



rebuilding a city and a culture

Working with more faith than money, Sarajevo's Muslim community repairs its damaged mosques.

THE EARLY MORNING—the two hours or so after the sun rose but before the fog lifted—was vital to Muslims during the war in Bosnia. That's when they scrambled onto the roofs of their mosques to survey the damage done by the previous day's bombardments and to fix what they could. The faithful knew the fog had begun to evaporate when the bullets from Serb snipers lurking in the mountains surrounding Sarajevo got too close for comfort. "That's how you knew they could see you," says Zukic Kemal, manager of the city's Center for Islamic Architecture, who had more close calls than he can remember while surveying the situation at the Begova Mosque, the most important Muslim institution in Sarajevo.

Now, two years after the fighting officially ended, Sarajevo's Muslim community can rebuild their scarred mosques without the threat of sniper fire. But repairing so many religious structures—86 mosques in all were damaged, including four that were completely destroyed—requires not only safety but money and materials, too, items still in short supply throughout Bosnia.

Since 1995, the Bosnian government has provided a mere \$29,000 for mosque repairs. International aid is usually targeted towards rebuilding schools, roads, bridges, and hospitals. Islamic countries and organizations have contributed some money to the cause—the Saudi Arabian government donated \$750,000 to restore the Begova Mosque, for example—but it hasn't been nearly enough to complete the necessary repairs.

So with funds hard to come by, religious

devotion and community spirit are the forces driving the renovation of the mosques. People donate their labor and whatever money or materials they can spare to rebuild what the Serbs tried so desperately to annihilate. "People are doing whatever they can. There is just no money," Kemal says. "The government has no money. People have no money."

No one knows how many of Bosnia's 1,500 mosques were destroyed, because half the country is in Serb hands and Muslims can't easily investigate. The Alada Mosque, Bosnia's oldest and some say most beautiful, was located in the town of Foca, controlled by Serbs. It was razed early in the war. In the northern town of Banja Luka, all 17 mosques were blown up.

In Sarajevo, the importance of the mosques transcends religion; they are a vital part of the city's character, a personality that is subtly shifting as it emerges from its war-induced funk. Though most of the city's mosques are small and individually might seem unimportant, taken together they bestow an Eastern mystique on the city. In the old part of town, the slender minarets of some 70 mosques slice into the sky; in the maze of narrow cobblestone streets that fan from the busy market square, there's at least one mosque for every four or five blocks. The atmosphere here comes alive with a mystical symphony when the different calls to prayer summon the faithful as they have for hundreds of years. "This is about a way of living," says architecture professor Nedžad Kurto. "Psychologically, it is important. People shouldn't feel like they are ▶ 39

During the three years of fighting in Bosnia, 86 of Sarajevo's mosques were destroyed or damaged, including this one, above, which was shelled in the early months of the war.

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strangers in their own city."

Yet some Sarajevo natives feel slightly ajar in their city, and it isn't simply a question of the destruction that encircles them. Indeed, many insist they barely notice the gutted buildings lining the streets. What is more apparent—and worrisome—to them are the shifts in population that have occurred since the war broke out in 1992. To them, it seems that there is a greater Muslim influence in the city today. Women wearing traditional head scarves are no longer an anomaly, nor is it uncommon to overhear the religious greeting *Salaam Aleikum* ("Peace be on you"). But what really sets these more traditional people apart from the city's natives is their status as refugees from small towns they fled during the war. Before the war there were 510,000 people living in Sarajevo; now there are 388,000, and more than one-quarter of them are refugees. And many of those who fled Sarajevo were professionals and intellectuals; the University of Sarajevo is still missing half of its professors.

Sarajevo natives derisively call the refugees "village people" because of their unsophisticated behavior. They smoke on the tram, hesitate when crossing the street, and grow onions in flower boxes. Livestock has been spotted on the city's outskirts. "People feel bad because of what the refugees went through," says longtime resident Jadranka Milicevic. "But you see all these country faces. It doesn't feel like your city anymore."

The desire for familiarity in the midst of economic, social, and political change is motivating Sarajevo's residents to work to rebuild their mosques. "It is true that a mosque is just a building," says Dzevad Turulja, caretaker of the Magribija Mosque, whose minaret and walls were crushed by shelling in 1992. "But each mosque has a different feeling that comes from its people. After prayer we sit together. We talk. It is like being back in school."

Magribija's congregation was lucky. One of its members is an architectural engineer who was able to make sure the reconstruction was done properly. The roof was made of wood, so it was relatively easy to get the necessary materials. And though Magribija still has no minaret—there is a promise of a donation from an Islamic charity—the mosque reopened this year, on the anniversary of the shelling.

Charitable organizations are inundated with such requests. The Bijela Mosque has been waiting for two years for money to repair the roof, which was hit by nine grenades during the war. Though it was patched then, the repairs were clearly insufficient. After it rains, water stains one wall and the carpets are damp. There is concern the roof may col-

lapse. "Finding money is going so slowly. Maybe our mosque is too small, but we are hopeful something will happen," says Fehim Kafadarevic, a 67-year-old who would patch the roof between shellings. "Watching when they shell your mosque is like watching when someone hits you straight in the heart."

During the war, the Serbs shelled mosques with a savage ferocity as they tried to erase all traces of Muslim culture. The Begova Mosque was especially targeted because of its historical and cultural significance. It was commissioned by Gazi Husrevbey, a Turk who ruled Bosnia during the sixteenth century and was instrumental in turning the city into a

major trading post. Built in his honor, Begova is appropriately grand, a masterpiece of Islamic architecture. Completed in 1530, it is surrounded by a stone wall, separating it from the busy market outside. Five marble pillars create a large porch, serving as an entrance to a vast, airy room topped by one large dome, one half-dome, and two smaller ones.

The major dome was hit countless times during the war, and two grenades ripped huge holes in the copper-topped structure. The gashes were covered by plastic sheeting; two men were each paid two packages of cigarettes to lay the covering—a fantastic reward at a time when an individual cigarette cost one

deutsche mark. Both men survived sniper fire to shield the mosque's interior, but rain and snow still seeped in and ruined all of the carpets as well as the magnificent ornamentation that adorned the walls.

Today, the exterior work on Begova is almost complete. But re-creating the interior—now completely white, with almost no traces of its previous majesty—will take many more years. The original plans for the mosque are in Istanbul and few artisans are qualified to mimic the intricate design. But for all its potential beauty, Zukic Kemal says that "it is not so urgent to complete the inside. This is a symbol of our community. It must be done right." THERESA AGOVINO