Mapping Memoryscapes: New Research Perspectives

Edited by
Karin Roginer Hofmeister,
Klára Kosová,
Aleksandra Wiktorowska

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Introductory Remarks on the "Abandoned" Places of Worship in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Memory, Cultural value, and Territorial Identification Processes

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Abstract

This study deals with the places of worship in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, in the aftermath of the 1992–1995 war and following the forced displacement of the local population, ended up being located in areas controlled by people who belong to a different "nationality" from that of the inhabitants who had lived there in the pre-war period. The main aim of the research is to understand the role of these inherited places of worship in the representations of the current population. Therefore, the research identifies the places of worship left behind in six different municipalities, namely Brod, Kupres, Vareš, Ilijaš, Višegrad and Stolac, which were chosen because of the changes in population that occurred there, by religious groups that abandoned those areas during or after the war. The first aim of the research is to analyze their current status (destruction, abandonment, reconstruction, or conservation) to clarify the role these buildings (or their remains) play in the landscape as an outcome of the post-war period. The second aim is to examine the meaning they assume for the current populations in terms of memories, symbolic representations, identity significance, and inclusion in the process of (re)building a new local identification.

Keywords

Territorial identification; places of worship; post-war landscape; memory; Bosnia and Herzegovina

Introduction

This chapter presents my PhD research in cultural geography on the symbolic and identity meaning of the abandoned places of worship in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It describes a preliminary stage, resulting from several years of elaboration of the research project which was implemented in the two years following the drafting of this article. More specifically, the text provides an explanation and justification of some of the underlying choices made in terms of conceptual framework and territorial context; it also clarifies the terminology adopted to interpret and describe the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Beyond the reflection on the current socio-political conjuncture in Bosnia and Herzegovina, this case study might be explored further to allow additional contributions to studies on the relationship between places, memory and identification processes through the analysis of places of worship which help spatialize the juxtaposed identities on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It could also give a new insight into the current construction of identities in Bosnian and Herzegovinian society by seeking to establish if there is a local identification, which is independent of that of religion.

The first section of the text briefly describes the historical context and divisions along the lines of identity in Bosnian and Herzegovinian society, specifying relevant lexical choices. Starting from this overview, the second section focuses on the materialization of such division in the landscape of the country and explains the conceptual framework adopted to read the territorial context. The third part aims to justify the two fundamental choices of the case study: the relevance of the places of worship and the selection of the six municipalities where research would be conducted. Finally, the last section presents the research's main aims and the methodology to be followed to achieve the expected results.

Identity division and historical context of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Identity is a peculiar issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina because everything in this field is highly controversial, and nothing is clearly defined. Centuries of coexistence created a unique environment where mixing was normal and social interaction regular, people could understand each

other while not using exactly the same language[1] and locally shared the same traditions and way of life while following – if they were believers and practicing their faith – different religious prescriptions. However, in this inclusive environment, everyone knew everyone's affiliation to the three "nationalities," basically differentiated only according to religious belonging: Bosniaks[2] who are Muslims, Serbs who are Orthodox Christians, and Croats who are Catholic Christians. This concept of religious belonging should not be understood to represent the expression of their individual faith but rather as a cultural reference point upon which the difference among the nationalities is based (Bougarel 2001). For this reason, I use "nationality" and "religious community/group" interchangeably, while I try to avoid the terms "ethnicity" or "ethnic group."

Indeed, the choice of terminology is quite a delicate issue: in dividing the three constituent peoples (the constitutional wording for defining the three above-mentioned national-religious communities), local and external rhetoric attributes to the term ethnic group an ontological sense, which is problematic in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian context. In my work, I criticize this dominant use of the ethnic narration that has a clear political aim for the politicians who confirm and endorse it: The reification and deepening of the segregation of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian population according to the "ethnic" labeling cemented by the war. This ethnic discourse is even more problematic because it is, at this point, widespread in the media and academic studies dealing with the country, sometimes becoming the expected starting point for every interpretation of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian reality. Through my research,

1 The language is actually a major issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina and a revealing one: scholars, politicians and ordinary people are involved in the dispute among the supporters of the existence of a single common language and those who affirm that Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian are three distinct languages in general and in Bosnia and Herzegovina in particular. It is very difficult to solve this dispute because, even though it is clear that people living together for centuries could communicate without any problem, some slight differences (the choice of the alphabet in writing, the selection of some words instead of other ones) were always used to mark a distinction of belonging, knowing that in an inclusive society the aim of mutual understanding was achieved in any case, provided that everyone knew the linguistic habits of the others. Today the problem is more evident and serious, because the law, the school systems and the physical division of the people is creating an excluding environment.

2 The term "Bosniak" was officially adopted only after the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina; Yugoslav authorities used instead the word "Muslim" as the national identifier of the Slavic people of the Islamic religion (officially named as such by Communist authorities since 1968 and recognized as a constituent nation since 1974) (Glamocak 2005, 41–42). The history of this term is the subject of a chapter by Xavier Bougarel (2002), while Marina Glamocak (2005) wrote an illuminating article on the evolution of the Bosniak identity.

I would like to explore if the situation could open new perspectives and connections to be explored beyond this prevailing vision. I am aware of the risk signaled by Robert M. Hayden that "if analytical distancing is based on moral disapprobation, the result may be distortion" (Hayden 2007, 106), and I intend to be self-critical about my judgment, aware of my positionality and ready to ultimately just confirm that the dominant narration remains valid; however, I also want to remain open and give visibility to other, even if minor, possible ways of interpreting the situation that I might find during my fieldwork.

Having this in mind, whenever the terms related to ethnicity are employed in this chapter, they should always be understood to be referring to the way they are used by others or according to the constructivist meaning presented by Andreas Wimmer, partially following the definition by Max Weber, as "a subjectively felt belonging to a group that is distinguished by a shared culture and a common ancestry" (Wimmer 2013, 7), but adding the category of "boundary," a line of mental division that has a twofold dimension: "categorical" (linked to social classification and the distinction of the groups) and "behavioral" (i.e. that influences the relations and social actions of the individuals) (Wimmer 2013, 9). These ethnic constructions also carry a strong meaning of political revendication; therefore, the term "nation" should be appropriate (Wimmer 2013, 8). Nonetheless, the fact that two of the three mentioned communities claim to belong to nations that already have their centers of power outside Bosnia and Herzegovina, has led me to favor the use of the term "nationality," which seems to imply the idea of the entirety of the national group to a lesser extent.

The 1992–1995 war ended the fluidity among and peaceful coexistence of the three nationalities. Differences in religious belonging became rigid ethnic differences, an idea strongly fueled by nationalist propaganda according to the interests of the post-communist leaders (Violante and Vitale 2010, 177). The war and the widespread practice of ethnic cleansing provoked a radical redefinition of boundaries among communities causing the escape or displacement of about 2.2 million people, half of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the largest exodus in Europe since World War II. This caused the uprooting of entire communities and their relocation to areas conquered by other groups. The Dayton Peace Agreement, which ended the conflict, simply froze the situation, creating two entities (the Republic of Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) whose borders basically retrace the frontline at the moment when the agreement was signed (Björkdahl 2018, 38; Riding 2019, 239).

After the great movements of population that occurred during and after the war, the inhabitants of almost all the municipalities of Bosnia and Herzegovina are today divided into two parts: those who have lived there since birth, being rooted there for generations, and the displaced people, who came to live there following the expulsion from their original birthplaces.[3] These changes also led to a general homogenization of the composition of the population, meaning that the part of the population that remained often belongs to the nationality in charge of the territory, while the other communities were expelled. Additionally, the relocated people who came to live there are members of the currently dominant religious group too. At the same time, generally speaking, they suffered the forced eradication from an area where they became a minority.

After the end of the war, the Dayton Peace Agreement stipulated that the displaced people have the right to return to their original dwellings and, in a way, tried to encourage this restoration of the pre-war Bosnian melting pot (Ó Tuathail and O'Loughlin 2009, 1047). However, twenty-five years after the agreement, we can see that the returnees who came back to their original towns and villages are still few, and doubts are raised about the perspective that the redistribution caused by the war and ethnic cleansing could be a reversible change (Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2005, 658). On the contrary, the newly established institutions of post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly when dominated by nationalist and ethnocratic parties, have strongly acted in order to discourage the claims of the returnees and to preserve and consolidate the separation that materially helps their policy of antagonistic nation-building (Violante 2015b, 154).

Nevertheless, the relocated communities live in territorial contexts rich in material records of the groups that previously inhabited these places. Among them, several religious buildings are especially meaningful as bearers of identity values and are often quite visible in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian landscape due to their size, color, and minarets or bell towers. These places of worship are not simply visible but also have a strong presence in another sensorial area, the auditory one: through the various calls to prayer (the recitation of specific phrases by a muezzin atop the minarets, the tolling of bells from the different churches) that

3 Stephanie Rolland (2004) describes the problems related to the coexistence and failed integration of these different components of the population in Mostar, showing in this urban reality a new kind of conflict between "original" often mixed inhabitants and displaced people generally coming from the countryside, where the religious groups tended to be scattered in different mono-confessional villages.

resonate in the air, marking the hours and echoing in the streets, squares and valleys; these sounds too are the essential elements of a landscape that constitutes the multisensory context in which people find themselves living. The landscape of Bosnian and Herzegovinian towns is full of various fragrances, mostly due to the abundance of places selling food, and odors in the winter season emitted by obsolete and polluting heating systems; some of the religious buildings add their own smells to this olfactory atmosphere due to the incense used during Christian celebrations and the beeswax candles that are always lit in dedicated chapels inside or around orthodox churches. Many of these mosques or churches were targeted by artillery or burned during the war, and consequently were destroyed or severely damaged; others remained untouched or were rebuilt after the war but still stay in territories that no longer belonged to the original religious group.[4]

Territorial context: identity in the landscape of Bosnia and Herzegovina

The historical picture presented above explains the choice of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the field of research. In fact, in this country, memory, a central reference of identification (Lavabre 2012, 266), has been "contaminated" by post-war grief and hatred (Violante 2015b, 154). Ethnic cleansing was aimed at the material realization of exclusive territorial identities, eliminating every kind of mixture among communities (Walasek 2016, 205–206) to generate an "effect of the space on the identities"[5] (Gervais-Lambony 2004, 471). These divisions are, at this point, engraved in the territorial "infrastructure" (Di Méo 2001), in the "spatial structures [that are] supposed to 'generate' identities" (Gervais-Lambony 2004, 471). The term "identity" is defined by Guy Di Méo as "an ideology, meaning a coherent ensemble of mental representations that an individual or a group makes of themselves or of the others, of their place in the society and in the space" (Di Méo 2004, 340). This definition should not lead us to forget that identities are never unique: They are constructed and used in different ways according to spatial and temporal circumstances (Gervais-Lambony 2004, 470).

4 This is the main topic of the work by Helen Walasek (2016), with the contribution of other authors, entitled *Bosnia and the Destruction of Cultural Heritage*.

5 All quotations were translated from the original into English by the author.

The choice of Bosnia and Herzegovina is therefore justified by the hypothesis that this country could be the appropriate place to analyze the relations between space and identity construction processes. This analysis was planned to be conducted by confronting the mainstream political discourse that uses the "religious-national" division as an interpretive prism of local reality and as the only loophole of stability (Kinnvall 2004, 742) for a society strongly destabilized by conflict and also by the image that the inhabitants, the actors in this rhetorical and symbolic battlefield, have of themselves and their society, with particular attention for the different categorizations and social constructions that could emerge (Wimmer 2013).

It is evident from a simple observation of the urban or anthropic landscapes of Bosnia and Herzegovina that landscapes partake in the nationalistic conflict based on opposite identities that dominate the country's political scenario. On the one hand, places in Bosnia and Herzegovina still abound in traces of the recent war and records of the multifarious culture of its inhabitants; on the other hand, several, often forced, insertions of symbols of identity claims can be recognized easily (such as billboards, new monuments, hodonymy or religious buildings) (Mazzucchelli 2010, 85–86). Due to its diachronic nature, the landscape materializes and makes traces of historical events in the territory visible. For this reason, as it happens in other fields (such as historiography), the landscape is manipulated too, often only rhetorically or semantically, but sometimes also physically and materially, to support discourses aimed to unite one part of the society against another (Björkdahl 2018, 41–42), or sometimes even only for the electoral or personal goals of some leaders of the different political formations. Of course, as Monika Palmberger warns, we should not consider the people as passive subjects and mere receptors of these changes and political visions (Palmberger 2012, 24); yet the denunciation of such manipulations still remains a duty for a deeper understanding of the meanings transmitted by places.

In the process of appropriation, cultural heritage played a special role because, being charged with identity meanings, it was the victim of deliberate destruction in the acts of ethnic cleansing during the war (Walasek 2016, 23; Perry 2016, 186; Mazzucchelli 2010, 31–32; Tratnjek 2011; Lewicka 2008, 213). The main aim of such destruction was "to obliterate the material evidence of the expelled communities' deep roots in the locality, effecting a transformation of the cultural landscape from one of ethnic diversity into an apparently historical-

ly mono-ethnic domain." (Walasek 2016, 55). The intended result of such actions was to show a landscape fully free from traces of the presence of different religious groups or even of any kind of "living side by side" or "living together" of different communities (Tratnjek 2011; 2012a; 2012b).[6] In this way it was possible not only to show a new "ethnicized" landscape but also to rewrite history, claiming that a particular region always belonged to a certain group, that no other community ever lived there, because there are no (more) traces nor visible evidence of their presence (Mazzucchelli 2010, 34–36).[7] This kind of planned action led some observers of these events to label the devastation or demolition of mosques, churches, bridges, libraries, towers, caravanserais, traditional houses, and other distinctive monuments as "cultural genocide," mainly perpetrated by the Bosnian Serb forces in the areas they controlled during the conflict (Walasek 2016, 52–53).

Today, cultural heritage is at the center of many nationalistic clashes, which are becoming increasingly focused on symbols rather than on specific actions and argumentation among politicians in office (Violante and Vitale 2010, 179).[8] For this reason, Annex 8 to the Dayton Peace Agreement is explicitly devoted to the Commission to Preserve National Monuments. In fact, it is one of the most delicate topics in the post-war period, as the numerous cases of obstruction to or protests against the reconstruction of "contentious" destroyed monuments (generally mosques) show (Walasek 2016, 228).[9] Another one is the return of refugees and displaced people, which is clearly linked to it

6 The concept of komšiluk (similar to "good neighborhood") was crucial in social relations before the war and somehow overcame the differences in religious belonging; it might be interesting to explore if it still remains strong, even after the disruptions that the war caused in the communities (see Appriou 2001, 8).

7 Stephen Schwartz (1999, 41–42) explains that the shelling of the National and University Library and the Oriental Institute in Sarajevo was carried out with the aim of erasing any trace of living together. Bénédicte Tratnjek (2014) uses the term "memoricide" to express this obliteration of (a part of) the memory from the space.

8 For example, Antonio Violante (2015b, 152–154) and James Riding (2015, 382) describe the political controversies and divisions that occurred on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide in 2015 and the concurrent commemorations where every part of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian society remembers and transmits only its own memory and history, depicting the others' as "false."

9 Antonio Violante (2006) reports the violent protests occurred in May 2001 in Banja Luka on the occasion of the start of the rebuilding work on the Ferhadija Mosque, dynamited during the war by unknown people (225–226). In another article, the same author more widely contextualizes the preservation of multi-confessional monuments in today's Banja Luka (Violante 2015a).

(Perry 2016, 188) because "the destruction of cultural or religious property was intended to discourage the return of the expelled population" (Walasek 2016, 55, 61).

The choice of the "abandoned" places of worship and municipalities

As already suggested, the choice of places of worship is relevant for this analysis because, according to Bernard Debarbieux, mosques and churches are "generic" places, that suit idealized forms, correspond to archetypes, are reference points for the processes of identification (Debarbieux 1995, 22–23; 2010, 28–29), and where people perform ordinary practices that "participate in the organization and social regulation by the space" (Debarbieux 2015, 172–173). For the communities living around them, such archetypes can also be "places of memory," working as material loopholes for individual and – moreover – collective memories (Mazzucchelli 2010, 22); therefore, they inscribe themselves in the symbolic heritage of the groups that makes visible their collective institutions, their practices and their social representations of the space (Veschambre 2008, 185–187). The notions of "trace" and "mark" can be used to describe this process: Vincent Veschambre (2008) defines the former as a simple material and unintentional reminder of the past, while the latter is described as the result of an action "thought and realized to make visible a person, a group, an institution, to build the support of an (individual or more generally collective) identification" (10–11). Both notions can be applied to places of worship in Bosnia and Herzegovina because they can be, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes at different times, both traces and marks, or traces for someone and marks for someone else.

I decided to use the adjective "abandoned" for the places of worship I focus on in this research. It needs a short clarification too: It does not refer to buildings that are necessarily ruined, unkept or deserted; on the contrary, I expected to find the great majority of these buildings standing and perhaps even reconstructed and hosting some leader of the local (potential or existent) religious community. I labeled these places of worship as "abandoned" because they were left behind by their community, by the people who were forced to leave their place. As a result, these sacral buildings remained in the same territory but under the control of a newly dominant group of a differ-

ent religion. I did not exclude the possibility that some returnees came back and still use these places of worship for their religious practices. Still, if they exist, they are clearly in a position of a minority within a potentially hostile environment.

The already-mentioned presence of displaced communities makes the evaluation of their representation of the legacy of other religious groups particularly interesting. This allows us to understand what testimonial value these places can acquire for local communities or, on the contrary, to what extent they are downgraded to the role of "shadows" of an erased or currently under-removal past. Understanding the meaning of these sites could shed light on the local identity of displaced populations and help in measuring their level of integration in their new territorial context.

As previously described, the local communities living around these places of worship could be made up of three components: residents who have lived there since before the war, who are likely to belong to the currently dominant religious group; the displaced people, who probably belong to the same dominant religious group; and finally some returnees, belonging to the religious group that visits and uses the "abandoned" places of worship and constitutes nowadays a minority in its own territory. Therefore, it is interesting to understand the kinds of bonds of identification with these places established by these three groups in the local community. More specifically, a question must be raised about the emergence of a new identification with the places in such a peculiar context of the "relation with the past of people, of society and of spaces" (Gervais-Lambony 2004, 483). And we need to ask whether such an identification would be different if we dealt with people who have not changed their residence, rather than with individuals who moved recently or who were forced to leave their own territory and have now returned as an unwelcome minority. In the first and last cases we would deal with locals who have experienced the overturning of the communities and who keep a longer memory linked to religious buildings and their territory, while the second is related to people who have lived in these places for a shorter period of time.

On the basis of these theoretical and historical indications, six sites were considered for the case study. I selected six Bosnian and Herzegovinian municipalities[10] that have undergone substantial changes in

10 Generally, the extension of a municipality in Bosnia and Herzegovina includes an urban center and an extensive countryside sprinkled with small villages that often have a different community composition than the main center.

the national composition of their population after the war: Brod, Ilijaš, Kupres (FBiH), Stolac, Vareš, and Višegrad. They are comparable in demographic size and represent all the possible patterns of a substitution of community (absolute or relative) majorities among Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. This choice was made to include abandoned places of worship of all the three confessions, Muslim, Orthodox Christian and Catholic Christian, as well as to have an equal number of cases where each national-religious community has become dominant. Additionally, these municipalities are located in areas that reflect the socio-spatial diversity of Bosnia and Herzegovina (fig. 1): from the plains of Posavina (Brod) to the valley of the Bosna river near Sarajevo (Ilijaš), from the Drina valley (Višegrad) to the plateaus of Tropolje (Kupres), from the mountainous areas of central Bosnia (Vareš) to the hilly region around the valley of the Neretva river (Stolac). The following table summarizes their main features.

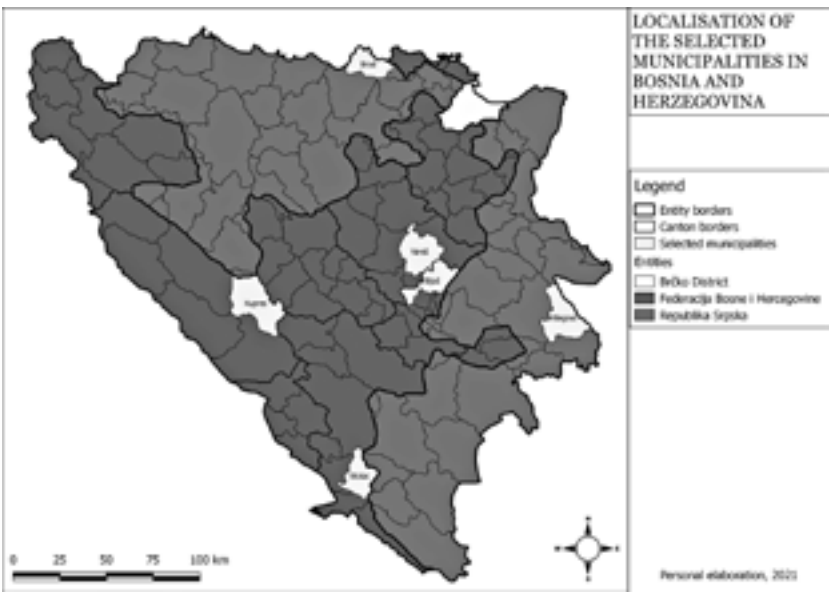


Fig. 1: Localization of the municipalities selected for the case study in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Source: personal elaboration

Table 1: Location and the main demographic characteristics of the municipalities selected for the case study (legend: RS = Republika Srpska, FBiH = Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina; B = % of Bosniaks, C = % of Croats, S = % of Serbs).

Name	Area	Population 1991	Population 2013
Ilijaš FBiH	Sarajevo Canton (north to the capital)	25,016 (45.2 S / 41.7 B)	19,603 (92.6 B)
Višegrad RS	Podrinje (eastern Bosnia)	21,199 (63.5 B / 31.8 S)	10,668 (87.5 S)
Vareš FBiH	Zenica-Doboj Canton (central Bosnia)	22,203 (40.6 C / 30.2 B / 16.4 S)	8,892 (61.3 B / 31.7 C)
Stolac FBiH	Herzegovina-Neretva Canton	15,187 (48.7 B / 36.6 C)	14,502 (58.5 C / 38.2 B)
Kupres FBiH	Canton 10 (north-western Herzegovina)	8,836 (46.3 S / 43.1 C)	5,057 (88.5 C)
Brod RS	Posavina (northern Bosnia)	33,744 (41.3 C / 33.0 S)	16,619 (69.1 S / 19.8 C)

Source of the data: Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, n.d. and Statistika.ba, n.d.

Objectives, project description and methodology

The aim of the research is to analyze the representations of these abandoned places of worship among the people who live in the territory around them: What is the symbolic meaning of these buildings? Which value is ascribed to them in official texts and the discourses of their inhabitants? Are these places of memory only traces of the past, or are there new meanings assigned to them? Did they become marks of revendication of the permanence of the community that built them, of the existence of diversity despite the effects of ethnic cleansing, or the assertion of the power of the currently prevailing community?

The first result expected from this research would derive from landscape analysis of the selected sites: it would allow me to understand how the spatial and symbolic role of the places of worship has changed in the last three decades and what forms of decay or renovation they suffered. Starting from the work carried out involving local stakeholders, I want to reconstruct the picture of the representations of these places of worship developed by those who live around them today and the perception that emerges from their narratives.[11] In this regard, it is reasonable to expect a diversifica-

11 On the role of perception in human geography as an interpretive instrument of territorial reality see Scaramellini 2008, 25–30.

tion of the symbolic meaning attributed to the different places, according to the function of the spaces and people's personal experiences. Starting from different experiences and memories relating to these places, it might be possible to propose a picture of the identification relationship that may or may not exist between the inhabitants and these buildings.

More specifically, the extent of conservation or destruction and, if it is the case, of enhancement of all three main confessions' religious buildings would be assessed in the six selected municipalities. The way the abandoned places of worship (or what remains of them) fit into the current landscape and cultural context, resulting from the destruction of war, population change and recent reconstruction, should also be observed through landscape analysis. Particular attention was meant to be devoted to their relationship with the new monuments that mark the presence and identity of current inhabitants that belong to different religions. The question of ownership of buildings and the means necessary for their restoration, or the involvement of international organizations or foreign patrons in their maintenance, should also be considered.

The research was planned to continue with semi-structured interviews with local political actors to distinguish the cases in which patrimonialization or tourist promotion policies have been implemented from those in which, on the contrary, religious buildings are really abandoned due to the indifference of the relevant institutions. A study of the value attributed to these places of worship in official texts or images (speeches given by local authorities, tourist promotion materials,[12] territorial planning actions) was also envisaged. Even members of the clergy of different religious denominations have been considered to provide pertinent information and views to continue the analysis. Local experts or historians were also intended to be interviewed, and members or representatives of relevant associations present and active in the territory. The opinion of all the stakeholders must be examined to reconstruct their origin and relationship with the territory and places of worship and to recognize the presence of any misleading information and to identify on which narrative framework it rests, with particular regard to ethnic or cultural ideologies or nationalist rhetoric.

Moreover, I planned to interview some inhabitants of these territories to analyze their representation of the abandoned places of worship, the value they attribute to them and the perception that emerges from their

12 Eventually, even the comparison between pre-war and post-war tourist promotion materials, including postcards, could be useful; and the images published by official tourist services could be contrasted with personal pictures or paintings that interviewees may keep at home.

narratives. In choosing the inhabitants to be interviewed, also through contacts with the actors already indicated or with other realities known in the field, an attempt was made to build the widest possible picture of the many forms of diversity that may be encountered. The aim was to compare the narratives of and evaluations by people with different experiences concerning the places of worship taken into consideration, starting from how long they have resided in that particular area and how frequently they visit them today. This comparison was also meant to show if there were differences between the official rhetoric and politicized evaluation of these abandoned religious buildings and the individual perceptions of the people who see them every day and who are used to their presence in the habitual landscape around them.

Conclusion

In this chapter a conceptual framework for the research has been sketched out, showing, on the one hand, the importance and problematic role of identity and the divisions based on identity in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian context and, on the other hand, the relevance and the meanings of places of worship for people's identification. I also explained the main choices that defined the following steps of the research. The municipalities chosen as case studies were briefly presented as well as the reason why they were selected. Finally, the twofold methodological framework and the guiding questions of the research were introduced too.

This framework proved to be the crucial scaffold for the subsequent work, even though the fieldwork made me reconsider several issues such as the number of the case studies and the way to involve interviewees. Unfortunately, the restrictions on movement caused by the covid-19 pandemic also obliged me to reduce the planned extensive presence in the sites and affected the meetings with the interviewees. However, I could still collect sufficient data for the analysis of the relation between memory, identification processes and religious landscape and, after the necessary elaboration, the results will be presented in the upcoming thesis.

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