

Peacebuilding and Lines of Friction between Imagined Communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and South Africa

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Abstract

With specific reference to Bosnia-Herzegovina and South Africa, this article looks at how peacebuilding actors constantly recreate public space and the discourses within it. The formation of imagined political communities reflects the extent to which peacebuilding interactions can be rather horizontal or vertical in nature, producing different types of friction in the encounter between peacebuilding actors. In Bosnia, the predominantly horizontal nature of international peacebuilding processes has resulted in the emergence of fragmented local sub-spaces. Those are often in conflict with international and national political communities, with frictions emerging between local, national and international actor networks. The article will contrast those processes with the mosaic developing in South Africa, where boundaries between actors are more blurred. Due to strong vertical cooperation, sporadic frictions tend to emerge within those spaces rather than exclusively at their boundaries. The article will analyse the extent to which different patterns of peacebuilding interaction impact upon the constructive and destructive frictions that those produce.

KEYWORDS

Peacebuilding, friction, Bosnia-Herzegovina, South Africa, imagined communities

Introduction

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Having conducted research in Bosnia-Herzegovina since 2008 to research local and international peacebuilding, I was struck by the apparent deadlock of the peacebuilding process and the seemingly small degree of change in the ways in which society reflects war and peace. Two subsequent visits to South Africa presented a different picture – more explosive, yet more dynamic, with discourses about peace and conflict penetrating multiple societal and political spheres. Reflecting the dynamic nature of frictions between diverse sets of peacebuilding actors, these observations tie in with Tsing’s conceptualisation of frictions as arising “out of encounters and interactions.”² They shed light on the multi-faceted nature of global connections as well as the different localities developing from those local-global encounters.³

The emergence of a set or network of actors as imagined socio-political communities illustrates the location and nature of frictions in each of those two contexts, reaching across societal levels. Those imagined communities highlight the fact that local, national and international actors are inextricably linked. At the same time, the boundaries between different categories of actors (local, civil society, national, international) are subject to constant re-negotiation in the formation of frictions and bridges between and within those categories. Thus, rather than essentialising peacebuilding landscapes and structures, this article attempts a snapshot of the formation of imagined communities to point at frictional tendencies of interaction, their destructive and constructive nature. The article will outline the predominantly horizontal political communities in Bosnia-Herzegovina,⁴ before casting light on the verticalisation of community-formation in the case of South Africa. However, this does not represent an attempt to romanticise emerging imagined communities in those two case studies by presenting those communities as stable and homogeneous. Instead, the article investigates the processes during the course of which multiple boundaries between imagined communities are negotiated and frictions are constantly (re-)enacted, vertically and horizontally. This approach will outline the tendencies through which political communities continuously integrate and disintegrate to make their voices and needs heard in the negotiation of peace and peacebuilding.

² Anna L. Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), xi.

³ Cf. Tsing, *Friction*, 1.

⁴ From here onwards BiH or Bosnia.

It can be said that Bosnia represents one of the more typical case studies in the field of peacebuilding, not only because it is referred to as such in the literature, but also quite visibly in the light of the heavy involvement of a set of international actors in the micropolitics and processes of governance in the country. The latter are often assumed to be conflict-prone and in need of international assistance to lead to peace at all societal levels. Against this background, one may wonder about the extent to which South Africa can be considered a peacebuilding case at all, given that for many, development issues appear to be more pressing than peacebuilding in the narrow sense. In South Africa, however, issues of development, poverty, discrimination, social justice and criminality are the markers through which social engagement is typically characterised. Those issues represent the discursive frameworks through which peace-related engagement is framed in the country. Looking at the very recent history of South Africa, it does become evident that discussions about a peaceful future for the country are closely linked to the (in)ability to include the poor and marginalised with political debates and, more generally, the ways in which issues of social justice are addressed. In this context, people most affected by these issues emphasised that material deprivation is likely to lead to criminality, violence and continued unrest.⁵

Research undertaken for this article is based on multiple visits to Bosnia between 2008 and 2011 as well as two research visits to South Africa in 2012. The case studies shed light on two alternative processes of community formation and the production of frictions in the peacebuilding landscape. In that sense, the article will not suggest that Bosnia and South Africa represent analogous or parallel cases of peacebuilding. Instead, I am using those two case studies to test the value of the concept of ‘friction’ in two very different contexts, to investigate the extent to which the concept can account for the difference in historicity, nature of the conflict and associated peacebuilding efforts, understood as an interplay between imagined communities.

Friction between ‘Imagined Communities’

⁵ Township elder, *personal interview*, Malawi Town, 07/09/12.

To illustrate the fluid boundaries at which frictions emerge, we need to revisit Anderson's idea of 'imagined communities'.⁶ This involves an understanding of a set of actors as a community if the actors included define themselves as such by imagining their role as part of a cluster or network of agency (e.g. an elite community, a grassroots community, an international community). Those networks and their boundaries are subject to constant renegotiation and can thus only be grasped in the context of their surrounding processes in cultural and social spheres. The strongest community affiliation is always context-dependent. In contrast to Anderson's reference to imagined political communities as limited and sovereign entities,⁷ I claim that the definition of 'imagined communities' does not only apply to more or less autonomous nation-states. Instead, the concept can be extended to any political network with varying degrees of autonomy and sovereignty.⁸ In that sense, an imagined community in the understanding of this article is any set of actors who act with a high degree of coherence and understand themselves as a joint network of actors. This includes a perception of one's group as sharing a set of values, norms and a common sense of belonging. At the same time, any actor is part of multiple imagined communities, which may or may not be in conflict with each other.

The concept of friction is a metaphor that would usually be found in Physics,⁹ representing a metaphor to conceptualise the encounter of substances. Similar to encounters of groups of actors, it can be considered a type of resistance and does not only occur between solids, but also between fluids. When two non-similar substances meet, they dissipate energy, mostly in the form of heat, which in turn means that those substances are affected by that friction and change. Generally, friction is needed to enable movement, so it can be conceptualised as a transformational process. It is therefore a condition for change and transformation. In that sense, the metaphor of friction can be viewed as the encounter of (fluid) imagined communities resisting and impacting on each other, while producing energy and continuous change. Frictional

⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991).

⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*. 6.

⁸ Cf. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network-theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁹ I would like to thank Matteo Broggi and Pierre Beaurepaire for familiarising me with the notion of friction in Physics.

peacebuilding thus creates energy which can be constructive or deconstructive, but is always transformational due to the impact that actors have on each other.

Perhaps ironically, peacebuilding policies generally assume a gradual rapprochement of local actors to what is perceived as universal norms and thus imply a friction-free nature of local-international interaction, despite an emphasis on difference between ‘local’ and ‘international’.¹⁰ In that sense, peacebuilding assumes that a more or less coherent international community will be able to transform a conflict-torn civil society into a coherent and peaceful one. International peacebuilding actors often seem to assume that conflict emerges from frictions at the local and state level respectively. When addressing the situation in BiH, for instance, the EU’s key words to describe local conditions include notions of ‘problems’, ‘failure’, ‘very little progress’, ‘difficulties’ etc.¹¹ In a similar vein, a recent report of the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on BiH points to frictions inside the political system, specifically with respect to

the inadequacy of assistance provided to non-war related beneficiaries and discrimination resulting from significant discrepancies in the protection afforded to war-related categories in comparison to others; as well as from the distinctly different stance of the entity governments towards the different groups.¹²

International intervention is then expected to overcome those frictions, creating a tension-free landscape of actors.

At the same time, actors discursively create those boundaries to reaffirm their own community group as well as how those relate to other imagined communities. Those boundaries must not be considered as stable, but are in constant discursive renegotiation. In this context, Björkdahl has outlined the extent to which frictions are inherent to any process of localisation, while the latter emerges when global norms

¹⁰ Cf. Boutros Boutros Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping* (New York: United Nations, 1992).

¹¹ Cf. European Commission, “Commission staff working document Bosnia and Herzegovina 2010 Progress Report, accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council” (Brussels, 2010).

¹² OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, *The Right to Social Protection in Bosnia and Herzegovina* (Sarajevo, 2012), 16.

are absorbed locally, and vice versa.¹³ Processes of inclusion and exclusion are part of those processes of localisation and their contextual (re-)negotiations. In these processes, certain actors are made part of an imagined community, while others are excluded from it. Against this background, critical peacebuilding literature has started to question the assumed friction-free nature of the international level itself. This body of literature has argued that friction may produce a variety of outcomes, generally conceptualised as ‘hybrid peacebuilding.’¹⁴

Imagined communities, local, national and international, are thus in a potentially frictional relationship each other, whether that friction be in the form of adaption, co-option, resistance or rejection. However, the fact that imagined communities are situated in shared webs of significance¹⁵ means that actors’ identities strongly derive from meanings created within these multiple webs of significance. These processes become particularly complex when actors are part of multiple imagined communities. The production of cultures - in the ways in which communities interact - facilitates the emergence of frictions, or in Tsing’s words, “the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference.”¹⁶ The creation of difference in turn is not limited to vertical processes in the sense of top-down governance, but also happens horizontally. The non-linearity of those frictions has to be accounted for, given that vertical divisions can only be grasped in the light of horizontal dynamics, and vice versa. Horizontal and vertical friction is always linked. Without implying direct causality, it can be said that channels of communication that may be blocked vertically may, for instance, support the emergence of horizontal channels, while weak horizontal links may facilitate a stronger vertical orientation of the actors involved in peacebuilding. The very nature of those frictions and cleavages can be considered crucial to understanding the dynamics of interaction within peacebuilding contexts as well as the thus emerging relationships between various sets of actors. At the same time, this means that we must not only investigate frictions in the light of global connections, as Tsing

¹³ Annika Björkdahl, “A Gender-Just Peace: Exploring the Post-Dayton Peace Process”, *Journal of Peace and Change* 37, no.2 (2012): 286-317, p.292.

¹⁴ Roger Mac Ginty, *International peacebuilding and local resistance: hybrid forms of peace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and Oliver Richmond and Audra Mitchell (eds.), *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011).

¹⁵ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London: Fontana Press, 1993).

¹⁶ Cf. Tsing, *Friction*, 4.

suggests, but we have to account for friction as a process of local just as much as global connectedness, in the light of the energy that is produced through local-global encounters.

Vertical frictions and Horizontalisation in Bosnia-Herzegovina

Peacebuilding in Bosnia-Herzegovina can be said to have taken on a trusteeship style. The transition from war to peace (or what is labelled as such) was a process heavily directed by international actors and involved local actors mainly as signatories of externally devised peace agreements. Still today, intervention is international, mainly through the European Union (EU), the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the OSCE, but also through the engagement of individual states – first and foremost the United States. Even 17 years after the end of the war in BiH, peacebuilding remains muscular, while Bosnia's domestic affairs reflect a strong international dimension. This approach is linked to the assumption that frictions at the local level can only be overcome through external guidance.¹⁷

What the following section will show is the gradual emergence and solidification of horizontal imagined communities and the resulting development of vertical frictions in BiH. As a result, actors tend to articulate and channel their needs horizontally. Vertical links do exist, but tend to be scarce and often blocked. Again, this is not an attempt to essentialise the emergence of communities, but rather to outline some tendencies through which they have become integrated internally.

The International Community

Looking at the international community, it can be said that it is often perceived as one group, both locally and from within that community. Indeed, although different international actors pursue a variety of agendas, it seems that the EU has gradually been taking over the role of the agenda-setter. As early as 2008, the World Bank in Sarajevo was determined to align to EU conditionality in the design of its programmes.¹⁸ Similarly, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Bosnia made clear that they support EU integration, promoting, for instance, the EU's

¹⁷ Stefan Simosas, Office of the High Representative, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 08/03/11.

¹⁸ Marco Mantovanelli, World Bank, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 10/03/08.

standards of social inclusion and cooperation.¹⁹ The EU itself also seems to base its actions on a cooperative way of working with other international actors in the country. A political advisor to the EU Delegation to Bosnia-Herzegovina quoted the process of passing civil service laws in 2003, which she considered an efficient process, given the support the EU received from the OHR.²⁰ Given that, as a general rule, the process of passing laws in BiH can take years due to the complex power-sharing arrangements, the fact that those civil service laws consolidated within only a few months was considered a success. However, the imagination of international actors as an almost friction-free community of actors is not just a product of those institutional forms of cooperation, but also of the ways in which the international community is portrayed locally. When speaking about the international community in everyday life discourses, people do not tend to differentiate between different agencies.²¹ There is a more general notion of the group of “internationals”, a term which comes with heavy baggage as a result of the perceived failure of any international actors to end the violence before the end of violence in 1995. Not least as a result of that failure, international actors are perceived as distant from ordinary people’s lives, while the latter picture the former as distant and, as with all that is distant, as more or less homogeneous. This perceived detachment is closely linked to a rather sceptical view of international peacebuilding more generally. A political advisor to the EU Delegation himself pointed to the Delegation’s awareness of a growing animosity towards EU on the ground.²² In that sense, there are not many attempts by local actors to break through the shell of international agency, while the latter remains in a more or less isolated arena, with its own culture in friction with the surrounding ‘local’ environment.

The Political Class

These centripetal forces also play out in the political class – perhaps surprisingly against the background that one expects to deal with a deeply ethnically segregated landscape shaped by ethnicised political communities. However, several meetings in parliament with politicians from competing political parties reflected a strong sense of unity among the interviewees. Rather than arguing against each other,

¹⁹ Staff member, UNDP, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 03/09/09.

²⁰ Political advisor, EU Delegation to BiH, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 03/03/11.

²¹ This became obvious throughout months of field work in Bosnia, spread out between 2008 and 2011.

²² Xavier Oleiro Ogando, EU Delegation to BiH, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 08/03/10.

in all of those meetings the interviewees agreed on many central issues and indeed behaved like allies rather than as political opponents.²³ It has to be taken into account that the constitution itself forces different political actors to cooperate if they want to move anything. The Dayton Peace Agreement in which the constitution is embedded clearly envisages concerted action between the three majority ethnic groups as each of them holds veto rights.²⁴

Similarly, the EU has a strong interest in having one single interlocutor, both from the perspective of the local Delegation as well as from Brussels.²⁵ In that sense, EU accession presupposes a friction-free political landscape, coherent local structures and, to a certain extent, requires that landscape to be integrative.²⁶ The European Parliament's recent progress report on BiH indeed confirms the requirement for a single (rather than divided) country to enter the EU.²⁷ This in turn implies the requirement to overcome frictions between different political parties and their socio-geographical divisions. This is of course not to say that the political class is free from horizontal frictions. To the contrary, the difficulties in forming a government after the 2010 elections reflected the extent to which divisions shape Bosnia's political landscape. It took fourteen months for political parties to agree on the formation of a government, which did in fact block the state considerably. However, Bosnians from a variety of backgrounds, and particularly in the Federation, would often tell me that "our politicians are all the same", "they are all corrupt" and "I do not want to get involved with those people". People tend to see politicians as mutual allies who are all equally corrupt and not interested in the welfare of Bosnian citizens.

Some politicians seem to be aware of this problem, admitting that they cannot fulfil citizens' expectations²⁸ and that there is a lack of citizens' engagement with public debates.²⁹ To a large extent, this coincides with the view of many international

²³ Personal meetings in national parliament: with representatives from SDP BiH, SBiH, SDA, SDS, Sarajevo, 10/03/09; meeting in parliament, Sarajevo, 13/03/08; meeting in parliament, Sarajevo, 07/03/11.

²⁴ See Dayton Peace Agreement, http://www.ohr.int/dpa/default.asp?content_id=380 (accessed 11/10/12).

²⁵ Xavier Oleiro Ogando, EU Delegation to BiH, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 08/03/10.

²⁶ Cf. Stefanie Kappler, "Centrifugal Peacebuilding and Divergent Transformation", *International Peacekeeping* 19, no.5 (2012): 612-27 and Audra Mitchell, *Lost in Transformation: Peace and Radical Change in Northern Ireland* (PhD thesis: Queens University of Belfast, 2009).

²⁷ European Parliament resolution of 14 March 2012 on the 2011 progress report on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Strasbourg, 2012. See <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2012-0085+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN> (accessed 11/10/12).

²⁸ Nermina Zaimovic-Uzunovic, SDP, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 07/03/11.

²⁹ Selim Beslovic, SDP, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 10/03/09.

actors of Bosnian politics, which are perceived as largely driven by the media, with the latter not living up to high quality standards.³⁰ Such perceptions are reflected in the statement of an OHR advisor who argues that people do not necessarily vote in their interest, but are often fooled by the media.³¹ Without necessarily agreeing with this statement, it can still be argued that the media act as instruments of political parties rather than translating and mediating between different sets of actors, e.g. politicians and the local population. There are certainly exceptions to this, such as the *Balkans Investigative Reporting Network* (BIRN), but by and large, the most widely consumed media stations do not strengthen vertical links between different imagined communities in BiH. As a result of this perceived distance between the political sphere from people's everyday lives, there is a strong feeling among local communities that politics is not serving their interests.³² A Bosnian student remarked that "everybody has problems with politics here, but no one is trying to change that. People only complain."³³ Indeed, due to the frustration with the ways in which politics are developed in BiH, people have withdrawn from that sphere. Most Bosnians would not tend to approach the government with their grievances and most pressing needs, but will instead channel those issues into family and neighbourhood circles. This results in a growing distance between the grassroots and political elites, further contributing to the cementation of horizontal imagined communities at the expense of vertical links. Friction thus emerges between the political class and the local population, while it has to be said that although there is a strong cohesion within the political class itself as well as the international community, those two communities do connect.³⁴ This is partly due to the fact that Bosnian politicians and international agencies are forced to cooperate to a certain extent in a system of mutual dependence. Yet those connections tend to be selective and instrumental, while there are only few connections between those communities and the grassroots, as the article will continue to show.

Civil society

³⁰ Interview with five staff members, EU Delegation to BiH, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 15/03/10.

³¹ Staff member, OHR, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 16/03/10.

³² Ingrid Halbritter, Pharos, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 15/03/08.

³³ Mirza Ajnadžić, EFM student radio, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 07/03/11.

³⁴ Kappler, "Centrifugal Peacebuilding and Divergent Transformation".

Even in the arena of civil society organisations, there is a tendency to form strong communities horizontally. On the one hand, civil society actors compete for funding, which at times leads to divisions within the civil society sector. On the other hand, civil society actors in BiH are generally mutually networked and do joint projects. The *Mreza za Izgradnju Mira (Network for Building Peace)* is but one example of the increasing strengthening of the civil society community.³⁵ It can also be said that many people are involved in a number of civil society organisations and/or movements at the same time. This can take different shapes and forms: It is not unusual to meet someone who has worked for a variety of NGOs, who has set up different networks and ways of strengthening civil society cooperation and generally knows most people active in the field of civil society in BiH. Some people tend to use the money and contacts gained in the work for an externally funded NGO to support activities that they care about most in their private time.³⁶ It is therefore common to be involved in the creation and administration of several NGOs at a time, which in turn strengthens the community-feeling of NGOs even more. The dissemination of dominant peacebuilding discourses to be found in the sphere of NGOs is even enhanced through the donor frameworks they are situated in. As most NGOs are funded by international donors, they have had to adapt to the requirements of their sponsors in terms of professionalising their work, often presenting it in business frames and using ‘trigger words’ such as *human rights*, *gender* and so forth.³⁷ It can be observed that NGO activists tend to be young and speak flawless English, thus, mainly out of necessity, forming their own project-oriented community. Frictions within this discursive community are not usually expected as their narratives are based on a jargon that is needed to attract funds – although often not out of choice, but out of necessity.³⁸

At the same time, civil society as an organisational tool is not necessarily deeply rooted in Bosnian history. Accounting for the externalised character of civil society in BiH, Pugh suggests that it is impossible to create trust and positive relationships in civil society from an external stance.³⁹ Seligman relates to Eastern

³⁵ Cf. <http://www.mreza-mira.net/> (accessed 11/10/12).

³⁶ Nebojsa Savija-Valha, various affiliations, *personal interview*, Sarajevo 12/03/09.

³⁷ Various confidential sources, *personal interviews*, Sarajevo, Mostar and Travnik, March 2010 and February 2011.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Michael Pugh, “The Social-Civil Dimension”, in *Regeneration of War-Torn Societies*, ed. Michael Pugh (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 112-33, pp.121, 122.

Europe more specifically, arguing that, since societal interests in many Eastern European countries have historically been subordinated to the state, the concept of civil society in that region is lacking in substantial value.⁴⁰ Civil society, despite its attempts to distance itself from donor regulations, is often perceived as a donor instrument and are thus situated in close relation to the imagined community of international actors in BiH. They do not tend to be viewed as a locally grown set of actors, nor as a tool through which Bosnians would tend to make their voices heard.⁴¹ A staff member of the Nansen Dialogue Centre in Mostar, for instance, suggested that as an NGO, it is sometimes difficult to make a difference as problems are deeply rooted in communities.⁴² This statement in turn implies a detachment of the NGO sphere from local communities and points to the problems NGOs face when attempting to translate local grievances into donor-attractive policies.

Not only are there frictions between them and local communities, but partly also with international actors. In a number of cases have civil society actors made efforts to achieve their own goals as detached from what the international community expects.⁴³ Just to quote one specific example: the *Helsinki Committee for Human Rights*, based in Sarajevo, has emphasised the desire to develop its own human rights initiatives as opposed to building on the project outlines as international actors propose them.⁴⁴ Again, this example reflects the extent to which civil society actors are, partly intentionally, partly by necessity, focused on their own community rather than on the surrounding communities. Their work is largely de-politicised and therefore isolated from the ethnic divisions that may otherwise divide them horizontally.⁴⁵ This focus creates a certain degree of stability within those circles, while at the same time perpetuating frictional peacebuilding between local, state, NGO and international communities.

The local population

⁴⁰ Adam B. Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), pp.6f.

⁴¹ Cf. Stefanie Kappler, "Liberal Peacebuilding's Representation of the Local: The Case of Bosnia and Herzegovina", in *Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism*, eds. Oliver Richmond and Audra Mitchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), pp.260-76.

⁴² Elvir Djuliman, NDC Mostar, *personal interview*, Mostar, 15/04/10.

⁴³ Nebojsa Savija-Valha, Ambrosia, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 23/03/10.

⁴⁴ Srdan Dizdarevic, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 10/03/08.

⁴⁵ Cf. Hans-Martin Jaeger, "'Global Civil Society' and the Political Depoliticization of Global Governance", *International Political Sociology* 1, no.3 (2007): 257-277.

Similar dynamics are at play in the ways in which the local population are viewed and imagined externally. There seems to be a tendency among international actors to refer to Bosnians, sometimes as one, but mostly as one or three local homogenous groups. The Dayton Peace Agreement itself reflects the assumption that the three ethnic majority groups, i.e. Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, can be represented as a more or less unitary group, thus setting the tone for how local society is portrayed politically. Again, we can observe tendencies for local communities to be represented as part of one community. This is linked to the aim of many international agencies to reconcile horizontal divides rather than addressing vertical frictions. The World Bank, for instance, praises itself for achieving unified licence plates across the country, thus allowing for a greater freedom of movement.⁴⁶ Along similar lines, the EU is interested in clear boundaries around imagined communities, basing its approaches to policy-making on a triangle between the EU – local authorities – local civil society.⁴⁷ This triangle in turn presupposes coherence within its elements, pushing for clear boundaries and the elimination of frictions within them.

What the analysis of the various imagined communities in BiH shows is the limited amount of official translation of needs vertically. There certainly is a high degree of corruption and clientelism⁴⁸ as well as cooperation between civil society organisations and donors, while at the same time, vertical links of cooperation are dominated by horizontal links. Groups of actors situated in different power positions appear to have a frictional relationship with each other, they often perceive their identities as mutually exclusive (e.g. ‘if you are local, you should not work for the international community’: or: ‘the political community is not interested in the needs of ordinary citizens’) and their productive encounter is limited in terms of their mutual hybridisation. The lack of a shared language (in terms of national language as much as the ways in which experiences are framed) further inhibits communication and interaction between imagined communities. In this context, it has been pointed out to me that the language the EU uses is not connected to people’s everyday lives, with terms such as ‘peacebuilding’ or ‘democratisation’ remaining meaningless

⁴⁶ Goran Tinjic, World Bank, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 10/03/08.

⁴⁷ Xavier Oleiro Ogando, EU Delegation to BiH, *presentation*, Sarajevo, 15/03/10.

⁴⁸ Boris Divjak and Michael Pugh, “The Political Economy of Corruption in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, *International Peacekeeping* 15, no.3 (2008): 373-386.

beyond their institutional context.⁴⁹ The perception that the international community remains distant from local experiences can be said to be particularly strong outside Sarajevo, the capital city. In Banja Luka, which is more than six hours by bus from Sarajevo, people described the extent to which they felt excluded and distanced from the politics of the international community.⁵⁰ Given that most international organisations have their headquarters in the capital city (with a few exceptions such as the OHR or the OSCE who do operate beyond Sarajevo), connections between non-metropolitan actors and international actors remain a rarity and geographical frictions are common.

This is, however, not to say that there are no vertical connections whatsoever. *Gariwo*, for instance, an NGO working for civil courage, has organised meetings between students and international ambassadors, aiming to establish links of communication between those individuals.⁵¹ At the same time, those bridges can only be found sporadically, failing to reach across wide societal and political sectors. International peacebuilding seems to have reinforced rather than challenged the horizontalisation of political communities.

Against this background, the following section will contrast the situation in BiH with the ways in which vertical communities are formed and imagined in South Africa.

Horizontal frictions and Verticalisation in South Africa

While the example of BiH reflects deeply engrained vertical lines of friction, the following section will present the case of South Africa as a community landscape, not exclusively, but predominantly shaped by horizontal frictions and vertical cooperation. This has to be seen in the context of South Africa's recent history and particularly the era of apartheid and the struggle against it, both deeply engrained in the living memory of South Africans. That memory seems to be mainly shaped by frictions between different ethnic groups – most notable between Black, White and Coloured people, but also including a variety of other groups represented in what is

⁴⁹ Aida Pilav, Pozoriste Mladih Sarajevo, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 31/03/10.

⁵⁰ Branka Sestic, Muzej Savremene Umjetnosti RS, *personal interview*, Banja Luka, 27/04/10 and Predrag Bjelosevic, Djecije Pozoriste RS, *personal interview*, Banja Luka, 27/04/10.

⁵¹ Eleonora Emkic, Gariwo, *personal interview*, Sarajevo, 23/04/10.

often referred to as a ‘rainbow nation’. The transition from a radically segregated system of apartheid to democracy has turned what seemed to be an ethnic conflict into a conflict about access to power and resources.⁵² Against this background, peacebuilding in South Africa has to be seen in the light of its recent transition to democracy, limited international intervention, an emphasis on reconciliation as well as the role of civil society organisations in service delivery in a context of inequalities and poverty.⁵³ The themes of resource distribution and transitional justice have indeed become the *leitmotifs* along the lines of which peacebuilding is imagined and structured in South Africa.⁵⁴

It can be said that, historically speaking, in South Africa there are groups sharing ideas and norms that transcend vertical/ hierarchical structures. It has been pointed out that “we all know each other. We were part of the same struggle, on either side”.⁵⁵ In that sense, the fact that South African history is shaped by a multitude of cleavages other than along lines of political hierarchy has contributed to the emergence of constantly changing lines of friction along a number of alternative lines, including class, geographical location, skin colour and so forth. The frictions between the formerly governing white elites and the oppression of the black majority can be said to have been transformative, resulting in violent and non-violent forms of resistance and finally resulting in the overthrow of the apartheid system in 1994.

Selective vertical cooperation

In the process of transition to democracy, which, as opposed to the case of Bosnia, resulted from internal pressures, the presence of international actors has been rather sporadic, and a real sense of an ‘international community’ has not really developed until today. Instead, most international actors present in the country engage

⁵² For a more comprehensive account on South Africa’s transition to democracy, see Patrick Bond, *Elite transition: from apartheid to neoliberalism in South Africa* (London; Sterling, VA: Pluto Press; Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 2000).

⁵³ Cf. Rocky Williams, “From peacekeeping to peacebuilding? South African policy and practice in peace missions”, *International Peacekeeping* 7, no.3 (2000): 84-104.

⁵⁴ Cf. Alex Boraine, “South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission from a Global Perspective”, in *Peace versus Justice? The Dilemma of Transitional Justice in Africa*, eds. Chandra Lekha Sriram and Suren Pillay (Oxford: James Currey, 2010: 137-152. This also came out of meetings with Valdi Van Reenen-Le Roux, The Trauma Centre, *personal interview*, Cape Town, 06/12/12 and a documentary film screening organized by the Human Rights Media Centre for those excluded from the TRC process, Cape Town, 08/12/12.

⁵⁵ Fr Michael Lapsley, Institute for Healing of Memory, *personal interview*, Cape Town, 30/08/12.

in their very own agendas without necessarily linking them to each other. The World Bank, for instance, focuses on research on poverty and inequality of opportunity,⁵⁶ while the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is engaged in the fields of governance, human rights, environmental sustainability, poverty reduction, HIV and crisis management.⁵⁷ The EU itself has only a rather limited role, particularly in comparison with its involvement in BiH, and tends to focus on trade as well as partnership agreements on a contractual basis.

Due to this rather loose connection between different agencies, South African institutions have started to engage with international donors according to their needs and perhaps more selectively than in BiH. This allows for a tough, but flexible approach to funding and project cooperation and is useful for local agencies as they can thus circumvent conditionalities they would otherwise be confronted with. Against this background, the *City at Peace* project, based in Cape Town, has decided to work with a number of international funders and their projects according to what they perceive as their needs. For instance, cooperation takes place with the Forum Theatre, also active in Palestine, as well as with the *Global Youth City Project*, which reaches into communities in Burma, Guatemala, Norway and so forth. All these countries have sent partners for joint programme development with *City at Peace*.⁵⁸ This is but one example which reflects selective connections between local and international agents, according to the needs and ambitions of the respective actor. At the same time, there are more institutionalised forms of cooperation across levels, with the *Dialogue Facility* in the context of the SA-EU Strategic Partnership programme representing an attempt to institutionalise vertical links.⁵⁹ In their attempts to connect South African actors from civil society as well as political and academic spheres with the EU, the *Dialogue Facility* clearly tries to break up boundaries between different sets of actors. Along similar lines, the Cape Town-based *Centre for Conflict Resolution* addresses a large target audience, including local councillors, church leaders, schools and community leaders.⁶⁰ The inclusion of different sets of

⁵⁶ See, for instance, World Bank, “South Africa, Economic Update, Focus on Inequality of Opportunity” (Washington: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank, 2012). Available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRICA/Resources/257994-1342195607215/SAEU-July_2012_Full_Report.pdf (accessed 16/10/12).

⁵⁷ Mfaroo Moyo, UNDP, *personal interview*, Pretoria, 04/09/12.

⁵⁸ Wahseema Roberts, City at Peace, *personal interview*, Cape Town, 28/08/12.

⁵⁹ Cf. <http://www.dialoguefacility.org/> (accessed 17/10/12).

⁶⁰ Oscar Siwali, Centre for Conflict Resolution, *personal interview*, Cape Town, 28/08/12.

actors as well as the attempt to establish structures of accountability between them can in turn be said to strengthen vertical links and to create vertical imagined communities – at least on a project-base, if not beyond. Imagined communities thus seem to be common, sporadic, flexible and needs-based.

Horizontal frictions

One of the main reasons why vertical links seem more likely than in BiH is the fact that there are more horizontal frictions and divisions. The divisions within government itself are by no means a new phenomenon,⁶¹ but have recently been highlighted by the violence triggered by the Marikana mine strike and the police responses to it. Not only did the strike and the responses to it trigger nation-wide debates about resource distribution, social justice and the associated normative underpinnings of politics, but it has also cast light on the fragile horizontal links across government. The expulsion of Julius Malema, the youth leader of the ANC, from his political party in April 2012 is thus symbolic of those controversial debates reaching across the country⁶² as well as the rapidly-changing nature of alliances and frictions. At the same time, these frictions within government have opened channels through which grassroots actors have been able to enter political debates and to have an influence on political elites. In this context, it is particularly striking to see the extent to which even the most deprived sections of society are entering political debates. The shack dwellers' movement *Abahlali baseMjondolo* is but one powerful example of a way in which marginalised sections of the population can become very political. The movement has been fighting against eviction campaigns from their settlement and launched a number of campaigns challenging government policies.⁶³ As one of the former organisers explained, there was much political activism involved.⁶⁴ He also pointed to the fragmentation of government, suggesting that the associated “political confusion” reflects “the true sense of who we are”.⁶⁵ In that respect, the dissatisfaction with the government and its internal divisions have led to attempts to challenge the ANC from inside, in terms of building on those divisions to

⁶¹ Cf. Geoffrey Hawker, “Political Leadership in the ANC: The South African Provinces 1994-1999”, *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 38, no. 4 (2000): 631-658.

⁶² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-19536522> (accessed 17/10/12).

⁶³ Mzonke Poni, *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, *personal interview*, Khayelitsha, 30/08/10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

achieve political change.⁶⁶ Along similar lines, the township “Malawi Town” is very politicised, fighting for their rights by challenging political strategies openly.⁶⁷ Although conditions of the township seem very adverse regarding political activism due to its geographical marginalisation as well as the lack of public transport to take people to political venues (such as Town Hall), local leaders have repeatedly sought conversation with the local political elites.⁶⁸ This also holds true for the Khulumani Support Group, making the grievances of those marginalised from the truth and reconciliation processes heard to politicians.⁶⁹

It becomes obvious that these strategies only work in a political landscape in which actors are vertically linked and in communication with each other – in whichever way. This can also be considered one of the reasons for which *Abigail’s Women’s Movement* was able to start its engagement with the most marginalised sections of the township Khayelitsha from nothing, while eventually obtaining the support of the Ministry of Social Development.⁷⁰ What started as a few women caring for elderly and handicapped people could thus become a caring centre.⁷¹

At the same time, these cross-level connections and thus emerging sporadic vertical imagined communities can to a certain extent also be found in the work done by museums. The latter seem to perceive an increasing interest in their work on the part of politicians. The *Iziko Slave Lodge* is one example where the museum pointed to the issue of empowerment of the Khoi (a South African ethnic group), which was thereafter integrated with the political agenda on a nation-wide basis.⁷² In a similar vein, the *Gender Equity Unit* at the University of the Western Cape has started to engage in political activism beyond its direct mandate at the university. Through their submissions to the government, the unit has, according to its director, impacted upon the legal status of women as well as their rights and equality.⁷³ Therefore, instead of exclusively cooperating with gender units across the country, they have decided to lobby vertically, both upwards and downwards. With respect to the latter, the theatre

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Township elder, *personal interview*, Malawi Town, 07/09/12.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ I witnessed a political discussion of members of Khulumani in Cape Town, 08/12/12.

⁷⁰ Ntsoaki Dina Motolwana, Abigail’s Women’s Movement, *personal interview*, Khayelitsha, 03/09/12.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Paul Tichman, Iziko Slave Lodge, *personal interview*, Cape Town, 03/09/12. See also <http://www.southafrica.info/services/rights/traditional-080811.htm> (accessed 18/10/12).

⁷³ Mary Hames, Gender Equity Unit at the University of the Western Cape, *personal interview*, Cape Town, 29/08/12.

project co-coordinated by the *Gender Equity Unit* aims to establish contact with the grassroots of society in terms of engaging a broad audience. Not only do new students perform in this project every year, but they also bring their families to the performances, which critically reflect social and political issues in South Africa.⁷⁴ The open nature of this project as well as its outreach into wide sectors of society – including people who would not normally have attended theatre events – reflects a strong connection between the grassroots and civil society. The *Bonfire Theatre* is another example in which different sets of actors are linked across societal spheres, as the company addresses a broad audience, including business people, refugees, children and so forth with the aim to integrate communities at all levels.⁷⁵ Unlike the situation in BiH, where civil society seems distant from local society, there seems to be a stronger integration between South African civil society organisations and their surrounding society, whose needs are often at the base of civic and political engagement. Civil society as a whole seems much less integrated and coordinated than in Bosnia, while the overall civil society landscape is more fragmented. This is a result of South African NGOs working with different agendas that they derive from local contexts, as the examples of *Abigail's Women's Movement* or the *Gender Equity Unit* illustrate. Due to the fact that those organisations are located in the midst of their recipient communities, they are born out of the specific needs of the latter rather than strictly adhering with donor agendas. This certainly also has a less positive side in that the interests of a number of grassroots organisations are competing with each other, thus producing horizontal frictions. In that sense, politics is about securing one's share of resources in a context of scarcity and competition. On the other hand, the politicisation of the 'everyday' brings the benefit of including those traditionally excluded from elite-level politics. These processes of inclusion are in turn facilitated by a number of 'translators', i.e. actors who establish vertical links and remove frictions between actors. One example would be the *Apartheid Museum* in Johannesburg in its attempts to involve the local community and particularly young people in their rather political work.⁷⁶ In a similar vein, the *Medical Research Council* at the University of South Africa undertakes research on identities emerging at

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Heather Schiff, Bonfire Theatre Company, *personal interview*, Cape Town, 03/12/12.

⁷⁶ Wayde Davy, Apartheid Museum, *personal interview*, Johannesburg, 06/09/12.

grassroots level and tries to make their findings heard to policy-makers.⁷⁷ As researchers in the institution highlighted, there have indeed been policy-relevant reforms in the field of health as a result of the dialogue between the institute and policy-makers.⁷⁸ Generally, compared to the horizontalised landscape of imagined communities in BiH, South Africa seems to have stronger links between researchers and policy-makers.⁷⁹ Although not friction-free, it can be said that there is a clear awareness of grassroots demands towards the government, including the most pressing issues such as poverty, unemployment and so forth,⁸⁰ not least as a result of the work of ‘translators’ as outlined above.

Verticality: Limiting and Empowering

At the same time, the situation must not be glorified as the fragmentation of horizontal political landscapes equally reflects divisions along the lines of ethnicity, class and so forth. The vertical orientation of politics must also be seen in the context of South Africa’s patrimonial heritage⁸¹, which favours vertical structures of accountability in exchange for votes and includes structures of clientelism at its base. As a township elder pointed out, politicians mainly enter in contact with the shack dwellers in his community before elections are due.⁸² Against this background, it can be argued that vertical imagined communities are not naturally more peaceful than horizontal ones, but what the South African example shows is their ability to generate more flexibility in the political landscape. Change may thus happen spontaneously and can lead to sudden outbreaks of violence, which the Marikana mine incident mirrored very clearly. However, the instability of the system equally allows for the development of powerful vertical communication channels and thus creates more leeway to deal with political challenges. In this primarily vertical culture of politics,

⁷⁷ Kopano Ratele and Shahnaaz Suffla, Medical Research Council, *personal interview*, Cape Town, 30/08/12.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ A government official stressed the need to obtain input from academia. Staff member, Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), *personal interview*, Pretoria, 05/09/12. The fact that, at least to a certain extent, collaboration is happening, also became obvious from a researcher’s point of view: Laurie Nathan, University of Pretoria, *personal interview*, Cape Town, 07/09/12.

⁸⁰ Pitso Montwedi, Chief Director: Human Rights & Humanitarian Affairs, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, *personal interview*, Pretoria, 05/09/12.

⁸¹ Bruce Berman, “Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State: The Politics of Uncivil Nationalism”, *African Affairs* 97 (1998): 305-341.

⁸² Township elder, *personal interview*, Malawi Town, 07/09/12.

events involving multiple actors seem to be more common than in BiH. The launch of Fr Michael Lapsley's book in Cape Town was rather illustrative of this, attracting a large number of 'ordinary' people, but also Desmond Tutu, the mayor of Cape Town and a variety of media and civil society activists.⁸³ It was in this venue that a political discussion about social justice was had, where speakers discussed the past and future of South Africa as well as linking this to people's everyday experiences of peace and social (in)justice. The willingness to engage in discussions about pressing social topics may partly be viewed as a legacy of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which involved different levels of society and initiated a cross-societal debate about politics in their most traumatising form. This is not to romanticise the TRC as it has been subject to critiques questioning its lack of clarity of its findings,⁸⁴ its ambiguous use of the concept of reconciliation⁸⁵ its limits in terms of wider impact,⁸⁶ its inability to deliver reparations to most people adversely affected by apartheid policies⁸⁷, as well as its tendencies to over-privilege white and previously powerful people.⁸⁸ At the same time, the TRC may have laid the institutional grounding for cooperation across sets of actors and thus the formation of dynamic vertical imagined communities. In that sense, the TRC may have seeded the foundations on the basis of which frictional peacebuilding emerged in the South African context. Referring to the TRC, Shaw indeed suggests that a "new paradigm for transitional justice had been created, and awaited its own frictional travels to other parts of the world."⁸⁹

Conclusion

Without a direct comparison, the snapshot on those two cases reflects the extent to which the nature of frictional lines between imagined socio-political communities impacts upon the ways in which conflict is constantly (re-)produced in a

⁸³ Launch of Michael Lapsley's book 'Redeeming the Past', Cape Town, 03/09/12.

⁸⁴ Piers Pigou, "There Are More Truths to be Uncovered before We Can Achieve Reconciliation," *Sunday Independent*, 23 April 2006

⁸⁵⁸⁵ Tristan A. Borer, "Reconciling South Africa or South Africans? Cautionary Notes from the TRC", *African Studies Quarterly* 8, no.1 (2004): 19-38.

⁸⁶ Catherine M. Cole, "Performance, Transitional Justice, and the Law: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission", *Theatre Journal* 59 (2007): 167-187, p.174.

⁸⁷ Shirley Gunn, Human Rights Media Centre, *personal interview*, Cape Town, 07/12/12.

⁸⁸ Audrey R. Chapman and Patrick Ball, "The Truth of Truth Commissions: Comparative Lessons from Haiti, South Africa, and Guatemala", *Human Rights Quarterly* 23, no.1 (2001): 1-43, pp.8, 9.

⁸⁹ Rosalind Shaw, "Memory Frictions: Localizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone", *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 1 (2007): 183-207, quote at p.193.

landscape of agency. The thus emerging multi-dimensional picture of frictions casts light on the complex political constellations found in each society. However, it may come as a surprise that peacebuilding actors have only rarely investigated the *nature* of friction, instead aiming to eliminate frictions as such. This approach has neglected the constructive potential frictions may have. The horizontalisation of the Bosnian socio-political landscape seems to prevent flexibility and socio-political transformation on the one hand. On the other hand, horizontal links are contributing to strong links within communities, often in families and neighbourhood circles. Vertical links are present, but seem to be less dominant in the political system. In contrast, South African communities seem to develop vertically, thus allowing for political flexibility and the vocalisation of local needs. At the same time, the vertical friction in Bosnia implies limited connections between grassroots, civil society, politicians and the international community, while these very connections and their instability in South Africa signify a higher risk of political explosion. What this reflects is the double-edged nature of friction. Not only is it important to analyse its locality and directionality (horizontal, vertical, or both) and multi-dimensionality, but also its quality in terms of what sorts of effects it may produce. Frictional peacebuilding may in fact lead to fragmentation and exclusion, but it can also facilitate empowerment and selective inclusion along new lines of the socio-political landscape. As the example of South Africa has shown, quickly changing lines of friction can be risky and lead to a volatile political environment. Yet they can also grant access of more voices to the policy-making process, which, in the case of BiH, seems rather limited. Bosnian socio-political life presents itself as primarily horizontally stratified, which may produce more stability in the political system. However, this stability can be considered an uncomfortable and often exclusive stalemate for many citizens who are not represented in the political networks that are politically influential. If peacebuilding actors are to understand not only the local context in which they operate, but also the ways in which their own role impacts upon the mutual relationships between different actors, the directionality and quality of frictions in the socio-political landscape are key to understanding the dynamics and transformative impacts of intervention.