# Redefining Conflict Through Commonality: Ethno-Spatial Agonistic Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of International Relations

*In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in International Relations*

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*Vienna, Austria*

2024

# Abstract

This research explores the relationship between agonistic peacebuilding and spatial dimensions in the context of violent ethnic conflict. It builds on the premise that conflict is an inherent aspect of diverse communities, and that modern peacebuilding should transform violent conflict into constructive engagement. The study emphasizes the role of common spaces, particularly within cities, as arenas for inter-ethnic discourse and interaction based on agonistic principles. It contrasts these practices with the ethnic divisions reinforced by the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) and liberal peacebuilding in post-conflict Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).

The research investigates how post-conflict peacebuilding tools, referenced through the DPA, have perpetuated ethno-spatial divides. It includes case studies of Sarajevo and Brčko to assess the impact of agonistic peacebuilding. In Sarajevo, the destruction of common spaces and the creation of ethnically homogenous Istočno Sarajevo highlight limited inter-ethnic interactions. Conversely, the Brčko District, with a more inclusive representation of ethnic groups, demonstrates the potential of local-level engagement to foster community based on acceptance and respect.

The findings suggest that top-down peacebuilding approaches tend to maintain divisions, while approaches fostering common spaces for shared grievances and experiences can build constructive communities. The study underscores the importance of space as both a consequence of conflict and a tool for reconciliation, advocating for the use of spatial dimensions to support agonistic peacebuilding and create platforms for contestation and coexistence.

# Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor, Thomas Fetzer, for his valuable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this process. Your insightful feedback and unwavering patience have been of great help in navigating the challenges of this academic journey.

My special thanks go to all of my professors who encouraged me to always dig deeper and explore unknown avenues.

To my friends who are spread out all over the world – I thank you for your patience and support. Your thoughtfulness knows no bounds.

To my family who have stood by my side through all my journeys and provided me with a loving and caring home. Hvala vam.

Finally, I would like to thank Adrian for the long talks, new ideas, and genuine curiosity that helped me put my thoughts into words. Your support was crucial. I am forever thankful.

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# List of Abbreviations

DPA - Dayton Peace Agreement

FBiH - Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

BiH - Bosnia and Herzegovina

RS - Republika Srpska

YNA - Yugoslav People's Army

ICTY - International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia

IEBL - Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL)

BSA - Bosnian Serb Army

ARBiH - Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina

**Introduction**

*"Our tragedy is fragmentation. It begins as a state of mind and ends up as destiny. It is the tragedy of our family of nations who hobble across this great peninsula, this exquisitely set Earth, like an army of blind soldiers a thousand years old looking for a place to rest. Let them rest. Forgive them, forgive me, forgive us. Our fear drove us insane and melancholy."*

*Kapka Kassabova, To the Lake: A Balkan Journey of War and Peace*

The intersection of agonistic peacebuilding with ethno-spatial considerations presents a compelling framework for understanding and addressing the complexities of creating a sense of sustainable and long-lasting peace, diverging from the previous liberal attempts at intervention. This research paper explores the dynamic interplay between these two domains, positing the city as both a physical space and a symbolic embodiment of cultural and political contestation. The approach acknowledges conflict as an enduring element of social life and seeks to transform urban spaces into arenas where diverse groups can negotiate their differences constructively. Through a contextual analysis of the case studies of Sarajevo and Istočno Sarajevo, and Brčko, as well as a text analysis of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), this paper endeavors to demonstrate how the lack of a common space that unites people with different identities can be a root of further animosities, promoting ethnic divisions as the only way of living without violent conflict. I utilize Mouffe's conceptualization of transferring the friend-enemy relationship to an agonistic one (Mouffe 2005) as a means for sustainable peace in post-conflict. Furthermore, by using the analytical framework of agonistic peacebuilding proposed by Strömbom (2019) I analyze to what extent were these principles used in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and what are the effects of it in the present day. Furthermore, the notion of the city is used as a representation of proximity, materially as a place of meeting

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and symbolically embedded with an understanding of a shared world that exists between people, with human action and its relation to the public space that provides a place where individuals come together - a "world in common" (Arendt, Canovan, and Allen 2018).

Given the constant tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) among the two entities established by the DPA, liberal peacebuilding has had challenges in delivering the promise of sustainable peace and consensus. There are a number of possible reasons for why this is a case, but the one that attracts the most attention is the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina into two entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), populated mostly with Bosnians and Bosnian Croats, and Republika Srpska (RS), with majority Bosnian Serbs (and independent district of Brčko). With this clear spatial divide of ethnic groups, a question arises regarding the linkage between peace and space. Thus, this research uses the lens of agonistic peacebuilding to observe the important intersection between peacebuilding, space, and ethnic identity in the post-conflict setting of BiH

To determine if the role of space and ethnic grouping were considered and how such considerations affected existing ethnic enclaves, this research uses the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) as a starting point. It analyses the language and narratives in the agreement documentation and how they have manifested in actual behaviours and viewpoints. It looks at how the issue of ethnic segregation is being treated and if the agreement provided a possibility to create a platform for participation on all levels of society. Furthermore, the study can clarify whether any underlying beliefs or presumptions are present in the text, how terminology like "Bosnians," "Croats," and "Serbs" are employed, and whether there are any connotations they bear given the nature of the war and the parties involved.

Additionally, the research puts the elements of agonistic peacebuilding in the context of a case study analysis. It uses creation of Istočno Sarajevo as a response to the Siege of

Sarajevo to portray the spatial dimension of the ethnic war. With the analysis of a case study, this research tries to analyze the real-world implementation and impact of peacebuilding as outlined in the DPA. It looks at socio-political characteristics to observe that the ethnic isolation created animosities and intolerance between ethnic groups that are present in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina. Parallelly, it explores an alternative peace process in Brčko District that was employed due to the shortcomings of the DPA. This case uses a more local level approach and as such employs elements of agonistic peacebuilding in a successful way.

This research is organized as follows. In the first part, I introduce the terminology and overarching lens of this paper by providing an overview of the literature on agonistic peacebuilding and what the main assumptions of this novel form of peacebuilding are, predominantly by way of a liberal peacebuilding critique. Furthermore, I elaborate upon the agency of space, material and symbolic, in peacemaking by following the existing literature and using the city as a tool to explain the importance of proximity and togetherness. To conclude the literature overview, I provoke the various understanding of ethnicity and explore how scholars analyze ethnic groupism, given the nature of this particular case study. In the second chapter, I analyze the DPA in regard to the understanding of space and ethnic divisions within it. Following that, using the examples of Sarajevo in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Istočno Sarajevo, Republika Srpska, and Brčko District I examine the practical implications of spatial ethnic division and argue that the lack of agonistic common spaces for adversaries to come together and share their views is the reason for the rising tensions present today. The desired outcome of agonistic peacebuilding to provide a joint space for various ethnicities to interact in a democratic environment was never fully realized, and instead, the opposite actions have built up to ongoing tensions in Bosnia and Herzegovina today. Finally, the concluding paragraph is composed of the limitations of this study and

implications for further exploration of agonistic peacebuilding as a way of conflict management.

# 1. The conceptual framework

## 1.1. *Agonism and agonistic peace*

Peacebuilding is a field with many contestations, academic and practical. Understanding the intricacies of how peace is realized in practice, what structural elements can be found in practice, whether peace could be exclusionary for certain groups, and many other questions have been widely debated. However, the dominant approach in answering them has long been a liberal one, which seeks to resolve conflicts by establishing a consensus around shared values and institutions, individual rights, and free markets in post-conflict communities. It aims to recreate Western democratic models to create stable and peaceful societies. Liberal peacebuilding often sees conflict in a binary manner, conceptualizing situations as either in a state of peace or state of war, replacing the conditions of conflict with peaceful ones by including institutions with liberal democratic governance.

This approach has come under increasing criticism due to its apoliticality and aim to create one-size-fits-all practices. Scholars argue that liberal peacebuilding has failed to incorporate the local perspective (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Richmond 2011), taking Western democracies as role models and creating a shortsighted narrative of what a fully functional state should look like (Richmond 2010). This uniformity and standardization in peacebuilding and its practices would create detrimental outcomes with little to no options for disagreements (Aggestam, Cristiano, and Strömbom 2015; Mac Ginty, Muldoon, and Ferguson 2007). In trying to reform and improve the existing state, peacebuilding scholarship has been offering new perspectives on a conceptualization of peace on both epistemological and ontological levels. One of the promising ideas on how to improve liberal peacebuilding is the notion of agonistic peacebuilding, coming from a theoretical framework of agonism that argues

for more profound research into what peace is, rejecting the zero-sum approach and elite-focused peacemaking.

Agonistic peace disregards peace as a given and sees conflict as a potentially constructive tool in peacebuilding, giving a voice to all actors in a given society. Peace is not understood as creating consensus based on shared values and ideas, eradicating conflict, but the potential of conflict transformation. Agonistic theorists contend that the goal of peacebuilding should not be to eliminate conflict but to transform it by shifting antagonistic relationships between "enemies" into agonistic ones between "adversaries". Conflict is seen as an inherent and necessary part of politics and societies, escaping the binary view of conflict being a negative and destructive concept. If channelled properly, it has the potential to be a crucial tool for constructive peacebuilding (Kriesberg and Dayton 2017). Furthermore, eliminating conflict in its constructive form could do more harm than good. In contrast to the liberal peacebuilding that restrains a plurality of voices with its generally accepted peace agenda, raising the potential for civil unrest (Aggestam, Cristiano, and Strömbom 2015), agonistic peacebuilding invites all parties to express their views in a respectful manner. The benefit of this peacebuilding form is seen in a dialogue – providing a platform for all voices to be heard, regardless of their agreement with the leading discourse. Agonistic peacebuilding aims to create spaces and institutions that allow for the peaceful expression of contestation and dissent. It sees disagreement and debate as potentially productive forces that can prevent the ossification of power structures. Dialogue seeks to transform the nature of a conflict from violence or antagonism (others are enemies that have to be destroyed) to agonism (others are seen as legitimate adversaries to engage in a dialogue with). The democratic element of agonistic approach is certainly similar to the liberal one, but agonistic peacebuilding puts more value in the local agency and does not utilize a top-down approach and imposing frameworks and solutions.

The platform for a conversation or debate is valuable in peacebuilding due to its inclusivity of actors, especially in the political sphere (Peterson 2013; Jabri 2007). The diversity of all actors is crucial since it restructures the notion of otherness – it is not about creating a friend-enemy relationship, but rather an adversarial one (Mouffe 2005). It is important to mention that the word 'adversary' could have a negative connotation, inviting hostility. However, in the scholarship of agonistic theory and agonistic peace, it has a neutral tone. Adversary is seen as a legitimate opponent with whom one could have disagreements, but still engage in a dialogue with. Things that divide groups of people do not have to be antagonistic (Abizadeh 2005) as long as the dialogue is created around the idea of respect. When explaining this notion, scholars claim that the dialogue can still have disagreements, but it must be followed by democratic procedures, that should previously be agreed upon by the parties involved (Mouffe 2013; Shinko 2008). Some scholars see this as a potential obstacle for the reasons of different ideological inclinations or cultural ones (Mouffe 2005; Peterson 2013). However, the notion of democratic institutions is a base assumption, which makes agonistic peacemaking a delicate process of harmonizing plurality with democratic principles (Peterson 2013; Schaap 2006).

## 1.2. *Conflict transformation through identity*

The nature of conflict is its non-binary reality, where the roots of a dispute and the actions coming from it are often blurred when trying to trace its linear origins. The antagonistic sentiment often relies on identity being dependent on its presence and ability to vocalize differences (Mouffe 2020; Connolly 1991). Given that, scholars argue that antagonism is an inevitable factor of a diverse society, and should be embraced in socio-political reality (Goodhand 1999). A society is comprised of diverse groupings such as ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, and religion, and these identifications present a ground for political antagonism. But, as Aggestam et al. explain, even if there is a present antagonism between groups, there is a

capacity to evolve into agonistic relationships that interact and/or coexist (Aggestam, Cristiano, and Strömbom 2015). As mentioned before, it is the notion of grouping one identity as either a friend or an enemy that leads to enmity and friction, rather than differences per se. Given that, agonistic peace creates a political platform to transform the friend/enemy notion into rightful and acknowledged adversaries (Shinko 2008), but the acknowledgement and acceptance of the other is crucial. In the contest between competing ideas and interests, the aim is not to destroy or eradicate adversaries, or *others*, but to engage in vigorous debate and contestation, with the understanding that conflict and disagreement are permanent features of democratic life.

Social groupings have been a significant part of conflict analysis. Authors argue that the categories of friends and enemies are part of a narrative that creates collective identities (Buckley-Zistel 2008; Strömbom 2019), contributing to the creation of others on the basis of the differences with a self, which has an admixture for conflict (Jabri 1996). Conflict is embedded in a dichotomy of social belonging to a certain identity, depending on the stance in a specific temporality towards the other group. The potential for a change in an embedded stance is seen as a tool towards the transformation of a conflict, along with institutional and societal transformation (Buckley-Zistel 2008). This constructive transformation ponders the importance of all levels of agency, that being grassroots, middle-range, and top leadership. (Lederach 1997). As explained by Lederach, absolute peace is not possible, and conflict is an unavoidable and recurring process. Therefore, peacebuilding should embrace the conflict transformation through restructuring social and institutional relationships. This notion goes hand in hand with a conceptualization of relationships between adversaries in agonistic peace, emphasizing the importance of relationship transformation towards a constructive rather than destructive nature.

There are different understandings about the 'classification' of social groups and the role they play. Scholars in agonistic peacebuilding often emphasize the role of identity change and institutional inclusion (Aggestam, Cristiano, and Strömbom 2015; Peterson 2013; Ramsbotham 2010; Strömbom 2019). Creating a sustainable peace (absent of violence, but not necessarily constructive conflict), is possible by including different identities and interests into an institutional framework. The legitimization of it comes through localization of the process (Fjelde and Hoglund 2011). This means the inclusion of local actors in the peacebuilding process, rather than giving all of the agency to the elite level. However, as Strombom notes, constructing such an institutional framework is easier said than done (2019). The author emphasized the thread of inclusion on the ethnic basis since it could be seen as an exclusionary measure given that ethnic affiliation does not equal representation of views. Strombom suggests "…including a comprehensiveness of views, meaning that the presence of ideas and interests rather than people of a certain background and/or ethnic belonging might be the most important ground for inclusion, as well as the exchange of arguments within institutions in a dialogic manner." (Strömbom 2019, 953). Nevertheless, the technocratic view of peace solely through institutions and policies is apparent and often not enough to achieve durable peace.

As explained before, conflicts are often rooted in differences in identities and the perception of the other. Additionally, the dissolution of conflict is not possible if only material aspects, such as socioeconomic inequalities or institutional reform, are tackled, even if they are of high importance in a peacebuilding process (Nagle 2014). Scholars build on understanding the other and having empathy for them (Bush and Folger 2005) through public awareness of the other's identity narrative, prompting a type of self-transformation in understanding the other. Furthermore, agonistic peacebuilding applies this narrative technique in analyzing the process of relationship transformation from antagonistic to agonistic ones (Rumelili and Strömbom 2022). The agonistic recognition of the other's identity is argued to be a condition

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for conflict transformation, since it prevents 'the creation of ontological insecurity and dissonance which in turn curb the propensity for identity backlash' (Rumelili and Strömbom 2022, 1362). Recognition of the other's identity narratives is seen as a necessary move for establishing agonistic peace. This way, parties in a conflict are seen as equal and respected, prompting the openness to express their views. Strömbom uses the concept of thick recognition from (Wendt 2003) which creates 'more profound changes in the understandings of the self as well as the other party to conflict,' (Strömbom 2020, 954) thus giving it more legitimacy and with that more chance for a sustainable peace.

### 1.3. The Nexus Between Physical Space and Peacebuilding

One of the key limitations of the existing literature on agonistic peacebuilding is the practical implication of such a notion. Building a forum for dialogue is conceptually important, but the implications of it on everyday life pose challenges – what are the realistic meeting points that can function and be protected by democratic arrangement? What is the power of conflict transformation in societies divided by ethnic affiliations to a certain identity and the narratives that come out of it? How do we analyze relationship transfer from enemies to equals in a dialogue, engaging in agonistic peacebuilding? While various factors contribute to successful peacebuilding efforts, the role of physical space is often overlooked. This research tries to use space and place-making to explain peacebuilding in practice, symbolic and physical, arguing that a place does not exist without being empowered by human interactions and stories, nor are individual experiences possible without a space to materialize them and create agonistic narratives. It uses the city as both a figurative and practical embodiment of a place of meeting people with different narratives and identities. By creating common spaces where antagonists can practice their appearances and engage in dialogue, spatial agency can facilitate the transformation of hostile relationships into more constructive and peaceful ones.

Similarly, the destruction of space creates a separation that contributes to the violent conflict. Destroying memorabilia with symbolic meaning for a city and its citizens, is a method of military urbanism (Graham 2010) to securitize public spaces used in everyday life (Riedlmayer, n.d.). In literature, this is understood as a memoricide, or killing of memory with an aim to obliterate the memory and sense of certain group's belonging to a city, or to erase the memory of a common life (Riedlmayer 1995; Bevan 2006; Risic 2018). This includes the annihilation of cultural heritage sites (religious institutions, monuments, etc) or public spaces (bridges, squares, etc). Ristic uses Riedlmayer (1995) and Bevan (2006) to explain this as another form of ethnic cleansing that aims to erase history of ethnic diversity in the city and create grounds for, "the inscription of new mono-cultural ethnic histories" (Ristic 2018, 36).

A space is understood on the level of symbolic and material and it has similar implications in conflict and reconstruction. A physical representation of a conflict is primarily observed by a change in space. Apartment buildings, roads, and common spaces being heavily affected by destruction testify to deep animosities between groups and are a reminder of violence caused by hostility. Due to their presence as scars of a conflict that used to be, but also due to the necessity for daily functionality, spatial infrastructure is usually the first to undergo reconstruction in a post-hostile conflict period. This is also done out of necessity given the demographic change – displaced people's priority to find a safe place whether that was their home before the violent conflict or not. As a case in Bosnia and Herzegovina shows, which the research will go into depth later, displaced people's prioritization of safety and opportunity is stronger than a need to return to their original habitat (Jansen and Löfving 2008). Rebuilding after a conflict should not be about recreating a home as it used to be, but of creating one with similar functionalities in a new, given situation (Jansen 2009 via Bădescu 2015). To create a full picture of a space that gets its legitimacy through symbolic and material, it is necessary to understand what constitutes it. Lebbus Woods, an American architect and theorist,

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tried to explore the concept of reconstructing cities after the war by using architecture as a way of remembrance and healing (Woods 1997). He sees architecture as a means or a tool to not solely restore what was lost in the war, but create something new and innovative using ruins, acknowledging the past while looking forward to future possibilities. Woods argues that architecture is a way to transform the perception of destruction into usefulness: "Architecture, the very model of precision and self-exalting intelligence, should not fear its union with what has been the lowest form of human manifestation, the ugly evidence of violence. Architecture must learn to transform the violence, even as violence has transformed architecture." (Woods 1997, 16)

Rebuilding physical places and mending social ties are frequently related because of the realisation that space and its repair are only legitimate when based on human usage. Thus, the spatial aspects of peacebuilding—paying special attention to how physical environments are designed, used, and regulated in order to create spaces that are welcoming to all—have a significant impact on turning antagonistic relationships into agonistic ones. Fostering a peace that is based on interaction, communication and understanding, rather than a separated existence, requires this shift.

Nevertheless, if these common spaces are created outside of the notion of agonism, there is a danger of creating a homogeneity of a certain identity, which excludes the other and does not provide a point of meeting for different ideas and views. Without the diversification of users, a space, viewed from an agonistic perspective, loses its purpose since it does not provide an inclusive public sphere for the creation of what Hannah Arendt calls "world in common" (Arendt, Canovan, and Allen 2018). Here, while discussing the distinction between the private and public realms, Arendt introduces the idea of a shared world that exists between people, and how human action and its relation to the public space provides a place where

individuals come together. This refers to the durable and shared human-made environment that provides a stable context for human activities. It includes physical objects, institutions, laws, and traditions that outlast individual lives and create a sense of continuity and commonality among people. The common world is what grounds individuals in a shared reality and provides a framework within which the space of appearance can exist. This space is non-exclusionary, since it only exists if it belongs to everyone, despite the differences amongst them. That what unites people is the common "objective".

There is a growing literature in the field of critical peace-building that explores the connection between peace-making and local agency (Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic 2016; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Richmond 2011; Kappler 2014), trying to understand the intricacies of the role of "…agency, power, politics, interaction, community, identity, peace and conflict.." and longlasting peace (Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic 2016). Björkdahl and Mannergren-Selimovic expand of the idea of the 'local turn', giving practical implications of Mac Ginty and Richmond's (2013) attempt of addressing the local in peacebuilding. They suggest that there is a lack of understanding of the role of spatiality in making peace and place the agency in humans interacting in common spaces, using Arendt's idea of proximity, collective action, and inclusivity (Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic 2016, 324). This agency, and with it the legitimacy of a space, is only understood to be present as long as there is collective human action and cannot be understood as individual property. However, even with understanding that a space needs to have a meaning and agency, there is a need to further materialize what the space is in practice, so that one can research the applied concepts of agonistic peacebuilding or the lack of them.

## 1.4. City as a measurement tool

Since space is a vast concept, to try to limit the scope in a more tangible understanding, this research makes use of the idea of a city as a physical location that both forms and is formed by a social space of meeting and is given a meaning by people's endowment in it. It is seen as a measurement unit of agonistic peacebuilding. Several scholars use the city as a tool for creating coexistence between groups with different identities (Bădescu 2022; Gusic 2020; Selimovic 2022), emphasizing the potential in city as means of peacebuilding still to be utilized (S. Bollens 2012). In research linked to peacebuilding, both war and peace are shown to interact with spatiality, but in-depth studies have yet to go beyond this rationality to explore which spaces can create coexistence (Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel 2016; Gusic 2020) and some scholars see city spaces as a tool to do so (Bădescu 2022; Gusic 2022; Selimovic 2022).

Gusic explores the intersection of urban studies with peace research, using the 'city's constructive potential' from urban planning and coexistence from peace studies, and calls it urban peace. He proposes that "the city's potential for coexistence might enable coexistence between peace(s) in the postwar city" (Gusic 2022, 624). Gusic's conceptualization of the city brings up important elements that are used in practical agonistic peacebuilding as well. He builds up on a number of authors from the field and sees the city as heterogenous due to its diversity in all its elements – "They [city dwellers] are friends and enemies, workers and unemployed, rich and poor; [they] experience the city in vastly different ways; and lead mutually excluding ways of life" (Gusic 2022, 625). The author uses a poetic explanation of a city from Park (1915) and says that the cities are 'mosaic of little worlds' that are all functioning separately but are connected with infrastructure to a larger whole of the city. The city, comprised of the different cultures, ethnicities, and ways of living, relies on the proximity and meeting points in space of different groups to create the full unit of a city. "Antagonists and friends, protesters and police, customers and traders thus have somewhere to meet – like streets

or parks – and ways of getting there – like pavements or public transport" (Gusic 2022, 625). In a postwar context, city provides a platform for antagonists to exist, practicing the notion of coexistence of different perceptions of peace. Mannergren Selimovic also argues that the city serves as a space for meeting, and as such plays an important role of plurality in public spaces (Selimovic 2022), and this inevitable closeness does not provide space for isolation (Sennett 2008). People are obliged to interact and be exposed to their understanding of antagonistic counterparts. It is worth mentioning that most of these studies, including this research conceptualizes a city in a term of urban town that are not necessarily large metropolis and as such require interaction on daily basis (in government units, grocery stores, and other social practices).

However, Gusic does observe that the diversity, proximity, and belonging in the city can evoke conflicts, stating that in the postwar context, conflict can be constructive and destructive, materialized in discrimination and resentment, or may also inspire creativity and togetherness (Gusic 2022, 625). Even with animosity, the city requires coexisting with the others and knowing their ways of living, and as such should be used for identity transformation and learning to co-exist even with different beliefs and ways of living.

### 1.5. *The role of ethnic grouping*

Finally, this research zooms in on the conflicts that erupt due to ethnic divisions. Understanding the dynamics of ethnic identity is crucial for developing strategies that not only mitigate conflict but also promote sustainable peace in post-conflict urban settings. Expanding upon the notion of self-transformation of antagonistic actors by allowing the existence and acceptance of other ethnic identities, it is important to demarcate how identities are understood.

Some of the classical definitions of ethnicity say that an ethnic group is a "collection of people who identify with one another on the basis of some shared religious, regional, cultural,

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linguistic, or other communal identity who have a shared belief in common descent" (Horowitz 1985), or, "a group larger than a family for which membership is reckoned primarily by descent, is conceptually autonomous, and has a conventionally recognized 'natural history' as a group" (Fearon and Laitin 2000, 20). Contemporary definitions are more straightforward, implying that ethnic identity is a subcategory of identity categories where characteristics based on descent are used to establish entitlement of a group (Chandra 2006). However, the post-modern understanding of ethnicity is more flexible, with contents of ethnic groups able to be altered over time, or situational ethnicity where context plays a role in shaping one's identity in a given temporality.

In the context of this research, the important observation is the one about ethnic groups. Following his fieldwork in the Middle East, Fredrik Barth critically observes the assumptions of ethnicity based on a "collective of objective traits", arguing that they are the result of continuing social interactions and processes rather than being permanent, biologically defined entities (Barth 1969, 14–15). Additionally, he argues that ethnic borders are the product of intricate social interactions between individuals and groups rather than just lines painted on a map (Barth 1969, 16). While it is possible for individuals and groups to cross ethnic boundaries through migration, marriage, or trade, these interactions do not dissolve the boundaries themselves. Alternatively, people and groups could continue to identify as members of separate ethnic groups even while they interact with members of other ethnic groups. The borders are still in place and continue to influence how various groups interact socially. However, some authors see ethnic groupings with a more nuanced perspective, claiming that ethnic 'groupism' oversimplifies the complex social dynamics that underlie ethnic conflicts (Brubaker 2004, 8). Brubaker proposes to rethink ethnicity, "And it [rethinking ethnicity] means taking as a basic analytical category not the "group" as an entity but groupness as a contextually fluctuating conceptual variable" (Brubaker 2004, 11). The author further problematizes the concept of

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identity, saying that the term "identity" is made, "…to designate sameness across persons or sameness over time; to capture allegedly core, foundational aspects of selfhood; to deny that such core, foundational aspects exist" (Brubaker 2004, 35). Finally, another issue brought on by groupism is reification, which occurs when the idea of a group is regarded as an actual objective entity rather than a social construct. This may give rise to the idea that ethnic or national conflict is unavoidable and that groups are naturally at odds with one another.

According to prominent realist theory (Posen 1993), behaviours among ethnic groups are predicted by assuming that ethnic groups are security-maximizing rational. Given the anarchical state of the international level, they have to engage in spirals of conflict during periods of transition because they can't be assured that the other side (actor) will not target them. Posen calls this an ethnic security dilemma and argues that the offensive-defensive capabilities are indistinguishable during the ethnic civil war and that offence is superior to defence. People's individual need to survive amid the structural situation of a state collapse (internal anarchy) gives rise to emotions (fears) in security dilemmas. However, Petersen places more importance on emotions. The author analyzes four different emotions and their predicted targets – fear, hatred, resentment, and rage – to analyze the rise of ethnic tensions (2002). In ethnically diverse environments that already carry a type of grievance based on archetypes of historical narratives that bind certain ethnic groups together, these emotions, mixed with the status of a minority, would motivate them to leave the existing diverse groups and seek safety among people whose self-identification matches theirs.

The lack of togetherness and the creation of ethnically homogenous spaces, or ethnic enclaves, characterize a partition as a way of fostering a sense of safety, with rising animosity towards the others. Ethnic belongings, even if socially constructed and fluid, are often utilized to create adversaries, without the openness for self-transformation, accepting the other, and

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coexisting in a space. However, it is important to mention that ethnic enclaving within ethnic conflict does not always happen on a voluntary basis, but certain ethnicities are forced to flee their residences. Within the broader framework of recognizing and engaging with conflicts, power dynamics, and diverse identities, agonistic peacebuilding focuses on creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and negotiation among various stakeholders, including refugees and internally displaced people. Its main focus is the importance of addressing the underlying causes of displacement, such as ethnic tensions, property disputes, and social injustices, by advocating for a participatory process in decision-making.

Using the example of the destruction of multiethnic Sarajevo creation of ethnically homogeneous Istočno Sarajevo, which was a result of the ethnic migration of Bosnian Serbs from Sarajevo to a majority Bosnian Serb area, this paper argues that the lack of coexistence among ethnic groups caused by creating ethnically homogenous cities is a contributing reason for a lack of constructive agonistic dialogue that led to animosities still present to this day, 30 years after the violent conflict. Furthermore, it provides an example of Brčko city, where such spatial segregation was not utilized in the peacebuilding period, providing a possible insight of the benefits of the agonistic peacebuilding in post-war period.

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## 2. The Introduction of Case Studies

### *2.1. The lens of agonistic peace*

One of the goals of peacebuilding is to create a system that would prevent spiralling back to violent conflicts. To put it in terms of agonistic peacebuilding, peacebuilding actors should work on creating an environment that would welcome disagreements, but prevent their escalation into antagonistic forms (Mouffe 2013). The case studies of this research aim to analyse to what extent have the principles of agonistic peacebuilding been taken into consideration. Istočno Sarajevo and Sarajevo present a case where the distancing is present on both political and spatial matters, whereas Brčko has not seen such a divide.

Strombom's perception of analyzing agonistic peace is based on a three-level analysis, modified from Lederach's peace-building triangle. To Strombom, agonistic peace should be analyzed from the elite to the grassroots level. The elite level looks at "the inclusion of different interest groups in formal negotiations, as well as the prospects of including various claims and interests in future institutional set-ups are key" (Strömbom 2019, 954). This reseach aims to research this by analyzing DPA, an elite-led peace agreement. To analyze a second-level, mid-range one, one needs to look at the interaction between ethnic groups on a more local level. In this research, this is done by observing spatial exclusion. It analyses the effects of deliberate destruction of architecture with meaning in Sarajevo during the war, and the creation of Istočno Sarajevo in peacebuilding as a result of intentional exclusion in the first case study. Contrary to that, it observes the infrastructure for ethnic integration in the case of Brčko, where the spatial divide between ethnic groups is less present. The third, grassroots level analyses the local acceptance of the peace process. Here, it is important to observe the local dynamics in institutions by analyzing the presence of diverse voices in decision-making. This would include an in-depth analysis of local sentiments towards the process of peacebuilding, in this case the

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creation of common space in a form of political participation. Given the logistical limitations, this level goes beyond the scope of this research, but nevertheless poses an important level of analysis for future studies. However, it does provide an insight on how is political participation organized in the DPA, which is often a critique of the international intervention in BiH.

It is important to note the limitation of the analysis of agonistic peacebuilding in analyzing post-conflict settings. First, agonistic peacebuilding is still an emerging field in peace studies. Even if the conceptualization of the theoretical framework has been growing, the empirical research is still limited, and analyzing past conflicts through an agonistic peacebuilding approach can only take into consideration hypothetical assumptions of what would be the result of an agonistic approach. Agonistic peacebuilding is often found as a descriptive tool of analysis, rather than a prescriptive one. Furthermore, previous peace agreements lacked the nuances that agonistic peacebuilding offers, especially in the conceptualization of conflict parties, so analysis of previous peacebuilding processes requires theoretical flexibility. Finally, agonistic peacebuilding is not a completely new framework in approaching peacemaking, but rather an approach that aims to reform existing practices of the liberal approach and advance it to a more appropriate methodology.

## 2.2. Context

Bosnia and Herzegovina was one of six constituent republics of Yugoslavia. After the death of President of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito, Yugoslavia was faced with economic and political turmoil. The declining federal government and the rise of nationalistic policies by newly elected politicians escalated with secession movements. Slovenia and Croatia were the first countries to declare independence after successful referendums (1990-1991). Both countries faced military resistance by the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), with Slovenians having a short ten-day war, and Croatians with an intense four-

year war, gaining independence. North Macedonia also succeeded without military involvement. However, the separatist movement quickly spread to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the independence referendum was held on the 29th of February and 1st of March 1992 (Jeffrey 2006). The turnout of the election was 63%, with Bosnian Serbs boycotting it and calling it illegal (Zimmermann 1996, 188 via Jeffrey 2006). However, out of the 63% who voted, 99.7% voted for independence. The following day, Alija Izetbegović, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina announced independent Bosnia and Herzegovina. This decision was disputed by Bosnian Serb politicians who, led by Radovan Karadžić, later the first president of Republika Srpska and his party Serb Democratic Party, created the Assembly of the Serb People of Bosnia and Herzegovina to represent Bosnian Serbs. On January 9, 1992, the Bosnian Serb proclaimed the creation of the "Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina," later renamed Republika Srpska. The Republika Srpska initially consisted of territories with a significant ethnic Serb population, particularly in eastern and northern Bosnia and Herzegovina. Serbian paramilitary groups, with the support of the JNA and later the Serbian government, seized control of these areas through military force. The European Community recognized Bosnia and Herzegovina on the 6th of April, followed by the United States who did the same on the 7th of April 1992. Karadžić used this to claim how great powers did not want a united Serbia (Jeffrey 2006) and how they used this recognition to interfere in Yugoslav internal politics. The Bosnian war started just a day before that, on the 5th of April 1992, when the Bosnian Serb Army started the Siege of Sarajevo.

The conflict caused extensive ethnic cleansing and population displacement, leaving deep ethnic and religious divisions. Numerous war crimes were committed, leading to international prosecutions by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The Bosnian War is considered Europe's most devastating war since World War Two with some of the largest massacres. The war prompted significant international intervention

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and peacekeeping efforts, which resulted in a number of peace negotiations. Finally, the peace agreement was reached by signing the DPA.

### 2.3.  A Pyrrhic Peace Agreement

An important turning point in the almost three-year-long Bosnian War was the peace talks that resulted in what is known as the Dayton Peace Agreement. With the official name of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the negotiation process for this peace agreement was done at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, close to Dayton, Ohio, and was mediated by the international community. It was finally signed on December 14, 1995, in Paris. The talks were done with President of Bosnia and Herzegovina Alija Izetbegović and Foreign Minister Muhamed Šaćirbeg, President of the Republic of Serbia Slobodan Milošević (representing Bosnian Serbs), and President of Croatia Franjo Tuđman (representing Bosnian Croats) (Komšić 2016). On the side of the international community, the representatives of the United States, the European Community (Germany, France, UK, and Spain), and Russia took part in the negotiations and witnessing.  Three conflicting parties (Bosniaks, Serbia, and Croatia) agreed to a ceasefire and division of BiH into two entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina consisted of 51% of total BiH and mostly populated by Croats and Bosniaks, and Republika Srpska with the control of 49% territory primarily populated by Serbs (Figure 1). Furthermore, the agreement included a decentralized government for both entities, later often described as weak with insufficient state-level institutions (Juncos, 2005). The power-sharing between two entities is further divided between 10 federation cantons, 142 municipalities, and the semi-independent district of Brčko (Cox 2001, 6). Besides that, DPA introduced a state-level constitution for the national government

to define powers shared between the state and the entities, in addition to both entities having

their own constitution.



*Figure 1 - United States Central Intelligence Agency. Dayton Agreement boundaries with internal federation holdings: April: Bosnia and Hercegovina. [Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 1996] Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/2009584232/.*

The main aim of the Agreement was to put an end to the armed conflict, but additionally

to assist in the transition process from an early post-conflict period to rebuilding and

consolidation. However, it created a complicated system of power-sharing that often blocked

the peace process due to the interest-based decisions of the parties involved. These parties have

an ethnic prefix – Bosniaks, Serbs, or Croat. The legitimization of such division came with the

Annex IV of the DPA. This Annex is the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and it outlines the structure and functions of the national government of BiH, the division of powers between the state and its entities, and the fundamental rights of its citizens, including the right to return[1]. In the Constitution, a prominent role in political structure is given to ethnic identity. When analyzing Annex IV, several phrasings indicating the dominance of the ethnic identity arise. For example, before the introduction of articles, when stating who composes BiH, Annex IV reads, "*Bosniacs, Croats, and Serbs,* as constituent peoples (along with Others), and citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina hereby determine that the Constitution of Bosnia and Herzegovina is…" (italics added) (The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1995, p.17). Firstly, there is an immediate focus on ethnicity before citizenship, emphasizing ethnic affiliation as the first and foremost unit of measurement of all citizens in BiH. This implies the importance of ethnic groupings in political representation, which is further confirmed by other articles of the Constitution. This is the first level of division that can and is negatively affecting sustainable peace, boosting the rivalry and animosity between the ethnic groups by implying the importance of one's ethnicity. This is observable even in today's socio-political reality of BiH. Political participation becomes the choice based on bettering of interests for one's group, rather than making a choice on the level of the whole country.

Secondly, this phrasing has discriminatory tendencies, especially in the electoral process. This is best described in Articles IV Parliamentary Assembly and Article V Presidency. These two articles explain the political and governmental structure of BiH and create a spatial overview of political participation and representation. According to the Constitution, both entities get a quota for their participation on various levels of government

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[1] This point is often contested by both academic and practitioners who find this as a paradox, stating that the DPA in the same time rewarded the creation of ethno-national spaces, but also called for return of refugees in the ethnically cleansed areas, for more see Jeffrey (2006).

on the national level. For example, The Parliamentary Assembly is divided into the House of Peoples and the House of Representatives. The House of Peoples has 15 delegates, two-thirds from the Federation (five Croats and five Bosniacs) and one-third from the Republika Srpska (five Serbs) (The General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1995, p.22). The delegates are chosen by the parliaments of the two entities. Similar logic goes to the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives has 42 Members, two-thirds from the Federation, and one-third from the Republika Srpska. These members are elected for four-year terms through a process of proportional representation based on the population of the country. The constituencies are further divided among two entities. Consequently, the Federation can only choose Bosniacs and Croats, and Republika Srpska Serbian members. This means that political participation depends on where one lives (space) and how one identifies (ethnicity). Furthermore, similar logic is applied to Article V. According to the Constitution, the Presidency consists of three members: one Bosniak, one Croat elected from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and one Serb elected from Republika Srpska. These members are directly elected by the citizens for a four-year term. The chairmanship of the Presidency rotates every eight months among the three members. This tripartite structure is designed to ensure representation and power-sharing among the three main ethnic groups, but it excludes everyone who does not declare as a member of one of the three ethnic groups from being part of the political process. It further incentivizes presidents to work in the interest of their ethnic group, and it spatializes politics depending on the entity which has the presidency.

To oversee the implementation of the civilian aspects of the DPA, the international community introduced The High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina. This role includes ensuring the country's compliance with the agreement's terms, promoting political stability, and facilitating the transition to a self-sustaining peace. The High Representative has significant powers, including the authority to impose laws, remove public officials, and make

binding decisions to overcome political deadlocks and ensure the proper functioning of the government. This means the possibility of overruling policies and laws of national politicians, or imposing new ones, practice often used in BiH, in political stalemates if those would contribute in maintaining the principles of the DPA.

The fractured divisions created by the Bosnian war were difficult for the Dayton negotiators to demarcate. There were complex geographic patterns of ethnic cleansing and destruction throughout the nation, which led to localised geopolitics rife with conflicts over displaced people (Dahlman and Ó Tuathail 2006). The DPA was viewed by the local authorities—installed via ethnic cleansing—as a move towards strengthening ethnic division rather than towards rapprochement. The agreement did create a common space for political contestations in a democratic environment, but it did so by overlooking the local level, awarding war perpetrators and legitimising territories gained by ethnic cleansing. It divided cities, indirectly forcing movements of thousands of people not willing to live in an ethnic enclave to whom they do not belong.

## 3. The case of Istočno Sarajevo-Sarajevo

### 3.1. Deliberate separation

After drawing the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL), Sarajevo, once a city that prided itself with the multiculturality and multiethnicity, had been officially torn apart into Sarajevo, Muslim majority city in Federation, and Istočno Sarajevo (Eastern Sarajevo) with mostly Bosnian Serbs in RS. After the DPA, Sarajevo stayed as the capital city of BiH but was also the capital of FBiH. Parallelly, what was once called Srpsko Sarajevo (Serbian Sarajevo) during the war, Istočno Sarajevo got the status of the capital of RS, although this status is mostly *de jure*, whereas most of the governmental and administrative offices are in Banja Luka.

The City of Sarajevo is now composed of four central city municipalities: Stari Grad, Centar, Novo Sarajevo and Novi Grad in FBiH. In RS, municipalities of Istočno Sarajevo are Trnovo, Pale, Sokolac, Istočna Ilidža, Istočni Stari Grad and Istočno Novo Sarajevo. Out of six, five were created by separation from already existing municipalities from Sarajevo before the war. Only one municipality was not partitioned during the creation of RS but was part of it even before the DPA.

For reference, in 1991 Sarajevo had 40% Bosniaks, 30% Bosnian Serbs, 20% Bosnian Croats (S. A. Bollens 2006, 89) and 10% others. According to the census in 2013, Bosniaks are 77,4% of the total population, Bosnian Serbs 12%, and Croats 7,5% (3% classified as 'others') which poses a significant fluctuation in population. Similarly, Istočno Sarajevo notes significant ethnic division. From 18,35% Bosniaks out of the total population in 1991, that percentage declined to 3.95% in 2013, whereas the percentage of Bosnian Serbs increased by 17.27% resulting in 94,21% of ethnic Bosnian Serbs. It is important to mention that some municipalities had larger divides and some less. For example, the Municipality of Sokolac witnessed a decrease of Bosniaks by 26.7%, whereas in Novo Istočno Sarajevo that percentage is 9.9%. These migrations include data from a census done before the war in 1991, and after in 2013. No official census was done in between.

|  | Sarajevo | | Istočno Sarajevo | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Year* | 1991 | 2013 | 1991 | 2013 |
| *Bosniaks* | 40% | 77.4% | 18.35 % | 3.95 % |
| *Bosnian Croats* | 20% | 7.5% | 0.95% | 0.72% |
| *Bosnian Serbs* | 30.7% | 12% | 76.94% | 94.21% |
| *Others* | 9,3% | 3% | 3.76% | 1.12% |

*Table 1 Census data from 1991 and 2013, Source: Official BiH Statistics Agency*

Bosniaks from all over BiH were fleeing the conflict and ethnic cleansing. This was the case after signing the DPA, where many Muslims fled ethnic cleansing from RS. Most of them found refuge in Sarajevo, stationing themselves in neighbourhoods shelled by the years of bombing (Bollens 2006, p. 81).

Before the war, there were still certain ethnic inclinations in both cities, but there is an observable increase in ethnic division when comparing the censuses from 1991 and 2013 (Table 1). However, it is challenging to provide exact numbers in regard to ethnic migrations, since there was no official census done in between the 22-year period. Prettitore claims that the gap between official censuses was done to prevent the discouragement of potential return of displaced people, fearing their minority status in an entity that does not represent their ethnic group. However, the author mentions other reasons, "Some members of the international community actively suppressed the census out of concern that the results would confirm the consolidation of ethnic cleansing" (Prettitore in Dumper 2006, 198–99).

However, the existing data suggest observable ethnic groupings. There are a couple of reasons that explain this. Firstly, an obvious reason is the people seeking safety under the umbrella of their own ethnic identity or to groups within their ethnicity – Bosnian Serbs in Sarajevo decided to move to suburbs of Sarajevo which were mostly populated by Serbs. Secondly, Bosnian Serbs were an active target of sporadic violence by Bosniak violent groups, which raised the questions of safety in the newly signed DPA that created firm borders among ethnic groups. Finally, many Bosnian Serbs were strongly encouraged by the political elite of RS to move to Istočno Sarajevo or other parts of RS. These actions usually included propagandistic discourse that Sarajevo in the new circumstances (DPA IEBL) is not a safe area for Bosnian Serbs and that their survival is only possible if they resettle in Republika Srpska (Bassi 2014). The DPA legitimized the removal of common spaces between conflict parties,

and politicians from RS used that to create ethnic groups that would not interact with each other. This can be seen in the transcript from the 56th Session of the National Assembly of the Republic of Srpska held in Pale on the 17th of December 1995. Here, Momčilo Krajišnik, Speaker of the National Assembly of Republika Srpska for the government of Radovan Karadžić, later convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), said:

> "The task of this Republic [Republika Srpska] and the first strategic goal is to separate ourselves from Muslims and Croats, and no one has the right to base the strategy of Serbian Sarajevo on remaining [of Bosnian Serbs] in a common state. So, any danger or desire to find a solution to hold on [live in one country together] and solution of living together with Muslims and Croats in Sarajevo is excluded. ('Transcripts of Genocide', 84–85)

The DPA gave exactly what political elites wanted – ethnically cleansed communities with no interactions in between. The political elite assumed that living together might be beneficial to unite BiH which was not in their interest. This is seen by the words of Pantelija Milovanović, a member of the National Assembly of RS, who in the same session said

> "... I'm afraid of the Serbs remaining in Sarajevo, not [only] because they would be murdered, and that would probably be the case, but because I think that those Westerners, especially warm-hearted ones, might want to be smart about this and [try] to show to Serbian Sarajevo that it is possible to live together with them [Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats] so that they can use that as a model for them to swallow us [RS] in a whole country. I think we have to think about it. That's what haunts me." ('Transcripts of Genocide', 86)

Many Bosnian Serbs moved to RS after the DPA due to the fear spread by RS' media and the strong influence of the government of RS. This additionally created animosities between the groups which was embodied by minimal interaction and diminishing of presence in common spaces which created the sense of 'zajednički život' or common life present before the life. This is a sentiment that existed in Sarajevo before the war, which carried the positive implication of interculturality that Sarajevo was famous for throughout Former Yugoslavia.

Sarajevo after the war is divided between two political entities, with the new border being right on the outskirts of its area in the south (Figure 2). Compared to other divided cities, Sarajevo's situation is unique - the physical dividing line in Sarajevo has not affected the consolidated core urban area; rather, it has remained as an administrative boundary, but structural divisions are very much present. The border does not have checkpoints and the movement is free between the two cities, but the toll of the destruction of physical spaces and relationships translates into urbicide. In this sense, urbicide is the destruction of cities by deliberately targeting spaces that embody diversity (Graham 2004, Kipfer and Goonewardena 2007 via Glumčević and Novo 2021). The case of Sarajevo and Istočno Sarajevo is an example of the incomplete peace processes as a result of the DPA. The DPA might have reinstated the common national government bodies under which agonistic peacebuilding could be practiced, but it has divided it on a local level and contributed to creating an environment of supporting ethnic cleansing. It failed to acknowledge local actors, politically and spatially.
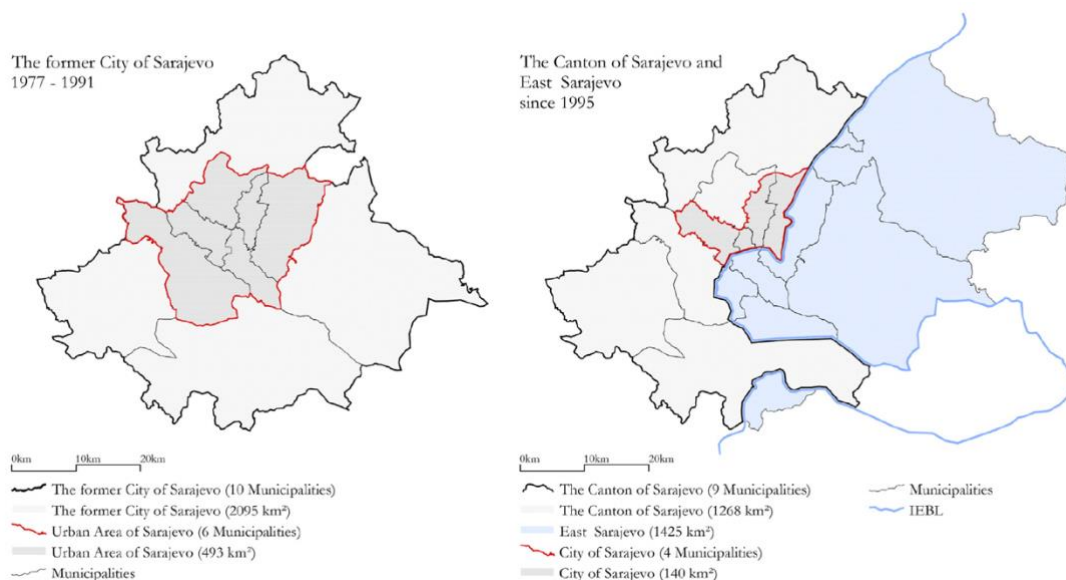


*Figure 2 The urban region of Sarajevo in 1991 and the Canton of Sarajevo after 1995. Authors: Aquilué, Roca 2016*

### 3.2. Siege of Sarajevo – Urban targeting

Starting on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April 1992 to the 29<sup>th</sup> of February 1996 the Siege of Sarajevo was 1,425 days under occupation. Sarajevo has suffered immense civilian losses, along with the destruction of its architectural identity. The Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) used space to inflict terror on the citizens of Sarajevo by inflicting fear and damage to what was known as a beacon of multi-ethnic society. They used its terrain as a military strategic station to shell and snipe the city targeting its public and urban spaces where people used to gather.

Ristic in her book *Architecture, Urban Space and War, The Destruction and Reconstruction of Sarajevo* contends that Sarajevo's spatial changes were a direct result of ethnic strife and struggle rather than just a wartime aftereffect (2018). The Siege of Sarajevo heavily affected the citizens of Sarajevo. They suffered through the devastation of architecture, destruction of infrastructure, and annihilation of dwellings. Furthermore, the geospatial location of Sarajevo was used against them. Due to the geographical terrain of Sarajevo – hills surrounding a valley, snipers from the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) would station themselves on the hills from the east side of the city (an area claimed by the RS during the war), and shoot at people in open common spaces, not allowing gatherings and interactions, prompting people to stay inside their homes and only be outside when strictly necessary. Military elite understood that limiting people's exposure to others and restricting movements would paralyze the city, "The war operated as urban (re)design of the city by other means, whereby politicians and the military took on the role of architects, urban designers and planners who reshaped the city" (Ristic 2018, 51). She further argues that "… sniping and shelling of public space obliterated the urban connections and patterns of everyday life that sustained Sarajevo's ethnic mix and, consequently, affected a certain level of ethnic division and ethnic separation of the city's population" (Ristic 2018, 52). The goal of these attacks was to intimidate citizens and spread distress in public spaces, since there was no military rationale for them (ICTY 1999 via Ristic

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2018). The destruction was done upon almost all public spaces used by citizens – parks, streets, markets, graveyards, squares, schools, hospitals (See Figure 3). Many people died in these urban spaces.
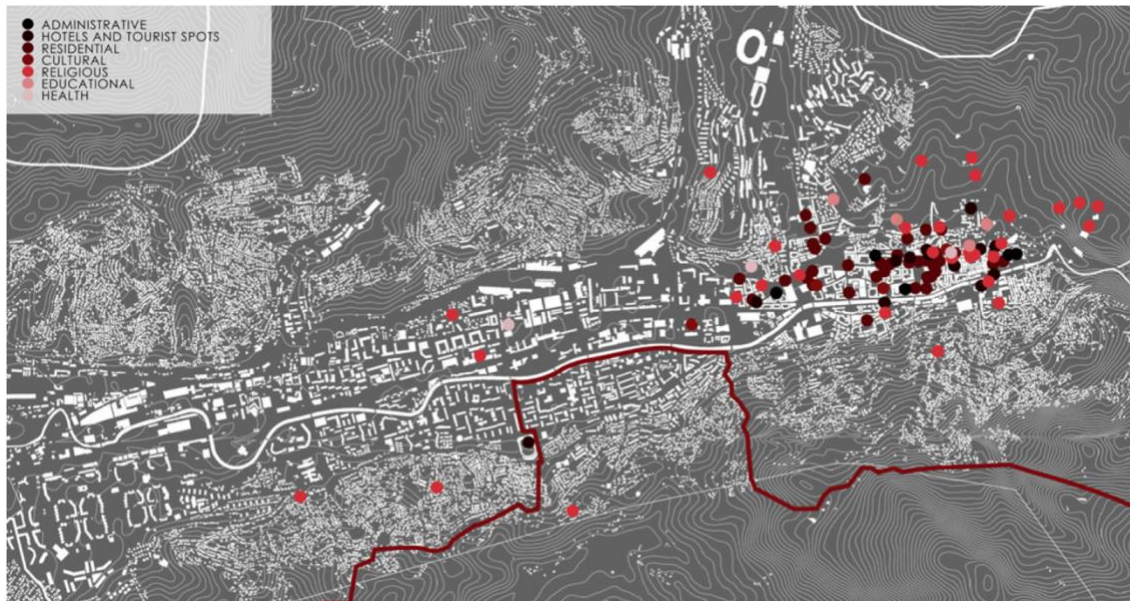
### 3.2.1. Oslobođenje



*Figure 3 Destroyed buildings across Sarajevo as recorded in Warchitecture: Urbicide catalogue; Map: A. Glumčević & L. Odobašić Novo 2021*

The attacks on Sarajevo from the BSA were also targeting places with meaning and/or symbolism. One of the examples is the attack on the building where the newspaper Oslobođenje was located. Oslobođenje, meaning liberation in the Bosnian language, was one of the first news outlets to report about the BSA army on the outskirts of Sarajevo. It was also the only functioning news outlet during the siege (Ristic 2018, 80). In the summer of 1992, 10 shells hit the building which started burning. The attacks were preceded and seceded with systematic destruction of the building (Figure 4). As noted in Ristic, the RS' political leadership legitimized these attacks by arguing that the building was used by the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina to attack BSA. However, the shelling of the building continued even after the building towers collapsed. The destruction of Oslobođenje was more than destroying the building, it was about destroying what this news outlet meant. Oslobođenje was a symbol

of resistance throughout its history and a reminder of multi-ethnicity. It was created during World War Two and was an important factor in the fight against fascism. It also advocated for the unification of Yugoslavian people during and post-war (Ristic 2018). During the Bosnian War, it shared the images and stories of besieged Sarajevo with the world. The staff in Oslobođenje had an ethnically diverse team, which was used against Bosnian Serb politicians' propaganda - "And we write about Sarajevo and Bosnia in a way that reflects something the Serbian forces deny—that Serbs and Muslims and Croats can work and live together in harmony" (Burns 1992 via Ristic 2018). However, the news outlet prevailed despite three years of attacks.

### 3.2.2. City Hall



*Figure 4 Building Oslobođenje after the attack, Source: FAMA Kolekcija Arhiv fotografija*

The National and University Library of Bosnia and Herzegovina (City Hall) is one of the symbols of Sarajevo and BiH. It was built in the 19th century in a pseudo-Moorish style by

the Habsburg rule in BiH for administrative purposes. After 1949 it became a library. It contained rare and important documents, books, and manuscripts of BiH and the rest of the Former Yugoslavia (Alic 2002 via Ristic 2018). During the Siege of Sarajevo, City Hall was shelled multiple times, with the worst attack on the night between the 25th and 26th of August, 1992 with inflammable missiles, which prompted a fire that destroyed most of the building and burned down about two million books, articles, and magazines ('Vijećnica | Ratno stradanje' 2011). This included the history of not only Bosniaks but also Serbs and Croats, from the period of Austro-Hungary. This was seen as a demolition of one's identity – trying to erase one's history by burning their books and cultural heritage, erasing the memories of their past – so the other one can thrive. The nationalists, according to Riedlmayer (1996) seek to destroy the evidence of different ethnicities living together since infrastructure and documentation have the power to tell the story of the co-existence of people with different religions and ethnicities to their children and the next generation (Riedlmayer, 1996) This would disable the political discourse of ethnic partition that elites from both entities were persuading, claiming that one simply cannot live with the other. City Hall, the embodiment of Bosnian acceptance and adaptability had fallen (Figure 5). The space once available for everyone, a place of meeting and sharing, had been taken away from the citizens of Sarajevo.  Today, the City Hall has been reconstructed to an almost identical state as before the war, but its usage and purpose have never returned to the previous state and are contested by the local citizens (Ristic 2018).

The case of Sarajevo's destruction tells a story about the importance of shared spaces. Viewing a damaged city as a place for a better future for all residents—rather than as a place for speculative construction and the rewriting of wartime memories—is crucial. The city and the people who were affected by the war's carnage make up a very complicated cultural and geographical issue. The acceptance of the spatial destruction of Sarajevo and legitimization of it through the DPA is a problematic approach that created deep divisions between conflict parties. The post-war removal of common spaces to express grievances took away a chance for identity transformation, an important step in agonistic peacebuilding in accepting the other and moving beyond dichotomies that created the violent conflict in the same space. The division of Sarajevo accelerated the ethnic struggles and used space, in this case, the division of one city into two, to do so.



*Figure 5 Destruction of Sarajevo City Hall. (Photos: Milomir Kovacěvić Strašni)*

### 3.3. Creation of Istočno Sarajevo

Istočno Sarajevo as a city was created after the DPA and is consistent with the above-mentioned municipalities - Trnovo, Pale, Sokolac, Istočna Ilidža, Istočni Stari Grad i Istočno Novo Sarajevo. Before the war, all of these were part of Sarajevo, but after the establishment of IEBL, there was a new reality – a recent suburban area of Sarajevo became the capital city of a newly legitimized RS entity. The city also had to coordinate the influx of people who, motivated by the political elite from RS, left their homes in FBiH and moved to RS. Whereas Sarajevo had to undergo the process of reconstruction due to damage inflicted by the war, Istočno Sarajevo had to be newly constructed.

Istočno Sarajevo had to create a new sense of home and belonging for thousands of displaced people. This included the creation of not only dwellings but other amenities people need, with a goal to minimize visits to the Federation's Sarajevo (Bassi 2014). Considerable new development was done, primarily residential complexes for the evacuating Bosnian Serbs. The goal of infrastructure rehabilitation initiatives was to address the serious issues brought about by the post-war absence of functioning infrastructure in Istočno Sarajevo. It has seen an increase in the number of facilities and services over the past years, including hospitals, schools, universities, churches and other public spaces. The building of religious objects was present in both cities, but mostly the ones that resonated with the religious affiliation of the entity, creating a sense of home more for some than others (Bădescu 2015). Badescu points out to the challenges of creating exclusionary spaces, "The symbolic appropriation of space through religious and cultural institutions of the dominant group acts on the one hand as an important element of nation-building, but also to create ambivalence from the other groups." (Bădescu 2015, 43). The rebuilding of common spaces offers a possibility for reconciliation but also intensifies conflicts by promoting certain political narratives that do not harbour agonistic sentiment. Furthermore, the planning of Istočno Sarajevo included public spaces,

often similar to the ones in Sarajevo. Because of this, residents no longer need to go to Sarajevo for essential necessities or recreational activities. Istočno Sarajevo does, in fact, have all the amenities and buildings that people might possibly want on a daily basis.).

A new university, the University of Eastern Sarajevo, was established in 1992, stemming from the University of Sarajevo. The Republika Srpska government acknowledged it as the replacement for the University of Sarajevo (1949–1992), from which ethnic Serb faculty, staff, and students opted to withdraw. It was created along ethnic lines, prompted to motivate Bosnian Serb students to leave the University of Sarajevo. Findings from Bassi (2014) refer to youth's apathy to go from Istočno Sarajevo to Sarajevo, since most of the things they need can be found in their home communities. The lack of friends from the other side is often a reason for the lack of interaction. Most of the meetings with the others come with job opportunities or daily tasks since FBiH's Sarajevo is economically more advanced and offers better employment and services. However, these trips are usually made out of necessity, and less out of desire to interact with Bosniaks. However, going 'to the other side' is considered to be a 'normalized' practice and does not imply any animosity. In that sense, physical separation with space does not play a role. On the other side, inhabitants of Sarajevo visit Istočno Sarajevo for access to cheaper goods. Bassi also finds that these interactions are more common in areas closer to the border. Additionally, dwellings in Istočno Sarajevo are more affordable which is slowly attracting people from Sarajevo, usually young couples, to move there. However, there is a lack of public transportation that would transfer citizens from one to another point, especially younger generations, which is a discouragement for interactions and forging relationships between the groups.

Although both cities are creating spaces that serve day-to-day tasks, there are still exclusionary practices that favour one ethnicity over the other. New religious and cultural

buildings related to either ethnicity were on the rise in both cities after the war, although many of the destroyed public buildings and places associated with all ethnic groups remained abandoned for years after the conflict. For example, residents of Istočno Sarajevo see the influx of new mosques in Sarajevo financed by Saudi Arabia and Malaysia hostile towards them. They see this as the 'Muslimization' of Sarajevo (Bădescu 2015, 43). Additionally, both cities have built a variety of memorials that essentially create two distinct ethnic histories and war narratives. Sarajevo and Istočno Sarajevo serve primarily as hubs for new ethnic struggles, despite the efforts from the non-governmental sector and international community (Bădescu 2015). When describing Sarajevo, Ristic states, "The city was transformed into two relatively mono-ethnic cities in which architecture, urban space, heritage, and memories of war work to mark ethnic boundaries, inscribe particular ethnic identities in place and exclude Others" (2018, 18).

The physical separation of Sarajevo by the peacemaking agenda did *de facto* end the war, but it has created a post-war reality of alienation of groups that lived together for centuries. The war used violent means to create ethnically cleansed groups in a city, but the peace agreement did the same thing using spatial practices of exclusion and separation. The chance of creating a common space to practice conflict transformation and create a well-functioning city where people with different ideas can be part of the democratic institutions was missed. The DPA opted for a band-aid solution, but it did not create an environment for inclusive peacebuilding.

## 4. The case of Brčko District

The case of the city of Brčko, part of the Brčko district, is a complex story with multiple actors and an example of a more agonistic peacebuilding process where different ethnic groups coexist by sharing their grievances and accepting the others in common spaces. While

negotiating the peace agreement in Dayton, pressured by the short timeframe given to Richard Holbrooke to provide a geopolitical win for the Clinton administration, and given the complexity of Brčko's position in BiH and ethnic tensions, Brčko municipality remained an open-ended point in DPA that only got resolved by the arbitrary process in later years.

The Brčko District consists of 59 settlements, out of which one is Brčko City, the administrative seat of Brčko District. Today, most of the urban areas are populated by Bosnian Serbs, whereas Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats are mainly inhabiting rural areas. Since Brčko has witnessed the horrors of war, ethnic migrations are present here as well. For example, the number of Bosniaks has declined in both the city and district as a whole. The same is applicable for Bosnian Croats. However, the Bosnian Serbs percentage has increased, in the city by more than double, but no ethnic group has a majority (Table 2).

|  | *Brčko District* | | *Brčko city* | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *Year* | 1991 | 2013 | 1991 | 2013 |
| *Bosniaks* | 44,1% | 42,4% | 55,5% | 43,8% |
| *Bosnian Croats* | 25,4% | 20,7% | 7% | 3,7% |
| *Bosnian Serbs* | 20,7% | 34,6% | 19,9% | 48,7% |
| *Others* | 9,8% | 2,4% | 17,5% [2] | 3,8% |

*Table 2 Census data from 1991 and 2013, Source: Official BiH Statistics Agency*

### *4.1.   Creating peace*

Brčko is strategically placed in between Croatia, FBiH, and RS. It is 493m2 of land that divides Republika Srpska into two parts and gives access to FBiH to the river Sava, which further flows into the Danube. It presents an important point in ethnically partitioned BiH (Figure 6). These commercial and strategic interests explain the intense war efforts in this area

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[2] This percentage includes 12,6% of Yugoslav. According to Jeffrey (2006) this was in line with other areas of Yugoslavia where Yugoslavs were citizens that did not feel strong affiliation to any national group, but rather multiethnic identity. These people were mostly populatuing urban areas.

and the temporary stalemate it created in the peace negotiation process (Jeffrey 2006). Previously populated mostly by Bosniaks, Brčko was invaded in 1992 by Bosnian Serbs - police and paramilitary formations and the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA). After expelling local residences, Brčko municipality was split into three sub-municipalities: 'Brčko Grad' (Brčko town), populated by mostly Bosnian Serbs, 'Ravne-Brčko' inhabited by Bosnian Croats, and the Bosniak 'Brčko-Rahić' (Jeffrey 2006, 206). The attacks targeted urban structures of Brčko, especially its cultural sites that were symbols of living together, with the aim to "eradicate difference in order to create and naturalise the idea of separate, antagonistic
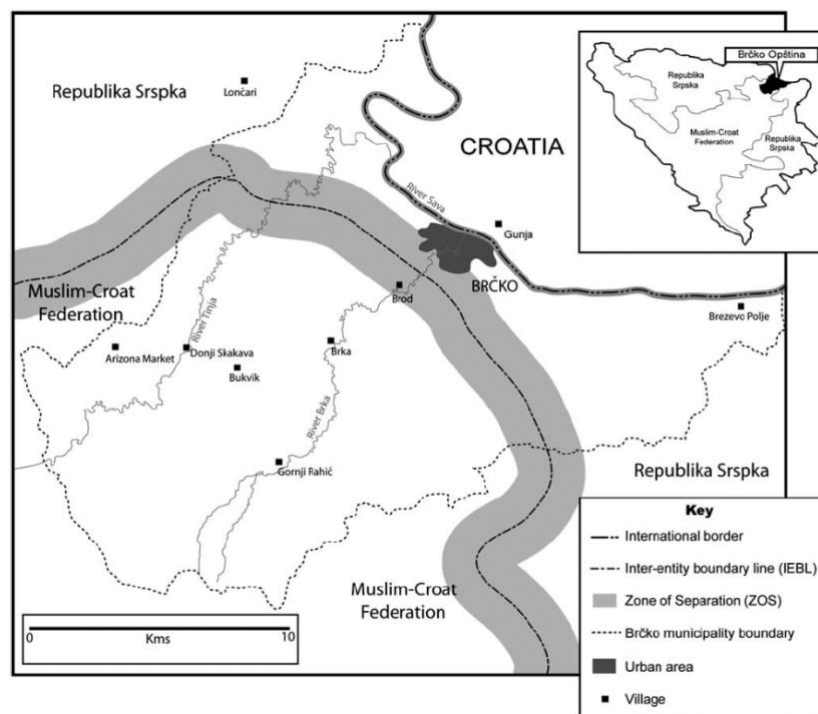
*Figure 6 Brčko opština following the 1992-1995 conflict. (Jeffrey 2006)*

sovereign territorial identities" (Coward 2004, 266 via Jeffrey 2006).

Since common ground on the Brčko issue could not be found, negotiating parties in the DPA decided to leave the question of whose should Brčko be to the international arbitration. In 1999, the Arbitral Tribunal provided the Final Award that unified the previous three sub-municipalities and created a neutral district that resembled the pre-war state. Brčko district

became a semi-autonomous administrative district with strong international supervision to ensure the implementation of the final award.[3]

Brčko district was formally created on the 8th of March 2000 by the 'Supervisory Order' given by the Brčko Supervisor. Brčko seemed like a second chance to the international community in peacemaking in BiH since this approach aimed at unification by creating shared spaces for political contestations in a respectful manner (overseen by the Brčko Supervisor). It eradicated the physical separation of sub-municipalities by creating one government while ensuring the proper return of internally displaced people and boosting the local economy. This peacemaking took into consideration local actors more than the DPA, and by analyzing the past, present, and future, created policies of integration.

Today, Brčko is considered a multicultural environment that is not exclusionary, with a common space for interactions and experience sharing. With the pressure of international presence, it created a democratic environment for dialogue, not necessarily with the goal of an agreement but for a common space to share ideas without putting ethnic prefixes as a primary goal. Seen as such, there are strong elements of agonistic peacebuilding since there is an inclination for identity transformation – putting ourselves in the shoes of others, understanding their grievances, and accepting their presence. Once that is achieved, there is a path toward common ground or the above-mentioned common life that existed prior to the war.

It is important to mention that, according to Strombrom, even if this peacemaking could be understood as an agonistic one since there is a thick recognition of the other, and an institutional change is present, some fallacies are present, such as discriminatory discourse in the Final award, where Bosnian Croats, Bosniaks, and Bosnian Serbs are still (as in DPA) seen

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[3] As of 2012, the Office of the International Supervisor is suspended, but not terminated. However, along with Brčko Arbitral Tribunal, the office still exists. The Supervisor is also the Principal Deputy High Representative in the Office of High Representative on the national level.

as constituent nations of BiH. This categorization is used to describe parties in a conflict. This is, according to Strombrom, seen as a closed framing of agonistic inclusion, implying less agonistic peace agreement, in this case, applied to the Final Award.

### 4.2. *Spatial component*

In comparison to the rest of the BiH, Brčko district did not see partitioning on ethnic bases by international intervention, although some ethnic groups are more present than others in certain settlements. However, in the city of Brčko, the difference between Bosniaks and Bosnian Serbs is 4,9%. This is an observable difference compared to before the war when there were 35,6% more Bosniaks than Bosnian Serbs. The aim of BSA was to populate the area with Bosnian Serbs and destroy any memorabilia of previous ethnic coherence. This was done by destroying monuments from public spaces, built in Yugoslav times to represent brotherhood and unity, a central idea behind Yugoslavia's multi-ethnic approach.

The destruction of spatial inclusion is the demolition of sacral sites that were prominent during the war in Brčko. All four mosques in the town were destroyed, along with the shelling Roman Catholic Parish Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The White Mosque in Brčko, constructed during the 18th or 19th century, was mined by Serb forces in 1992 and completely destroyed, along with its foundation (Riedlmayer, 2002). A similar situation occurred with Atik Sava Mosque, built in the 18th century, in which rubbles were spread out on top of a mass grave site nearby. Furthermore, the names of streets were altered. The popular shopping street was renamed "Srpskih Oslobodilaca Brčkog" (The Serb Liberation of Brčko), the main road through Brčko was renamed "Bulevar Đenerala Draže Mihajlovića" (after the leader of the Četniks during World War Two, a Nazi collaborator) (Jeffrey 2006). This accelerated in the period between the DPA and Arbitral Tribunal, when Bosnian Serb authorities put up a statue of Draža Mihajlović, although he had no affiliation with Brčko. Additionally, a memorial for

the 'Serb Liberators of Brčko' was unveiled (Jeffrey 2006) with the aim of legitimizing Bosnian Serb presence in Brčko, since "The construction of monuments that highlight mutually exclusive memories that are part of ethnonational identities play a significant role in nation building" (Sokol 2014 via Dijkema and Korajac 2022).

The eleventh point in the Annex to the Final Award is Symbol, which outlines the rules and regulations regarding the symbols, languages, and identification within the Brčko District, which emphasizes the importance of neutrality, equality, and inclusivity in the representation. (Final Award in OHR 2000). It states that "all such symbols shall be politically and ethnically neutral and subject to final approval by the Supervisor" (Final Award in OHR 2000, p. 14). This included recognition of all three languages as official (Bosnian, Serbian, and Croatian), inclusion of both Cyrillic (used predominantly by Serbs) and Latinic scripts (mostly used by Bosniaks and Croats) and renaming the streets' names that were established during Serb Occupation. Given that, the new name for 'Bulevar Draže Mihajlovića' was changed to 'Bulevar Mira' ('Boulevard of Peace'), road 'Srpskih Oslobodilaca Brčkog' ('the Serb Liberation of Brko') to 'Bosne Srebrene' ('Silver Bosnia').

Finally, if visiting Brčko city, it is inevitable to go through the city centre and see an interesting image in front of today's Assembly of Brčko District of BiH. In the span of 50 metres, there are three monuments. One is dedicated to the Bosnian Serb Army, the second to the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the third to the Croatian Defense Council. The first one is the same one that was built by the Bosnian Serbs in 1997, however, the statute of Draža Mihailović was removed due to the newly adopted Law on Monuments and Symbols of the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats also erected statues dedicated to their armies of the same size as Bosnian Serb ones. However,

the statue that is missing is the statue dedicated to innocent civilians who died in the war, with no place of remembrance.

## Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze the nexus of agonistic peacebuilding and spatial dimensions in the context of violent ethnic conflict. Building upon the idea of conflict as an inevitable component of communities formed by different identities and that modern peacebuilding practices should focus on transforming a violent conflict into a constructive one, I explore the importance of common spaces, materialized in a city as a measuring unit, where agonistic principles of inter-ethnic discourse and interaction can occur, and contrast these proposed practices to the reinforcement of ethnic divisions that occurred through the DPA and liberal peacebuilding process in post-conflict BiH.

Using the DPA as a legal reference, I examined how post-conflict peacebuilding tools were co-opted to reinforce ethno-spatial divides that continue today. Furthermore, I analyzed two case studies of cities to determine the effects that agonistic peacebuilding could or did play a role. In the first case, I analyze the destruction of Sarajevo's common spaces that used to symbolize coexistence and the construction of Istočno Sarajevo as a response to the newly formed ethnically homogenous city to maintain minimal interactions between the two cities. In the second case study, I look at the international response to the crisis of Brčko and the creation the of Brčko District that has a better representation of different ethnic groups. I find that when the peacebuilding process included a top-down approach, with fewer components of agonistic peacebuilding, the conflict parties continued their division and enhanced ethnic groupings, leaving no space for identity transformation, but a space for potential re-emergence of the conflict. However, if the peacebuilding process is more in line with creating a common space for sharing grievances and experiences between groups, hence putting more attention to the

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local level, there is a potential for building a community based on acceptance and respect. This does not mean creating a consensus on contested topics but understanding and finding a way to move forward.

Spatial aspects are the observable consequence of destruction and partition, and as such influence the post-war period. They also play a significant role in peacebuilding, whether through reconstruction, as a reminder of the conflict, or as a tool for moving forward. Space is given a meaning from people, so it requires their presence. There is no possibility for reconciliation if the former conflict parties are segregated. This meeting spot is where the agonistic approach places its value and can be further expanded upon. Agonistic peacebuilding should not be observed as a binary view of peace or war, moreover, the main postulate of agonistic peacebuilding is not peace as a final goal, but rather a recognition that certain differences are a reality, and that conflict is inevitable and can be represented positively within the right democratic preconditions. scholars and practitioners should find a way to make this persistent conflict constructive. This is a place where space could offer both material and symbolic platforms to practice an agonistic approach to eradicating violent conflicts and create spaces for contestation and coexistence.

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