge, an architectural structure, and what needs to be overcome are years of anger and hostilities culminating in years of bloody fighting. Reconciliation cannot be accomplished only through a bridge even though it is apparent that the bridge is a symbol of the historical Mostar. This does not mean that one side or the other wants to return to that past, nor will they necessarily internalise the same past in the symbolism and meaning of the bridge. The bridge’s adoption as a heritage and cultural symbol for reconciliation is tenuous at best.

## **Conclusion**

The old bridge in Mostar was reconstructed through many different organisations representing the wide spectrum of identities that were tied to the bridge. International intervention in the form of cultural intervention in the case of Mostar did not and has not brought the Croat and Muslim populations together as it was hoped. It did accomplish the goals of restoration, shared participation in its reconstruction, and demonstrating the ability of the international community to work together in at least one area. The divisions within the city seem too deep for one historic bridge to overcome. However, this is an interesting direction in

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<sup>80</sup> Grodach, “Reconstructing Identity and History in Post-War Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina”, 81.

which the international community sought to orient their intervention strategies for peacebuilding and development.

Soldiers for peacekeeping, negotiations, summits and all the traditional forms of international intervention after ethnic conflict have not always produced positive results, so intervening by supporting cultural heritage and cultivating pride in a country's shared past seems a logical and potentially successful venture. In the future, cultural intervention is an approach that should be explored further in terms of its implementation and for its policy implications since it has few drawbacks and the costs to the intervening country are low. On the other hand, benefits to the whole of the international community would be high if an ethnic conflict could be controlled successfully through this low cost approach. Mostar and its bridge resulted in mixed successes and failures. However, with further research on how to implement cultural intervention after ethnic conflict, Mostar could be used as a case to learn from for more successful interventions in the future.



## **Chapter Four**

### **Conclusions:**

#### **Why didn't a Restored Bridge Reunify Mostar?**

The restoration project of the old bridge in Mostar did not accomplish the goals for reconciliation that the international community had hoped it would. After the bridge had been rebuilt and the ceremonies had taken place, the city of Mostar had little more than a new bridge to show for their efforts as no major effect was had on reunifying the population. Why didn't the bridge and the restoration project then reunify the city? There are several reasons, which need to be explored as to why this project failed to reunify Mostar, and from these reasons much can be learned for future endeavours of cultural intervention. After addressing the reasons for the failure of the bridge to reunify the communities in Mostar, it will be meaningful to look at the implications that the failure has had on Mostar and to an extent on greater Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since we have seen that cultural intervention in large part failed in Mostar, it is imperative to learn from this example as much as possible in order to make adjustments so that future interventions do not fall victim to the same mistakes and miscalculations.

Drawing the analysis to a close, this chapter takes the conclusion from chapter three pertaining to the failure of cultural intervention to bring reconciliation to Mostar and builds on it to understand how and why this will effect future international intervention strategies. This thesis has thus far demonstrated how a bridge went from being a symbol of unity to a symbol of the

destructive forces that ethnic conflict can encompass. The goal of the final chapter and the importance for writing this thesis as a whole is to demonstrate that lessons can be drawn from Mostar and applied to future cases of ethnic conflict. Mostar could be used as an example from which the international community can refine their approach to helping countries vis-à-vis cultural intervention after ethnic conflict. By analysing what went wrong in Mostar, this will be helpful in preventing the same mistakes from occurring again in another country.

### **Reasons for the Failure**

I have argued that the old bridge in Mostar has not been the overwhelming success the international community hoped for when they adopted the bridge as an avenue for reconciliation between Croats and Muslims. First, we must look at Mostar and see what kind of reconciliation the present-day city reflects. This includes going beyond the rhetoric of international organisations that seek to further their own goals and seem to have either ignored or misrepresented the current divides still in place in Mostar in their press releases. The actual affects of the project must be examined. Why has cultural intervention failed in regards to Mostar, and what are the limitations of using a cultural symbol for peacebuilding and post-conflict development after ethnic conflict are the central questions which still remain. This assessment will naturally lead into policy implications and outlooks for the future of cultural symbols and reconciliation.

First hand observers from international NGOs report that the city of Mostar, though celebrating the reopening of the bridge, is not socially reunited along ethnic lines. Zimonjic states, “Thousands from eastern Mostar gathered on

the steep banks of the Neretva to cheer the fireworks at the opening ceremony. Western Mostar was quiet.”<sup>81</sup> The Muslim side (eastern) celebrated loudly the opening, while on the Croatian side (western) the same celebration was not occurring. "The noble aim to re-connect the two banks does not necessarily bring reconciliation, Zaim Nuric, owner of a souvenir shop told IPS. ”<sup>82</sup> The citizens of Mostar are living what the international community has declared a success: a city that may have a reconstructed bridge but does not have a reunified city. Why then has the city not been reunified despite the efforts of the international community? Why the bridge project did not succeed speaks volumes as to why the city as a whole has failed to reconcile.

### *Legitimising Old Regimes*

The bridge and reconstruction project failed in at least one regard because it reinforced corrupt leadership structures within the city of Mostar instead of bringing in change while rebuilding the bridge. “The rebuilding of bridges and roads, hospitals and schools, and even the distribution of humanitarian aid, reinforced the war-time regimes by giving them access to material resources and by building their credibility with the local population.”<sup>83</sup> In the urgency to rebuild

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<sup>81</sup> Vesna Peric Zimonjic. “Politics-Bosnia: A Famed Bridge Reunites But Does Not Reconcile.” *Inter Press Service English News Wire.com* (26 July 2004: 14 December 2005 <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1P1:96829792/POLITICS-BOSNIA%7eC%7e+A+FAMED+BRIDGE+REUNITES+BUT+DOES+NOT+RECONCILE.ht>).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>83</sup> European Stability Initiative. “Waiting for a Miracle? The Politics of Political Change in Bosnia Herzegovina” *European Stability Initiative.org* (9 March 2006: 15 April 2006 [http://www.esiweb.org/docs/printdocument.php?document\\_ID=8](http://www.esiweb.org/docs/printdocument.php?document_ID=8)).

after the war, the money was not put into the hands of new institutions, which could have been reflective of a unified city. Instead the existing and pre-war leadership received money in order to re-establish and rebuild the city, and with that they gained legitimacy amongst the population. It appears that the international organisations supported integration while financing segregation. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that there has not been a fundamental structural change in leadership since the project appears to have supported and solidified the existing corrupt structure. Unification of the city will not happen as the governing groups prefer and support the segregation, and thus the city remains divided along ethnic lines.

Taking a closer look at the financing of reconstruction, the failure of the bridge to unify the city translates into serious implications for Bosnia. Money to rebuild was coming from all over the world from the EU to the UN and from the World Bank. Money was flowing in from all sources, and to whom they gave that money seems to have had serious and negative implications. According to the European Stability Initiative,

Most of this money was spent without any consideration of its political impact. Concerned only with efficient service delivery, international agencies have rebuilt housing and infrastructure in co-operation with whatever local authorities they found in place at the time. As a result, the reconstruction programme has had the effect of strengthening the local power structures and their capacity to resist the state-building agenda.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

The bridge then becomes part of a larger problem of financing reconstruction, and thus has implications for post-conflict development. In order to have lasting legitimacy and sustainable development, Mostar and Bosnia are going to need to change in their governing policies and state building approaches need to change, in the very least. There will need to be a shift in legitimacy away from corrupt regimes benefiting from segregation towards governing bodies that support integration.

### *Poor Planning and Co-ordination*

Giving money before assessing to whom the international community was giving the money was part of another problem. The dilemma, which exists, is the lack of an overall plan or agenda from which all of the various international organisations can operate. The old bridge in Mostar project, it could be said, failed to meet international goals because of a lack of a cohesive overall strategy on a higher level. “The international community has established an extremely diffuse institutional structure in Bosnia, and problems of co-ordination and joint strategy for development have been endemic to the mission.”<sup>85</sup> The international community was involved in so many different facets of intervention in Bosnia, and they all need to work together if reconciliation is to happen. Moreover, if Mostar’s state institutions and governing structures do not have a cohesive and joint plan for restructuring supported by all international organisations and there

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

exists a lack of defined overall goals, then the work on the old bridge in Mostar has no hope of bridging those gulfs alone. A cultural symbol can only integrate a society so far. Carrying the symbol has to be a cohesive strategy that is discernible for all to follow, implement, and invest their support in.

### *Segregation versus Integration*

Another example of the segregation versus integration dichotomy in peacebuilding through symbols is demonstrated through the actual military forces in Bosnia and Mostar. This example also speaks to the lack of definite goals for the future of Bosnia. “UN's involvement in Central Bosnia is ostensibly about putting up a military shield to keep warring factions apart. There is an irony here, in that the ultimate objective is to bring these people together. But it is also a shield behind which much is supposed to be happening - though most of it is simply not taking place.”<sup>86</sup> Segregation in the name of peace is thus hindering the ability to integrate the city. In extension then, the symbolism of the bridge embodies just that dichotomy and the contradictory messages that the citizens of Mostar are receiving not only on this front but on the financial front as well.

Peacebuilding and post-conflict development then become contradictory in this sense. If peacebuilding is simultaneously segregating and integrating, post-conflict development strategies for lasting development will be set up for failure as they will have no constructive basis of an integrated city to build on.

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<sup>86</sup> Graeme Simpson. “Reconstruction and Reconciliation: Emerging from Transition” *Development in Practice* 7, 4 (1997): 476.

Further if segregation continues to play a key role in the peacebuilding process, what happens when the troops and international groups leave and post-conflict development hasn't been able to overcome the segregation that was imposed to stop the fighting. A way to overcome the segregation may be to adopt cultural symbols which have a less controversial history, and hopefully that can start to erode the need for the segregation elements of peacebuilding leaving an integrated city in its wake.

Mostar finds itself in an ambiguous position at present, as it is fighting these forces of segregation and integration in order to find its path in the years after the divisive conflict. While much remains for scholars to analyse and critique, what is certain is that the old bridge was not able to reunite the city of Mostar as the international community had hoped. Much of the failure of reunification in Mostar seems to lie at the feet of questionable financial backing by the international community, poor planning, and community segregation. Thus studying the reasons why the international community failed in Mostar is necessary and important to understanding the impact they could have on post-conflict development and future sites of cultural intervention.

### **Policy Implications**

The significance of this research lies in the fact that it can help to understand the role of cultural symbols in building a lasting peace and sustainable development after future ethnic conflicts. What can be learned from the case of Mostar and the international community's embracing of the old bridge as a cultural and political symbol in order to more constructively and successfully

integrate symbols into the future reconciliation processes? And, why would the international community want to continue to pursue cultural intervention after ethnic conflict? Finally, what are the future implications for Bosnia and the international community? These are all questions of policy that can be speculated towards and provide this thesis with applicability beyond this case study of Mostar. Further, this work provides the basis from which further research can be done to cultivate a greater understanding for the uses of symbolism in uniting a divided community.

#### *The Need to Understand the Symbol*

The role of symbols in uniting a community is not as straightforward as it would seem. In the case of Mostar, there were different views as to the meaning of the bridge between the Croats and the Muslims. The international community did not acknowledge that the reconstruction of the bridge would carry different meanings for each of these groups, and thus asserted the message that reconstruction of the bridge would be the first step towards reconciliation in Mostar. The conditions in contemporary Mostar have demonstrated that this has not been the case. So what can be learned from this miscalculation? The general assertion put forth by Brown in his chapter in *Post-Conflict Development: Meeting New Challenges* (2005), is that international organisations and those involved with the rebuilding of infrastructure must understand that infrastructure



can either bring together or keep apart sections of a community.<sup>87</sup> Therefore it is important to grasp the power of the physical structure to provide a symbol in which people can rally around or one which serves to divide the population even further apart. This has definitely been the case with Mostar and a lesson to be learned is that if handled incorrectly by the international community, the symbol could cause unintended outcomes such as providing legitimacy to the divisions that exist.

The policy implications of this are apparent then, as the international community must be sure to understand the whole picture in which they are intervening. For a symbol, that means understanding the historical development of the symbol, its political roles, and the meanings which communities have assigned to the symbol, to name a few. Without this comprehensive understanding of a symbol, prematurely adopting it as a cause for reconciliation might result in outright failure or even unintended harm by solidifying segregation around the symbol instead of unifying them.

### *Must have Unified Plans*

Another important conclusion is that reconstruction and reconciliation are not one-dimensional. Furthermore, reconstruction and reconciliation take a unified effort from all parties concerned and without that, failure is likely. In terms of the bridge in Mostar, its cultural symbolism was just one aspect of intervention in the country, and taken alone cultural symbolism will not unify

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<sup>87</sup> Brown, "Reconstructing Infrastructure" *Postconflict Development: Meeting New Challenges*.

Mostar as was demonstrated. The bridge, and thus symbolism, needed to be an integral part of a multifaceted approach to both peacebuilding and post-conflict development. The old bridge in Mostar needed to be a part of a greater plan for reconstruction. And though there were many organisations planning various parts of the reconstruction agenda, the bridge did not seem to be a part of some greater plan that would have been obvious to the average citizen. Therefore, the bridge's reconstruction did little beyond providing a way over the river, and bringing international organisations into the financing of the project. Its impact did not carry over into reuniting the populace of Mostar, which was one of the goals of its reconstruction.

In terms of policy, there has to be even more planning which goes beyond the symbol itself and links its reconstruction to an overall plan for the entire city and eventually country's reconstruction. For policy in the future, symbols must become part of a greater coherent plan which includes social, political and economic aspects, and these plans need to be adopted and implemented by all participating groups. A lack of organisation and failure to link symbols to this greater plan just gives symbols too great of a burden to carry. The old bridge in Mostar was not capable of reunifying Mostar on its own accord for various reasons, though it might have garnered more support had it been linked to a better plan.

### *Cost-Benefit Analysis*

Another policy implication for cultural intervention is that it has an excellent cost-benefit ratio if the intervention can be carried out successfully. Practically speaking, cultural intervention is very low in cost and has the potential to produce significant benefits for the whole world. The cost to intervening countries is financial assistance in reconstructing the symbol and promoting the project to the country. Significantly, an intervening country's need to risk troops' lives is limited making it an appealing option for intervention. For the host country, the benefit is the reconstruction of the symbol and the reconstruction of infrastructure, while working to reunify the population as part of the reconstruction project.

### *Implications for Greater Bosnia*

Finally, the policy implications this symbol in Mostar has on greater Bosnia-Herzegovina are important to understand. Mostar is a key city within Bosnia-Herzegovina because of its close ties to Croatia and because of its historically significant role as being a multiethnic city. In present day Bosnia-Herzegovina

Because Mostar remains one of the most divided cities in Bosnia-Herzegovina – and has come to symbolise mutual intolerance, distrust and tribal politics – any genuine agreement on a new statute for a unified city administration would offer both a template for other segregated towns and encouragement for Bosnia-Herzegovina in general. On the other hand, yet another failure in Mostar would also have disproportionate effects.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> International Crisis Group. "Building Bridges in Mostar" *International Crisis group.org* (20 November 2003: 15 November 2005 <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2374&l=1>).

Mostar's role within Bosnia-Herzegovina is an important one, and its influence can be felt far beyond the city limits. The international community's success or failure in Mostar will resonate to cities throughout the country. A strong and decisive defeat of ethnic hatreds needs to happen in Mostar in order for reconciliation to occur in all of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The policy implications are both important and widespread, as the international community cannot afford to fail in Mostar if it wants to succeed in the rest of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Success or failure in Mostar and in Bosnia will come down to the strength of their institutions to handle the change, and instigate the incorporation of all parties. Symbols cannot govern the people nor can they provide social necessities, but they can provide direction and orientation. "The path to Bosnian 'ownership' of the peace process is therefore through institution building."<sup>89</sup> Ownership will also come from Bosnian's ability to run their own institutions and to sustain their own peace, and this is also where international organisations and symbols can play important roles. According to Stuart Kaufman in his book *Modern Hatreds*, the key to lasting peace is through peacebuilding from both the bottom up and the top down. He further states that economics and diplomacy taken alone are not enough to prevent conflict, and ancient hatreds are an easy yet insufficient answer to a much more complex security dilemma which can lead to ethnic conflict. Instead international organisations can help initiate this

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<sup>89</sup> European Stability Initiative, "Waiting for a Miracle? The Politics of Political Change in Bosnia Herzegovina" *European Stability Initiative.org*,  
[http://www.esiweb.org/docs/printdocument.php?document\\_ID=8](http://www.esiweb.org/docs/printdocument.php?document_ID=8).

peacebuilding process by understanding a country's symbols and myths in order to facilitate a lasting peace.<sup>90</sup> Then and only then will the international community be preparing a country to go forward on their own; and the cultivation of symbols in order to both instil pride and confidence into the indigenous population can assist with that. Symbols can perhaps be resurrected to give a country hope and a stake in its future. The ultimate goal is to prepare a country so that when the troops and peacekeeping forces leave, the fighting does not resume and ethnic hatreds do not triumph.

The use of symbols in reconciliation is a form of international intervention that needs to be explored much further as it has implications for peacebuilding and post-conflict development strategies, and much can be learned from this case study of Mostar and its famous bridge. Symbols have the power to divide or unite a group, and for Mostar as well as future sites of conflict, this power needs to be acknowledged as it can either be a useful tool on the path to reconciliation or be an obstacle to overcome. Moreover, in order for reconciliation to work, there must be a plan that encompasses all aspects of life, which have been torn apart in the social, political, and economic spheres. Symbols can play an integral role in this process but cannot carry the process alone. Finally, in order for any peace process to work and for long-term development to be sustained, the country must internalise the process. Symbols can help a country to internalise it by linking the conceptual idea of peace to a symbol that is a tangible part of their life, as the bridge in Mostar could have done.

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<sup>90</sup> Stephen Kaufman. *Modern Hatreds* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001).

## **Conclusions**

The old bridge in Mostar embodies much more than a way to cross the Neretva River. From its inception it was a marker of religious and ethnic tolerance, until the days of Yugoslavia's disintegration. Since then, the bridge has been a symbol of the hatred, which came between ethnicities and religions within the same city. More recently the international community has adopted the bridge as a heritage site and used it as a symbol for their plans in peacebuilding and post-conflict development. Throughout its history, the old bridge in Mostar has taken on many meanings by different groups and has served as a link to overcome a prominent gulf. By recreating and restoring the bridge to its original magnificence dredging up the original stones from the riverbed, those involved in the project sought to restore peace to the city and send it down a path of redevelopment and reconciliation. This heavy burden was not one that the bridge could carry alone. If the sole focus was on the ability of the bridge to carry Mostar into a unified future, thus far it has failed. Yet, reconciliation is a long process, and is one in which both Mostar and Bosnia-Herzegovina still hope to overcome the divides of ethnic conflict in the years to come.

Bringing a divided country back together is a question scholars' have struggled with and policy makers have attempted to accomplish with varying degrees of success. This research has demonstrated that symbols could very well have the power to ease the transition if they are a part of a comprehensive strategy for reconstruction. Alone, they do not have the capacity to help implement the

change needed in a society as symbols alone do not fix corrupt governments or provide social programs for the people. Though some scholars would assert that partition is the result and solution for ethnic war,<sup>91</sup> this is overly pessimistic and perhaps could lead to more fighting in the future between the constructed homogenous societies. Several key scholars have argued that heterogeneous societies need to be the case for stable multiethnic states.<sup>92</sup> Sectioning off the Croats from the Muslims and leaving each in their current state of animosity will lead to further violence in time because as the peacekeeping forces pull out, the animosities which have not been bridged will lead to further hostility. The goal of intervention and development then should be to reunite and create heterogeneous societies where conflict becomes less attractive. And from this coexistence a country and the international community can work together to find a way towards a sustainable peaceful coexistence.

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<sup>91</sup> Chaim Kaufmann. "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars" *International Security* 20, 4 (1996): 136-175. Kaufmann asserts his reasoning that the partition of ethnic groups after war is nearly inevitable and the most likely solution for lasting peace.

<sup>92</sup> Scholars have asserted that it is heterogeneous and not homogenous societies, which lead to less fighting and should be the goal of post-conflict development to instill a lasting peace. Nicholas Sambanis. "Partition as a Solution to Ethnic War" *World Politics* 52, 4 (2000): 437-483.

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