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Renaming of Public Space: A Policy of  
Exclusion in Bosnia and Herzegovina



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## Abstract

During the war and thereafter, the names of public places (e.g. streets, squares, airports and even towns) underwent a process of “national screening” and in many cases were re-named. The cities of Sarajevo, Mostar and Banja Luka have seen the most incidences of the renaming of streets. On the case of Mostar, a city that has been divided into a Bosniak-dominated eastern and a Croat dominated western part of the city since the 1992-95 war, I show in this paper how the renaming of streets in Croat-dominated West Mostar presents a policy of exclusion, whereby the political strategy followed is to nationalise public space. At the same time I argue that the effect of this move has on the population is not as clear as it may seem. Although the renaming of streets is experienced by the non-Croat population as a practice of exclusion, it would be overhasty to assume that Croat citizens simply internalise the new street policy and in a similar way reconfigure their memories.

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## Keywords

public space, street names, post-socialism, post-war, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mostar



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In present-day Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), names, particularly those of public places, are ascribed great importance and are often the cause of disputes between the three constituent peoples – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – some of which even end before the courts.<sup>1</sup> Public places, particularly street names (but also squares, airports, cultural institutions etc.) were prone to being renamed during and after the 1992-1995 war by the national<sup>2</sup> group that dominated the territory in question. The renaming process has a twofold effect; first it eradicates the old name and thereby aims to “de-commemorate” the event/person/place that was previously remembered and in a second step, by renaming, it establishes a new commemorative space (Azaryahu 1997). In the case of West Mostar, the de-commemoration concerns the socialist past while the new commemorative space is dedicated to Croat national history.

Before the war, many streets in Mostar, as elsewhere in BiH (and in entire Yugoslavia) honoured the socialist era. Tito’s aim to unite the Yugoslav people and to enforce a shared identity and a shared past was inscribed upon the urban landscape. Streets, for example, were named in memory of important Partisans who fought against the Nazis during WWII. With the 1992-1995 war and the national division of BiH<sup>3</sup> (laid down in the Dayton Peace Agreement), street names were prone to being renamed in order to emphasise the national division of BiH. For BiH’s Croats who claimed Mostar to be their “capital city” (in contrast to Bosniak-dominated Sarajevo and Serb-dominated Banja Luka), the renaming of streets was an act of inscribing this claim upon the urban landscape. This paper first depicts the process of the renaming

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1 When the issue of renaming towns in the Serb Republic (*Republika Srpska*) was brought before the Constitutional Court of BiH, it was decided that this violated the rights of the other two constituent peoples (Croats and Bosniaks) to collective equality and to freedom from discrimination (Feldman 2005: 650).

2 Even if the local term “*narod*” cannot be directly translated into the Western notion of “nation”, it is still better translated as “nation” than as “ethnic group”. Moreover, the term ethnic has been analysed within a discourse of power. Using the example of Great Britain, Gerd Baumann (1996) shows that the term ethnic is used only for some groups (mainly for immigrants), but not for others (i.e. those from the “Western World”, such as English people, Germans, Americans, etc.).

3 With the Dayton Peace Agreement, signed on 14 December 1995, the 43-month long war in BiH officially ended. From that day on, BiH became a shared state of the three constituent peoples: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs, with Sarajevo as the remaining capital. But the country was split into two entities (and the special district of Brčko): the Serb Republic and the Federation of BiH with its 10 cantons. The Washington Agreement that established the Federation of BiH (which comprises 51 per cent of BiH’s territory as opposed to the Serb Republic constituting 49 per cent) foresaw Mostar as a united Bosniak-Croat city and as the capital of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (Canton 7).

ing of streets in Mostar and shows how in this effort Croat nationalist elites erased the socialist past in favour of a Croat national history that was inscribed upon West Mostar's cityscape. In a second step, the paper questions the immediate effect the renaming of streets on the population and their historical consciousness. While the renaming of streets in West Mostar is a clear sign to non-Croats that this territory does no longer belong to them, there is little evidence suggesting that the Croats of West Mostar have rewritten their memories in the same speedy and radical manner. We should not imagine nationality politics as a top-down process whereby citizens are pictured as empty containers who passively accept these politics wholesale. Much research on the renaming of public space leaves the question as to how the wider population receives this process unanswered. In avoiding this question, such studies risk to depict a picture of a historical consciousness as being passed on in a top-down manner.

## Renaming as a political strategy in times of regime change

The renaming of streets is not unique to BiH, it is a common practice when regime change calls for a new historiography. Often a new era begins with the renaming of the physical environment. The collapse of the communist regimes in eastern and south-eastern Europe offers a wealth of examples for the transformation of cityscapes, including the renaming of streets, of public space in general and even of the cities themselves (see, for example, Azaryahu 1997, Ugrešić 1998, Light 2004, Rihtman-Augustin 2004, Gill 2005, Palonen 2008). But this process is not restricted to post-socialist Europe and can be found in other cases when regime change or significant changes in power relations have taken place (see, for example, Cohen and Kliot 1992, Leitner and Kang 1999, Kliot and Mansfield 1997, Swart 2008). Taking Cyprus as an example, a radical renaming of public space took place after the Turkish invasion and occupation of northern Cyprus in 1974. While in Cyprus's Greek-dominated south, old street names have remained, the Turkish-dominated north has seen a rigorous renaming of places and streets in order to "Turkify" the territory. In the course of this venture, even old Ottoman place-names were renamed because the administration did not trust their "Turkishness" (Kliot and Mansfield 1997: 512).<sup>4</sup>

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4 For a discussion on place-names in Israel, see Cohen and Kliot 1992.



A political era is often heralded by naming and renaming “captured territory”, as has been the case in many modern nation-states:

For nationalism naming and re-naming – the continuing transformation of the supposedly eternal physical environment – is one of its most powerful and contentious tools, as well as one of power’s most explicit attempts to rewrite the past, literally reinscribing the surface of the world, and changing the name on the map – often while laying claim to something more ancient and authentic than the ‘old’ one. (Hodgkin and Radstone 2006: 12)

In many parts of the world, street names have served to evince an official version of the national past by commemorating historical figures and events. This is why street names are prone to a process of renaming in times of political change. Although streets are not places of commemoration in the strict sense, they still map the historico-political landscape:

Street signs are mundane objects. Accordingly, it seems that the impact of commemorative street names on the production of a sense of shared past and in evincing official versions of history is significantly less than that of historical monuments, historical museums or memorial ceremonies. However commemorative street names (like other place names) conflate history and geography and merge the past they commemorate into ordinary settings of human life (Azaryahu 1997: 181).

Moreover, precisely due their mundane character, which camouflages the manipulation behind it, street names represent history as a “natural order of things” (Azaryahu 1997: 181). Although in Mostar, the renaming of streets is still too recent and contested to be accepted as a “natural order of things”, we may assume that this has been the aim of the Croat political elites who are behind the renaming of streets.

The aim of nationalising territory in Yugoslavia started long before the war in the 1990s. A good example is Belgrade at the end of the nineteenth century, which underwent a process of the renaming of public space (Stojanović 2007). At that time an elite commission – including well-respected politicians and intellectuals – was authorised to rename Belgrade’s streets. Until then, streets had been named after trades and professions, important buildings or simply their outward appearance and were then renamed after geographical places important in Serbia’s national history and major cities in the Slav world. If a virtual map were drawn connecting the places “remembered” in the new street names, the borders of medieval Serbia, came to the forefront. With this project, the nationally conscious intellectuals of the commission hoped to bring Belgrade’s population to identify itself with the places remembered in

the new street names so that they would accept them as “their own” (Stojanović 2007: 76). As Dubravka Stojanović (2007) vividly shows in her analysis of this process, the new names stood in sharp contrast to names chosen by Belgrade’s people for their restaurants and inns that were much more internationally orientated; the owners preferred names of distant places such as “America”, “New York”, “Bosporus”, “Little-Paris”, “Little-Istanbul” and “Monaco”. Stojanović’s observations of the renaming of Belgrade’s public space thereby support the interpretation that those behind the renaming do not necessarily act according to the understanding and opinion of the wider society, as will be discussed later in this paper.

While the marking of public space (including street names) is a common practice in the nation-building process, what does the renaming of streets tell us other than revealing the wish of new power-holders to promote certain events while neglecting others? What does it tell us about the people who walk and live in those streets? Should we think of historical consciousness as being initiated from the top (by political elites) and passively received by the population? This view has often directed the analysis of transient regimes, as Keith Brown argues:

Yet in a region of transient regimes, what is emphasised about the inhabitants is their supposed willingness to adopt another national affiliation quickly. In parallel fashion, the new state is presumed to be ready and able to accept them as *tabulae rasae* and to inscribe national identity on them anew. Such a view at best credits the population with cynicism, a sort of post-modern shiftlessness; at worst, perceived from the stance of the nation-state, it presumes they have no notion of solidarity until given to them by a state (for, in this logic, only states make nations) and thereby makes them into ciphers. What one might term ‘experienced’ history drops out of sight as the rhythm of every aspect of life is taken to be determined by the continuities or disjunctures in ‘top-down’ history. (Brown 2003: 129)

We need to keep in mind that Mostaris depending on their age, have been exposed to different nationality politics, that were often in conflict with one another. It is unlikely that people completely erased their historical consciousness with each political change in keeping with the new historiography promoted by the respective power-holders. Moreover, autobiographical memories that do not necessarily fit into the official historiography promoted by the ruling elites, needs to find a place in the analysis as well (see Palmberger 2008, Palmberger forthcoming).

## Mostar: Remaining divisions

The Herzegovinian city of Mostar became a fiercely contested territory during the period of war and has thereafter remained a nationally divided city, with a Bosniak-dominated east- and a Croat-dominated west part. Mostar represents a special post-war situation as it is the only city of its size in BiH that has been left divided amongst two national groups almost equal in size.

The composition of Mostar's population has changed drastically as a consequence of the war. While before the war the population was made up of 35 per cent Muslims (Bosniaks), 34 per cent Croats, 19 per cent Serbs and 12 per cent others (including those who identified themselves as Yugoslavs); presently Mostar is split in half between Croats and Bosniaks, who make up the vast majority of the population.<sup>5</sup> Today, most *Mostarci* (Mostaris) define themselves as *Bošnjaci/Muslimani* (Bosniaks/Muslims), *Hrvati* (Croats) or *Srbi* (Serbs), unless they are members of one of the minorities, or unless they are among the few who continue to call themselves *Jugosloveni* (Yugoslavs).<sup>6</sup> Although the main line of identification is religion (most Bosniaks are Muslims, most Croats are Catholics and most Serbs are Orthodox), the divisions are more of a national than a religious kind (see Palmberger 2006). Still, the claim of national suppression during Tito's socialist Yugoslavia went hand in hand with the claim of religious suppression.

The year 2004 was a year of reunification in Mostar, at least symbolically: the city was officially reunified with a shared administration and city council and the reconstructed Old Bridge (*Stari most*) was reopened. Most of the international media reports, however, focused on the latter. Since the end of the war, "bridging" has been the self-declared aim of the international community. Reunification and reconciliation stood at the top of their list of priorities. Although the meaning of reconciliation was rarely clarified, it nevertheless functioned as a buzzword to attract funding, especially for smaller non-governmental organisations. It was also used to legitimise various activities led by the established international organisations. The Old Bridge took on a central role in the discourse of reconciliation, especially when plans for reconstruction were made.

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5 Of around 20,000 Serbs only about one thousand remained in the divided city during the war, and only a minority returned thereafter (Bose 2002: 105). Furthermore, significant demographic changes were caused by the flight of the majority of Mostar's intelligentsia and middle-class professionals (Bose 2002: 106).

6 In 2007, the *Federalni Zavod za Statistiku* estimated the population of Mostar to be 111,198.



Figure 1. Photo of the rebuilt *Stari most* (Old Bridge).

The old Ottoman bridge, destroyed in 1993, was finally reconstructed in 2004 with the financial help of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and the World Bank. The reconstruction of the bridge with its grandiose reopening celebration carried a lot of symbolic meaning, at least for the organisers. Ten years after the war had ended in Mostar, the international community needed a showpiece of success to signal that the reconciliation process had progressed. In his lecture at the *Examination Schools* in Oxford on 23 July 2004, the High Representative<sup>7</sup>, Paddy Ashdown, spoke of the reopening of Mostar's Old Bridge as a symbol that civilisation had prevailed over barbarism and that it was a clear sign of goodwill for a new start of multinational coexistence in Mostar. This assessment

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<sup>7</sup> The Dayton Peace Agreement put into place not only an international peacekeeping force to ensure security in the country, but it also installed an international authority, the Office of the High Representative (OHR), to implement the civilian dimension of the peace agreement.



is not shared by all experts on BiH, who rather see in the reopening of the new Old Bridge the desire of the international community to prove that the reconciliation process they have aimed for has been successful (see, for example Hoare 2004; Bougarel, Helms, and Duijzings 2007).

As described above, the international community has been promoting reconciliation and reunification in Mostar, drawing heavily on symbolic language such as the metaphor of the bridge. “Crossing sides” is per se seen as a positive act, while not crossing sides is seen as the equivalent of a lack of open-mindedness or even of hatred. In this context, a closer examination of why people do or do not cross sides is neglected. Although I do not wish to question the reconstruction of the bridge, it is still not clear to what extent it has had an impact on the reunification of Mostar. Moreover, although often unmentioned, the Old Bridge does not connect the Bosniak and Croat parts of the city (which are divided by the *Bulevar* – the main-street before the war and frontline during the war – west of the bridge).<sup>8</sup>

The lives of most Bosniaks and Croats are still separated. If they do not actively seek to interact with one another, Bosniaks and Croats actually share little time with their national counterparts: Bosniak and Croat children attend different schools, teenagers go to different universities, adults have separated workplaces and leisure time is predominantly spent on “one’s own” side of the city (see Palmberger 2010). Only a small number of people still maintain friendships with pre-war friends of a different nationality and for them even the nature of their relationships has often changed. Many of my informants who still maintain their old cross-national friendships no longer visit each other at home like they used to before the war, and instead only meet in public places like cafés. This change symbolises for my informants a shift in the degree of intimacy of these old friendships.

Although there are indeed no clear signs marking the exact border between Bosniak- and Croat-dominated Mostar, markers giving hints of the “nationality” of the two city parts clearly exist. Apart from street names, which will be discussed in more detail later in this paper, these are primarily religious symbols: Catholic churches on the west side and mosques on the east side.<sup>9</sup> As found throughout BiH, in and

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8 *Stari grad* (Old Town), where the bridge is located, made it onto the World Monuments Fund list of the 100 most endangered sites of historical and cultural significance (Grodach 2002: 66).

9 Another identity marker, though not visible in the cityscape, is language. But the languages on the Bosniak-dominated east and the Croat-dominated west side of Mostar are only minimally distinguishable and one often has to listen carefully to conversations in order to grasp “typical” Croat or “typical” Bosniak words.

around Mostar these places of worship have also significantly grown in number. Many mosques and churches have been built in recent times, and they attempt not only to outnumber one another but also compete in size. Since religion is the main marker of national identity in BiH, religious symbols are the most straightforward territorial markers. This does not necessarily mean, however, that Bosnians welcome the massive investment in churches and mosques. Quite to the contrary, many of my informants expressed great displeasure at what they regarded as a waste of money, money they thought would have been better invested in public amenities like schools and hospitals.

One of the most striking religious territorial markers in Mostar is a huge cross overlooking the city, which was erected in 2000 on the summit of Mount Hum. The cross, around 30 metre high, sticks out of the landscape and is one of the first things visitors see when driving into the city. The installation of this cross greatly provoked the Bosniak population, especially considering the fact that a great part of the heavy damage to the city was caused by artillery that was positioned at this mountain. The Croat population, on the other hand, presented the cross as a symbol of peace and the Bosniak request to remove the cross was seen as a sign of Islamic intolerance against Croats and their Catholic religion. After several years, however, the cross has become, if not an accepted part of life, then at least a popular subject for jokes amongst the Bosniak population. For example, they joke that the cross, if not good for anything else, at least provides much-needed shade during hot summer days. On another mountain on the east side of the city, there is a huge sign laid out in white stones stating in capital letters, "*BiH volimo te*" (BiH we love you). Particularly, before the war it read "*Tito volimo te*" (Tito we love you) but had to be revised after Tito's death and the breakup of Yugoslavia. This nationalism, however, is more present among Bosniaks than Croats. Most supporters of the new BiH state can be found among Bosniaks, while Croats generally show more patriotic sentiments for Croatia than for BiH. The BiH flag serves to illustrate this. On public holidays, in West Mostar the flag of BiH is only displayed on official governmental buildings (a new practice fostered by the international community) and on the buildings of international organisations, while on the east side the BiH flag can be seen on many buildings, even on small shops. Let us now turn to the political practice of renaming streets in post-socialist BiH.

## BiH's new street names – a policy of exclusion

Street naming is a state-wide practice in BiH, used to establish areas of influence and to assign a certain territory exclusively to only one nation. The nation's claim for exclusive rights of a certain territory is manifested in the new names, which establish a historic link between a certain place and the nation. At the same time, the past and current presence of those of belonging to other nations is negated. Before turning to the case of Mostar, I will provide a few examples from Sarajevo and Banja Luka to illustrate that the renaming of streets is a phenomenon that is practised across the state and is not particular to West Mostar. The three cities, Sarajevo, Banja Luka and Mostar, are each unofficially attributed to one of the three constituent peoples in BiH. Although Sarajevo is the capital not only of the Bosniak-Croat Federation but also of the entire country, the Serb and Croat parts of the population often perceive it as a city governed by Bosniaks. Since the war, the presence of Bosniaks – as well as their political power – in Sarajevo has increased. This change in power relations is visible in the cityscape. Although mosques and Catholic and Orthodox churches can still be seen standing next to one another, streets are now named in favour of the Bosniak national heritage. One of the post-war cantonal government's first actions in reconstructing Sarajevo was to appoint an administrative commission for renaming the capital's streets:

The 15-member Commission included artists, writers and historians, all resident in Sarajevo and mainly Muslims, nominated by the new canton [canton of Sarajevo] government that deemed them to be representative of the community that had survived the siege by the Četnici [this is the local expression for Serb soldiers used by Bosniaks and Croats and derives from WWII]. (Robinson, Engelstoft, and Pobric 2001: 966-967)

Advised by the commission, streets carrying the names of historic personalities of Serb (and also, but to a lesser degree, Croat) origin in particular were renamed, while signs in Cyrillic script (used by Serbs) were removed. Streets recalling the Serb and Croat presence in the city were renamed, like Belgrade Street (*Beogradska ulica*), together with streets named after the famous Serb linguist and reformer of the Serb language, Vuk Karadžić (*ulica Vuka Karadžića*), and King Tomislav, the ruler of Croatia in the Middle Ages (*ulica Kralja Tomislava*). In the process of nationalising places and streets, not only were the other nations marginalised but so too was the socialist past. During this process, names that had been replaced during Tito's period of rule were either changed back to their old names or were given new names:

[S]treets in Sarajevo, formerly with the names of communist worthies, now bear the names of writers, poets, military, political and mythological heroes, readily identifiable as ‘Bosniaks’ (Bosnjaks) rather than ‘Serbs’ or ‘Croats’. The legal tender of the Muslim-Croat federation incorporates symbols relating to the Bogumil Church from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, an appeal to earlier roots of Bosnian Muslims and other Bosnians when Bosnia covered a larger territory. (Robinson, Engelstoft, and Pobric 2001: 239)

Interestingly, some of the street names in memory of famous Partisans were not entirely removed but were moved from the city centre to the outskirts of Sarajevo (Robinson, Engelstoft, and Pobric 2001: 967-968). Especially in the city centre, street names are supposed to reflect Bosnian history; more often than not, this means Bosniak history.

The renaming of streets caused some resistance amongst Sarajevo’s population when the commission decided to rename the main street of Sarajevo, which was originally named after Tito (*ulica Maršala Tita*), in honour of Alija Izetbegović (a Bosniak activist and first president of BiH). This disagreement was expressed in protests and demonstrations in the city (Robinson and Pobric 2006: 245-246). Due to this resistance (and to the High Representative’s objections to naming the street after Alija Izetbegović), the main street in Sarajevo retained its name in commemoration of the former Yugoslav leader.

In Banja Luka, the seat of the government of the Serb Republic (*Republika Srpska*) and its de facto capital, streets underwent a similar process of renaming, in this case to strengthen the Serb presence. Looking at Banja Luka’s current street index, we see a clear dominance of streets reminding one of the Serb national heritage, while only a small minority of streets have names that can be identified as either Croat or Bosniak in origin. This was different in pre-war Banja Luka when a great number of streets had names indicating the Bosniak or Croat presence in the town (see *Dnevni List*, 15 October 2007). One very telling example is that of *ulica fra Grge Marića*, one of the city’s main streets named after a Franciscan monk, which today is called *Srpska ulica* (Serb street).

In terms of street names in Mostar, it is necessary to distinguish between East and West Mostar. While in the former, street names for the most part remained the same as they had been before 1992, street names in the latter underwent considerable renaming. This process started when West Mostar was declared the capital of *Herceg-Bosna* during the war in the 1990s. Herzegovina with Mostar as its main city has been central in the Croats’ drive towards independence, for the Ustasha movement during WWII as well as for the HVO (*Hrvatsko vijeće obrane*, Croat Defence Coun-





Figure 2. *Ulica fra Didaka Buntića* is a new street name, named after a Catholic priest born in 1871. The old street name (in the sign below) was dedicated to Matije Gubac, a Croat farmer who was a leader of a farmers' uprising in the sixteenth century. During WWII his name was associated with the socialist Yugoslav Partisans and a Croat and a Slovene Partisan brigade were named after Gubac.

cil) during the war in the early 1990s. Today, street names, newly erected memorials and religious symbols mark the public space of West Mostar as part of the Croat nation. The claim of Mostar being the city of BiH's Croats leads, in its extreme interpretation, to a denial of Bosniak (and Serb) existence or to a denial of the Bosniak-dominated part of the city. The claim that Mostar is an exclusively Croat city goes so far that the Bosniak east side of the city is simply ignored, e.g. in books on or maps of Mostar. Take, for example, a book published by the *Hrvatska kulturna zajednica u Federaciji BiH* (Croat Cultural Society of the Federation of BiH) entitled, *Mostar: ljudi, kultura, civilizacija* (*Mostar: People, Culture and Civilization*) (Augustinović 1999). This book gives a detailed account of all cultural and educational institutions in Mostar without mentioning any such institution located in East Mostar. Interestingly, a study of Mostar's tourist guides conducted by Pilvi Torsti revealed that Bosniak tourist guides continue to present the entire city similar to before the war, while

Croat guides concentrate only on West Mostar and leave the Ottoman heritage, such as the Old Town, unmentioned (Torsti 2004: 151).

The new street names emphasise a shared history with the motherland of Croatia by recalling Croat historic personalities and important Croat cities. The former include names of members of the Catholic Church and politically influential persons from the medieval Croat Kingdom as well as the NDH state. The new street names invoke the national meta-narrative by recalling the past glory of the medieval Croat Kingdom as well as the long period of victimisation on the way to national liberation. The victimisation of the Croat people by the communists is thereby given special attention. In this narrative we can attribute the mythical experience that Mitja Velikonja (1998) identifies, not only to the Croat, but also to the Serb and Bosniak nations. Velikonja divides this mythical experience into “mythems”, each comprising one of four phases: (1) the golden age; (2) defeat by a strong neighbour; (3) the Yugoslav phase; and (4) the final liberation. In the Croat case, the first phase is represented by the medieval Croat Kingdom which was brought to an end by Ottoman occupation. The occupation (the second phase) was followed by the repression of the Croat nation by Yugoslavia (the third phase). The future that Croats have been calling for is called national independence (the fourth phase), towards which the entire energy of the nation should be directed.

Like the advocates of Croatia’s war of independence, nationalist Croats in BiH defined their true national identity in sharp contrast to the Yugoslav identity and the socialist past: heroes of Yugoslavia were called criminals and any reminders of them had to be erased from everyday life. Most monuments from the socialist past in West Mostar were razed during and after the war with the exception of an immense Partisan memorial cemetery that is still placed there, even if heavily contested by the majority of Mostar’s Croats. In the case of street names, the communist past was erased by “Croatianising” them. For example, the street once called *Omladinska* (Street of the Youth) was renamed *Hrvatske mladeži* (Croat Youth). The simple message behind this was that Croats should no longer be reminded of the communist youth (which might bring up fond memories of being a member of the Yugoslav Pioneers) but should instead direct their feelings and affection exclusively towards the Croat youth.

A similar example is *Trg Rondo*, a central roundabout and square in West Mostar which was renamed *Trg Hrvatskih Velikana – Trg Mate Bobana* (Croat Nobles Square – Mate Boban Square). Although this square has been renamed, the majority of people still refer to it by its former and simpler name *Rondo*. *Rondo* is also the location

of a cultural centre formally called *Dom kulture* (House of Culture). Today, big letters on the top of the building proclaim its new name: *Hrvatski dom herceg Stjepan Kosača* (Croat House – Duke Stjepan Kosač).



Figure 3. *Hrvatski Dom* at *Rondo*.

In West Mostar, streets recalling the socialist period and those named after people known for their role in Serb or Bosniak national history were replaced by the names of Croat rulers such as kings and dukes or religious leaders such as cardinals and bishops. They were also renamed in memory of recent national heroes and victims, or after Croat cities in order to emphasise their affiliation with the mother-country Croatia. In this spirit, the JNA (*Jugoslovenska narodna armija*, Yugoslav People's Army) street became *Kneza Branimira* (Duke of Dalmatian Croatia in the ninth century) and *Bulevar Narodne Revolucije* (Boulevard of the People's Revolution) became *Bulevar Hrvatskih Branitelja* (Boulevard of the Croat Defenders). Thus the Boulevard once named after the People's Revolution was renamed in honour of the Croat defenders who 50 years later fought for the Croat national independence.



The renamed streets clearly show that the heroes of today are no longer the Partisans who established Tito's Yugoslavia but those who fought, both to defend the Croat nation and for its liberation. But streets are not only dedicated to national heroes but also to victims. For example, one street in West Mostar has been renamed *ulica Bleiburskih žrtava* (Victims of Bleiburg Street<sup>10</sup>). Another street previously called *ulica Jakova Baruha Španca*, after a Spanish communist revolutionist, is today called *ulica Žrtava komunizma* (Victims of Communism Street). *Ulica Petra Drapsina*, named after a leading Partisan in the liberation of Mostar on 14 February 1945 was renamed *ulica Franjevačka* (Franciscan Street). The day of Mostar's liberation by the Partisans is a day of mourning for Croats who remember the execution of several clerics by the Partisans, after each of whom a street has been named. Since the official Croat commemoration of 14 February 1945 is not a day of celebration but of mourning, the former street *Avenija 14. Februar* (Avenue of 14 February) was renamed *Avenija Kralja Tomislava* (see *Slobodna Dalmacija*, 24 February 1995). As shown above, the street in memory of this Croat ruler of the Middle Ages was renamed in Sarajevo.

The renaming of Mostar's streets did not remain unchallenged. When Mostar was under the interim EUAM (European Union Administration)<sup>11</sup> from July 1994 until January 1997, the goal was to restore it as a multinational city. In this respect, the renamed streets were seen as an obstacle. When in 2004 the High Representative, Paddy Ashdown, issued a new city statute for Mostar prescribing a unified city council and administration he also established a commission for revising the names of streets, squares and other public places. The commission consisted of seven members of which three were of Croat, three of Bosniak, and one of Serb national background. The commission's task was to advise the city council, which in turn had been put in charge of changing the names of two-thirds of all streets and institutions. Generally, the commission's existence never became widely known among Mostar's population

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10 When the Partisans met the British troops in Bleiburg, an Austrian town, in April 1945, the British handed over more than 18,000 captured members of various anti-Partisan forces (Slovene home guards, Ustasha soldiers, as well as Serb and Muslim Chetniks) who had sought refuge in Allied-controlled Austria. But most of them were massacred when they reached Yugoslavia (Malcolm 2002: 193).

11 The EUAM was envisaged in the Washington Agreement and was supposed to enforce "a unified police force (led by the West European Union); freedom of movement across the front line and public security for all; the establishment of conditions suitable for the return of refugees and displaced persons to their original homes; the establishment of a democratically elected council for a single unified city; and the reconstruction of the buildings and infrastructure as well as the reactivation of public services" (Yarwood 1999: 7).

and only attracted limited media attention. Between 2004 and 2007 there were a number of media reports on the commission's work, mainly criticising its inefficiency and slowness. While the Bosniak-dominated press expressed interest in a faster and more sufficient process of changing the new names, the Croat-dominated press tended to downplay the importance of the commission. In the daily newspaper *Dnevni List* (a Croat-leaning daily newspaper published in Mostar), for example, the activities of the commission were criticised for diverting attention from Mostar's more pressing problems such as high unemployment, the illegal construction of buildings and the lack of residential housing (*Dnevni List*, 9 October 2005).

The preliminary results of the commission were presented to the city council at its session on 5 May 2006.<sup>12</sup> The commission's task was presented as an effort to rename all streets and institutions that had names associated with fascism and totalitarianism. The commission was forced to admit that its members had had difficulties in compromising on the changes and therefore had only been able to agree on the renaming of a very small number of streets, such as those named after ministers of the so-called "Independent State of Croatia" (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, NDH)<sup>13</sup> including the streets *ulica Mile Budaka*, *ulica Jure Francetića* and *ulica Vokića-Lorkovića*. After the commission had presented its results and the municipal councillors of the HDZ (*Hrvatske demokratska zajednica*, Croat Democratic Union, the Croat nationalist party) had suggested that streets associated with Tito's socialism should also be renamed, a fierce debate arose. The argument the HDZ brought forward was that Tito's Yugoslavia had been a repressive and totalitarian regime just like that of the NDH. Members of the SDA (*Stranka demokratska akcije*, Party of Democratic Action, the Bosniak nationalist party) as well as the SDP (*Socijaldemokratska partija*, Social Democratic Party, the successor of the Communist Party) opposed this and denounced the HDZ's claim as being purely tactically motivated in order to divert attention from this uncomfortable subject. Their argument was that communism could not be equated with fascism. Members of the HDZ disagreed and claimed that it was clear who had been oppressed under Tito's rule – namely Croats, as Croats had not been permitted to use their language and practice their culture in Yugoslavia. Finally, the councillor and representative of the Jewish community, Zoran Mandelbaum, intervened by saying that his family had suffered during Tito's rule as well but

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12 Special thanks to Larissa Veters, a fellow anthropologist and friend, for sharing her field notes on this with me.

13 The NDH was a quasi-puppet state and had been established with the support of Germany and Italy in April 1941.

that one still should not lump all the injustices of past regimes together as if they were equal.

In the days following the city council session, press releases by Bosniak-dominated parties such as the SBIH (*Stranka za BiH*, Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the SDA, as well as the SDP, printed in local newspapers demanded all changes of street names to be reversed. To them, changing only a few street names would merely be a cosmetic solution. This point of view presented a clear opposition to the one voiced in the Croat newspaper *Dnevni List*, which argued that the public was not interested in street names but rather wanted the city council to focus on more pressing problems.

Bosniak and Croat representatives (or those who claim to represent the Bosniak or Croat nation) clearly follow different interests and hold different opinions about the process of reversing Mostar's new street names, as initiated by the commission. Still, as mentioned above, the new street names did not become a pressing issue discussed by the local media nor was the commission's work much debated among Mostar's citizens. Let us in the last part of the paper turn to the perception of street names among the wider population and to the relation between the act of renaming and their historical consciousness.

## The renaming of streets and the wider population's historical consciousness

In the introduction to the volume *The Art of Forgetting* one of the editors suggests: "We cannot take it for granted that artefacts act as the agents of collective memory, nor can they be relied upon to prolong it" (Forty 1999: 7). Memorials and commemoration sites need people to note and read them, which means first of all people have to take notice of them. This is also true for street names. My observations showed that people in Mostar were often unaware of the new street names. Those who grew up in pre-war Mostar most often still called streets by their old names. Generally, I was surprised to see how little knowledge people had of street names in their city. The location of public buildings, for example, was often described to me in terms of proximity to other known places rather than by providing the street names. I made a similar observation with respect to memorials (or at least their meaning), which were often unknown to my informants. But regardless of the indifference or ignorance of a large part of the Croat population in Mostar, for the non-Croat population, espe-

cially for Bosniak and Serb returnees, these territorial markers are a painful reminder of the fact that what they once used to call home has been taken away from them. This suggests that the act of Croatianising West Mostar's street names does not primarily strengthen the Croat identity of its citizens but first and foremost signals to non-Croats that West Mostar is no longer their home.

As shown in this paper, we have to be aware that “national places of memory are not simply imposed onto an empty landscape (...)” (Till 2003: 295) but that different parts of society “negotiate understandings of the past (and of social identity) at multiple scales through place” (Till 2003: 295). “Although elites have had more control over the establishment of places of memory in public settings, they cannot control how they are perceived, understood, and interpreted by individuals and various social groups” (Till 2003: 297). Returning to BiH and the protests against the attempt to rename Sarajevo's main artery, *ulica Maršala Tita*, it is evident that the decisions of the cultural, academic and political elites about what should be publicly remembered and what should be silenced did not resonate with the views of a good part of Sarajevo's citizens. It is likely that even the relocating of street names, inspired by the Partisan movement, from the centre to the periphery was a compromise for Sarajevo's citizens who did not want to see their (former) heroes leaving their city. But not only in Sarajevo, do nostalgic discourses of the “good old times” during Tito's Yugoslavia remain present they are also still vivid among the Croat population in Mostar. Nostalgia concerns first and foremost memories of socio-economic securities and well-being, but also the pre-war good neighbourliness (*komšilik*) among the different nations. Nostalgic discourses can even be found among those who welcome what is often referred to as “national liberation” and even among those who are today clearly behind the national division of Mostar (Palmberger 2008, Palmberger forthcoming). While street names can be simply renamed, thereby eradicating certain aspects of a shared past, this does not seem to be possible for the population, at least not in the same radical manner.

## Conclusion

In this paper I argued that no direct link can be simply assumed between a national historiography inscribed in the cityscape by cultural, academic and political elites and the historical consciousness of people who face these national markers in every-

day life. Thus, I suggest that we should not speak of “collective memory inscribed in the cityscape” but instead of the manifestation of the dominant public history discourses. The process of renaming streets tells us first of all about the changes in the dominant public discourse and political orientation and not necessarily about individuals’ memories. People are not empty vessels but hold memories of previous historico-political periods that they or their older family members have experienced, and these memories may conflict with the newly promoted historiography. This does not mean, however that they do not indulge (and thereby also strengthen nationalist discourses), but it means that perceptions and representations of the past are more manifold and overlapping than depicted in the topography of street names. This, however, does not change the fact that Croatianising streets in West Mostar is a policy of exclusion that unequivocally signals the non-Croat population that this part of the city is no longer their home.



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