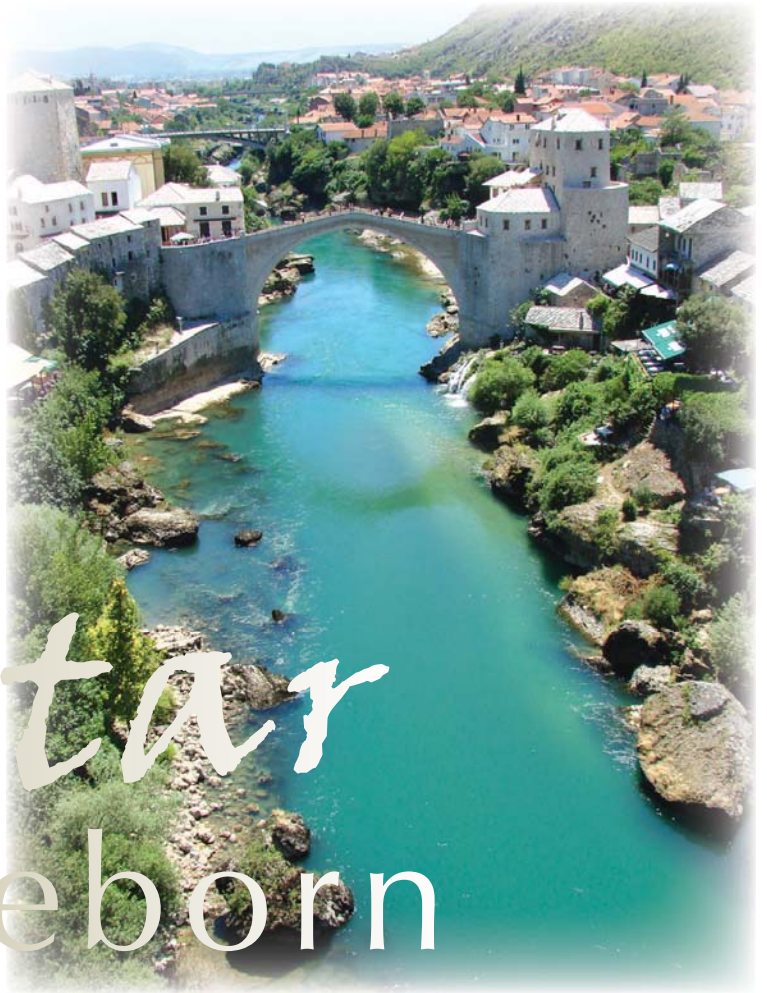


Adam Jones
UWCSEA 1979-1981

Adam Jones attended UWCSEA between 1979 and 1981 as a Canadian National Committee scholar. He is currently Associate Professor of political science at the University of British Columbia Okanagan, and author or editor of a dozen published books, most recently 'Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction' (Routledge, 2006). Adam traveled to Bosnia and Herzegovina last year and provides this account of his visit:



Mostar Reborn

If you seek a symbol with substance, look no further than Stari Most. The "Old Bridge" of Mostar in southern Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was built by Ottoman Turkish authorities in the 16th century, in the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent. For hundreds of years after, its graceful arch, made of local Tenelija stone, joined the twin halves of Mostar, split by the fast-flowing Neretva River.

First under Ottoman rule, then in independent Yugoslavia, Stari Most – and Mostar itself – came to symbolize successful coexistence among diverse ethnic groups. That coexistence was shattered when the Yugoslav union collapsed in chaos in 1992. The bridge itself collapsed, after months of shelling, in November 1993. For years after, only a fragile footbridge, first of wooden planks and then of metal sheeting, linked the Tara and Helebija towers on either side of the river.

Today, astonishingly, Stari Most has been restored to its former glory. Working with stone from the original quarry, a team of architects and engineers meticulously recreated the design techniques of its Ottoman builders. Reconstruction took almost as long as the original construction, but in 2004, this UNESCO World Heritage Site was once again opened to foot traffic.

Reconstruction of Mostar as a whole will take another generation, if not more. The city was perhaps the most ferociously

contested site in the entire Bosnian conflict – even besieged Sarajevo might not compare. A documentary DVD, "War in Mostar," on sale at local souvenir shops, makes clear that by the time of the ceasefire, much of Mostar resembled some German cities at the end of World War Two. In particular, the predominantly Muslim canton of eastern Mostar was a shelled-out ruin.

The irony is that most of the fighting over Mostar occurred between two forces that had previously been allies. When Yugoslavia dissolved and war spread to Bosnia in 1992, it was the territory's Serbs – backed by the authorities in Belgrade, who had laid claim to most of the arms and materiel of the former national army – who quickly gained the upper hand. Croats and Bosnian Muslims banded together to resist them. A cemetery near the Rondo roundabout in Mostar today holds Muslim victims of this phase of the conflict. It is surreal to walk along row after row of headstones, with "1992" listed as the date of death on every one.

Mostar, damaged by Serb shelling, held out until the siege was lifted

in late 1992. But only a few months later, in May 1993, the Croats and Muslims had their own falling out, and fighting broke out anew.

The more powerful Croats were aided by access to supply lines from the long Dalmatian coast, which allowed them to circumvent the international arms embargo on all the warring parties. Amidst scenes of looting, rape, and murder, they evicted thousands of Muslims from the western, predominantly Croat side of the city, and forced them across the Neretva to the eastern bank. They then pummelled the Muslim quarter for fully two years, with mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, and heavy machine-guns.

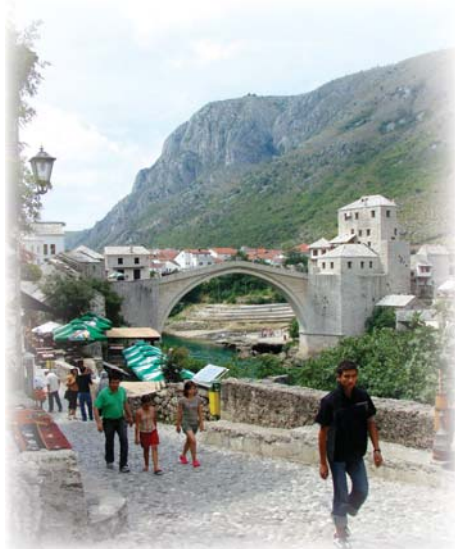


Outnumbered and outgunned, the Muslim population nonetheless offered staunch resistance. They even managed to hold on to a significant stretch of territory on the west bank of the river, the edge of which became the hotly-contested frontline in the battle.

This was urban warfare of a kind rarely seen in recent decades: perhaps only Beirut, Mogadishu, and Grozny compare. Today, more than a decade after the conflict ended, a stroll along Mostar's main boulevard, Hrvatskih Branitelja – the former frontline – is a shocking and sobering experience. Many buildings are nothing but empty shells, strewn with rubble and overgrown with weeds, their façades so peppered with bullets and shrapnel that barely a square metre remains intact. Here and elsewhere in the city, "DANGEROUS RUIN" signs warn against entering the premises, or parking near them.

Yet alongside the ruins, new structures are proliferating. The din of construction now drowns out "Mostar's heartbeat," the hammering of coppersmiths in the cobbled alleys of the old town – one of whom, with wicked insouciance, etches traditional designs into the spent casings of artillery shells left over from the conflict.

Many other buildings, though still pocked by exploded munitions, are again occupied and functioning. And away from the frontline in what is now an exclusively Croat zone, one could be forgiven for thinking the war never happened. Leafy streets offer shade for the dedicated denizens of cafes, sipping a beer or mineral water away from the midsummer heat. Stylish boutiques do a thriving trade: a favourite T-shirt for willowy young women is "Don't see fashion, BE fashion."



In the Ottoman old town, and most of the Muslim neighbourhoods on the east bank of the Neretva, reconstruction has also erased most of the evidence of the fighting. The Karadžozbeg mosque, which dates from 1557, is radiant in the bright summer sun. A stark black-and-white photo at its main entrance depicts the fate it suffered during the war: its minaret decapitated, and its dome perforated by heavy shells. As for the narrow, winding streets of the old town, their cobblestones positively gleam, buffed by the footfalls of the thousands of tourists who now visit Mostar annually.

This return to near-normalcy conceals lingering scars, however. What was once a demographic patchwork is now rigidly divided: Croats to the west, Muslims to the east. For Mostar residents, crossing the boundary to shop no longer means running the risk of physical attack; but neither are they likely to be shopping for real estate. Duplication rather than integration of services is the norm. There are two bus



stations, one for Muslims, one for Croats. And at the stately Grammar School, built during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, different floors are devoted to instruction in the Croat or Bosnian languages. There is even a kind of segregation on the alcohol front. On the Croat side, the tipple of choice is Karlovacko pilsener, brewed across the border in Croatia. But just try to find a bottle on the Muslim side of town, where Sarajevsko – brewed in the Muslim-dominated capital – is ubiquitous, emblazoned on the umbrella of every beer garden I saw.

If the scars are still relatively fresh, however, the progress in the last decade has been impressive. Supervised by European troops and political advisors, Croats and Muslims are now united in the Muslim-Croat Federation, one of the two "entities" – the other is the Serb Republic – that constitute the independent state of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is likely that by the time Mostar's youth reach adulthood, the country will have joined the European Union. Perhaps the rise of a pan-European identity will have greater success in damping down rivalries, and encouraging communal mingling, than its pan-Yugoslav forebear did. Regardless, Mostar's complex, sometimes violent, always fascinating heritage means that the city will remain a must-see for the Balkans traveller.

Adam may be reached through the alumni website.



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Mostar lies about 2 ½ hours by bus or train from the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo, and about the same by bus or car from Dubrovnik, Croatia's crown jewel on the Adriatic coast. It's a viable overnight trip from either of these more heavily-trafficked destinations. Sarajevo is served by a range of European airlines, including British Airways, Alitalia, and Lufthansa. Dubrovnik is a popular port of call for ferries and cruiseships, as well as charter flights and budget airlines.

Mostar is relatively small (about 95,000 residents) and geographically concentrated; all areas of interest are easily negotiated on foot.

Every summer in Mostar, a "cooperative" of male divers, based in the Tara tower, solicits cash from tourists to plummet the 20-plus metres from the Stari Most arch into the frigid Neretva River. But they take their sweet time about it – teasing the crowd for half an hour or more, until a critical mass of contributions is collected and they finally take the plunge. A diving competition is held in July, attracting competitors from throughout the region.

Daytrips from Mostar include the gorgeous Ottoman-era hill-town of Pocitelj, about 40 minutes away on the coast road; and Herceg Stjepan Fortress, half an hour away, which looms impressively on its stony Herzegovinan hilltop, offering sweeping valley views. The fortress site dates back to Illyrian times, the present construction to the Middle Ages.