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## Bringing cities in: the urbanization of critical peacebuilding

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WORKING  
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**BRINGING CITIES IN  
THE URBANIZATION OF CRITICAL PEACEBUILDING**

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**IN SERIES**

1. *Mostar and Mitrovica: contested grounds for peacebuilding* – Annika Björkdahl & Ivan Gusic
2. *Bringing cities in: the urbanization of critical peacebuilding* – Ivan Gusic

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mostar and Mitrovica – poignant symbols of conflict in our time as well as peacebuilding failures (Bollens 2012). In this paper I aim to urbanize the conception of peacebuilding and advance the knowledge on conflict in cities and cities in conflict. I develop a theoretical framework by merging critical peacebuilding and urban studies and employ it in comparative field studies in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and Mitrovica, Kosovo. This enables a dynamic interplay between the theoretical framework and the empirics from Mostar and Mitrovica.

As material and symbolic assets, cities are central contested spaces in many identity-based conflicts (Bollens 2001). Contested cities such as Mostar and Mitrovica – or e.g. Beirut, Jerusalem, Nicosia, Belfast – have proved particularly resistant to peacebuilding and they tend to be potential tinderboxes and fertile ground for old and new conflicts (Bollens 2011, Calame and Charlesworth 2009, Dunn 1994). The disappearance of mixed residential areas, common before outbreaks of violence, reduce the chances of reconciliation and accelerates polarization. Issues of refugee return and property become intractable knots. Temporary barriers tend to become permanent, and imagined walls become real (Calame and Charlesworth 2009, Sawalha 2010).

Contested cities are also often located at the epicentres of ‘new wars’ in which collective identities are threatened (Pullan 2011) and in vulnerable times they tend to freeze conflicts, as they remain contested regardless of conflict settlements. As such, contested cities become symbols of the continuities rather than discontinuities between war and peace. In Mostar, sixteen years after the cease-fire in BiH, everyday tensions are still present and in Mitrovica international forces – at the moment ‘assisted’ by Serbian barricades – guard the bridges over Ibar. These kinds of cities “personify” the conflicts that they often are focal points of (Anderson 2008). Mitrovica is Belgrade’s symbol that there are Serbs left in Kosovo (ICG 2011), while Croat ownership of Mostar is seen as a prerequisite for their survival in BiH (ICG 2009).

Nevertheless, these cities can have positive roles as well since contested cities as lived spaces provide for interactions that can either reinforce or undermine

polarizations in everyday life. In the streets negotiations over concepts such as tolerance and democracy take place and challenges to governing polarized communities emerge (Bollens 2012, Harvey 2006, Lefebvre 1996). In public spaces urban actors can materialized internationally sponsored, elite negotiated and nationally agreed peace accords as cities provide the locus of everyday interaction where identity is constantly constructed and re-constructed (Eastmond and Stefansson 2010). The urban nature of cities in combination with their central political, economical and social importance means that their situations often have implications outside the urban. Hence, the success or failure of peacebuilding in cities is of crucial importance for a wider state peace and (in)stability (Anderson 2008, Beauregard 1995, Graham 2010) as seen in BiH and Kosovo through Mostar and Mitrovica. The political deadlock in Mostar after the 2008 local elections fuelled tensions between Croats and Bosniaks on higher levels (ICG 2009), and the prospect for stability in Kosovo depends on the ‘northern situation’ (ICG 2011).

However, little research has been made on peacebuilding in cities and the nature of contested cities. Urban studies have generally ignored post-conflict ethnationally contested cities, while peacebuilding is state-centric and ignores the urban level of conflicts. There have been studies *in* contested post-conflict cities, but not *of* them. Consequently, a key deficit of peacebuilding is the lack of understanding contested cities as nexuses of top-down and bottom-up peacebuilding in the interaction of international, state and local initiatives. In cities externally designed peacebuilding is challenged, resisted, and transformed and through the characteristics of ‘the urban’ and ‘the city’ it has the ability to spread and have implications outside its own spatiality, instead of being confined to a limited zone.

#### **RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM**

Every academic piece needs a puzzle to tackle, and the one I address here is how conflict in cities and cities in conflict can be understood, what measures foster peace in cities and what factors generate polarization and conflict. The encapsulating problem is the failure of peacebuilding in contested cities and the subsequent obstacle to the wider peace that these cities constitute. The divide of Mostar in the Dayton agreement confirmed the ethnification of politics in

the *Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina* (FBiH) and Mitrovica continues to be the toughest issue to overcome in the Serb-Albanian conflict.<sup>1</sup>

To close in on this and address the shortcomings of contemporary peacebuilding, I argue that peacebuilding needs to be addressed with an urban logic in mind, focusing on cities and citizens in the everyday – i.e. cities should be included in the conceptualization of peacebuilding in order for it to undertake successful rather than counterproductive measures. Cities have long been the focal point of human progression as concentration of resources and urban proximities attract movements and individuals and enable their development. They are the genesis of human interaction, ‘politics’ has its etymologic roots in the Greek words for ‘citizen’ and ‘city’, and in his *Politics*, Aristotle had the ‘affairs of the city’ in mind. To then ignore the urban dimension of conflicts is to simply undermine peacebuilding.

Consequently, I have a theory-developing aim where I urbanize the imagining of peacebuilding by marrying the theoretical and conceptual insights of urban studies with the contemporary ideas of critical peacebuilding. The aim is thus to reconceptualise peace and conflict through an urban lens and advance the understanding of cities in conflict and conflict in cities. In this endeavour I have three foci. First I develop a theoretical framework that conceptualizes the role of cities in conflict and how they can function as (physical, abstract and lived) spaces for facilitating peace or generating conflict. This is the abstract and theory-developing dimension of my paper where I set the ground needed for the urbanization of peacebuilding. This theoretical framework then guides my field studies. Second, taking departure from the empirical field studies, I try to understand how ‘the city’ and ‘the urban’ obstruct and facilitate different peacebuilding efforts and how they generate new conflicts and provoke old ones in Mostar and Mitrovica. Third, I compare, when possible, the empirical discovering from the field studies in Mostar and Mitrovica through the lens provided by the theoretical framework in place, in order to distinguish similarities and differences between the two. The underlying and overarching

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<sup>1</sup> The focus here is on these two cities. For a wider overview of the region, BiH and Kosovo see e.g. Djokic and Ker-Lindsay (2011), Judah (2008) Lampe (2000), and Ramet (2005).



objective of the two last foci is to fine-tune my theoretical framework and produce ideas on facilitating and hindering factors of peacebuilding in cities.

## OVERVIEW OF LITERATURES

As aforementioned, this paper takes departure from two literatures in order to conceptualize contested cities, namely *critical peacebuilding* and *urban studies*, marrying the methods and critique of the former with the insights of the latter. Following the failures of peacebuilding in the last two decades in diverse contexts such as Afghanistan (Mason 2011), BiH (Kostic 2007), DR Congo (Eriksen 2009), Sierra Leone (Andreu 2009), Sri Lanka (Stokke and Uyangoda 2011), and Kosovo (Hehir 2010), to mention a few, *critical peacebuilding* emerged, as a reaction to these failures and as an attempt to achieve sustainable peacebuilding by critiquing the ontological and ideological premises that dominate contemporary peacebuilding.

Dominant<sup>2</sup> peacebuilding is focused around three ideas that make up its repertoire. First, there is economic liberalization, meaning that market-economy, privatizations and abolishment of trade barriers are to be established at once, believing that it is the only way to achieve economic recovery (Addison and Brück 2009, Berdal and Mousavizadeh 2010, Richmond and Franks 2007). Second, capacity- and institution-building is a priority where effective institutions in western style are seen as a prerequisite for stability (Jarstad and Sisk 2008, Paris and Sisk 2009). Third, there is democracy, but in such a narrow and instrumental conceptualization that it is only constituted of elections (Brancati and Snyder 2011). In summary: stability from institutions will enable the market-economy to provide prosperity, and elections validate the efficiency of the institutions. When these three dynamics are in place, there is peace and external actors should end their engagement (Suhrke and Berdal 2012).

In practice, critical peacebuilding argues, this is far from the truth. In BiH to early elections in 1996 brought the warring actors to power once again (Djokic

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<sup>2</sup> This is often referred to as 'liberal peacebuilding'. However, from a philosophical point of view, and with the methods practiced in the field in mind, there is hardly much that is 'liberal' about this peacebuilding. Hence, the term *dominant peacebuilding* will be used instead, referring to its dominant position in contemporary peacebuilding.

and Ker-Lindsay 2011). Externally supported institutions provided war criminal Charles Taylor with a stable powerbase in Liberia (Kovacs 2008). In Mozambique traditional economic systems were undermined when free trade was introduced (Cramer 2009). Further, the indirect implications of dominant peacebuilding, such as top-down approaches, narrow understandings of conflict, focus on symptoms rather than root causes, and belief in the universality of its own ideas have led to a number of other failures (see: (Goodhand et al. 2011, Philpott and Powers 2010, Ponzio 2011, Rubinstein 2008).

Critical peacebuilding argues that this problem-solving approach with imperialistic (Darby 2009) tendencies must be abandoned. A less naïve view on conflicts is needed, where change is thought possible and a static view of conflict is abandoned, where other nuances, actors and dynamics are included than just elites, external actors and institutions (Mac Ginty 2011). A top-down view on conflicts must be complemented with a bottom-up ditto since some conflicts cannot be transformed unless addressing local conditions (Autesserre 2010). One very important feature is *local ownership*, which emphasizes the need for locals<sup>3</sup> to be involved in peacebuilding since *they* live its result. This means revulsion from externally imposed agendas and instead allowing local, often hidden, agency ((Campbell 2008, Donais 2009, Kappler and Richmond 2011). Further, *context-sensitivity* is stressed as it is argued that conflicts might have similarities, but reside in such different conditions that a standardized blueprint peacebuilding toolbox is doomed to fail. Rather, sensitivity to local conditions and conflict patterns is needed (Berdal and Wennmann 2010, Mac Ginty and Richmond 2009, Tadjbakhsh 2011). Critical peacebuilding also argues that the *everyday life* of citizens need to be addressed and their problems accounted for (Richmond 2010, Tadjbakhsh 2011). The encapsulating concept that the above falls into is *hybridity*, meaning that compromise and resistance should play out between internal and external actors. There needs to be mutual understanding and respect, because neither can build peace alone – only by working together

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<sup>3</sup> This is a problematic term. Sometimes locals are dismissed, other times they are ‘romanticized’, often portrayed as homogenous, and rarely given agency. When I use the term I refer to people living in an area – i.e. acknowledging their diversity, agency and their right to define themselves.

and conceding in some issues is hybridity, and hopefully peace, achieved (Mac Ginty 2011, Richmond 2010).

However, while the critique has been heard, the theoretical arguments acknowledged, the field expanded, there are few examples of concretizations. Too much local ownership is damaging, since external actors are present because the locals could not solve the conflict themselves to begin with (Donais 2009). There are problems with locals excluding other locals – e.g. men excluding women (Anderlini 2007). Reconciliation is to be localized, but often there is only hate present. Critical peacebuilding has yet to present some ideas on how their concepts are to materialize. My contribution is showing the importance of the urban level of analysis and that these concepts can be materialized in cities.

To achieve this I use insights from *urban studies*. While not wanting to claim that states have *no* role, urban studies feel that the role of cities in politics, economy and society is larger than often accredited to them.<sup>4</sup> Therefore it is not intellectually honest to rarely give media attention to mayor elections, even though some cities have more inhabitants than medium-sized countries (UN-HABITAT 2008). New York, London and Tokyo, dominate the world's finance markets, yet focus is almost only on states when trying to solve economic problems (Sassen 2001). The budget revenues of Berlin are of the same size as Pakistan's, a nuclear country, and the innovative 'American' technological industry is actually concentrated in a few hubs (Sassen 2002, UN-HABITAT 2008).

State-centrism and its accompanying neglect of cities is a great source of frustration for urban scholars (see: (Davies and Imbroscio 2010, Davis and Libertun de Duren 2011) who argue that the most important and progressive, as well as potentially destructive, dynamics in economics, politics and society are located in cities and are urban in nature (Boudreau 2010, Davis 2011, Magnusson 2010). They argue that cities are unique, and this conceptualization is divided in two: the city and the urban. The *city* is a present and immediate reality, a practico-material and architectural fact that is a prerequisite for the

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<sup>4</sup> For the ever-growing importance of cities presented in numbers consult UN-HABITAT (2008).

*urban*, which is a social and lived reality made up of relations which are conceived, constructed or reconstructed by thought (Lefebvre 1996) – i.e. the urban needs the proximity of the city in order to flourish. The city is public space, streets, and buildings, while the urban is the lived everyday that takes place there (Soja 2000, Soja 2010). Hence when talking of *cities*, I refer to the combined result of ‘the urban’ and ‘the city’, the practical, abstract and lived outcome of everything, real and imagined, within the spatiality of cities.

Cities are, according to urban studies, nodal points for economic growth since they provide opportunities for concentration and specialization that lead to a more productive economic system (Bridge and Watson 2000b, Lefebvre 1996, Sassen 2002). London is the world’s centre for finance, Geneva gathers many of the world’s international organizations, and in Belgrade MNCs usually establish their Balkan offices. Cities are magnets for innovation, progressive powers and intellectuals (Arias and Warf 2009, Lefebvre 1996). It was in Cairo that the Arabic spring gathered enough democracy-striving people, Paris that attracted Simone de Beauvoir, and Athens where democracy was evolved. Cities attract artists, norm breakers and lifestyles that might not be accepted outside of their anonymity (Bridge and Watson 2000a, Short 2000). In cities people protest (Harvey 2006), strangers meet (Davis 2011) and cultures interact (Sassen 1998). Cities are self-organizing and consist of a multiplicity of political and economical authorities (Magnusson 2010) and they are the hubs of global economical flow through which states gain access to global markets. Rather than cities being subordinate to states, urban scholars argue, states depend on cities within its borders (Brenner 2011). It is here where people, groups, cultures meet, in the everyday, the proximate, the concentrated (Beall (Beall et al. 2011, Sassen 1998). A force of impulsion characterizes the urban logic of action. It is the lived and felt intensity of experimentations that has the potential to induce a dynamic process of political action or resistance (Boudreau 2010).

In urban studies cities are positioned between the *near order* (relations between individuals and smaller groups, e.g. families) and the *far order* (e.g. states, religious institutions, MNCs) and hence cities are nexuses between the local and global, the mediation between the orders, and should be the focal point of political, economical and social analysis (Lefebvre 1996). Therefore a

reconceptualization of political space and a reconfiguration of territorial significance is highly needed (Davis 2011, Harvey 2006, Lefebvre 1996) – in short: the city is global, the world is urban (Magnusson 2010). If we include cities in critical peacebuilding analysis we acquire a dynamic aspect of political, economic and social interaction. We open our eyes to see interactions that are of most importance to citizens, such as employment and housing needed for sole existence and survival, healthcare and education that improve and dignify life, and entertainment, culture and socialization that brighten it.

Laws are not implemented in committees by MPs, they are carried through by police officers in the streets. What are the most important features of peace (or conflict) if not the everyday life in cities? These include a sense of security, prospects for better future, possibilities to enjoy life, *or* constant fear, frustration, and isolating encirclement. In cities these things occur, or not. If we include the urban lens we neglect them, and can identify structures, processes and actors that obstruct or foster peace, and create possibilities to help people create what they need.

However, no matter how intriguing these ideas seem, urban studies are still struggling in the shadows of state-centrism, depriving the social sciences one of its most important analytical dimensions. What I attempt here is to (hierarchically) bring ‘up’ the urban dimension into critical peacebuilding and (abstractly) bring ‘down’ its concepts into cities.

### **CONSTRUCTING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To tackle my puzzle and fulfil my aims I construct a theoretical framework throughout chapters 3-5. It is the centrepiece, the core, which dominates my paper and I use it to understand cities in conflict and conflict in cities. By merging critical peacebuilding and urban studies I conceptualize contested cities as 1) *frontiers* in both the urban and larger conflict, 2) *actors* that have autonomous agency, and 3) *arenas* for political manifestations. Each concept is given its own chapter, beginning with a thorough theoretical construction and elaboration of the concept before moving on to interconnected insights deriving from my field studies in Mostar and Mitrovica, and ending with a brief conclusion emphasizing the role of the concept in peacebuilding and how it

can obstruct peace and generate conflict. Throughout the chapters I use adaption (Layder 1998) meaning that the initial theoretical framework has been modified by my insights from the field, producing a theoretically strong and empirically employed framework that advances the knowledge of contested cities and guides future research on how peace can be build and conflict avoided in urban environments.

My theoretical framework argues why cities must be included in the analysis, emphasizes the consequences of inclusion or exclusion, and elaborates the positive outcomes if focus starts in cities. Its concrete contribution to critical peacebuilding is twofold. First it adds the urban level of analysis into the conceptual toolbox of critical peacebuilding, hopefully enabling future success in both understanding and policy in a subfield that has experienced many failures. Second it suggests that the cities are the place and space where peacebuilding should not only be performed but *concentrated* and argues that the intimacy, interdependency and importance of (particularly contested) cities is an almost ideal place for materialization of the abstract concepts of critical peacebuilding.

#### **MOSTAR AND MITROVICA**

Taking departure from the premise that differences between cases outnumber their similarities (Gingrich 2002) I argue that the complexity of any case combined with fuzzy borders between them makes it hard to treat cases as similar *or* different (Coppedge 1999). Rather, all cases are ‘different in their similarities’ and ‘similar in their differences’ (Gingrich 2002:234-235). Furthermore, how one defines a case affects how cases are seen in relation to each other (Tilly 2001:31, 37). One should therefore focus on certain episodes consisting of sequences of events that might have similarities (Bennet and George 2005, 17-18, Tilly 2001:21) in order to be able to distinguish patterns and insights that *could* travel from one case to another (Wolf 2002:105).

My focus is on ethnonationally contested cities in post-conflict transitions from war to peace. Since there is little prior research it is as hard to know what factors are relevant, as it is logical to strive for plurality and try to include many variations – i.e. the case selection is strategic in order to provide fertile ground

for theory-development. With this in mind I chose Mostar in BiH and Mitrovica in Kosovo, which between them offer many variations of the research problem by sharing some events while being strikingly different in others (Goldstone 1991:52). They are both contested but differ in their polarization, the external involvement they have, their level of tension and conflictual history. This means that I could observe urban contestation in different forms, contexts and expressions. A short description of the chosen cases follows.

*Mitrovica*, in its northern part, is the last emblem of active Serb resistance *in* Kosovo. International forces guard – or rather keep under observation – the bridges that separate the northern Serb and the southern Albanian part. It is organizationally divided with Belgrade-financed institutions in the north and has UN, NATO and EU involvement. Violent outbursts happen and ethnic tensions are high, with deadly shootings, establishment of barricades and burning of property as late the moment of writing. Its *de jure* status is contested, but the divide is *de facto* present (ICG 2011). Further, the conflict is not internal, compromising both Serbia and Kosovo, and it will probably have consequences for Serbs and Croats in BiH, Bosniaks in Sandzak, as well as Albanians in southern Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia.<sup>5</sup>

*Mostar* was the bloodiest battlefield between Croats and Bosniaks during the war in Bosnia-BiH 1992-1995, effectively dividing the city on the Austro-Hungarian Boulevard. Today Bosniaks reside in the east while Croats dominate the western parts. The city is organizationally united on paper, but the ethnification of politics is highly visible and the *Office of the High Representative* (OHR) has repeatedly seen itself obliged to react against deadlocks. Mostar had a high-intense frontline during the war and possesses numerous obstructing local actors, but there is increasing interethnic contact and the security situation is very stable (ICG 2003, 2009). Moreover, while not an entirely internal issue, Zagreb has recently distanced itself from the Croats in BiH,

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<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the Kosovo conflict, see e.g. Bieber and Daskalovski (2003), Boyle (2009) and Hehir (2010).

while external actors involved have stressed that a divide of the country is unacceptable.<sup>6</sup>

No complete insights can be expected from only two cases, and important and decisive factors might not be present, but one is always limited by the time and resources at disposal and therefore *no* research design is perfect, only adequate with respect to aim and resources (Bennet and George 2005:23) and I believe that these cases provide many insights.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER**

In conformity with the briefly elaborated theoretical framework presented above, three chapters conceptualizing cities as *frontiers* (chapter 3), *autonomous actors* (chapter 4) and *arenas* (chapter 5), follow this introductory chapter and my methodological framework (chapter 2). Through adaption there is, in each chapter, interplay between the theoretical framework and the empirics from the field studies, developing the theory, fine-tuning it through the empirical insights and comparing Mostar and Mitrovica. Each chapter ends with a short conclusion.

After my construction of a theoretical framework that can be used to analyse the urban dimension of conflict and understand the peacebuilding potential of cities, as well as gain knowledge of Mostar and Mitrovica, a comprehensive conclusion (chapter 6) follows. I finish with one chapter where I reflect on where research needs to move from here (chapter 7).

## **2. METHODOLOGICAL POINT OF DEPARTURE**

Since problems of peace and conflict through an urban lens have received little attention, I have an *explorative* as well as *theory-developing* approach in my endeavour to advance the knowledge of cities in conflict and conflict in cities (Bennet and George 2005, Gingrich 2002). It is possible that ideas that on beforehand looked logical end up being irrelevant while some insights cannot be derived from a desk (Clasen et al. 2006:139) and therefore I have an

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<sup>6</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the war in BiH, see e.g. Bieber (2006), Chandler (2006), and Pickering (2007).



adaptive (Layder 1998) design and an open-minded approach. The latter concept implies that I am critical of my understandings and strive to always be prepared to reconsider conceptualizations. The former concept expresses my belief that knowledge is unlikely to come (at least from me) solely from a desk *or* the field. My results would not be materialized if I had not done a theoretical conceptualization *and* the subsequent fieldwork. Neglecting the former would have limited my understanding of Mostar and Mitrovica, while ignoring the latter would have excluded crucial insights. The developed theory in this paper is thus a result of a constant fine-tuning throughout the interplay process between theory and empirics. Next I address contested cities as objects of study before moving on to my comparative aspect. Finally I describe and reflect upon my fieldwork design and method choice.

### **THE (CONTESTED) CITY AS AN OBJECT OF STUDY**

I write about ethnonationally contested and polarized (as well as divided cities) but during my field studies some people became upset that their city was singled out as a ‘particular case’ and claimed that all cities are divided in some sense and asked me why I insinuated that their city was particular. I remember a notable discussion when I was asked why Mostar was portrayed as divided when nobody talks about the deeply segregated London as divided (Bojo 2011). Which brings into question the different conceptualizations of London, Pristina and Johannesburg vis-à-vis those of Belfast, Mitrovica and Nicosia. Is not every city and society divided in some way and united in another? Is there any difference between a hipster in Brooklyn who never visits Manhattan, and a Croat that never visits the Old Town in Mostar?

The answer is yes in both cases. Every city *is* divided in some way, but at the same time there is an (ontological) difference between the Croat and the hipster who both identify with one group and refuse, or feel no need to, interact with ‘the other’ group(s). Mostar and Mitrovica are both divided – just as any other city – but on top of this they are also politically contested and polarized which makes them scientifically noteworthy. Divided cities are common, contested are not (Cunningham and Byrne 2006). A contested city is one where socioeconomic cleavages are bound up with political divisions (Bollens 2007b:2) where a part of the urban population rejects cooperation

with city institutions (Cunningham and Byrne 2006:45). Contested cities are initially divided (Silver 2010:346) but become contested when different groups see themselves as ‘owners’ of the city (Samman 2008) and initiate unilateral actions aimed at strengthening their group’s sovereignty (Morrissey and Gaffikin 2006:874). Contested cities are not just divided where people do not interact, but they often have a sacred meaning and higher importance (ibid.) where ethnic identities are politicized and constitute bases for social organization, and where insecurity and conflict are catalysts for clustering when spatial boundaries become concrete and impermeable (Silver 2010:349). In divided cities there is conflict about uneven distribution of political, economical and social power, but contested cities have an added dimension of ethnonationalistic claims (Morrissey and Gaffikin 2006:874). A contested city, to put it simply, inhabits at least one group that considers some part of the politics as artificial, imposed or illegitimate (Bollens 2007b:3).

#### **THE COMPARATIVE ASPECT**

As aforementioned, I have a comparative ambition when I try to distinguish similarities and differences with how frontiers, agencies of cities, and arenas function in Mostar and Mitrovica respectively, in order to advance knowledge on cities in peace processes and generate transferable knowledge. I move, however, outside the parameters of what is typically understood as comparing. From my perspective different factors dominate in different contexts (Goldstone 1991:49), cases have more ‘differences than similarities’ (Gingrich 2002:234-235) and it is uncertain if societal laws exist (Tilly 2001). Rather, knowledge is situated and context-bound (Gallie 2007:280) and thus what ‘is’ in Mostar needs not to be in Mitrovica (Jackson 2011, Tilly 2001).

This, however, does not imply that all components are unique in all aspects, and thus it is possible to identify *similar aspects* in different sequences (Goldstone 1991:50). What makes social science even possible is ‘our belief that if we can identify certain sets of salient initial conditions that confront a particular actor or group, we can expect that they will react in a particular (though not identical) fashion that produces a characteristic (though not completely predictable) outcome’ (Goldstone 1991:56). In other words, what one can extract from research are tendencies, patterns or useful accounts and

thus my comparative focus turns to identify ‘patterns grounded in social life worlds’ (Melhuus 2002:78) in cases that show similarities so that ‘lessons learned’ *might* be applicable in other cases (Fox and Gingrich 2002).

This is still only likely with context-sensitivity since similar aspects are only part of the story as every case has critical differences that affect its outcome (Goldstone 1991:61). Just because Mostar and Mitrovica share a similar path towards the cementation of their polarization (Chapter 3), does not mean that an externally imposed unification of institutions will lead to higher interaction in Mitrovica just because it did so in Mostar. Quite the opposite, it is probable that it will lead to *more* conflict due to a lingual barrier and the heavy external involvement in Mitrovica, that Mostar did not have.

This abstract elaboration boils down to certain practical implications for my comparison. As brought forth in the literature overview (Chapter 1.2), there has been little research on my topic, and hence it is quite difficult to present a scheme for comparison on beforehand that would be usable due to the difficulty of including/excluding different dimensions and deeming what is ‘important’ or not. Therefore I *abductively* identify and behold patterns of similarity and differences between Mostar and Mitrovica. This is done with inspiration and guidance from the theoretical framework I develop in the subsequent three chapters and in my comparison I try to generate conceptual insights by ‘asking the same questions’ to both cases and using insights and patterns from one city to try to establish whether similar patterns can be observed (or not) in the other. How this is conducted more practically in the field is presented in the rest of the chapter.

## **FIELDWORK**

Since this is an exploratory study I expected to discover new insights and dynamics as the research progressed. Therefore I divided the fieldwork into different phases in order to enable insights from one city to be used in the other. I started in Mostar, and then travelled to Mitrovica before returning to Mostar. This setup allowed me to refine my conceptualizations since insights from Mostar could be adapted to Mitrovica, and thereafter insights from Mitrovica could be adapted to Mostar. The adaptive interplay between theory

and empirics allowed my theoretical framework to meet the actual situation in these cities, while switching cities added an extra dimension when insights could be cross-adapted. I consistently tried to maintain a flexible design and an open-minded approach to be able to adjust my approach if not appropriate (Fox and Gingrich 2002). This proved to be a quite appropriate approach. While my theoretical framework did not undergo major alterations the fieldwork led to important modifications and insights that fine-tuned my results.

### **THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW**

Methods should be chosen in accordance to their appropriateness vis-à-vis the stated research aim (Jackson 2011). I wish to advance the knowledge of cities in conflict and conflict in cities and due to (lack of) prior research my approach is explorative and theory-developing, implying a need for a method that is as well (Aberbach and Rockman 2002). The method I identified as most suitable in pursuing insights needed to accumulate this new knowledge is the *semi-structured interview* that uses *open-ended questions*.

This method has a history of being adapted in new (or neglected) research fields (O'Reilly 2004) since it is a powerful tool to obtain in-depth insights and generate new knowledge (Nunkoosing 2005). It is suitable for exploratory research (Griffe 2005) that aims to develop theoretical concepts (Kvale and Brinkman 2009) with knowledge development as overarching aim (Aberbach and Rockman 2002). It creates conducive scenes for discovering the unknown since its open-end questions enable wide-ranging discussions and allows informants to provide full articulation of their insights – the answers are hence not limited by my preconceptions (Aberbach and Rockman 2002). Furthermore, as semi-structured they provide flexibility but still enable me to focus the interviews and obtain answers in a given time (Harvey 2011). Finally the validity is high since answers are articulated in the framework of informants (Aberbach and Rockman 2002) while being confirmed (or not) by other informants (Nunkoosing 2005)

This variant proved a suitable middle way between closed questions that are limited by preconceptions and time-consuming unstructured interviews (Leech

2002). Its adjustability was utilitarian since it allowed me to have individual approaches to my informants, which was occasionally needed. I had a general interview guide with various questions I wanted to close in on, but due to its length and wide spectrum I neither could nor saw it as useful to ask all informants all questions. Therefore I would usually adapt a selection of questions in order to suit the profile of my informants, which often gave a comfortable scene since my handwritten question signalled informality. I always did my 'homework' (Harvey 2011) and was careful to seem professional and knowledgeable in respect towards my informants, but I also remained curious and less knowledgeable than the informants because important information can be missed if someone assumes I know what I perhaps do not (Leech 2002:665-666).

The lengths of my interviews varied, with the shortest one being thirty minutes and the longest for about two hours, and I usually recorded them because that gave me time to 'conduct the interview' (Harvey 2011:436) and ask more qualified follow-up questions. But I remained aware that recordings sometimes silence people, and only recorded if people seemed at ease with it. As regards sampling I used snowballing (Bryman 2008), where one person recommends me to others, and since I aimed at advancing conceptual knowledge on urban conflict informants were selected on what they might know (Aberbach and Rockman 2002). This combination proved successful since I accessed spatially fragmented networks (Harvey 2011) and ended up talking with very insightful people.

While I mostly talked with experienced people that often were used to being interviewed, it is important to acknowledge that I make public what is private (Nunkoosing 2005). To balance this power asymmetry all my informants have been given opportunity to read a draft of this paper before publication, as well as to remain anonymous. Due to official reasons or their personal safety nine of my forty-three informants chose anonymity.

Even if this method served me well, it has some negative aspects. Its flexibility allows exploration, but parallelly I lost analytical rigour since no interview was the same. However, in this initial phase of this research field this is a necessary cost. Furthermore, these interviews are time-consuming while being very

demanding. I was away for two months and between making contacts, planning and conducting interviews, as well as transcribing them, I had time for little else. But hard work paid off since I received rich answers, discovered untold stories shed new light on my topic.

### **3. CITIES AS FRONTIERS**

Most people probably share the common view that frontiers are in the periphery. In contested cities however, this is not the case. The fiercest battles occur city centres, where people live, with civilians in the line of fire. Since these fronts are in the intimacy of cities, they can rarely be proper lines for permanent divide, making them real and active well after any ceasefire, both in the minds and lives of citizens. Here I conceptualize cities as frontiers in ethnonationalistic conflicts, and use the theoretical part for guidance in my field studies where I address the frontiers in Mostar and Mitrovica. I finish with a comparison and a short conclusion.

#### **‘LIVING TOGETHER SEPARATELY’**

I begin constructing my theoretical framework by arguing that contested cities can be understood as destructive frontiers. In contested cities, communities and citizens ‘living together separately’ (Gaffikin et al 2010:495) is a lived oxymoron that sums up the complexity of the cities as frontiers. All things are abstract until they are spatialized (Soja 2010:9) and urban frontiers are negative and lived spatializations of violent confrontation (Morrissey and Gaffikin 2009:875). Cities are increasing in importance and have ‘advanced’ to be flashpoints of conflict (Duren 2011:3) that have to be conquered to achieve victory (Marret 2001:1). They provide political and economical advantages (Brenner 2011; Hills 2010), platforms for external and internal legitimacy (Kotek 1999), and often hold the most important religio-cultural monuments (Lefebvre 1996). This symbolic and actual value, and the subsequent centrality attributed to cities have made them likely to stand at the frontlines of conflict (Duren 2011:2) in which they experience the harshest violence and atrocities (Beall et al. p. 11). Their proximity makes asymmetric power-relations less important, they are inhabited by civilians who are hard to isolate from fighting forces, and their value makes a retreat less acceptable. In combination with the

easy target that is urban infrastructure (water, electricity, food supplies) suffering in cities becomes particularly inhumane (Graham 2010).

But also after ceasefires do urban frontiers remain since in cities everyday life coincides with frontiers in an uncommon way. In interstate conflicts the border and the frontier overlap, but in intrastate conflicts the centres are contested (Pullan 2011), where people meet their protagonists and live as ‘intimate enemies’ (Bollens 1999:8). Unlike regions or states – e.g. South/North Sudan – cities cannot be separated in a similar manner, since their proximity obstructs an everyday where the divide is unnoticed (Bollens 2012) and hence mutually accepted status quos are rare (Kotek 1999:232-233). Contested cities inhabit ‘two dreams’ (Pullan 2011:15), often represent the last vestige of a larger conflict (Kotek 1999:232), and the satisfaction that borders can give identity requirements in peace deals (Newman 2001:148) is not likely since the ‘threat’ remains so close (Boal 1994:31). They can gain stability, but remain somewhere on the continuum between war and peace (Bollens 2007b:14) with negative effects for the broader peace process as well (Beall et al. 2011:20).

While urban frontiers have various nuances, a logical divide can be made between *hindering* or *non-hindering*, as well as within a *separated* or *united* entity. A non-hindering frontier is present in Mostar where one can impedingly walk through the city, while a hindering ditto can be seen in Jerusalem where a wall quite clearly marks the frontier (Bieber 2005; Yifachel et al. 2009). A frontier within a united entity can be seen in Belfast (Hughes et al 2008) where there is a common election, while the opposite example can be found in Nicosia (Koureas 2008), which is separated by the EU border.

**Figure 1.** The nature of the frontier

<b>Nature of entity/dividing line</b>	In a united entity	In a separated entity
Non-hindering	<i>Belfast, <b>Mostar</b></i>	<i>Sarajevo</i>
Hindering	<i>Beirut</i>	<i><b>Mitrovica</b>, Nicosia, Jerusalem</i>

Frontiers are often intensive and sharpen persistent divides. They are extensive, leavening few parts of societies unaffected, and consist of intimate enemies, spoilers and normalization of revenge (Morrissey and Gaffikin 2006:876). Urban frontiers are not only fixed territorial lines but social, spatial and political constructs that are tied up with identities (Newman 2001:139). They create inclusive and exclusive spaces (ibid.), their micro conflicts over service are intensified by macro conflicts, and they encapsulate the conflicts they are a part of (Boal 1994:31). They can be fluid or fixed, concentrated or scattered, and inhabited by both extremists and cosmopolitans (Hall 2006:46).

Since polarized cities are never ‘secured’ – i.e. controlled by *one* group – their tensions rarely die out and the thus they become sites for provocations and manifestations (Deboulet and Fawaz 2011:136). Symbolic pre-war buildings can be targeted in order to destroy the memory of what once was (Hills 2010:29), new buildings can communicate that their constructors are ‘there to stay’ (Pullan 2011:19), segregation and clustering is probable (Silver 2010:349), and regular problems are intensified, often seeing everything as a zero-sum, resulting in spatial paranoia (Boal 1994:36). Even though frontiers are responses to insecurities felt by people, they often ensure that insecurity prevails (Hughes et al 2008:526) since walls – both those made by concrete and barbwire, and those in people’s minds and spatial strategies - are not neutral, they alienate and create fear (Marcuse 1994:43), they influence the perception and use of space (Piquard 2009:65). The symbolism of frontiers increases violence, while violence increases symbolism, resulting in a negative spiral making cities focal points or even magnets for unresolved ethnonational conflict (Pullan 2011:31).

Finally, frontiers undermine the comparative advantages of cities vis-à-vis the rural (Harvey 2006:95). In contested cities parallel institution emerge in everything from healthcare and education to garbage disposal (Kliot and Mansfeld 1999:207). Urban dynamics are thus neutralized when concentration of resources and centralizing efficiency collapses (Soja 2010:17). A ‘space of hate’ (Nagle 2009:327) characterizes frontiers, due to insecurities people only move in ‘their’ areas, and the dynamic urban life is replaced by people that ‘live together separately’ (Gaffikin et al 2010:495)



From a peacebuilding point of view, frontiers are obstacles to peace and indicators of failed peacebuilding. Critical peacebuilding has however not appropriately addressed urban frontiers, their generation of new conflicts or the cementing impact on societies (Bollens 2012; Pullan 2011, Mac Ginty 2011). On the contrary, when urban frontiers have been addressed, it has been in such a manner that peacebuilding has *supported* their rise. A myopic solution has been to let conflicting groups manage themselves, believing that if they are not forced to interact, violence will decrease – effectively leading to consolidation and institutionalization of boundaries in order to ‘avoid bloodshed’ (Jarstad 2008; Silver 2010; Sriram 2008, 2009; Stokke 2011). Often this has succeeded in the short-term, while the long-term effects have proved remarkably hard to reverse, as seen in Mostar and Mitrovica (Jarstad 2008; Sriram 2009; ICG 2009, 2011). The negligence to address polarizations at their birth leaves no room for peace space and normalizes polarizations, sometimes to the extent that reunifications become unimaginable (Bollens 2007a, 2009, Demetriou 2007:75). Since frontiers prohibit the emergence of peaceful discourses (Nagle 2009:330) critical peacebuilding needs to acknowledge their role in peacebuilding and people’s sense of security. Both real (security, well-being, education), and symbolic (value-system, way of life, world-view) threats need to be addressed (Hughes et al. 2008:536), and there needs to be a realization that post-war claims are secured in the everyday (Bieber 2005:422) Opening borders, creating shared spaces and deconstructing frontiers is needed to achieve peace and decrease tension. If unaddressed, urban frontiers will lead to politization of ethnic identities, clustering of communities, and impermeable spatial boundaries (Silver 2010:349).

### **MOSTAR AND MITROVICA**

In the conceptual part above I have shown how frontiers can cement polarizations into irreversibility. Here I take departure from these insights and analyse Mostar and Mitrovica. I discover that characteristics from a conceptual frontier are present in both cities as well as many of the predicted consequences thereof.

## MOSTAR

It cannot be denied that Mostar once was a much less contested and clustered city. Before the war there was no west and east, children went to school under one curriculum, and mixed marriages were common. According to one anonymous OHR official, ethnic cleansing, IDPs and voluntary moving, however, ‘led to one side being predominantly Croat and the other predominantly Muslim’ (2011) and today expressions such as ‘east-west’ and ‘the other side’ are present, there have been heavy demographic shifts and education is segregated. During the war each side had a crisis management, which through peace deals in 1994 and 1995 were transformed into three municipalities on each side of the Austro-Hungarian boulevard, effectively creating two politico-administrative parts of Mostar with little or no formal contact (Bozic 2011) – peacebuilding thus institutionalized the polarization. During this time Mostar grew apart and has today two universities, parallel garbage disposals, and basically two city centres. Almost everything – from healthcare to administration – found in the east can be found in the west, and vice versa, meaning that

*‘for the average Bosniak in the east and the average Croat in the west, there are not many reasons to cross, of course if they do not want to. People never have to cross, and due to the happenings during the war, they do not wish to, leading to no interaction’ (Voloder 2011).*

The frontier influenced the perception of space, undermined urban dynamics and made people live together separately. Each side became like a city of its own, and this divide has remained to a great extent even after the formal unification in 2004. The polarization has proved hard to reverse and while there today is one mayor in a united entity patrolled by one police force, a united everyday remains missing.

*‘When I give you a paper, the city is united, but when you go in the field, everything is divided. You know in which part of the city you have Croats and in which part you have Bosniaks’ (Bozic 2011).*

People need not to interact, and many do not. There is little public space for multiethnic interaction and there are two pictures of the city.

*‘There is a divide that came and now has stabilized, there are people that do not know anything else than a divide (...) and people simply identify to different patterns in this divide, rather than to Mostar. (Zuljevic 2011), and they ‘lack opportunity for interaction, not having relatives, friends or acquaintances on the other side, thus never going to the other side. (Coric 2011).*

Mostar attracts tourists that can enjoy their stay without experiencing a frontier, but if one digs deeper one can see, hear and feel a frontier of some sort, depending on the context, person and occasion. Some choose not to acknowledge it, an outsider might miss it, but sometimes it cannot be ignored:

*“When there is derby it is normal to have 700 policemen, and then this divide of these two parts of the city is really seen, because the police stand in line on the line of demarcation. In that moment it is most evident, the whole boulevard (...) just at the frontline between HVO and ABiH during the war. This is an imaginary line, you have no checkpoints, no barbwire, no Berlin wall (...) but there is a wall in the heads that is visualized when the police is lined up at the spots where it can come to a clash” (Hakalovic 2011)*

**Picture 1.** The Austro-Hungarian Boulevard.



*While many of the not yet renewed houses are on the boulevard, the street is like any other and the frontier is non-hindering.*

I repeatedly heard this story: an imagined or invisible wall in the heads of people. The ceasefire did not present a mutually accepted status quo, no one is prepared to ‘surrender Mostar’ and the public discourse uses ethnic glasses. Outcomes are seen as zero-sum and few parts of the society are uncontested. There is little search for a common good, and gain is unfortunately seen in relative rather than absolute terms. Apolitical things become ethnified, compromising is seen as a weakness, taking away focus from important issues, as an anonymous OSCE official explained:

*Mostar is in a pre-political state (...) instead of debating whether the garbage disposal price is reasonable, to low or to high, they debate on what colour the truck is and which group affiliation the workers have (...) the issues that affect the everyday are not debated’ (2011)*

This ethnified zero-sum discourse creates group pressure not to have interethnic contact, there is lack of trust towards integrative initiatives, and regular problems are intensified. This has created a society of fear and ignorance. On the one hand people are alienated and ignoring the other side is normal. The schools, which are monoethnic, are rivalling and their curriculums conflicting. Young people

*'have no possibilities to meet the others and realize that they are all pretty similar. As it is now they can imagine and believe things that they hear, (...) they have no possibility to check if that is true or not. No contact creates ignorance'* (Sadovic 2011).

**Picture 2.** The rebuilt Ottoman bridge.



*Mostar today is a secure, beautiful and almost entirely renewed city, with few signs of the war.*

On the other hand, the continued contestation has created a fear of domination and people in Mostar simply *'have a fear that if they do not vote for the nationalist, then the others will'* (Cemalovic 2011). The frontier has enabled fears from the conflict to prevail, created spatial paranoia and obstructed the

emergence of progressive alternatives. People vote according to their ethnicity, interaction is sparse, and the parallel systems create no need to leave ‘comfort zones’ (Hakalovic 2011). The same parties as before the unification are in power, the political stalemate cripples the mayor, and people live their everyday life on one or the other side. Identities are tied up with notion of west or east and the comparative advantages of Mostar are undermined. The political focus is on banalities rather than economy and governance and Mostar is more a battlefield than a meeting place – the frontier has consequently sharpened divides and cemented the polarization:

*Just after the war it was easier to discuss and interact with people that participated in the war than it is today, because the divide is so huge’* (Bozic 2011).

#### MITROVICA

If Mostar can fool the eye of outsiders, the polarization of Mitrovica cannot be missed. Crossing one of the bridges is like walking into another world. North of Ibar Serbian is spoken, Cyrillic written and Dinars used, while the south speaks Albanian, writes with Latin letters, and pays with euros. Products in stores differ and flags mark territory. If wanting to take a taxi from north to south of Mitrovica one needs to take a taxi with Serbian (or no) license plates to Bosniak Mahalla<sup>7</sup> and there switch to a taxi with Kosovo license plates (if going back repeat the procedure) since taxi drivers dear not drive to ‘the other side’. The institutional divide in total, from healthcare and education to water and electricity supply, and Kosovo mobile phones do not function in the north, while Serbian ones do not function in the south. The interethnic contact is more similar to contact in a border region than within one city. Mitrovica is *‘like a symptom of a conflict that was never healed, which was frozen’* (Gashi 2011) where its citizens are like intimate enemies.

The mixing in Mitrovica never reached that of Mostar. Children went to mixed schools but in separated classes (in Albanian or Serbian). People interacted, worked together, and went to the same cafés, but there was also Albanian and Serbian cafés, few intermarriages and divided walking streets. It was however

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<sup>7</sup> Bosniak Mahalla is a mixed area in north Mitrovica, situated just next to the Railway Bridge, east of the infamous Main Bridge.

far from the contemporary polarization and clustering. Once the city was united and functioned without parallel institutions or north-south conceptualizations, and while there was *'dominantly Serbs in the north, and dominantly Albanians in the south (...) it was mixed'* (Gashi 2011). The fact that the Orthodox cemetery is south and the Muslim one north of Ibar indicates precious mixing. This changed during the conflict in 1999 when external actors wanted to avoid bloodshed (ICG 1999, 2000) and thus developed a policy that aimed to

*'keep people divided, because as long as they are divided (...) they will not be able to physically shoot each other. There was thus no investment in (...) making people not wanting to shoot each other. The solution was to put down troops and physically divide the city. (...) They sealed the town, they sealed the communities, which basically made people cross-move to their parts. There they were made to be safe, there they felt that they belonged, so they would not be near the other.'* (Gashi 2011)<sup>8</sup>

Before 1999 Mitrovica was not as physically defined, nor rhetorically expressed, into north and south as today, where there is a *'pretty clear line, a front, in Mitrovica'* (Carlsson 2011) that is a symbol for the Serb-Albanian conflict and a site for confrontations (Rydén 2011). Mitrovica is administratively separated between two conflicting societies that do not want to be in the same political system, making it *'a city in a conflict with itself'* (Hajrizi 2011), and due to urban proximity this conflict is continuously present in the everyday, making everything political and controversial. Interactions are seen with suspicion and integrative initiatives frowned upon. The head of CBM, a Mitrovica based NGO proclaims that their *'participants are afraid that people might find out that they interacted'* (Syla 2011). Lack of contact, the ethno-political discourse, and diametrically opposed political goals have undermined the comparative advantages of Mitrovica (ESI 2004), dissolved its urban dynamics, and created an environment in which Serbs and Albanians are

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview of these events, see: ICG (1999, 2000).

*'not only a very clearly defined other, a feared other, but a very unknown other, and then the fear grows with the unknown. The less you know the more do you pretend to know, and then the more you fear' (Gashi 2011).*

**Picture 3.** A man crossing the barricade in Bosniak Mahalla.



*The barricades do not hinder ordinary people to cross, they are more there to keep Kosovo institutions out.*

The frontier influences perception and use of space, and both Serbs and Albanians kept warning me of the hostility and lawlessness of other side whilst assuring me how their side was tolerant and secure. Serbs are afraid of domination and marginalization if joining the south, seeing the Ahtisaari plan as something that *'promises everything but gives nothing'* (Larazevic 2011), whilst the Albanians see the north as lawless, dominated by criminals and hostile towards them. The frontier has created spatial paranoia, stimulated alienation, and enabled fears to prevail.

Some old contacts are upheld (with some difficulties) but new ones are hard to establish, which fosters two conceptualizations of the city. There is little space for new interactions, fear keeps people away from one another, and the



political, social and institutional divide has cemented the contestation, made it almost irreversible and hidden progressive alternatives:

*'I believe that the train for unification has left the station (...) the city has been divided for such a long time that it has been normalized (...) I do not want claim that Mitrovica is a lost city as such, but there is very few things that bind people together, it is more a question about demarcation of the border' (Carlson 2011)*

**Picture 4.** The northern riverbank next to the main bridge.



*“The city is ours” written in Serbian and Cyrillic next to “Fuck Serbia”.*

The frontier has created parallel societies, and as one anonymous EUSR official elaborated: *'you have children that have grown up in this system where the other is presented as man-eaters. The question then is what you can expect (...) if you can ever mix these two communities again'* (2011)

#### *SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES*

Mitrovica and Mostar both have concentrated frontiers in their centre that originate from violent conflicts and serve as everyday reminders of them. The most important similarity is the cementing effect of their contestations that have sharpened the polarizations and left few parts of the societies unaffected. Alienation and zero-sum politics have followed and the subsequent residential segregation has decreased interethnic contact and made them fertile grounds for propaganda, prejudice and fear. Newer generations do not know ‘the other’ while older generations have less space for old friends. The lack of mutually accepted solutions have maintain ethnified politics and even if both cities are stable, the difficulties to bridge the communities have increased steadily over time, since their everyday life has grown apart to function independently.

Both cities are also symbols in a wider conflictual context, effectively making every compromise more controversial (ICG 2002, 2005, 2009). They attract more attention and incidents because of their proximity, as well of their media concentration leading to vicious circle of generating more incidents and attracting more media. Furthermore, they attract external actors that are not necessarily context-sensitive (increasing the risk for unintended consequences) or have the best aims for the cities in mind. Nor do they function properly as cities that centralize and attract diversity that makes them grow. Their comparative advantages are undermined while their urban dynamics have been replaced with people that live next to one another.

The one difference I wish to stress is that Mostar has improved with repaired buildings, one mayor and a united political framework. There is fear in both cities, but Mostarians favour a united city more. This might be explained from several angles. First Mitrovica has been allowed to cement its divide. Even the Ahtisaari plan (UNSG 2007) accepts some form of polarization when suggesting Mitrovica’s division into two municipalities, while the unification of Mostar is a EU demand for BiH (Bozic 2011), effectively countering the imagining of two cities. Second, Mitrovica can still end up being divided by a state border while not being a part of BiH is not a realistic target in Mostar. Therefore the ‘battle’ for Mostar is within mutually accepted institutions while Mitrovica is a political hotspot (Hajrizi 2011), suggesting that settled broader

frameworks might enable internal reconciliation processes. Third, Mitrovica's frontier along Ibar is quite natural, as the '*bridges do not serve to bridge the sides, but to divide them*' (Hajrizi 2011), while the boulevard in Mostar is a more arbitrary line, resulting in more neutral space. This has worked against cementation and for some common public space where alternative projections can materialize (Voloder 2011). Finally the lingual barrier in Mitrovica is not present in Mostar.

## CONCLUSION

I have here shown how contested cities can be understood as urban frontiers. In both Mostar and Mitrovica the physical, abstract and lived reality created by frontiers disrupts peacebuilding and fuels tensions. While not a positive result in itself, it is a step forward since understanding urban frontiers and including them into our analysis enables us to counter their devastating effects. Through my theoretical framework we now understand that frontiers lead to clustering, zero-sum politics and alienation, provide fertile ground for prejudice, fear and continued conflict, and undermine cities as such. With this knowledge partition or division of contested cities becomes something to avoid and actively address (in contrast to passively allow) in the *incipient* phase of peacebuilding, since the method of 'separating for stability' is a myopic way of seeing things. As the field studies show, the longer a frontier is left alone, or even strengthened, the graver the obstacles and higher the costs to achieve a sustainable progress become.

## 4. CITIES AS ACTORS

The anthropomorphising of a city is quite unconventional, even though cities are referred to as actors daily, and also show clear signs of being actors. Here I first conceptualize cities as actors, with particular emphasis on contested cities in conflict. Thereafter I use this theoretical part for guidance in my field studies in Mostar and Mitrovica and address how their agency creates peace and (or) generates conflict in these two cities. I finally compare my empirical insights in order to distinguish patterns of similarities and differences and finish with a short conclusion.

### **‘CITIES ARE PEOPLE TOO!’<sup>9</sup>**

Cities are often described, at least implicitly, as passive and lacking agency, and are (de)conceptualized as reflective living spaces within administrative boundaries. This view – however dominating (Magnusson 2010) it may be – is not uncontested (Brenner, 2011, Brown 2001, Santamária 2011). Cities can have agency and self-interests of their own (Davis 2011, Lefebvre 1996). They are, by definition, sub-state entities, but as such they do not need to be *subordinate*, they can resist states (and others) and chose alternative paths (Esser 2009:3, Lefebvre 1996:102, Magnusson 2010:43-44). In this section I conceptualizes cities as actors and provide them with autonomy.

Corporate agency, a term coined by Alexander Wendt (1999:195), conceptualizes ‘non-individuals’ as actors with agency that cannot be reduced to the sum of their different parts – e.g. cities cannot be reduced to the actions of their citizens or leaders. Using corporate agency, I conceptualize cities as actors, with bodies, not reducible to their parts, having a ‘life’ with identities, needs and interests (Wendt 1999:197). This agency has two dimensions, one *external* and one *internal*. Starting with the former, cities are organizational structures that bind societies together (Wendt 1999:199-201). This is however clearly not enough, because many organizations are both binding and organizing without being actors. Therefore, first, the *idea* of an actor must be present and people – both citizens and non-inhabitants – must believe in the existence of an actor (Wendt 1999:219). Second, an *institutionalization* needs to be in place, meaning that cooperation (of citizens, administrations, companies in the city) is taken for granted, that principals have a disproportionate control over agents (as mayors do over citizens), and that not only self-interest predominates, i.e. people feel part of a collective (Wendt 1999, 220-221). Third, the city must possess *authorization*. This means that actions of members (citizens) are attributed to the corporate body (city), i.e. the actions of individuals are constituted as the actions of the collective – e.g. the police officer that fights crime on the behalf of the city. If these preconditions are fulfilled, a city can be said to be an actor (Wendt 1999).

One can claim that this ‘agency’ is nothing else than the sum of all individuals in a collective, or the sum of leadership. This would however ignore that cities

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<sup>9</sup> I borrow this from Alexander Wendt (1999) who uses the term ‘states are people too’ when conceptualizing the agency of states.

have a *lasting* history, that they are a work of history, of social relations and production and reproduction of humans by humans (Lefebvre 1996:101). Cities produce macro-level regularities among elements over time and space that are explained by (constantly reproduced) structures of collective knowledge to which individuals are socialized (Wendt 1999:217-221). The external dimension of the agency of cities is thus ontologically independent from its (nonetheless related) internal dimension, it *cannot* be reduced to its parts (Wendt 1999:199-201).

Cities are anthropomorphized daily, and the accuracy in this description is hence an even stronger argument that they possess agency (Wendt 1999:193, 216). But they are not holistic as persons are because of their internal dimension – the society. The behaviour of cities cannot be understood without considering the internal relationships within their societies (Wendt 1999:209-210) since there is a constant struggle for agency *within* cities (Graham 2009:205, Lefebvre 1996:112-113), hidden in the illusion of oneness (Lefebvre 1996:116-117). Cities are collective organizations that sustain human life, and we try to transform them all the time (Harvey 2003:33) through internal societal struggle for agency. Societies, as internal parts of corporate agency, consist of shared knowledge of rules within fuzzy borders (Magnusson 2010:45-46, Wendt 1999:209-210). Within them different individuals and groups fight over how their city is to be imagined and how it is going to act vis-à-vis actors (Bridge and Watson 2000a:7, Kallus and Kolodney 2010:416) – a city is consequently a group of groups that fight for agency and the outcome of this struggle are the actions of that city (Lefebvre 1996:112). Cities are ‘constituted by internal structures that combine a collective idea (...) with rules that institutionalize and authorize collective action by their members’ (Wendt 1999:243). It is important to stress that this conceptualization consists of ideal types for heuristic purposes meaning that the internal struggle for agency is rarely of full-scale, while a city never can be completely holistic since some form of resistance always is present (Beall, et al. 2011:7, Wendt 1999:243-245). Cities have agency, but it is never ‘complete’ – i.e. there will always be internal actors working against it – while societies can resist but rarely incapacitate cities.

Attributing agency to cities has severe consequences for the view on their role in society (or conflict) and therefore the claim that they are mere containers of

processes should be abandoned (Harvey 1997:23). Furthermore, the static centrality-periphery conceptualization of space becomes less relevant because it talks about geography and physical distance, when the contemporary world functions through mobilities and flows (found in cities), rather than isolated locales (Warf 2009:29).

Less abstractly speaking, cities are neither fully independent nor fully subordinate (Magnusson 2010:44) but compete about sovereignty with states and can be independently linked with the world (Santamária 2011:85-104) as relatively autonomous actors in the global scene (Davis 2011:245). They play an increasingly important role in directly linking their national economies with global circuits (Sassen 2002), and they are stepping-stones to securing regional or national power formation (Duren 2011:3). Power is not absolute, and even if cities often are inferior, they can obstruct, resist and change (Beauregard 1995:241). While we here must not forget that states still remain the ultimate guarantor for e.g. security, rule of law, and capital (Sassen 1998:197) we see a rescaling of what the strategic territories that articulate the new system are (Sassen 2002:1). States are losing significance to the increasingly important sub-state actors of which cities are the main ones (Sassen 1998).

The ideal city has one society that perceives itself as one city (even if this unity demands broad frames) acting as one actor for the greater benefit of all citizens (Lefebvre 1996). This, however, is hardly the only type, and within my area of focus it is rare. As can be observed below there are four types of agency that cities can have. The first has already been mentioned, and consists of a united society that has some sense of togetherness that results in united agency. The second type is a city that externally acts like one city, i.e. when interacting with other actors it is presented and perceived as one. Internally however it is not united and its citizens are split into groups that have little interaction and wish to distance themselves from each other (Bozic 2011, Vlassenroot and Büscher 2009:2-9). The third type is a city that once was united, but today is inhabited by two societies that act like two unrelated entities (Carlsson 2011). A fourth, hypothetical type, is one society that is split over an area that falls under two jurisdictions – i.e. people feel a togetherness not captured by only one actor.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> One possible exception is Sarajevo that was one society that today falls under two different jurisdictions. The question is whether people still consider themselves as one

**Figure 2.** Typology of city agency

Nature of external agency / nature of internal unity	One city	Two cities
One society	<i>Malmö, Berlin, Copenhagen</i>	<i>Goma/Gisenyi, Sarajevo</i>
Two societies	<i>Mostar, Belfast</i>	<i>Mitrovica, Jerusalem, Nicosia</i>

When I conceptualize cities as actors, their perceived role within conflicts is drastically reconfigured. No longer are they just spaces in which peace is being built, they are *acting parts* that can hinder peacebuilding and generate new conflict, or potentially break statewide stalemates and spearhead a wider peace. No matter which, cities are active parts in peace processes, and as such they need to be analysed by and actively included in peacebuilding (Beall et al. 2011:2).

Cities can act negatively and resist ceasefires that have been nationally agreed upon (Vlassenroot and Büscher 2009:2-12). They have their own interests – that often do not coincide with the state’s ditto (Graham 2009:160) – and cannot be expected to passively implement top-down decisions (Kliot and Mansfeld 1999:172). Cities are vital pieces of the peace puzzle that is the ethnonationalist conflict (Beall et al. 2011:6) and their leaders influence the everyday of citizens, making their policies key to peace, or war (Cunningham and Byrne 2006:58). Furthermore the decision to unite a city is *de facto* a choice made on the urban, not the state level since it is here that cooperation emerges or not, where minority and refugee problems have impact, and where territorial disputes on maps become lived realities (Kliot and Mansfeld 1999:172).

But cities can contribute to peace as well. They might attract radical nationalists (Pullan 2011:32), but at the same time they produce cosmopolitanism and cross-border cooperation (Hall 2006:46). Here people in leading positions can meet their counterparts, build trust and work for peace. Here people are faced with the reality of conflict that might lead them to abandon confrontations

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society or not. The second is Goma and Gisenyi that reside on each side of the border between Congo and Rwanda. Research shows how their citizens are starting to form a common identity (Vlassenroot and Büscher 2009).

(Larkin 2010:428-433) and here the relative autonomy of cities (Beauregard 1995:241) can enable them to bridge divides. The actions of a city are driven, not by one actor, but by many representations that highlight some groups and ignore others (Bridge and Watson 2000a:14), leading to a predominately positive or negative role for it.

## **MOSTAR AND MITROVICA**

In the section above I conceptually showed that cities have agency with which they can have substantial impacts on peace processes. Here I use that theoretical framework to understand the agency, or the lack thereof, of Mostar and Mitrovica, showing how cities can be important and strong actors, but also demonstrating how a contested city can have its agency crippled by internal polarization.

### *MOSTAR*

There is – to certain extent and with some stretch – an idea that Mostar is one entity, through its united political framework this idea is institutionalized, and when the mayor presents the city externally he has an authorization to do so since the political framework (while debated) is not challenged. Consequently, Mostar is one city, but when it tries to act towards other actors it is plagued by the internal struggle of its two societies, which efficiently weakens its external agency.

*When the mayor goes somewhere outside of Mostar, he represents the united city of Mostar, but when we go into the council, the divide is highly present'* (Bozic 2011).

The city council is dominated by parties that are monoethnic or are perceived as such (ICG 2009), and as described in the former chapter, the politics have been cemented around ethnic lines, with the sides perceiving many initiatives as zero-sum, effectively slowing the progress of Mostar. According to an anonymous OHR official in Mostar *'you have in-fighting on every single issue'* (2011). The ethnification of politics, the complex legal framework of the city<sup>11</sup>, and on-going blocking means that a *'situation called compromise is something imaginary and*

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<sup>11</sup> See ICG (2009), or The Statute of Mostar (OHR 2004)



*unreachable*' (Voloder 2011). The city acts like two societies in the local realm without a common goal for the city. Mostar has the potential to be a significant player in the region, but due to internal disagreement it cannot muster strength to speak with one voice (Nyman 2011). Subsequently this means limited agency and sparse results when striving for the few citywide interests that can be agreed upon. When talking about Mostar and its politicians an anonymous OSCE official stated that:

*'they can pretend to be united, even pose together, in order to get some benefits, but when back in Mostar they will again start to fight one another as regards how this benefit is to be distributed. There is one mayor, there is one political system, but this is for show, unofficially everything is divided (...) there is no true unity. There is only an administrative unity that is for show, it is forced, and it is fake'* (2011)

The city does not attract companies, fight for its interests nor promote itself successfully. It does not have sufficient internal unity to be able to act like one rational actor, because everything is boiled down to zero-sum.

*'On paper, but the paper can take everything, there are some initiatives that work for some greater good, but it is not as it could be without the division. The corridor 5C that will run from the north to the south of BiH (...) is a good thing for Mostar (...) but there are disagreements on the city level as to where to put it, the west or east side of the city (...) it is an example that shows that there is rarely a thinking that this or this is the best for us all, rather the ethnic group is always in first line. When outside or above of the city it can act as one, but as soon as it comes to the ground level, there are disagreements. If there were three cities fighting for something, Mostar would surely be the last, because there would always be something that would obstruct the common cause* (Voloder 2011).

#### MITROVICA

While Mostar is crippled by its polarization, Mitrovica is so polarized that its parts are two distinct entities. The actions of Mitrovica in its southern part are

to a great extent influenced by Pristina but Mitrovica in its northern part<sup>12</sup> has shown that it identifies some city-specific interests, pursues these goals and resists attempts that go against it. It perceives Kosovo institutions as an existential threat to Serbs and uses barricades and refusal to participate as a political tool aimed at keeping Belgrade-sponsored institutions instead. There is a clear idea of northern Mitrovica, there is support for the resistance and an authorization of the broader political goal, and people's participation in the barricades is institutionalized.

*'They act a little for their own interests. If we look at what is best for Serbia then the government has decided for EU membership. Here they are not opposing this, but their actions are not helping Serbia with that (...) they act along their interests. (...) Crassly speaking they would remain calm if they wanted the best for Serbia, and trust that Belgrade will solve the situation for them, but they have not reacted like that, they have taken things in their own hands (...) because they worry about Belgrade's intentions, they believe that what is deemed best for Serbia might not be what is best for the Kosovo Serbs. A local interest has been created (...) that works to fend their own back first, and the worst that can happen is that the institutions of Kosovo take over' (Carlsson 2011)*

There are debates regarding who is behind the resistance, what interests are the driving factors and who is benefited. Local politicians, the Serbian government, the opposition in Belgrade, criminals, the people – the candidates are many. Is Belgrade the director behind the troubles in the north, or have they lost control? Have the Serbs in the north been kidnapped or are the local leaders executing the will of the people? This is unclear and, as an UNMIK official proclaimed, *"the question is who the puppeteer is, and who the puppets are"* (2011). There are rumours that criminals are involved, but the resistance is supported by many people, people do not want Kosovo institutions (Rydén 2011, Subotic 2011). Since most of Mitrovica's money comes from the Serbian budget it gives the government leverage, but it would probably be political suicide to cut off the financing (Carlsson 2011). Also, the political focus on northern Kosovo

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<sup>12</sup> Together with the rest of northern Kosovo.

since summer 2011, and the subsequent external pressure put on Serbia has hardly been beneficial for the government.

But all this is, while *interesting*, not *relevant* for the agency of Mitrovica, because there is an idea of a *northern* Mitrovica, there is an institutionalization of power where people man the barricades, and the authorization to the perceived leaders is not contested. Whether it is legal or not, legitimate or unethical, widely supported or frustratingly endured, is really not the point to be made here. These factors do not change the fact that northern Mitrovica has tendencies of independent interests, aims and actions. These go against external agencies such as EULEX, KFOR and ICO, they go against Pristina, and they resist (to some extent) their main financier Belgrade.

*It has become clear that Pristina has no control over northern Kosovo (but it has also become clear that Belgrade has less and less control over northern Kosovo' (Carlsson 2011)*

The people in northern Mitrovica might not succeed with their aims of not belonging to Kosovo and they will probably cave in to Belgrade's demands – whatever they might be – but their resistance has made life difficult for leaders in Pristina, Belgrade and Brussels (Rydén 2011). The significance of their agency, its long-term imprint, or its benefit can be debated, but its *existence* cannot.

#### *SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES*

Mostar is not able to channelize its potential agency that could work to turn the city into a dynamic regional hub. Mitrovica, in its northern part, on the other hand has identified certain interests and is actively working for them with citizen support. Consequently, Mostar is a one-entity city with two internal societies while Mitrovica's two societies inhabit two entities. This is the difference between the cities, one is paralyzed and forced into passivity due to internal polarization, while the other is able to provide resistance, obstruct imposing measures and identify alternative ways. But while their agency is different, they are similar in their outcomes. Polarization is present in both cities and they are not reaching their full potential in economic growth, political maturity or social advancement. Mostar cannot muster its agency while Mitrovica is divided and effectively undermined. The comparative

advantages of cities are critical mass and centralizing efficiency, and a divide is consequently nothing less than counterproductive. Both cities further hinder the wider peacebuilding and reconciliation process. Mostar is for some the symbol of why a multiethnic BiH cannot endure and creates tensions between Bosniaks and Croats in FBiH. Mitrovica's resistance leads to enormous external pressure on the government of Serbia and has probably delayed its EU association process, while questioning the stability of Kosovo (Bieber 2005, Gashi 2011, ICG 2012).

All this however shows the *potential* of cities as autonomous actors, if internal coherence can be channelized into external action. Cities can obstruct, resist and change and should logically not be ignored. This agency needs not to be decisive but external actors cannot expect that their will is to be fully implemented – cities can have agency, even they do not accomplish what they want. If northern Mitrovica gets forced into joining Kosovo institutions, the agency needs not to stop, it might just get transformed – as seen in Mostar, where accepting a common legal framework did not mean unification or integration. Resistance and obstruction is hence something that cannot be hindered from above, rather the urban agency needs to be acknowledged, listened to and channelized.

## **CONCLUSION**

I have in this chapter advanced knowledge on the role cities play in conflict, and emphasized that contested cities *have* a role in the peace processes they are part of if they use their potential to be actors. This role is then all but passive, and instead of docile construction yards external actors should expect to find active cities that have their own agendas. Expecting Belgrade to have full control of Mitrovica, or Mostar to behave like one society just because others want them to, is simply not reality-based. Critical peacebuilding needs to acknowledge this because ignoring the agency of cities does not make it go away. Quite the opposite, neglect will only produce counterproductive measures and disappointing results. However, if understanding this critical peacebuilding might disarm the dangers of contested cities and channel their agency into positive directions.

## 5. CITIES AS ARENAS

The term 'arena' instinctively brings to mind connotations such as the Coliseum, a parliament or some discussion program – platforms desired by many, granted to few. To a great extent this analogue is accurate, even if it refers contested cities. The arenas in Mitrovica and Mostar are constituted by contested space. They are actual and abstract scenes and places to which not all are granted access and where battles are fought. This chapter first conceptualizes cities as arenas, with particular emphasis on contested cities. Thereafter the theoretical part guides the field studies in Mostar and Mitrovica that address the role of the arena in both cities. A short conclusion grounded in both theory and empirics wraps up the chapter.

### **PLATFORMS FOR POLITICAL MATERIALIZATION AND SPACES FOR INTERACTION**

Here I argue that the material side of cities such as buildings, streets, and walls, as well as the lived side of the urban with its interaction, proximity and dynamic constitute arenas. My achieved result is seeing cities as places where conflict can be provoked or peace created (Deboulet and Fawaz 2011:135; Lefebvre 1996:115). To put it simply, arenas are political spaces that can be used as platforms for mobilization (Kallus and Kolodney 2010:406), stages for expression, and sites of violence (Bollens 1999:5-6). They are spatial epicentres of human interaction (Larkin 2010:418), whether referring to snipers in Sarajevo or peace gatherings in Oslo. They are tools with no independent implications. Their nature is unpredictable, their progress non-linear (Magnusson 2010:45-46). They are characterized by interdependencies, mobility and differences between groups that meet there (Boudreau 2010:55). They are the locus for everyday interaction (Bollens 1999:8) and strategic terrains for political materialization (Sassen 1998). Their intimacy can produce fast and intense effect that shape socio-political relations in the everyday (Boudreau 2010:55) resulting in conflict or compromise, inclusion or exclusion, violence or peace (Nagle 2009).

Arenas can be sites for frustration (Kallus and Kolodney 2010:413-414), but also spaces where action can be created (Boudreau 2010). Their unpredictability and speed can easily turn a small occurrence into a massive storm (Boudreau 2010:62; Hepburn 1994), as Mohammed Bouazizi showed

when he set himself on fire in Tunis and sparked a revolution that at the moment of writing has overturned dictators in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. In arenas initiators, to paraphrase Nietzsche, need to be nothing more than matchsticks.

Arena manifestations are heuristically speaking confrontations (Lefebvre 1996) or negotiations (Davis 2010) with *symbolic* or *practico-real*<sup>13</sup> and *immediate* or *long-term* effects. The symbolic dimension communicates a ‘message’ – e.g. when streets and squares are renamed in order ethnify cities (Boal 1994:37). The practico-real dimension refers to e.g. mobs (Budhani et al 2010:11) that are life threatening or walls that limit freedom of movement (Marcuse 1994:43), be it ‘peace walls’ in Belfast or Israel’s illegal ditto. The events can have immediate effect, as riots and tanks have on personal security or blockades have on mobility. But they can also have incremental and long-term effects like the emerging cooperation in Belfast or the slow building of the wall in Palestine.

**Figure 3.** Manifestations in the arena

Nature of manifestation/speed of events	Symbolic	Practico-real
Immediate	<i>Demonstrations, non-violent manifestations, rumours</i>	<i>Barricades, riots, human shields, hooligans</i>
Long-term	<i>Ethnic buildings, flags, murals, graffiti</i>	<i>Excluding walls, peace cafés, inclusive parks</i>

The manifestations are made in order to either consolidate or resist power (Silver 2010) and fighting for space enables groups to be noticed, and messages to be heard (Lefebvre 1996:113). Struggle for space and the will to be heard is present in all societies. What varies is who the actors are, what messages are transmitted in what way, and who has and who has not access. In arenas actors are included or excluded (Newman 2001), legitimacy is created or lost

<sup>13</sup> These two possess *ontological* differences. The difference between a peaceful protest and violent riot is thus *not* different intensity of the same manifestation – rather the two are different in definition and nature. The first one has only abstract implications while the other has practico-real consequences.

(Demetriou 2007), identity is formed (Kallus and Kolodney 2010) – it is in the streets that revolutions occur, leaders get overthrown, messages are sent (Harvey 2006:102).

Politicians in power can hold speeches or send law enforcements to exclude potential opponents from using the streets (Demetriou 2007, Short 2000). Religious leaders, oppositional politicians, and other powerful actors can utilise the arena to advance their goals through manifestations and campaigns. This also applies to global actors such MNCs, the EU, and different NGOs who, through control of public space, can mediate their agendas – i.e. in arenas power can be enforced and agendas controlled (Esser 2009). But a force of spontaneous impulsion characterizes the urban logic of action. It is hard to fully control and quite impossible to permanently exclude others (Boudreau 2010). Here the oppressed can present their version and strive for equality (Kappler and Richmond 2011, Soja 2010).

In arenas negotiations can be conducted over how politics, society and the everyday are to be created and transformed, and the possible outcomes are located on a broad spectrum. Arenas can be the source of destabilization when groups confront each other and produce fast and unpredictable breakdowns of larger processes (Bollens 1999:5) – as when Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount initiated the second Intifada. Perceived differences can be cemented, the right, or not, to the centre can create alienation and frontiers can be established (Marcuse 1994:43). Denied access shows dominance over an excluded group and cities become battlegrounds when groups proclaim cities as theirs (Cunningham and Byrne 2006:42).

Arenas are however what the actors make of them and can also stimulate change, break norms and bridge divides (Pullan 2011:32). Actors denied official access can be included and frontiers can be crossed and made irrelevant (Davis 2010:231). Just as cities can be overrun with extremism and violence, urban proximity can bring people together, and the anonymity in cities provides fertile ground for positive change (Larkin 2010:428-433). Furthermore, while barricades can separate people and provoking symbols can cause tensions, arenas are ‘a powerful tool in building new boundaries between the social and the technical and, therefore, in building new forms of life’

(Bollens 2009:102) – i.e. they can be used to promote mutual coexistence and tear down walls, both literally and figuratively.

This has significant implications for peacebuilding since the importance and proximity of cities and the dynamics of the urban make arenas *the* source, space and place for political mobilization. There the everyday is negotiated, relations formed, and compromises reached (Bollens 1999, 2012; Davis 2010; Mac Ginty 2010, 2011). This does not imply that the roles of other actors should be disregarded or downplayed, rather the role of cities needs to be emphasized and upgraded. Here concepts emphasized by critical peacebuilding have their best chance to materialize, to become something real. Cities encapsulate the everyday where citizens are granted or denied healthcare, employment and education (Mac Ginty 2010; O’Dowd and Komarova 2011:10; Ponzio 2011) In arenas securitization of space forces people to avoid areas of ‘the other’ (Cunningham and Byrne 2006:62; Leonard and McKnight 2010:29-35), but there intergroup divides can be bridged and peace initiated as well (Bollens 2012). Arenas enable the materialization of local ownership since there opportunities are provided for the ‘local-local’ to resist imposing actors and speak their mind (Donais 2009; Kirby and Marston 1995; Richmond 2011a; Sassen 1998). In cities peace is created, materialized or resisted, and conflict played out, enhanced or counteracted. There suffering can reach many viewers, fighters can be mobilized, peace agreements accepted, and polemic elites resisted. In arenas negotiations are conducted, not applied, and hybridity achieved through compromises between various actors (Kallus and Kolodney 2010:406; Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond 2010, 2011a, 2011b; Vlassenroot and Blücher 2009:9).

#### **MANIFESTATIONS IN MOSTAR AND MITROVICA**

Above I constructed a conceptual notion of cities as powerful arenas for interaction, political manifestation, and resistance. I have further created awareness that cities can be used to advance or hinder peace and showed that they are fertile grounds for materialization of critical peacebuilding concepts. Here I try to exemplify how manifestations can work for peace and against conflict, or the other way around. The examples however focus on the potency of cities as arenas, not the situations in Mostar and Mitrovica as such. As



elaborated above, urban arenas are unpredictable and non-linear, sometimes making communications hard to determine, and their reading (Lefebvre 1996) a subjective and intricate process. Hence my reading is not – *cannot* – be claimed to be a plenary or exhaustive one.

#### THE ETHNIFICATION OF A CITY

The arena in Mostar, to connect with the theoretical framework above, serves as a stage of expression, and the messages transmitted are symbolic and have long-term effects, with the main message being ownership of Mostar. In the east the Bosniak presence is seen on almost every corner together with anti-Croat sentiments, while the west is dominated by Croat symbols and anti-Bosniak messages.

**Picture 5.** Urban expressions in Mostar.

*Starting from left: 1) the Croat coat of arms crossed out, 2) “Rodeni (the east Mostar football club supporters) are stinking cunts”, and 3) the Ustasa symbol accompanied with NDH, the acronym of the Nazi Croat puppet regime during the second world war.*

There is a struggle over whose city it is, and this battle is fought with street names, flags, and buildings as tools to signal ownership, and it is often obvious which – or rather *whose* – part of Mostar one is in (Bevanda 2011). Ethno-



nationalistic symbols and buildings, monuments to ABiH or HVO, intolerant sentiments, types of beers served in cafés, they all serve to mark territory and show dominance as an anonymous OSCE official elaborated:

*'Churches, crosses, mosques are built where there is no objective need, it is a matter of politics. (...) People are (...) marking their territory with these kinds of objects, demonstrating higher power, sending a message to the other*

*side that this is ours, we belong here, we are dominant here. Particularly in Mostar this symbolism is highly expressed' (2011)*

Mostar, especially its centre along the boulevard, is a contested space and the site where confrontations occur between groups that try to build higher monuments than the other side, kids that paint over each other's offensive graffiti, and hooligans belonging to the two rivalling (and monoethnic) football clubs. It is also the site where people are excluded and blocked. The two different parts of the city signal more ownership by the absence of 'the other side' than by the presence of 'our side', multiethnic symbols are rare, simply lacking space in the dominant discourse (Coric 2011). These manifestations *'inflict bad memories to people that survived the war'* (Voloder 2011) and normalize ethno-nationalistic tensions and tendencies. They also mark the polarization and multiply it (Zuljevic 2011) while making Mostar a negative symbol and a battlefield between Bosniaks and Croats. All leading to the supplanting of public space that can be used for interethnic contact and reconciliation.

**Picture 6.** Symbols of ownership.



*Starting from left: 1) the flag of ABiH, and 2) the very illustrious church tower next to the old frontline. The cross – which is lit during night – on the mountain Hum is seen in the background.*

### *WAKENING ATTENTION AND RESISTANCE*

The barricades in northern Mitrovica and the rest of northern Kosovo have since the summer of 2011 been *the* midpoint of the Western Balkans. Media has daily updates, renewed and intensified attention has been placed on the frozen situation, and the local leaders there are paid more attention. Since 1999 there have been Belgrade-sponsored institutions north of Ibar and Kosovo institutions south of the river, while external actors – such as KFOR, UNMIK and EULEX – have been maintaining security and the status quo. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July in 2011 however Kosovo Police (KP) forces tried to seize the checkpoints on the border to Serbia that had until then been out of their control. The first Kosovo Serb reactions were spontaneous and disordered but in time barricades were erected and the resistance systematically organized. People now work in shifts and installed alarms mobilize the community in case of a breach.

**Picture 7.** The Kosovo Serb barricade on the main bridge seen from the southern side.



*The bridge is blocked for cars, but crossing by foot is possible.*

These barricades are both practico-real and symbolic with immediate effects. On the one hand many of them are filled with messages against EULEX and KFOR as well as Serbian flags. The barricade on the main bridge of Mitrovica is symbolic, since the nearby railway bridge is easily crossable, but other barricades are actually blocking access to the north.

*'The barricades have two purposes (...) one symbolic showing that this is ours, 'here we are in control'. (...) The other is practical, sure they are small, but they can easily be reinforced if needed, it is possible to restrict accessibility.'* (Rydén 2011)

There are ambiguities as regards the nature of the barricades, but there is support for them. People describe them as political manifestations, a revolt and the only remaining way to express their political goals and their resistance to what they feel is externally imposed – the barricades are a non-agreeing with the integration of the north into Kosovo institutions, expressed by using Mitrovica as an arena.

*The barricades are a form of protest. (...) We simply do not have other means to fight, the barricades are our only tool to somehow attract attention, to show that there exists a problem, it is a political protest, it is a protest to achieve a political goal, to attract some attention to the problems that exist here. We have the problem of imposed solution all the time, more solutions are from the outside than are from here.* (Subotic 2011)

People feel that they are on the wrong side of the Serbian border (Carlsson 2011), they express fear and unwillingness to join Kosovo institutions, and they want to keep Belgrade-sponsored institutions – the blockade is the materialization of that. The 'message' being communicated to Pristina and external actors – such as KFOR and EULEX who in the north are widely seen as having 'chosen sides' – but also to Belgrade, is a confronting one saying that (northern) Kosovo is part of Serbia and that there are Serbs who refuse to be dominated by Albanians and answer to Pristina. This resistance has been present for a long time, but with the barricades it: *'has become a more distinct*

*protest, it has visualized the problem as such, the fundamental problem, that this is an area that does not accept to be part of that it has been assigned to be a part of* (Carlsson 2011)

The barricades are interpreted in different ways on the spectrum, from a legitimate protest supported by local people, to an illegal blockade by criminals that want to keep their smuggling routes free from scrutiny. Nonetheless, no matter the underlying reasons, it has become apparent that there is heavy resistance against the integration of the north into the rest of Kosovo, the problems around the situation have been emphasized, and KP and the rest of the Kosovo institutions have been kept away. People in the north have used Mitrovica as a stepping-stone and brought forth their interests, to the dismay of Belgrade and the frustration of Pristina. The north has gained importance and started to speak with their voice – however unclear it may be. One could claim (as some do) that the arena has been used by excluded actors to resist imposed power, make their voices heard, and take local ownership. One could also claim (as others do) that the public discourse in the north excludes opposing voices. While it might be true that if *'only focusing on the criminal elements (...), then you miss the most important that motivate people'* (Carlsson 2011) either way indicates that the arena can be used as a medium to resist, to show alternatives and to negotiate hybridity. While cities may not change their situation all together, they can still hinder and alternate top-down encapsulations, as the barricades in Mitrovica have started ideas of autonomy and special status for the north (ICG 2012).

**Picture 8.** A billboard seen when entering Mitrovica from the north.



*'EULEX go home!' signed with 'citizens of northern Kosovo and Metohija'*

#### *SPREADING LIKE WILDFIRE*

After the drowning of three Albanian children in Ibar on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2004 rumours began to flourish that Serbs had chased them towards the river and were thus responsible for their deaths. The day after Albanian protesters gathered to cross north on Mitrovica's main bridge while Serbs gathered to stop them. KFOR troops blocked the bridge in order to keep the groups apart, but in the tumultuous situation guns were fired and grenades thrown killing at least eight people and wounding hundreds (ICG 2005:5). The same day and the day after violent clashes between Albanians and Serbs occurred all over Kosovo.

*'Mitrovica has in this whole story been a generator. (...) It has indirect consequences on other places. Mitrovica is seen as a battlefield between the interests of Belgrade and Pristina. (...) Things that happen in Mitrovica echo out (...) When we had troubles in Mitrovica, five hours later we had the same in very different places in Kosovo' (Hajrizi 2011).*

The intimate hostility and antagonism in Mitrovica led to a fertile atmosphere for such a clash, and the unpredictable and non-linear dynamic of cities enabled such rapid evolution of events. As an anonymous UNMIK official claims:

*'Things that happen in Mitrovica echo out in a negative sense, if you have clashes there it raise political tensions in the region (...) It is a flashpoint, it is a frontline'* (2011).

A wrongly interpreted *local* accident led within hours to clashes between tens of thousands of people, burning of hundreds of houses and thousands IDPs *all over* Kosovo. Many Serbs keep referring to these events as a breaking point, with a 'before' and an 'after', as they had severe ramifications for the interethnic trust and peacebuilding. The confrontations in Mitrovica echoed out and are still a source of fear, anger and distrust (ICG 2005, 2011, Subotic 2011).

One could say that similar events can happen anywhere, and surely they can, but cities like Mitrovica are more potent sources for unrest than other cities. Urban intimacy and interaction means that people are close to one another, leading to a higher frequency of situations with potential tension. The symbolic values of these cities also hasten and magnify events. People had the possibility to clash in Mitrovica, and these clashes were given more importance due to Mitrovica being the symbol for Serb resistance and the only remaining urban place where Serbs live.

#### *A PLACE FOR INTERACTION AND POSITIVE EXAMPLES*

While the arenas in Mostar and Mitrovica are being used to provoke tensions, mark territory and exclude undesirable elements of their societies by materializing confronting politics, they can be places where people meet, interact and heal wounds, and while not in excess, they have such examples as well. There are people and organizations that also use arenas, but to communicate tolerance and the possibility of multiethnic societies. The intimacy of cities enables the creation of long-term and practico-real consequences where actual relations between people are formed. It enables spill-over effects, engages people in their everyday, and has peace-facilitating

effects where nationalistic rhetoric is resisted and alternative voices heard. One Mostarian example is the renovated park a stone's throw from the former frontline.

*'The biggest public space at the moment is the park. It is the only place were little Leo, Thea, Lejla and Aida play, it is a super thing. (...) During the weekends it is crowded. It is the classical example of public space (Musa 2011).*

There are also NGOs that try to be platforms for an united Mostar, like NDC that have integrative educational projects in schools, or OKC Abrasevic, that tries to be a neutral place that provides cultural events to a city that lack a cinema. The equivalent in Mitrovica is the CBM Rock School that has one premise on each side of Ibar and works to promote interethnic contact between young people. Through music people from both sides interact, and this contact has spillover effects to their parents (Syla 2011). Mostar has also a reconstructed gymnasium on the old frontline, which inhabits 'two schools under one roof' – i.e. the premises are shared while the classes are divided under a Croatian and a Bosniak program, an attempt by the Mostar's educational department to provide shared space (Sadovic 2011). Moreover, in the top floor of the same building one can find UWC Mostar, which is a high school that admits students from all over the world and has an integrated education.

*Our school opened to give a positive example to the rest. (...) We tell that the results of our students are much better than the other schools just because they are surrounded by differences and different. Our kids are from the whole world and they affect each other positively, these differences produce a higher effect. (...) The argument that kids from different nationalities cannot go to school together is shown false here (Musa 2011).*

Another similar Mostarian example is the new, non-ethnic, kindergarten 'Sunny Bridge' that also has integrated education. While it is hard to measure the impact of these initiatives, it is clear that they are trying to use arenas to bring people together, show that multiethnicity can function, and be alternative voices. They are examples of how arenas can function as places where people



come together, meet and start interactions that move societies forward. While things could be better:

*'those that were here (in Mostar) during the war and just after can notice and see how much better the situation is today than it once was, it is not the same city, in a positive way. There are some agents of change (...) that want to build new circles of people that not necessarily belong to their ethnic group (...) to rebuild the komsiluks that were destroyed by war' (Voloder 2011)*

## CONCLUSION

Ethnification of space, communicating resistance, building interethnic contact –urban arenas are mediums and tools where political messages are conveyed and spaces where interactions occur. They are zones of engagement that encapsulate the duality of cities (Raffin 2010). In this chapter I have conceptualized urban arenas. The added value I produce is that I give critical peacebuilding an understanding of the potential (both negative and positive) role of urban arenas. I make critical peacebuilding aware of dangers in contested cities, but also elaborate that they have very fertile peacebuilding conditions. Yes, there is a greater risk and probability that tensions will be created in and spread from Mostar and Mitrovica, than from (the homogenously) Banja Luka and Pristina, but at the same time, in contested cities we have friction (Tsing 2005) and thus a greater chance at producing interethnic contact and finding progressive solutions that can spread to Banja Luka or Pristina. I advance the critical peacebuilding analysis, add the urban dimension and enable it to see arenas as dynamic spaces and effective tools to reach political goals, but I also imagine a space where peace can be built.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Through my three conceptualizations of contested cities I have advanced the knowledge of critical peacebuilding, added an urban dimension into their analytical toolbox, and created an understanding of conflict in cities and cities in conflict, making critical peacebuilding better equipped to understand and handle the specificities of urban conflict and peacebuilding in cities.

My first dimension illustrates how contested cities can be understood as frontiers during and *after* conflict, leading to an incremental detrition of interethnic contact as well as clustering, infected political climate and unfolding of contested cities as battlegrounds and flashpoints. I create an understanding that frontiers must be adequately addressed since long-term effects of initial separation can produce intractable divisions, as illustrated by Mostar and Mitrovica, but I also generate initial knowledge on how frontiers are to and are *not* to be dealt with.

My second dimension rearticulates the agency of cities and argues that the subordination of cities vis-à-vis states does not implicate submissiveness. I establish that cities can have ideas of themselves, institutionalized actions and an authorized representation, which enables them to identify city-specific interests, act towards these aims, and resist what is deemed harmful and counterproductive. Mostar has kept its ethnified politics in spite of its formal reunification, and what is agreed upon between Pristina and Belgrade does not necessarily reach the implementation phase in Mitrovica. This creates insights that urban leaders should be included (or at least addressed), since ignoring them does not make them go away, and critical peacebuilding is now aware of that cities can be their foes, but also their friends.

My third dimension conceptualizes cities as arenas for political manifestations and spaces for interactions. The term should be understood figuratively as cities function as intimate spaces and effective tools where manifestations take place, messages are interpreted and sentiments spread – slowly or swiftly. I create an understanding that arenas can be used to proclaim ownership, communicate resistance or promote interethnic contact, to mention a few, and make critical peacebuilding aware of arenas as baffling cups of tea, but also efficient tools of peacebuilding if handled with thoughtfulness.

More research is clearly needed, but I here emphasize the importance of the urban dimension and the centrality of cities in human and political interaction in general – and in conflict and peacebuilding in particular. If critical peacebuilding does not operate at the urban level, lacks understanding of the dynamics that shape urban politics, or neglects the power of cities, it misses great opportunities to prevent conflict, materialize its concepts and build peace. But it also excludes locals, undertakes counterproductive measures and

wastes time and resources. The subsequent results are more often than not ethnified politics and cemented contestation, resistance towards external actors, and negative spillover effects. I show that the lack of an urban dimension in the conceptualization, analysis and policy of critical peacebuilding is undermining both its short-term and long-term efficiency and sustainability. Contested cities are consistent stumbling blocks in wider peacebuilding efforts, they are overrepresented when it comes to unsettling new tensions, and they tend to remain vicious battlegrounds for local, urban and regional conflicts. However, while this is the most common mark made by contested cities, it is not the only. I have made clear that the obvious interest of critical peacebuilding is to avoid the destructive outcome of contested cities and promote their progressive side. The move towards such potential results is that critical peacebuilding abandons state-centrism, refocuses its analysis to include cities through an urban lens, and understands that its abstract concepts can be materialized in cities *by* cities. My theoretical framework is hopefully suitable to describe, understand and possibly change contested cities, and should be used to advance the understanding of contested cities even further.

One might feel that I have overestimated the role of cities, while neglecting or (even worse) ignoring the powerful role of states. States *are* the actors that, without doubt, have most power and legitimacy when it comes to larger societal processes that areas undergo. The Dayton agreement was made over the heads of the people in Mostar, and Pristina and Belgrade will probably agree to some solution that will be imposed on Mitrovica. However, sixteen years after Dayton there are few tendencies of positive peace in a still contested Mostar. As regards Mitrovica, Serbia can establish good relations with Kosovo, maybe even recognize it, but the 'to be or not to be' of a multicultural society will be up to the people of Mitrovica.

If we are interested in territory, legal frameworks and judicial matters, we can ignore cities. But if we truly wish to achieve a sustainable, emancipatory and just peace, that speak to the citizens that are forced to live this peace (or 'peace'), then we need to not only include cities, but take *departure* from them, since actualities cannot be imposed, they have to be endogenously created. Advancing the knowledge on cities in conflict and conflict in cities and

showing the importance and potential of the urban dimension is the contribution I make here.

## **7. FURTHER RESEARCH**

Every researcher taps into subjects that cannot be addressed due to limitations in time, space or scope, and I am no exception. The conceptualization of contested cities in peacebuilding left little room to elucidate the connections and mutual impacts *between* my three concepts, nor did I leave any room to envision an urban peacebuilding or imagine an urban peace, even if the people I met had many ideas and thoughts for how the unfavourable position of Mostar and Mitrovica could be turned and what it might look like.

In this ‘post-last’ chapter I briefly touch upon these three areas, as they are the next steps from here. I speculate on the connections between the arena, the frontier and the city as an actor, and hope that my theoretical framework can serve as ground for a future *urban peacebuilding* that can negate the negative risk and direct the positive potential of contested cities, creating an *urban peace*.

### **CONNECTING THE ARENA, THE FRONTIER AND THE AGENCY**

I have created an understanding for the different dimensions of contested cities, but while indirectly suggesting some connections, I have not explicitly discussed the relationships between my concepts. They are obviously connected, even if the ways of how might be unclear at the moment. Frontiers are both bridged *and* created in arenas. Internal agency struggles are played out in arenas and their results can reinforce or abolish frontiers. Arenas provide platforms for (both internal and external) agency of cities, while their public space is limited by frontiers, which in their turn undermine the agency of cities. The concepts seem ‘analytically separable but interdependent’ (Tilly 2001:32) and one might not be more important than the other. Positive and negative course of events can begin in all three, spread to the other two, and generate spirals of amplifying speed.

Incipient cooperation between internal leaders who identify the undermining effects of a frontier and choose to appear together in public can lead to a

weakened frontier and positive interactions in the arena. Their positive changes can lead to stronger external agency, more public space and less tension. At the same time a clash in the arena can strengthen the frontier, provoke internal struggle and undermine external agency, lead to more clashes, pressure leaders to refuse cooperation, and block of roads. While I only speculate, it seems reasonable that similar processes can be identified in forthcoming research. Identifying these concepts was the first step, the next must be to clarify their relationships.

### **URBAN PEACEBUILDING**

While I have conceptualized cities as important to peacebuilding in abstract terms, an *urban peacebuilding* should take a more practical turn. Grounded in my theoretical framework and my field studies I identify three main starting-points for urban peacebuilding.

The first aspect I identify is *urban planning*. My informants repeatedly deplored the lack of neutral and multiethnic public space in their cities, while stressing the positive impacts of the few platforms where interethnic contact have been possible. In contested cities urban planning is the spatialization of peace since it is used to produce space (Lefebvre 1996), and its role should be to recognize and help transcend urban divides (Bollens 2012). The potential impact of urban planning on the everyday in contested cities is vast since it affects housing construction and allocation, social service delivery and accessibility, refugee allocation, economic development, reconstruction, to mention a few (Bollens 2012) and decides who is (and who is not) involved in decisions shaping urban change (Rydin 2011). Used in peacebuilding urban planning could challenge sectional territorial claims, locate key services so that segregated communities are drawn to the same public space, remove defensive walls and barriers, and create multiethnic space for peacebuilding (Gaffikin et al. 2010:508-509)

The positive impact of secured employment, decent living conditions, and a prospective future on contested societies is stressed both by research (Berdal and Wennman 2010) and my informants. Therefore my second aspect in future urban peacebuilding is *urban development*, which has a dual potential. On

the one hand economic stagnation is a source of tension between conflicting groups (Berdal and Mousavizadeh 2010), especially in contested cities (Boal 1994). On the other hand cities are the driving economical nodes of states (Wegelin and Lindfield 2010). Guidelines on how to stimulate urban development (in contested cities) could thus not only bring polarized urban communities together into economic cooperation, but also have significant implication on state economies – utilizing the undermined comparative advantages of contested cities could both disarm tensions and create future prosperity (Kirby and Marston 1995, Sassen 1998). To channelize the full potential of urban development, an inclusive and future-orientated development must be planned for (Yuen and Ooi 2010), referring to development of human capital and infrastructure (Wegelin and Lindfield 2010), bringing together firms into industry networks (Turok 2005) and supporting creativity and innovation (Yuen and Ooi 2010) in order to encompass all social and economic activities (Wegelin and Lindfield 2010).

Finally, I see *urban governance* as the spider in the web of urban peacebuilding, since urban strategies without an urban accommodation are ineffective and cause instability rather than progress (Esser 2009). My informants consistently emphasized that different peacebuilding initiatives in Mostar and Mitrovica have been misdirected, narrow-mindedly planned, and inadequately executed due to exclusion of urban groups and initiatives, ignorance of urban contexts, and failure to tap in on the articulated needs of citizens (Nagle 2009). I see urban governance as a potential answer to these shortcomings since cities potentially gather the interests of the whole society (Davis 2010) and are central to effective and legitimate governance (Hirst 2005).

Urbanity is a condition characterized by interdependencies (Boudreau 2010) meaning that unofficial networks are as important as official structure (Magnusson 2011), and thus all actors important to a city should be included, such as local public authorities, private business, NGOs, interest groups, etc. (Andersen and Kempen 2001). A sound urban governance should provide political accountability, reliable and equitable legal frameworks, bureaucratic transparency, and efficient public sector management (Ooi 2010:13) and (in the case of contested cities) address root-causes, facilitate mutual empowerment, confront status quos and be actively engaged (Bollens 1999:21-38). However,

since cities have not been acknowledged in peacebuilding, urban actors often lack either resources or adequate training to deal with the complex situation that is the post-conflict environment. Therefore urban administrations need to be professionalized, their office-holders properly educated, and their institutions reformed to achieve accountability (Ooi 2010:18). Concentrating urban peacebuilding through urban officials means that ‘economic and social bonds of trust’ (Harding 2005:70) found in cities can be utilized and their detailed contextual insights used to satisfy articulated needs, avoid pitfalls and maximise outcomes (Nagle 2009) – to urban problems there needs to be urban solutions (Fainstain 2009).

One needs to know, however, that I have emphasized the *positive* potential of urban peacebuilding and its envisioned components. All these strategies consist of pitfalls, risks and uncertainty in cities that are *not* contested. I need not to elaborate that the complexity reaches new heights in cities such as Kirkuk and Nicosia compared to Berlin and Bogota. Urban planning possesses a sinister duality. On the one hand it can be used to address root issues, empower marginalized groups, and promote collective public space (Bollens 2012). On the other hand it can construct negative political narratives (Staiger et al. 2009), reinforce power (Yifachel et al. 2009), and accommodate and reinforce ethnically pure neighbourhoods (Bollens 2012). Urban planning is controversial (Silver 2010), its negative effects often neglected (Barakat and Narang-Suri 2009). In contested cities the, in non-conflictual situations complex ideas, of urban development become particularly problematic. Contested cities undermine the centralized economic advantages of cities and resist the economic, social and political interdependency and diversity urban development needs to function (Bollens 1999:9). Finally, as regards urban administration, we must remember that the city is only ‘a humanly constructed resource system, a vast assemblage of heterogeneous physical artefacts and assets, produced through human work and ingenuity, ready for people to use for whatever purpose they chose’ (Harvey 2003:34) i.e. its potential is not necessarily positive, as this paper has illustrated repeatedly. Strengthening urban foci and institutions, and including urban actors can in worst cases just provide negative flows with useful tools for continued oppression (Beall et. al. 2011).

The final note to be made is thus that urban peacebuilding needs to acknowledge the ambivalent role of urban planning, the problems for urban development that contested cities constitute, and the destructive potential of urban governance. Awareness needs to be present and an urban peacebuilding adapted to the complex environment that contested cities constitute, so that its potential can be utilized. It is a task as complex and hard achieve as it is desirable and necessary, and it is one that must be undertaken.

#### **URBAN PEACE – AN UTOPIA FOR WALKING**

If an urban peacebuilding is developed and employed, as a result a peace that is invested with local characteristics may emerge – a hybrid form of peace more suitable to overcoming the divisions in highly contested cities and states. A ceasefire, elite negotiations and an abstract notion of justice are all characteristics of an abstract *state* ‘peace’ not localized or materialized at everyday level. On the other hand, a *local* peace within a small community of reconciled neighbours is only confined to a ‘zone of peace’ with the ‘known other’, failing to reach the ‘unknown other’. An *urban peace*, however, is potentially able to handle the shortcomings of both the local and the state-level peace. Dealing with issues that have ‘real’ consequences and are of severe importance to citizens, such as employment, housing, security and local investments, urban peace is localized and owned, civic and emancipatory. Through the characteristics of ‘the urban’ and ‘the city’ it has the ability to spread and have implications outside its own spatiality, instead of being confined to a limited zone.

One could here critique me for wanting further research on a vision, but then one would have misunderstood me. In one aspect urban peace is an utopia, but in my world utopias cannot be accomplished because goals are relative. Even though all goals articulated by women’s rights activists a hundred years ago are fulfilled few would say that gender equality prevails. As we come closer to our goal its level of details reaches new heights and it moves further way from us. In cities, no matter how far we come, there will always be excluded and marginalized citizens. My urban peace is a utopia that escapes every time we come close to it, so that we continue walking (Cuz and Novy 2009:238).



On the other hand *imagining* urban peace is a powerful peacebuilding tool. How we imagine things influences how these things evolve, and therefore my urban peace becomes a means, not an end (Gordon and Buck 2005). Hence, by researching urban peace we can avoid stagnation, but also shape how peacebuilding is conducted.

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