

Review Essay

When Is It Best to Remember?

Maintaining the Sacred Center: The Bosnian City of Stolac

Rusmir Mahmutćehajić. Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2011.

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INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT

The town, Stolac, has a long history of vibrancy as a strategic commercial town and a Center of culture in the southern part of Bosnia—spawning writers, poets, scholars and artists, an amount disproportionate to its size. *Maintaining the Sacred Center: The Bosnian City of Stolac*, is the latest book of Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, who carries on the heritage of his own hometown: Stolac. His book begins with a quote from the Quran and a line of poetry by Stolac-native Mak Dizdar—Bosnia’s leading poet in the 20th century. Both the Quran and the poetry of Mak Dizdar are returned to throughout the book, firmly placing this book in the Islamic tradition, and also in the humanistic cultural milieu of the town itself.

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Maintaining the Sacred Center forms a distinct step in Mahmutćehajić's project to regain history in Bosnia and Europe. It is an attempt to recover what was destroyed, ignored, or at least troubled by the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and the totalizing force of Tito's government. His previous works have on the one side focused on Bosnia's pluralist history—*The Denial of Bosnia* (2000), *Bosnia the Good: Tolerance and Tradition* (2000) and *Sarajevo Essays: Politics, Ideology, and Tradition* (2003)—and on the other on exploring the meaning of Islam in a pluralist environment—*On Love: In the Muslim Tradition* (2007) *The Mosque: The Heart of Submission* (2006). *Maintaining the Sacred Center* endeavours to do both through an analysis of the microcosm of the town of Stolac.

In one sense this is both a logical step in his works as well as their culmination—especially when taken as a set of writings with *On the Other: A Muslim View* and *Across the River: On the Poetry of Mak Dizdar*. Mahmutćehajić's latest writings portray an attempt to take the lessons learned from decades of struggle—struggle to define the meaning of Bosnia in the post-Yugoslavia Balkans and the place of Islam in a modern, pluralist Europe—back home. *On the Other* serves as a blueprint for a theology of inclusion based on epistemic humility, and *Across the River* seeks to draw out some of the same humanist wisdom from one of Bosnia's greatest literary figures. In an intimate exploration of memory, history and society *Maintaining the Sacred Center* sees the author face the complexities and problematics of his hometown of Stolac, and take steps towards the recovery of its significance, built up over centuries of communal life. Yet this is not just a work of history, but also an exploration into theology through historiography. With the theological underpinning of this work being a desire to return to original perfection (Mahmutćehajić 2011: 19).

A book as complex as this cannot be justifiably reviewed in so short a space. Instead this article is a steadied glance, locating various facets of the book in context and comparing them with writers from disciplines as far afield as cultural geography, psychoanalysis and philosophy, who have faced similar challenges in encapsulating a human being's relationship with their surroundings.

There are three key aspects and dimensions of the book to look at. First, I look at the book in terms of the text itself and how it seeks to explain how individual and community historically interacted and were constituted by the town of Stolac, with particular reference to the writings of Yi-fu Tuan. Second, looking at the role of the author in writing about a lived landscape, looking especially at the issue of memory.

Thirdly, looking at the way that Mahmutćehajić's book deals with the contemporary lived reality of Stolac and the multiplicity of histories, highlighting the books virtues and limitations and what these mean for healing and reconstruction in Bosnia.

**TEXT: LANDSCAPE AND HUMANS CONSTITUTED
IN AN ORDER OF SIGNS**

The social dimension of lived spaces has been approached in a number of different ways in academia—whether in sociology, cultural history, anthropology, cultural geography, *inter alia*. These approaches stem from the perpetual ancient struggle to interpret the meaning of the spaces around us, but also from the struggle to define how we, as societies, imbue our surroundings with meaning. These theories have often highlighted a religious dimension to landscape and lived spaces. This is particularly evident in projects of sacred geometry—from both the perspectives of those who design buildings as well as those who use them. Charles-François Dupuis, in his seminal enlightenment take on religiosity, wrote that the evidence of history shows that the worship of the nature that surrounds us is universally the root of religiosity (Dupuis 1872: 23–48). While this may have been a facet of enlightenment—era hubris, it does point to the central role that making sense of one's surroundings has in all our lives.

Mahmutćehajić's latest offering echoes a number of genres of writing about landscape and urban spaces, which will be highlighted throughout this article. His writing reminds the reader of contemporary authors who seek to investigate the relationship between the social, the physical, and the sacred, whether in landscapes or constructed environments. Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*, which speaks of the interconnectivity of the various dimensions of the landscape around us, is a case in point. His view is that the space around us imbues our selves with meaning and vice versa, in a symbiotic relationship where each aspect has always already informed the other. As he aptly states: "Nature has done things to us, and we have returned the favour" (Schama 26/4/1995: 186). In this sense, *Maintaining the Sacred Center* at its core describes a vision of the urban landscape as interpretive of life, where symbolic resonances shape the individual's interaction with space.

This perspective echoes very clearly with the genre-making writings of Yi-fu Tuan, author of the oft-quoted *Space and Place*. Tuan sought to learn about the lived experience of space and how the individual experiences and draws meaning from this

space, in a way that is often more illustrative and symbolic than scientific in its method. For Tuan,

[the] attempt is to systematize humanistic insights...so that their importance is evident to us not only as thoughtful people curious to know more about our own nature—our potential for experiencing—but also as tenants of the earth practically concerned with the design of a more human habitat. The approach is descriptive, aiming more often to suggest than to conclude. (Tuan 1977:7)

Tuan's approach, like Mahmutćehajić's, is interested in a symbolic framework of understanding that elucidates our use of space. Mahmutćehajić paints a picture of the town of Stolac through a number of lenses, constructing facets of both the town and its people. He lays out a set of conceptual frames in short chapters through which the relationship between the town and its inhabitants is viewed.

Maintaining the Sacred Center is comprised of a core set of nineteen chapters, book-ended by a set of additional texts, which both bolster the text and work with it. The core text is a framework of nineteen distinct chapters, each chapter observing the town of Stolac through a different lens. The chapters—which are named illustratively with titles such as “The Garden,” “The Hour,” “Recite,” “Doors and Windows,” “The Tree”—take different approaches in conceptually locating the town of Stolac. The different chapters work together to paint a variety of pictures of different aspects of the town that have been lost either through neglect, or through forceful destruction.

As we are later to learn in the book the number nineteen has a special meaning for Stolac—being the number of paths leading to the town, and the number of pillars on the town-Center mosque. The number nineteen also reverberates through a triptych of texts that form a distinct body within the text. These are composed of the chief text, followed a set of nineteen images of the *carsija*, and a Post-Scriptum divided into nineteen parts. The main text and the Post-Scriptum work in tandem, providing two distinct experiences of the same issues. And while the core text tries to recover a habitus of Stolac-past, the ‘Post Scriptum’ is a very personal meditation on Stolac's recent history. The chapters in each of the works which make up this tryptich vary from being very closely related to more tangential, because while some are clearly linked (the tryptich of parts respectively: Oblivion and Recollection—a personal reflection on epistemology and landscape—The Human Being and the World in Focus and Dispersion)

others are seemingly not. The images, while both being interesting in themselves and serving to take us on a tour of the *carsija*, do seem to harbour another layer of meanings which emerge on closer contemplation of the ostensibly disjointed work as a multifaceted and coherent whole.

Mahmutćehajić shares with Tuan the structuralist notion that there are discernable truths within the landscape that explain our use of the landscape. Mahmutćehajić writes:

Human beings and the world bring together a mutable order of signs. The key question is therefore: How can these signs in the world and in us be taught or learned as a discourse on the earth and the heavens and what lies between, as well as of the body and the Spirit and what lies between? (Mahmutćehajić 2011: 27)

Philosophically this approach to the world is very close to classic structuralism as propounded by Ferdinand De Saussure. Saussure saw landscape as a “specific, spatial signifying system, connecting both the signifier and the signified” (De Saussure 1974: 188).

Mahmutćehajić’s signs, like Tuan’s, are both conceptual dichotomies and questions of direction/perspective. For Tuan the distinctions between relative space and bounded space (Tuan 1977: 13–16) or between hearth and cosmos go to highlight that we as humans divide space into different parts and assign values to those parts (ibid.: 34–50).

For Mahmutćehajić these divisions of space are intimately related to our relationship with the divine. The key relations in the text are between the highest and lowest, the inviolate and the violate. The dichotomy between high and low relates both to the position of the town of Stolac to that which surrounds it and also to the human condition in relation to God. The relationship between *the violate* and *the inviolate* is more subtle. Mahmutćehajić describes the state of humanity after Adam’s violation of the tree in the garden of Eden (for the author *the inviolate tree*), and the core relation between violate as human and inviolate as divine (Mahmutćehajić 2011: 7–13). But more central than this is the inviolability of the geographical space of the sacred in the Islamic world—he points here to the haram of the Inviolable Mosque in Mecca (ibid.: 79–85). He then locates the various inviolate spaces in the social and cultural landscape of Stolac—including the larger and smaller graveyards and the various religious spaces—to highlight the central space of the inviolable in the town’s lived history (ibid.: 156–57).

Mahmutćehajić also explains the city through directions, without reference to dichotomies. For Tuan, directions are central in human understanding of a space, in particular how

... strange space turns into neighborhood, and how the attempt to impose a spatial order by means of a grid of cardinal directions results in the establishment of a pattern of significant places, including the cardinal points and center. Distance is a meaningless spatial concept apart from the idea of goal or place. (Tuan 1977: 136)

Mahmutćehajić locates Stolac in relation to the cardinal directions that are relevant to it, that is, the four ways that one can enter the town, which correspond also to the four directions that one can enter the Mosque in the Center of Stolac carsija. He relates this to the idea of the *mihrab* in Islam (Mahmutćehajić 2011: 21–26). In *Maintaining the Sacred Center*, Stolac is at the cardinal Center of the valley, the Carsija mosque is at this fulcrum in the Center of the town, and then the *mihrab* in the mosque itself points to the divine Center (ibid.: 3–6, 21–23) .

However the Center of Stolac is not described only in its directional relationship to the divine. As Tuan underscores urban spaces are fundamentally social spaces:

In the city, people build up an image of human possibility as they observe, and learn to participate in an extraordinary range of activities undertaken, peacefully, by individuals and groups who are strangers to one another. (Tuan 1996: 154)

A number of social places are described which highlight the relationship between society and landscape: the guesthouse showing the divine place of hospitality (Mahmutćehajić 2011: 47–53), the market square highlighting the central place of the exchange of goods and services and ideas (ibid.: 54–59), and the *mekteb* (place of books) illustrating the central role of books—and the book—at the core of life in Stolac.

For Mahmutćehajić these sets of signs are central to our relationship with God. They are navigational points in our relationship to the divine, and are signs constantly guiding our struggle to be more virtuous and return to original perfection. This return is of profound importance for Mahmutćehajić. He is not just telling a story about human spirituality or about a little town in southern Bosnia devoid from its context, but narrating the return through contextualizing Stolac in its spiritual environment.

The word ‘Stolac’ is looked at etymologically and its relations to the idea of a seat are explained. Stolac is explained itself, as the ‘the seat’ (ibid.: xxi). This is, probably more than anything else, fundamental to understanding the book’s aims. For Mahmutćehajić, Bosnia represents a conundrum at the heart of Europe that needs to be solved, if the possibility of unity in diversity in the wider world is going to be successful. In *Maintaining the Sacred Center*, Stolac is placed as a central lynchpin in resolving Bosnia’s conundrum. As the last words to the forward to the book remind us:

We are in the world. But our world is fully comprehended by God's Seat (Stolac). In comparison to His Seat, the totality of existence is a ring tossed into infinite space. (ibid.: xxiii)

Stolac is then symbolically and concretely placed at the forefront of humanist and religious attempts at reaching unity in diversity.

AUTHOR: HISTORY AND PRESENT ARE ONE IN MEMORY

However accurate this reading of the town may be, Mahmutćehajić’s project could extremely easily be seen as an attempt to recover a golden age, and as such be belittled as a mere act of *nostalgie* on the part of a sentimental. It cannot be denied that the book is consciously nostalgic, seeking to remember a forgotten past. Why does it do this? Have not theorists trying to reach back to a golden age been debunked? The “noble savage” of Rousseau has been the object of derision of a generation of anthropologists. The reader is almost caught in a bind between nostalgia and research, between sentiment and recovery, but this book is not a simple act of remembrance for sentiment’s sake. Mahmutćehajić sees the remembrance of a lifestyle and lives that were lost as a dynamic process. The act of remembering is inextricable from this, and is an active process. The reader is constantly challenged to ask not the passive “What did we forget?” but the dynamic “When is it best to remember?”

Schama in *Landscape and Memory* when speaking on the role of memory in the interconnectivity of the various dimensions of the landscape around us highlights the role of memory in the construction of the space in which we live. This proximity perspective is close to that of Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus* and *doxa*, and this informs most effectively of how Mahmutćehajić is speaking of Stolac (Bourdieu 1977). Mahmutćehajić writes of a mutually constructive relationship between humans and their landscapes—which is at once social, urban and natural. Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus*—negotiating as it does

between objective structures and practices—enables us to see a reality that transcends the dichotomies which have hemmed in much theoretical thinking about the social world. Mahmutćehajić's thinking about the town of Stolac is—if not drawn from the palate of Bourdieu—very closely comparable to it. Bourdieu analysed the dialectical process of the “incorporation of structures” and the objectification of *habitus*, whereby social formations tend to reproduce themselves. Bourdieu comes up with a social theory of lived landscape where society—through practice and repetition—is both created by and creates its surrounding.

Stolac, however, is not so easily comprehended, with layers of hidden social and physical history which are not readily available for investigation. And this is where Mahmutćehajić's offering is unique and comes into its own, and where moreover his work echoes that of Schama. Rather than writing an analysis of extant practices and relations with the lived environment, Mahmutćehajić seeks to rediscover the habitus (or collections of different habituses [sic]) that were lost in part or in full during the conflicts of the 90s and the political forces before this. It is then an excavation of landscape and even memory, and a rebuilding of landscape and memory.

Schama argues that landscape is intrinsically tied to people's memory and to the perspective from which they engage with their surroundings and as such helps form a their sense of identity.

Before it can ever be the repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock. (Schama 1995: 6–7)

However, neither memory nor recorded history are inclusive, and are more often than not swept under the carpet of time. For Mahmutćehajić this is a reality that is known only too well.

Every thread that binds phenomena with meaning passes through the dead and their graves, through wounded and tortured selves, through destroyed buildings and their contents, to find itself in the shadows and light bounded by the earthly horizon and the arch of heaven and all that lies between them. It seems that the fading riches of the way of life of the murdered and their world remain, somehow mysteriously, within that frame. (Mahmutćehajić 2011: xxvi)

The subaltern studies research method, where truth in history is sought through the investigation of absence, is illustrative in this regard. Ranajit Guha in his *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* and the subsequent project of Subaltern Studies underscored that social history is often hidden in records and requires a project of recovery to extricate it. Mahmutćehajić's latest offering can certainly be seen in this same vanguard, and he certainly speaks from the same page: "Oblivion and recollection are conditions of the human self...any record is simply a shadow of what we have seen" (ibid.: 118).

History and presence are united in memory, and—as both Schama and Mahmutćehajić explain—this is evident in the memory of landscape. But, as Sharon Zukin explains in *Landscapes of Power*, our lived spaces always "reveal, represent and symbolize the relationship of power and control out of which they have emerged" (Zukin 1993: 192).

Stolac certainly does not offer a clean history, and less so a simple present. The beauty of a town faithfully rebuilt to its nostalgic image can belie the fact that Stolac has experienced turmoil, destruction, trauma and criminality. To bear witness to this, Mahmutćehajić includes an essay that acts as the second part of the story of Stolac—its unfortunate recent history. "Post Scriptum: My Ruins" narrates the author's personal experiences of the decline and disappearance of those facets of the town and its lifestyle which are carefully reconstructed in the first part of the book. This segments the book neatly, on the one side painting a picture of a life-once-lived and on the other telling a story of trauma and overhaul.

The division of the book in this way may also serve to slightly truncate the overall message. The visceral narrative—the current story of trauma and overhaul—is almost left as an add-on at the end of the book; as a 'Post-Scriptum' after even the Afterword (Mahmutćehajić 2011: 153–87). This division is uncomfortable, but for Mahmutćehajić it seems to promote a dynamic act of remembrance, by linking memory and truth through a lived landscape, and by noting that the ever-present stories of destruction and downfall are a mere post-script—an addendum to a past with much stronger foundations.

ACTUALITY: THE STRUGGLE TO REGAIN HISTORY IS MESSY

Mahmutćehajić offers a recovery of Stolac's history that is clearly Muslim in its perspective, while being informed by perennial philosophy. For me this combination brings up a key problem in the book's goal. There is a very strong and unreconciled tension in *Maintaining the Sacred Center*, between on one side the book's goal of recapturing a universal history, and on the other the way that the book proceeds to do this in remembering that history through the experiences of one religious tradition alone.

The preface to the book by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, while introducing the author excellently, states that the goal of Bosnia's "becoming once again a place where...different religions and cultures can live side by side in peace and harmony... cannot be achieved seriously except on the basis of the teachings of tradition and the perennial philosophy" (Nasr 2011: xii). While the intentions behind this statement are noble and the message of commonality is pertinent, the assertion is perhaps misunderstanding the efforts required on the ground.

Looking at the context of Mahmutćehajić, *both* his theory and his praxis continually shows the attempt to promote a peace that is both rooted and open (Nayed 2010). Mahmutćehajić's perspective, seen in his other writings, has always been open to the competing narratives at play in the region, highlighting their place in a single diverse Bosnia—a Bosnia of 'unity in diversity'. He has also not in his practical efforts to achieve peace attempted to subsume all these under a single grand-narrative but strives to listen to the *dialogic, carnivalesque* nature of reality and the interplay between various narratives (to use the Bakhtinian terms).

The problem that exists when trying to recover history in contested regions is the question of whose history and whose meanings are being recovered. The Balkans in particular have experienced waves of history brought by new immigrants, new styles, new prophecies, so that the Balkans is now a garden with a number of interconnected and competing ecosystems.

Benvenisti's *Sacred Landscapes: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948* is an excellent example of how to pay homage to the competition that is inherent in contested spaces. Benvenisti writes that his book is about "my troubled internal landscape as much as it is about the tortured landscape of my homeland" a sentiment which chimes well with Mahmutćehajić's (Benvenisti 2002: 1). He also puts forward that the land "had six dimensions, a three dimensional Jewish space, underlain by an equally three

dimensional Arab space” (ibid.: 2). And while the subtleties of identity in the former Yugoslavia may underscore a situation that is more interconnected, the result became the same a “struggle turned into an ethnic cleansing operation” (ibid.: 3). Benvenisti’s response to the attempted recovery of the history of a landscape held sacred by competing discourses is one of polyphony—where competing histories are overlapping and interlaid.

The shift from De Saussurian structuralism to post-structuralism is enlightening here, and looking at the book through Kristevan eyes gives added depth to any reading of the De Saussurian heart of Mahmutćehajić’s core text. Julia Kristeva’s idea of the semiotic in *Revolution in Poetic Language* was a radical departure in Structuralism, towards something more inclusive but also messier. Her main hypothesis is that other preverbal language structures (which become *the abject* when we acquire the capacity to engage in verbal language) constitute a ‘semiotic’ language, which makes a constant revolution against the symbolic language of reason (Kristeva 1984). For her this revolution is most often displayed in the form of language disturbances, which are inherent to poetry, both in its classical and modernistic forms.

Kristeva’s seminal article “Stabat Mater” usefully illustrates the dialogic relationship we see through Mahmutćehajić’s division of the core text (Kristeva 1985). Kristeva’s article is an overt display of *intertextuality*, where meaning is sought in the relationships not only between the reader and the text, but also the text in relation to other texts. Kristeva writes in “Stabat Mater” with a dry academic text interspersed with bouts of poetic language that try to convey some of the emotive or gut meanings that the academic text fails to offer. It is an unusual method of writing an academic article, but enabled her to engage with some of the more visceral meanings around a subject (i.e., that which is usually *abject*).

The inclusion of the semiotic side-by-side with the academic allowed for an explanation that neither of the sides alone offers, but is found in the space in-between. Mahmutćehajić, through placing a set of parallel frames—on the one side a past of clear meanings and wholesome relationships, on the other side a present full of semiotic incursions through trauma, destruction and loss-of meaning—takes us one step closer to understanding. In doing so he offers a distinctly more complete picture of the history of the social life and history of Stolac than may have been garnered from an attempt to reconcile the two in a single space.

But what Mahmutćehajić has to illustrate is not only a landscape that was divided by identities but also a lifestyle that was suppressed by the overwhelming discursive power of totalitarian ideologies. These totalitarianisms for him include both Tito-era Communism and the nationalisms of the post-Yugoslav era. Both of these political developments have resulted in a destruction of the social fabric of Stolac. It may be unusual to call the heterodox and tumultuous nationalist movements of the post-Yugoslav era totalitarian, but they do display a number of the characteristics of a totalitarian regime as described by Hannah Arendt in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1966). Arendt argued that totalitarian ideologies demand an internal coherence that is all encompassing. They also demand the destruction of natural human bonds through new bureaucratic methods and the destruction of public places and private spaces—i.e. the polity—through redesign or monitoring. As Mahmutćehajić underscores while introducing the conceptual premise of *Maintaining the Sacred Center*: “All of the links and relationships in the webs of meaning woven through history are broken” (Mahmutćehajić 2011: xxvi). Stolac has experienced all of the phenomena that Arendt described in the Tito era—and also again, in a different way, since the end of that era. To put it in another way, Stolac’s old social bonds have been dispersed.

It is in this regard that Mahmutćehajić’s book speaks of a spiritual dispersal—that is a diaspora of time rather than spatially. The theme of dispersal is retuned to throughout the book, evoking feelings of both loss and recollection. So, as trauma has dispersed the polity, and their links to the fabric of their landscape, so accordingly *Maintaining the Sacred Center* is an attempt to go back. The split levels of understanding, and the parallel tracts of nineteen steps leading to a return both speak about this link: between the people cast aside, the lingering landscape, and the deeper links that can be seen, in religion, and in social action.

Intriguingly, Tuan speaks about some of the benefits of the diaspora experience from space and place. These benefits point directly to the dynamism inherent in Mahmutćehajić’s work. Tuan writes:

History provides instances of people forced into exile, and suffering deeply from it; and yet the same people might gain some spiritual benefits from the displacement—at least in the long run. (Tuan 2011:196)

Speaking specifically about the Jewish experience, Tuan argued that through the act of displacement the Jewish people were “able to bring to fruition universalist ideas that existed only in germinal form in the older Prophets“ (ibid.). Tuan’s perspective underlines that displacement and remembrance can have an important and dynamic role to play in our contemporary lived experience. This is clearly the role that *Maintaining the Sacred Center* plays.

CONCLUSION: DYNAMIC REBIRTH ROOTED IN A THEOLOGY OF LANDSCAPE

Stolac has experienced more than its fair share of traumatic experiences that have dramatically altered its habitus, and destroyed many of its buildings. But new life is born during destruction, as Schama explains elegantly. This is an important lesson both for the recovery of a people’s *habitus* and the practice of life within a polyphony of narratives about landscape:

We cannot help think of fire as the element of annihilation. But both mythographers and natural historians know better: that from the pyre rises the phoenix, that through a mantle of ash can emerge a shoot of restored life. So if this is a book of memories, it is not meant as a lament at the cremation of our hope. Rather it is a journey through spaces and places, eyes wide open, that may help us keep faith with a future on this tough lovely old planet. (Schama 1995: 19)

Schama’s quote may very well have been written by Mahmutćehajić, as it precisely portrays the books aims. However, for me, the space in between structuralism and post-structuralism in Mahmutćehajić’s work, and in his theology, is that which allows this journey to happen and merits further investigation. The core text is very De Saussurian with a clear set of *signs* and *signifieds* in a collective memory. However, the fact that this is placed as in the past and as something that was lost is a tacit acceptance that De Saussure was wrong. So, like the shift from De Saussure to Baudrillard, the fixity of meanings becomes loose—signs divorced from their meanings. In a sense Mahmutćehajić is suggesting that although meanings change, we need to remember and understand where meaning was found in the past, in order to understand ourselves, and how we might engage with the future. In this sense memory and the transformative power of nostalgia can be a dynamic force for today. The goal is not to return to the past but to

recognise our ability to rectify the past in our memories and to rediscover elements of a true history that has been choked, suppressed or just ignored. As Ivo Banac beautifully puts it in his introduction to *Maintaining the Sacred Center*:

The key lies not in the loss of the urban order, a signpost towards the Center—towards the transcendent—but in the discovery of order within oneself, which enables one to rebuild a destroyed world. (Banac 2011: xiii)

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