

Mostar as a post-socialist city.
A story of erasure.

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Cemented in the image of “the divided city” Mostar has been observed through almost only one lense : its so-called “ethnic division”. The capital of Herzegovina would be an exception in the country, “the special-case-city” (“*grad slučaj*”) as it is often called. Although it is impossible to argue that Mostar is not a divided city, it is not difficult to demonstrate that it is a lot more than that either. Added to that, the recent transformations of Mostar have been mainly considered on the level of urban planning, reconstruction, ethnic demography and as the results of the last war which devastated 80% of the city. Pre-war Mostar is almost nowhere to be found in the recent academic literature except to mention its high rate of mixed marriages. The chronology usually jumps from Ottoman Empire, Austro-Hungarian occupation directly to the late XXth century. If the socialist period is evoked, it mentions very quickly the “development of the city” and is delt with in one sentence. The rendition made of the transformations of Mostar let think that it resides exclusively in the infrastructures destruction. Little case is made of the destruction of the economy and of the socialibilities of the city. So, what was Mostar before the war ?

A very autonomous city which produced all it needed and only had to import cereals. From coal to flowers through aircraft and cigarettes, the capital of Herzegovina was an industrial city, a worker’s city, a city that never got rich, as many state during discussion. Many mostarians recall the busy city, the factories buses driving the workers back in town after their shift, the social life attached to the now missing colleagues. Mostar was a very important city for the military too with multiple garrisons and the Marshall Tito college for future pilots of the JNA, a strong aeronautic industry (SOKO). The war destroyed the industry and all that was attached to it. Many workers who originated from other republics left the city , infrastructures were pillaged. Some factories used prisoners from the nearby concentration camps to work in their facilities and became places of pain and sufferings.

After the war, the focus was put on the reconstruction by the EU obsessive motto of “reconciliation”. EU was in direct charge of the reconstruction of Mostar. Western research largely relayed EU’s preoccupation and vocabulary about Mostar. As in the rest of the country no policy directed towards socio-economic justice was set. The destruction of Mostar went on after the war as ethno-nationalists in power finished to dismantle the industry through a process of disastrous privatizations. Together with EU, some local actors also participated to the neutralization of the socialist past, antifascist heritage and redesigned local memories into a more acceptable narrative for EU, white washed of any potential subversive trends.

This communication aims at showing how the socialist period is crucial to understand the transformations Mostar underwent in the last 25 years and how the analysis of the multiple dynamics of erasure of the socialist period inform us on the post-war period in this city.

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