SOCIOPOLITICAL SYMBOLIZATION OF *STARI MOST*[1]: CONSTRUCTION, DESTRUCTION, RECONSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The long-lasting Ottoman domination towards the Balkans were based on various dynamics. Besides the Empire's political and economic tools; the unique characteristic of Ottoman architecture was reflecting the Empire's dominance over the territory. In this context, *Stari Most* (Bridge of Mostar) which is located in the borders of today's Bosnia and Herzegovina should be considered as one of the greatest heritage of Ottoman Empire in the Balkans. Despite of the fact that in the very beginning, the bridge was constructed only for public's transit; in the course of time, the bridge took symbolic meanings on itself. Besides its strategic importance during the Yugoslav Wars; the Bridge was symbolizing a "sociological and political hyperlink" between the Muslim and non-Muslim societies of the Mostar City. On the other hand, at the utmost level, the bridge was one of the symbol of Yugoslavia's togetherness until its destruction. Yet, during the Yugoslav War, in 1993 *Stari Most* is destroyed by heavy artilleries. In other words, the 1993 shelling was not only aiming the bridge but also aiming the togetherness of Bosnian Muslims and the Catholic Croats. Likewise its destruction; the reconstruction of the *Stari Most* had also become very meaningful in the sense of the reappearance of international community in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This study aims to give the answer of the following question: *How/Why a simple bridge can take on symbolic meanings in the course of time?* The research question is elaborated by investigating the Ottoman period, *Titoist* Yugoslavia and aftermath of the Yugoslav Wars.

Key Words: *Stari Most, Ottoman Empire, Yugoslavia, International Community, Symbolization*

INTRODUCTION

"*Before it became an empire stretching to three continents; Balkans had been the heart of the empire. From the foundation of villages, towns and cities to the erection of architectural structures, mosques and bridges, the Ottomans left long-lasting marks on the history and culture of the region and played a significant role in the development of the Balkan culture* (Balcı, 2014:60)."

The abovementioned citation is a vintage introduction for academicians those investigate the correlation between Ottoman Empire and Balkans. On the other hand, the complicated task for the Ottoman-Balkan studies is the difficulty of making a pure distinction between the disciplines. In other words, the field forces the academicians to exert their final products by using interdisciplinary methods. For instance, even the very first citation of this study, invites the different approaches of architects, theologians, historians and sociologists. For this reason, this study will be also apparent blend of these disciplines. On the other hand, before starting to discuss the sociopolitical aspect of this study, exposing the basic correlation between architecture and politics is vital.

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[1]The alternate of the Mostar Bridge in local language which literally means"old bridge".
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Without any doubt, during the man's history, politics is the primary factor of structural changes almost in every level (Cerny, 1990:9). With a very "naïve" approach, wars which destruct and reconstruct the architecture of cities are the output of failed politics. Yet, needless to mention that the correlation between architecture and politics can't be that reductive. For instance, Milne argues that architecture is the symbolism and expressive form of states (Milne, 1981:132). According to Milne's proposal, it can be argued that Moscow's giant collective housing projects symbolize the collectivity of socialist ideology, New York's countless skyscrapers symbolize the inaccessibility of USA's power or Beijing's commercial centers symbolize the great economic power of China. In other words, it might be argued that architecture represents the "tongue-tied" side of state ideology. In parallel, when Hitler came to power in Germany, he condemned many architects as Bolshevik artists (Lane, 1986:284). On the other hand, regarding the architecture and politics correlation, while mostly architecture symbolizes or reflects the state ideology, in some cases, ordinary architectural works might take on symbolic meanings based on the particular political developments in certain territories. In other words, some architectural works might be re-interpreted in the course of time despite of the fact that their architects didn't intend to symbolize them with something. Exactly at this point, *Stari Most* sets a great example of how an ordinary bridge might be the symbol of social togetherness and how the destruction of a bridge might symbolize a social dissolution. But previous to this, the founding state ideology of Ottoman Empire and *Titoist* Yugoslavia should be examined carefully.

In the recent history of Balkans, Ottoman Empire and *Titoist* Yugoslavia should be considered as the two indispensable political actors of the region. Despite of the fact that the both of these actors had their own *sui generis* administrative principles, the most remarkable common point of these two different administrations was the large scaled order –mostly, between the 14. and 18. centuries for Ottoman Empire and the Tito administration in Yugoslavia between 1946 and 1980- in the territory. Despite of the fact that the political and non-political instruments of these two parties for consolidating their power within the territory is not the primary research question of this study, it is considered necessary to focus on the very major standpoints which shall guide the further arguments of this paper.

Millet[3] system which is considered as the sociopolitical spine of the Ottomans defines the great harmonization of the ethnic and religious components of the empire. In the first place, it has to be mentioned that *millet* system was the output of religious classification within the empire (Güneş, 2015:3). In the second place, it should be stated that it isn't possible to imagine a perfectly functioning*millet* system comprehension during the long-lasting patronage of Ottoman Empire. Because as soon as the nationalistic tendencies started to rise within the empire, the "soul" of the *millet* system was fundamentally disturbed by the end of 18.century. According to Karpat who is considered as one of the greatest Ottoman historian, the *millet* system was in favor of "fusion of family and community" (Öztürk, 2009:72). On the other hand, Barkey and Gavrilis enlarge the Karpat's definition by arguing the *millet* system as one of the best well functioning non-territorial autonomy. In addition, they argue that *millet* system let the non-Muslim components of the empire such as Jewish, Greek Orthodox and Armenian communities to organize their existence in the empire wherever they resided and whether or not they were a numerical minority or majority (Barkey and Gavrilis, 2016: 25-26). On the other hand, beside its social and economic aspects; *millet* system is also used as a foreign policy tool especially by supporting the Orthodox community

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[3]Millet is an Arabic word which can be translated into English as nation. Despite of the fact that the term does not refer to any religious identity, but according to Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, in the terminology of Ottoman historians, the term is mostly used to define the non-Muslim communities. For further information see Benjamin Braude's study titled "Foundation Myths of the Millet System".

against the Catholics in order to secure the balance of power after the conquest of Istanbul (Akça, 2007:58). In the light of these information, it might be argued that in fact the political elites of the empire were not concerned regarding the ethnic or religious identity of the *millet* unless they pay their regular taxes and be manageable in the sense of political and sociological order within the empire. On the other hand, Ottomans' tolerance to *millet* was not only stemming from *realpolitik* but also the rulers of the empire were deeply engaged to religious -Islamic- beliefs in the sense of both their personal and the empire's disposition purpose. At this point it should be mentioned that Ottoman's perception to ruled classes was very much influenced by the early Turks and their beliefs before the Islam. Philip Mansel describes this old correlation between religion and politics as following:

"*While still nomads in Central Asia, many Turks had regarded themselves as a 'Chosen People of God.' Demons in war and angels in peace, equally heroic and humane, they were destined to rule the world*" (Mansel, 1995:4).

Needless to mention that this mission was not only based on early Turks' political realism and limitless power maximization demands but also, Ottoman's ruling class was persuaded that they were called by God to rule the world with fairness and justice. In this respect, *millet* system can be considered as the guarantorship of sociopolitical harmony and order within the empire till the end of 18.century.

Nevertheless, the unique Ottoman architecture in Balkans should be considered as an "inanimate" evidence of fusion of family and community as analyzed before under the name of *millet* system. In this sense, one of the most significant study regarding the religious interaction on Ottoman architecture in Balkans is written by Machiel Kiel. Despite of the fact that the most significant mosques in Balkans were constructed according to the classic Ottoman architecture; in his study, Kiel produces a term call "campanile minaret" mosque which describes a "hybrid" combination of both Islamic and Christendom architecture. In this sense, Kiel identified 14 monuments, such as *SeferAğa* Mosque and *Avdic* Mosque which perfectly match with the "campanile minaret" mosque definition (Kiel, 2010)Despite of the fact that it is still unclear whether these "campanile minaret" mosques are the products of a positive interaction and communication between the different religious groups of Bosnia and Herzegovina or they only represent an architectural transformation of sanctuaries in the course of time. In this context, Kiel's simple indicator can be considered very decisive which is based on the directions of the monuments. In this context, Kiel argues that these "campanile minaret" mosques can't have been Orthodox Christian churches because of their directions which suppose to be oriented towards the east but not (Kiel, 2018). In order to support this argument, also Ayverdi's findings worth to be analyzed. According to him, while most of the Balkan countries such as Serbia and Greece, systematically extinguished the Ottoman architectures in their countries in the sense of identity building process, on the other hand today's Bosnia and Herzegovina still has the richest sources for Ottoman architecture studies (Ayverdi, 2006: 152). According to this argument, it might be argued that still today's Bosnia and Herzegovina can be considered as a great mosaic of ethnic and religious diversity in Balkans.

On the other hand, starting from the 18.century, the golden ages of *Pax Ottomana* in Balkans is started to be disturbed both by the internal and external dynamics. Major disorders on administration, military, economy and land regime caused a long-lasting territorial losses. Finally, through the Balkan Wars, Ottoman Empire completely lost its control over the Balkans. On the other hand, *Pax Ottomana* period was not the only period when Balkans enjoyed the political order, social harmony and peace.

Niebuhr's short but effective definition for Yugoslavia: "*Yugoslav strongman Josip Broz Tito's multi-ethnic creation from the ashes of a Europe devastated by the Nazi Germany*" (Niebuhr, 2017:285). On the other hand, in case of rooting the ashes of Yugoslavia, as much as its European ashes; ashes from the Ottoman period will be also found. Therefore, *Titoist* regime in Yugoslavia can be considered as the Slavic version of *millet* system (Güzelipek, 2016:80). In 1963, when Tito introduced his new policy call *brotherhood and unity*, he projected to eliminate the existing ethnic and religious tension between the different founder groups of Yugoslavia by giving them equal rights. In addition, Tito concluded his speech with the following sentence: "*We have spilt an ocean of blood for the brotherhood and unity of our people and we shall not allow anyone to touch or destroy it from within*" (Shan, 2014:54). Despite of the fact that Yugoslavia enjoyed his golden years under the leadership of Tito; his death on 4 May 1980, had involved the country to very exigency years. Finally, uncontrolled nationalism and every type of fundamentalism named the decade between 1991 and 2001 as the Yugoslav Wars. Still the Yugoslav Wars keep its incomprehensible nature. Was it an "ethnic" revenge of Slavs between themselves? Was it a taken revenge from the Ottomans? What was the role of religious/sectarian identities during the war?

Fig. 1 Mostar Bridge in The Early of 1970's

(Source: https://flashbak.com/the-groovy-opel-car-calendar-of-1970-376508/1970-opel-kadett-at-the-mostar-bridge-1970-opel-calender-mostar-bosnia-hercegovina/)

Till 1995, major skirmishes between the Serbs, Bosnians and Croats; on the other hand, between 1998 and 2001, bloody conflicts between Serbs and Kosovo Albanians describe the Yugoslav Wars. In this context, in fact all these questions above can be considered true in its own right. On the other hand, rightful answers don't change the negative consequences of the Yugoslav Wars. The war caused an enormous destruction within the country. Human cost being in the first place, the war caused the Yugoslav economy to collapse. Long lasting territorial disputes emerged between the young states of Yugoslavia. Social links between the people of Yugoslavia are dramatically harmed. Beside the collapsed "invisible bridges" between the different ethnic and religious groups of Yugoslavia, many physical monuments, sanctuaries, residential buildings and bridges are destructed. *Stari Most* was one of the most important one or more clearly had become one of the most symbolic one after through its destruction. Fundamentally, this paper argues that during the post-war periods, societies tend to symbolize the architectures with "old but gold" days. As it is seen on the case of *Stari Most,* most of the Yugoslavs re-interpreted the meaning of *Stari Most* after its destruction. On the other hand, even the international community put forward the reconstruction of the bridge by symbolizing the reunion of the Bosnian society. The following chapter of the study shall focus on the history of *Stari Most*.

1. *STARI MOST:* THE TRIANGLE OF CONSTRUCTION, DESTRUCTION, RECONSTRUCTION

Stari Most is constructed above the Neretva River among the city of Mostar. Before exerting the technical data regarding the bridge; it is considered necessary to focus on the ethnic and religious composition of Mostar during the history in order to comprehend the identicalness between the bridge and city.

Despite of the fact that during the Ottoman period there is no certain census data of the city, descriptions regarding the social dynamics of the town give us some hints. According to the nomination for inscription on the world heritage list report of UNESCO, although Mostar had common features with the other states of the empire; in the sense of religious and cultural plurality, Mostar used to differ from the others very quickly (Nomination for Inscription…). In particular, the report focuses on the religious plurality of the city by describing the existence of mosques, churches and synagogues side by side and the ethnic harmony between the Catholic Croats, Eastern Orthodox Serbs, Muslims and Sephardic Jews who came to Mostar after their expulsion from Spain in 1492 (Ibid.).

It is very possible to argue that Mostar kept its natural plurality also during the Yugoslavia period. In his demographic study, Ondrej Zila adapts the Bougarel's typology to Bosnian cities. In this context, Zila includes the Mostar into a certain city type call heterogeneous ethnically balanced community. Based on this definition, in that type of cities like Mostar, the first nation should not be represented by more than %50 and the second strongest nation shouldn't exceed the third nation twofold. Finally, the third founding nation should be represented by at least %10 of the total number of city inhabitants (Zila, 2013:13). In this context, the ethnic composition of Mostar before the Yugoslav Wars was perfectly matching with the Bougarel's typology. In the depend, before 1991 the population of the city was constructed by %35 Muslims, %34 Croats, %19 Serbs and %12 others (Palmberger, 2012:11). On the other hand, in the present day the total population of Mostar is estimated 113.169 but there is no official information regarding the certain numbers of ethnic groups. It is estimated that more than %50 percent of the city is constructed by Croats, approximately %45 Muslims and finally %4-5 by Serbs (Ünal,2015:146). In the light of these information it very possible to argue that today Mostar ethnically turned into a bi-national ethnically balanced community (Zila:13) and lost its amazing ethnic and religious plurality.

According to the Ottoman State Archives, the construction order of *Stari Most* was given on 25 February 1566 by *Suleiman the Magnificent* and the construction of the bridge is completed only in a year by *Mimar Hayruddin* who was one of the most famous apprentice of *Mimar Sinan* (Doğan, 2011:8-12). Basically, the length of the bridge is 30 meters (100 footers), its height from the water level is 24 meters and its width is calculated 4 meters (Ibid.).According to historical data, the bridge had three major recondition respectively in 1677, 1738 and finally in 1957 (Ibid.).Despite of the fact that *Stari Most* had shown a great resistance to abrasive flow of Neretva River for 426 years; the Tuesday of 9 November 1993 had become a turning point day both for the bridge and city.

The complexity of the Yugoslav Wars was making the armed conflict "the war of anyone with everyone". In this context, 1993 was one of the most critical year of the Yugoslav Wars. As is known, the Serbian-Croatian war in 1991 was only one series of wars which caused the collapse of Yugoslavia. After the ceasefire agreement signed on 2 January 1992 (Cigar, 1993:297), Serbian and Croatian aggression gravitated towards the Bosnian Muslims. Under these circumstances, Mostar was one of the most critical city where the Croat and Bosnian Muslim forces could come across. As a result of long-lasting armed conflicts between Croats and Bosnian Muslims in Central Bosnia and Herzegovina -particularly in Mostar- during 1993, in the morning of 9 November 1993, *Stari Most* is destroyed by heavy Croat artilleries (Malcolm, 2002:254).

Fig. 2 Mostar Bridge After Heavy Shelling

(Source: https://www.worldbulletin.net/balkans/24-years-since-destruction-of-bosnias-stari-most-h166155.html)

The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina ended on 14 December 1995 after the confirmation of Dayton Agreement by all the parties. Despite of the fact that in the late days of 1995, the war came to an end in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the destructive results of the war forced the different nations of the former Yugoslavia to keep their war memories alive. In this sense, until 2004 when the bridge is recovered, the nonexistence of *Stari Most* was the most remarkable and tragic evidence of the Yugoslavia's downfall with all its values.

Needless to say, that after such a major downfall, the recovery of the former nations of former Yugoslavia could not possible only with national efforts. For this reason, the involvement of the international community to Bosnia and Herzegovina gave a start to a long-lasting recovery process in the country. Not only the politics, economy or social structure of the country but also the cultural heritage of Bosnia and Herzegovina "entered the radar" of the international community and in this sense, the reconstruction of the *Stari Most* is given a start. On 23 July 2004, "*Novi Most*"[4] is inaugurated. In other words, by the description of Armaly and *et al.* a "coalition of committed" consisted mainly from Turkey and respectively from France, Italy, Netherlands, Croatia, European Union, World Bank, UNESCO, Aga Khan Trust for Culture and World Monuments Fund and The Council of Europe Development, accomplished the "mission" (Armaly, Blasi and Hannah, 2004:7).In the present day, the bridge is rebuilt and one more time became one with the Mostar city. On the other hand, what was the meaning of *Stari Most*'s existence, vanishing and "reincarnation"?

Fig. 3 Reconstruction of *Stari Most*

(Source: https://archnet.org/sites/6250)

2. A BRIDGE MORE THAN STONES

Symbols are one of the oldest tool of mankind in order to give secret messages or in contrast in order to make something synonym with another object. For instance, universally olive branch or white dove is the symbol of peace likewise how white flag symbolizes the nonresistance. According to Şenol, people do not use symbols instinctively, but they use them by knowing that they are covering an another notion or phenomenon by using a symbol (Şenol, 2017:82). In other words, it is possible to argue that people do not always communicate with words or feelings but sometimes they prefer to use symbols as a short and

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[4]The new brige. In here, the author prefers an allusive description.

effective way of communication (Ofuafo, 2013:296). In the light of these information, the following question reappears: *What (was) is the symbolic meaning of Mostar Bridge?*

"*Rivers divide; bridges unite*" (Doğan:7) In fact this quote reflects the approach of Ottomans to their bridge constructions. Not only the *Stari Most* but also another very famous bridge in Balkans, *The Bridge on the Drina*, which inspired the Ivo Andric's famous novel symbolizes the great harmony of ethnic and religious pluralism in Balkans. Particularly in Balkans, bridges symbolize the meeting point of different ethnic and religious groups and in addition these bridges are considered as the "unification" point of differences in peace and order. Specifically, on the case of *Stari Most*, the bridge was considered as the interaction occasion of Muslims, Catholic Croats, Orthodox Serbs, the Jews and the others. On the other hand, naturally there are some oppositions regarding the symbolic meaning of *Stari Most*. For instance, Krishnamurthy shares her fieldwork experiences and her interview with Aida Omanoviç who was the head of Mostar Office. During the interview Omanoviç shares her opinion regarding the bridge as following:

"*Today they want to make a symbol of it. I don't know why... I simply refuse to connect the Old Bridge and the recent war. I don't want to see the bridge as a symbol. When the Old Bridge was destroyed, it was considered that Mostar is dead- totally killed*" (Krishnamurthy, 2012:82).

Despite of the fact that Omanoviç rejects to symbolize the bridge with something, in fact the feeling of the Mostar society after the destruction, displays the importance of *Stari Most* for the collective memory of Mostar's people. In other words, Mostar society's public representations of the past (Hirst and Manier, 2008:185) which are mostly shaped by the proud of social togetherness is fundamentally collapsed after the destruction of *Stari Most*. This reality can be also named as the "genocide of collective memory". In a similar vein, Karasu argues that, Yugoslav Wars caused an *urbicide*[5]in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in particular for Mostar (Karasu, 2008:52). In other words, in one side while the systematic destruction of Ottoman architectures in Balkans work in support of young states' nation-state building process while showing the Ottoman patronage as a "dark period" (Turhan, 2005:591), on the other hand these destructions fundamentally harm the collective memory Balkan societies.

At the same time, after the destruction, the new symbol of the *Stari Most*'s was defining an in close gap between the Muslim population of the city and the Catholic Croats. Especially, when the demographic distribution of the city is taken under consideration, it is possible to claim that the destruction of the *Stari Most* created an East-West Dichotomy in Mostar. In here, the extension of East-West Dichotomy has a key role to fully understand the previous argument. In his much-cited work *Clash of Civilizations* thesis, Samuel Huntington argues that from now on potential clashes within the international system won't be only between states but it will be among the different civilizations/cultures. According to him, in the micro level some inter-civilization relations tend to be more conflictual than the others - for instance relations between Islam and Orthodoxy or other Western Christian Churches-. On the other hand, in the macro level, these clashes shall turn into a "West and the rest" discourse (Huntington, 1996:82). In other words, it possible to claim that East-West Dichotomy identifies a sharp differentiation which is not only based on directions but also bases on values and cultures. Particularly on the case of Mostar, this East-West Dichotomy not only refers to ethnic, religious division but also moral secession.

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[5]The term of *urbicide* defines the genocide of cities.

On the other hand, since the end of Yugoslav Wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the efforts of the international community had significantly increased. One of the most important and difficult task of the international community was creating a united Bosnia and Herzegovina in the sense of ethnic and religious association. Exactly at this point, the reconstruction of the *Stari Most* not only assisted the reunification of social links in Mostar, but also the reconstruction of the bridge is used as a symbolic event or effort in order to rejoin the whole Bosnia and Herzegovina. In the second place, 23 July 2004 can be also considered as a mile stone date for Bosnia and Herzegovina in the sense of international community's reappearance in the country as the guarantor of the peace and order both in the city of Mostar and in the whole Bosnia and Herzegovina.

CONCLUSION

In the final analyses, it can be argued that symbolization is one of the oldest communication tool of mankind. Likewise the other regions of the world, in Balkans, it is also very possible to observe many symbolic architectures like *Stari Most*. Despite of the fact that in the very beginning *Stari Most* was constructed for the necessities of the local community; in the course of the time the bridge took on different symbolic meanings. Till the "well-functioning" ages of the Ottoman Empire and *Titoist* Yugoslavia, people considered the bridge as the meeting and transition point of different ethnic and religious groups. On the other hand, *Stari Most* had its strongest symbolic meaning after its destruction in the very beginning of 1990's. In this respect, it is possible to claim that after its destruction the value and the meaning of *Stari Most* is re-discovered not only by the local community of Mostar but also by the Bosnians or even by the Yugoslavs. Till, its reconstruction the bridge symbolized the fragmentation of Mostar's local community and Bosnian people. On the other hand, in 2000's the reconstruction of *Stari Most* didn't symbolize something different but the efforts of the international community focused on to reconstruct the collective memory of the local community and Bosnian people based on the "old but gold" days.

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