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## Mostar and Mltrovica: constested grounds for peacebuilding

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WORKING  
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**MOSTAR AND MITROVICA**  
**CONTESTED GROUNDS FOR PEACEBUILDING**

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**IN SERIES**

1. *Mostar and Mitrovica: contested grounds for peacebuilding* – Annika Björkdahl & Ivan Gusic

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## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

While the grand moves of peace and conflict might occur somewhere else, their actual impact is often found in the city. Consequently, this article brings to the fore the city as the nexus for international and local peacebuilding efforts. By marrying critical urban studies with the critical peacebuilding literature the ‘divided city’ is explored as a convenient and tractable ‘diagnostic site’ for studying complex processes of peacebuilding situated within and constituted of urban spaces. The city also provides a site for fusion where it is possible to capture the frictional encounters between international liberal peacebuilding discourse and local practices, and the unpredictable ways in which discourses and practices are transformed through their interactions. By focusing on the urban space we are able to explore how the international interacts with ‘local’ and ‘localness’. Thus, this article aims to understand the friction that emerges in the interaction between international and local peacebuilding actors, discourses and practices in divided cities. The overall ambition is to contribute to the understanding of how the liberal peace travel across differences, accommodates as well as is accommodated by the places it engages.

Derived from three key values inherent in the liberal peacebuilding discourse and their interplay with the post-conflict realities of divided cities three frictional encounters are identified and critically examined: democracy encounters ethnocracy; civic identity meets ethno-nationalist identity; local ownership contrasts with local agency. These spaces of friction illustrate different dynamics and outcomes of the unequal encounters between international peacebuilding agency, discourses and practices and local counterparts.

A focus on the city contributes to understand the “grounds for peace”. Ethnographic fieldwork in the two cities of Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Mitrovica, Kosovo, during 2011 has been helpful when studying where peace takes place. The fieldwork has generated novel empirical material and important insights to the divided city as a nexus for international and local

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of the article were presented at the Swedish National Conference for Peace and Conflict Studies in Gothenburg, Sweden, in June 2012, and at the Precarious

peacebuilding. A total of 43 semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants such as international diplomats, representatives of international organisations, local activists, public servants, local politicians, informal community leaders, and intellectuals. Our ambition is to allow both the voices of local actors and those of internationals to be heard and no one speaking on behalf of the other.<sup>2</sup>

Two concepts emerge as key to the forthcoming analysis: ‘divided city’ and ‘friction’. When this paper labels a city ‘divided’, it does so from a peacebuilding perspective, meaning that the divides originates from or was amplified by a violent conflict and overlaps with the divisions present in the wider conflict discourse e.g. ideology in Berlin and ethno-nationalism in Mostar. Post-conflict, divided cities experience a continuation of contestation over the ownership and the right to the city, and such cities have proved resistant to peacebuilding efforts. The second concept friction, central to our analysis, assists us to understand what happens when international liberal peacebuilding actors, ideas and approaches travel to, connect with, and engage local conditions and circumstances.

The article unfolds as follows. First, the international/local divide in liberal peacebuilding is examined and the ‘local’ is unpacked to introduce the urban as a lived space providing opportunities for both co-existence and contestation. Second, by bringing the city in we explore the city as a site of friction between the ‘international’ and the ‘local’ and how this is expressed in social and physical spaces. We explore frictional dynamics between the liberal peacebuilding discourse and local practices – some which construct and uphold the divisions of the contested city, while others overcome division and stimulate interactions across divides. Third, this article illustrates how such frictional peacebuilding has produced anomalies and antagonisms in the divided cities of Mostar and Mitrovica. The article concludes with some final remarks on the limits of the liberal peacebuilding to transform divided cities and reconcile communities. The outcome of the frictional engagement in divided cities demonstrates that unpredicted, unintentional and unforeseen constructive and destructive discourses and practices challenge both the liberal

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<sup>2</sup> The ethnographic fieldwork in Mostar and Mitrovica was conducted by Ivan Gusic in connection with his Master’s thesis.

and the ethno-national.

## **2. PEACEBUILDING AND FRICTION**

Peacebuilding interventions demonstrate complex, multidimensional and frictional engagements between the 'international' and the 'local'. Yet, the mainstream peacebuilding literature often constructs a dichotomy between those doing the intervening, and those intervened upon. A recognition that such dichotomy is not particularly helpful for understanding the realities of the peacebuilding landscape has recently brought about research on hybridized peace processes and the liberal-local hybrid peace (Mac Ginty 2010, 2011, Richmond 2009, Wilén 2012). Liberal peacebuilding literature often references the importance of local ownership in relations to the need for localized and contextualized peace (Donais 2009). However, few attempts have been made to critically examine how peace is localised and the local agencies engaged in such processes (Aggestam and Björkdahl 2012, Björkdahl 2012a, 2012c, Pickering 2007). Yet, the liberal peacebuilding discourse from which most peacebuilding interventions are designed seems to hold certain assumptions about people and places, which are constructed from the local/international peacebuilding dichotomy.

Given the nature of the peacebuilding process, the 'local' is as diverse as the 'international'. Yet, the liberal peacebuilding discourse is based on key assumptions that the 'local', with whom the international peacebuilders can engage, is relatively monolithic. The post-conflict community is understood as lacking agency. It is apparent that the term 'local' is frequently used in the liberal peacebuilding discourse and although it has adopted a variety of meanings it is often used in a homogenising, derogatory, essentialising and 'othering' manner (Mitchell and Richmond 2012). Gradually, 'local' has thus become meaningless as a term as researchers ascribe localness to any actors and features of the post-conflict society that are not characterised as 'international' (Call 2008, Chesterman 2004, Paris 2004, 2010, Paris and Sisk 2009). The liberal peacebuilding discourse is thus unable to capture the diversity of localness, and the ways in which this diversity creates new concepts of power, space, and peace. Moving outside liberal peacebuilding's

homogenised understanding of local, local-local, localism and localness may cast new light on local agency. Actors occupying the urban space, for example, are highly diverse, with a wide range of lived experiences, backgrounds and daily realities. They are constantly shifting and redefining their space, sometimes visibly, and other times not. Recent critical research however attempts to diversify and differentiate ‘the local’, but neither the nature of the local nor localness has been examined properly (Mac Ginty 2011, Richmond 2009).

This article develops the notion of ‘friction’ to assist in understanding how internationals practically engage with localness. “As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (Tsing 2005:5). It suggests that both the international and the local most likely will be transformed in the process of interaction; that there will be a fair amount of “friction” when the international liberal peacebuilding actors, discourse, and practice engage with post-conflict realities. Yet international forces, such as liberal peace, do not transform local post-conflicts environments in a one-way street without acknowledging the feedback loop from the recipient societies encountering these forces. The idea that the particularities of the local and the perceived universalism of the international are actually in constant confrontation, and transformation with each other needs to be recognised. As Tsing poignantly states this relationship between international and local is actually “push-pull, producing entirely new realities” for both local spaces and international discourses. Hence, friction hints at the co-constitutive dynamic of the international and the local, the external and the internal, the inside and the outside. The international discourse of liberal peacebuilding, “can only be charged and enacted in the sticky materiality of practical encounters” (Tsing 2005:1). As a result, the reality of imposing a liberal peacebuilding toolkit in a city like Mostar or Mitrovica will not look like the international blueprint nor the locally envisioned divide, but something new will emerge through the friction of the international and local interplay. The dynamic processes of engaging with ‘reality’ in divided cities is much more complex than the international peacebuilding industry expects, as frictional encounters make peacebuilding particularly precarious.



### **3. THE CITY – A SITE OF FRICTIONAL INTERNATIONAL/LOCAL ENCOUNTERS**

The liberal peace discourse of international peacebuilders emphasises human rights including minority rights, democracy, good governance, equality, rule of law and civil society – all key elements of a liberal polity. These liberal assumptions, it is assumed, are more easily localised in cities as cities traditionally are regarded as more cosmopolitan, progressive and are often sites for social change. Yet, the urban space is complex, different from the rural and the global and it possesses a challenging duality. Through the use of propinquity we are able to disentangle the urban from the rural and the global. ‘Propinquity’ is a term that captures the particular characteristic of the city where actors interact frequently within the closeness of the urban space. It does not apply at other scales and through propinquity we might be able to expose the urban as a particular political practice (John 2009). Propinquity also means that political leadership is close to what it administrates and where politics extends way beyond the formal institutions into the realms of governance and civil society (John 2009). Thus the city emerges as a potential space for intergroup contact and interdependence that may generate tolerance, progressiveness and creativity that may be conducive to peacebuilding. On the other hand, the closeness of the urban space keeps conflicting communities in the same everyday, transforming them into ‘intimate enemies’ thus having a potentially destructive role in peacebuilding (Bollens 2012). The urban space is consequently Janus-faced, complex, and may facilitate or obstruct transitions towards peace.

The divided city demonstrates how identity, contestation and space are intimately intertwined. Here political, social and spatial divisions persist after a ceasefire has been reached (Bollens 2012). The traditional relays of local democratic accountability are assaulted, earlier systems of urban governance break down and central government support for municipal activities are dismantled. The disappearance of mixed residential areas, the influx and placement of refugees change the demographics of the urban space and accelerates the spatial polarisation of the city (Kliot and Mansfeld 1999). In such a city divides materialise themselves in political entrenchments and struggles for domination and manifest themselves spatially in the everyday

interaction (Dunn 1994). Urban divides thus leave few or no part of the city unaffected, and they gradually sharpen existing tensions. They create imaginary walls in people's mind, spatial boundaries in the streets, and division between political authorities. In a divided city a stable settlement is pending, thus freezing the conflict, and making the city a stumbling block for both internal and external peace efforts.

The city of Mostar emerged from the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992-1995) as a divided city with unresolved ethno-nationalistic conflicts. The 'war within the war' between Bosniaks and Croats split the city into two autonomous halves the east and the west along the Austro-Hungarian Boulevard (Björkdahl 2012b, Yarwood 1999). Although the symbolic 'Stari Most' (the Old Bridge) has been rebuilt, the two communities remain deeply divided, as does the city. An internationally designed political framework based on complex power-sharing mechanisms between the ethno-national groups was imposed on the city in 1994 as a guarantee for a transparent, legitimate and democratic system of governance. Although the divides in Mostar were created by the war they were maintained and reinforced by international peacebuilding strategies such as the power-sharing system. These divisions are spatial, social and political constructs closely linked with identities. A divided city is rarely a mutually accepted status quo and the urban space continues to be contested (Bollens 2007). In the divided city of Mitrovica the situation is equally problematic as the once united city now consists of two separate societies with limited interaction and parallel institutions. The cementation of the divides can be traced to the initial actions of KFOR and other international peacebuilders. In the aftermath of the NATO bombings in 1999, external actors sealed the town and separated the North from the South to hinder the conflicting groups from escalating the violence (Interview with head of INDEP Gashi 2011). The riverbanks of River Ibar were made a line of demarcation patrolled by KFOR soldiers. In retrospect liberal peacebuilding facilitated the polarisation, normalised the divide, and legitimised those that struggle for partition.

#### **4. SPACES OF FRICTION**

Space is "constituted through interaction" as Gaffikin and Morrissey assert (2011:100). Consequently, the interplay between the international and the local

and between the liberal peace package and local practices are obviously not predetermined nor detached from the particular space in which they occur. Spaces of friction are manifestations and products of agency rather than merely providing the locale where agency can unfold. Such spaces thus display negotiations, mediation, coercion, and resistance, where alternative forms of everyday peace may emerge. In their encounters with the internationals, locals accept, adopt, subvert, resist, mimic, and mock the peacebuilding intervention producing outcomes comprising elements of both the international and the local. The liberal peacebuilding discourse from which most peacebuilding interventions are designed holds certain values, such as democracy, civic identity as well as local ownership that are to be translated into practice in post-conflict societies. Yet, when engaging with local realities in divided cities these values clash with ambitions to establish ethnocratic governance, the belief of the superiority of ethnic identities, and local agency that resist or co-opt the peacebuilding efforts.

#### **DEMOCRACY ENCOUNTERS ETHNOCRACY**

Democratisation, according to the liberal peacebuilding discourse, is assumed to create a system of rule embracing elected “officers” who undertake to represent the “interest” or views of citizens within delimited territories while upholding “the rule of law” (Held 1995:5 cited in Franks and Richmond 2008). Democracy is thus a form of governance in which all eligible citizens have an equal say in the decisions that affect their lives and it allows people to participate equally. Part and parcel of this norm package is good governance often promoted in the shape of power-sharing arrangements where minority rights are secured through representation, vetoes, and equality before the law (Sriram 2008). In divided cities susceptible to intense inter-communal, identity-based contestation, a different logic of power comes into play. Here, urban governance resembles an ethnocracy rather than a democracy. The ‘demos’ is redefined and ethnicity not citizenship forms the basis for power. Political boundaries privilege the ethnic majority’s domination of the minority. Politics is ethnicised as the ethnic logic of distribution of power polarises politics and shapes the party system. The dominant ethnic community appropriates the state apparatus public institutions (Yiftachel and Ghanem 2004). This type of ethnocracy challenges the ‘universal’ idea of liberal democracy. Thus, the

international democracy discourse often applied in post-conflict societies rarely travels frictionless to ethno-nationally divided cities. The aim of the international peacebuilders is to transform the ethnocracy of the divided city into a liberal democracy. Clashes subsequently become unavoidable, causing friction between the international and the local – between democracy and ethnocracy. Yet, this obviously frictional process of international/local interactions should not be seen only as a confrontation between international ideas about liberal democracy and the local practice of ethnocracy. Rather it is an unstable, unexpected and uncertain process in which universals and particulars confluence creating new and messy dynamics, actors, and structures unanticipated by and diverging from both the international discourse and the local practice. Frictional peacebuilding may either transform the discourse and practice of the international peacebuilders, adapting democracy to the conditions and circumstances of the divided city or resist the liberal democratic peace by engaging in anti-pluralist, ethnically polarized politics oriented towards maintaining status quo.

#### *MOSTAR*

Initially, the international peacebuilders made reunification of Mostar a priority regarding it as a potential flashpoint for the wider conflict. This ambition of a joint, democratic urban governance of the city obviously clashed with the practices of the local ethno-nationalist elites, who in the aftermath of the ceasefire and the Washington Agreement of 1994, resolutely began securing war gains to ensure Croat ownership and domination, or a substantial Bosniak presence and influence. Faced with this post-conflict reality the international peacebuilders unwillingly divided Mostar into six heavily decentralized and ethnically pure municipalities (three Croatian in the west and three Bosniak in the east) with an overarching city council with limited executive power (Office of the High Representative 2004). The three Croat municipalities united and functioned like a coherent urban governance system in western Mostar, while the three Bosniak municipalities functioned in a similar way in eastern Mostar, with little formal political contact between the two. The ‘common’ mayor and the deputy mayor (one Croat and one Bosniak) became figureheads of unity but without political influence. The city council was bypassed and voters only had influence over the side of the city in which they lived (Interview with OHRs political officer Bozic 2011). While officially ‘one’ city, Mostar was

institutionally divided as local elites took control over the political institutions obstructing the process of democratisation.

In 2004 the Office of the High Representative (OHR) abolished the six municipalities in favour of one municipality for Mostar and imposed a new political framework to ensure a more democratic system of governance. It was based on complex power-sharing system between Bosniaks and Croats aiming to reunite the city. The power-sharing mechanisms were based on the pre-war census of 1991 and included election regulations for the city council, indirect election of the mayor of Mostar, and the principle that public servants were to be appointed according to ethno-national proportions. Most executive powers in Mostar were transferred to the strengthened city council, which basically forced the ethnic parties to work together for the first time since before the war (Office of the High Representative 2004). This was regarded as an institutional set-up that would guarantee the citizens of Mostar a more democratic governance system and equal access to public services regardless of their ethno-national background (Commission for Reforming the City of Mostar 2003). However, the imposed power-sharing framework did not manage to mediate the conflict, transforming the two ethnocracies into one shared yet paralysed political system due to an abundance of vetoes and political stalemates. A case in point is the 16 failed attempts to elect a mayor after the 2008 elections, which forced the OHR to once again to intervene (Interview with OSCE political officer Rafitbegovic 2011). The election results demonstrate the overlap between the political, ethnic and the geographical divide.

The international liberal peacebuilding approach was structural, technocratic and administrative, imposing unification through mainly social engineering and institutional design, while the local practices were processual and political, resisting the international versions of liberal democracy and promoting ethno-nationalism trying to appropriate political institutions and decision-making processes in order to exercise ethnic dominance. Thus the frictional encounters of the internationally promoted democratisation and the ethno-nationalist practices of local elites resulted in a 'flawed' democratic system of governance, cumbersome decision-making procedures and empty institutions. The externally imposed Statute of Mostar was eventually proclaimed

unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of BiH (CCBH) due to injustices in how votes are distributed, thus making Mostar the only municipality not to participate in the local elections in October 2012. Consequently, while the city of Mostar is officially united, a united everyday remains missing. The political tensions still overlap with ethnic divisions, and the dominant political parties are mono-ethnic and operate in an ethnified discourse that depicts the Bosniaks and BiH-Croats as enemies.

#### *MITROVICA*

The peacebuilding efforts undertaken in Mitrovica followed a different path. In the aftermath of the 1999 bombings, international peacebuilding actors aimed at reintegrating the city by implementing the standardised blueprint, establishing transparent and accountable democratic institutions that were to include both Albanians and Serbs (Schleicher 2012). Albanians majority concentrated in the south of the city appreciated the intention to dismantle the old Serbian political system and create a new system that promised equal representation. However, the Serbs in the north of the city equated abandoning their existing institutions with submission to Albanian discrimination (Interview with anonymous EUSR official 2011). Thus, the post-conflict geographical divide of Mitrovica meant that the new, Kosovo-wide, political system reached the river Ibar, and no further. Serbs rejected UNMIK attempts to establish new institutions in the north of Mitrovica and resisted efforts to dismantle the Belgrade-financed institutions in place in the north. The unforeseen consequence was that Serbs from the north participated in UNMIK institutions in the south while the Serb institutions in the north remained intact. Thus two parallel systems emerged. One exclusively Serb based in the north in which only Serbian parties participate, and one in the south in which both ethnic groups were included (International Crisis Group 2000b).

The friction between the peacebuilding content and post-conflict context in Mitrovica produced messy and unpredictable outcomes. Serbs voted in two local elections, Mitrovica had two city councils, and political accountability was undermined since political obligations of the two councils overlapped (International Crisis Group 2002). Following increased tensions and riots the political divide became so intractable that the *Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo*

*Status Settlement* (CSP) actually divided the city into Mitrovica North and Mitrovica South (Ahtisaari 2007). Thus, today Mitrovica is characterised by parallel institutions. There are few Serbs participating in the political institutions of the South, and no Albanians participate in the North. Attempts have been made by the Kosovo government and International Civilian Office (ICO), responsible to assist the implementation of the Ahtisaari plan, to integrate the North into the political framework, but the municipality of Mitrovica North (the intended Serb Mitrovica municipality within the Kosovo institutions) is consistently boycotted and no one votes in these elections, in contrast to the Belgrade-organised elections and the Belgrade sponsored institutions. Thus, the internationally established institutions in northern Mitrovica are virtual institutions existing on paper only (Interview with KFOR political officer Flidr Flidr 2011, Interview with NGO activist Lazarevic 2011).

The liberal democracy envisioned by the international peacebuilders proved difficult to translate into local practices in Mitrovica. In contrast to Mostar, external actors never succeeded in creating united, citywide institutions in Mitrovica due to local resistance. Yet, the outcome has not been as imagined by the parties to the conflict. In a sense, the frictional encounters between international peacebuilding efforts and local resistance institutionalised the conflict where northern Mitrovica resembles a Serb ethnocracy, and southern Mitrovica consists of a hijacked democratic system turned into an Albanian ethnocracy.

#### **CIVIC IDENTITY FACES ETHNIC IDENTITY**

Part and parcel of the liberal peacebuilding discourse is ambitions to reconcile and reintegrate post-conflict societies by replacing exclusive ethnic identities with civic ones and ethnic spaces with shared ones (Bollens 2012, Lederach 1997, Philpott and Powers 2010). In divided cities efforts are thus made to promote a civic identity in a city that embraces differences and diversity and upholds the spatial right to the city for all (Gaffikin et al. 2010, Yarwood 1999). However, the intertwined concepts of civic identity and shared public space stand in stark contrast to the ethnic identities and exclusive spaces produced during the violent conflict and maintained in the post-conflict contestation of the urban space. The construction of ethno-nationalist discourses of identity

and belonging is an explicitly place-based process. Discourses of place frequently involve a rewritten version of local history which rejects or obscures the shared past of the integrated city (Young and Light 2001). Creating and maintaining the divided city through signs and symbols is based on a deliberate reshaping of place, a (re)construction of identity and the associated creation of a history to foster cultural homogeneity within borders of urban space, making re-representation of place in post-conflict societies significant for cementing divides and ethnic identities.

Thus, the divided city becomes a site of frictional engagement when international actors strive to replace ethnic identities with civic ones while the local practices reinforce ethnic identity as the “authentic”. To translate the discourse of civic identities and a cosmopolitan city into practice means transforming antagonistic ethno-nationalistic identities and discourses and their marks in the cityscape. This interplay inevitably produces international/local friction. The outcome of frictional engagement is manifested through the competitive construction of shared and ethnic spaces (Bollens 2012, Davis and Duren 2011, Gaffikin and Morrissey 2011).

#### *MOSTAR*

Mostar clearly depicts these frictional encounters and their outcomes. The EUAM (European Union Administration of Mostar), the predominant international peacebuilder in Mostar, was tasked with the ambitious objectives to reconstruct, reintegrate and reunify the city. Yet, it was faced with a number of challenges. An exodus of Mostarians seeking refuge abroad, an influx of internally displaced persons and refugees as well as an internal movement of urban dwellers moving from one side of the city to the other, altered the composition of Mostar’s post-war population and challenged the shared identity as Mostarian (Vetters 2007). In the direct aftermath of the war, resettling refugees and internally displaced persons as frontier populations became a tool to dilute the shared Mostarian identity and reinforce the ethnic identity, to colonise urban space and foster confrontation and to ensure territorial control. EUAM attempted to strengthen the pre-war shared Mostarian identity and local communities were consulted and local professionals from all ethnic groups were recruited in order to produce an All-Mostar Structure Plan (Björkdahl 2012b, Stahn 2008, Yarwood 1999). The



international discourse of promoting a civic identity thus caused severe resistance as local practices promoted ethnic identities through changing the cityscape. Instead of a shared, unified Mostar the Croat ‘west’ and Bosniak ‘east’ defined the city and served as base of identification.

In the west of Mostar EUAM was met with Croat symbols, anti-Bosniak messages, monuments to the Croatian Defence Council (HVO) and the notorious gigantic cross on Mount Hum, while Bosniak ownership of eastern Mostar was established with street names, flags, monuments to Army of Bosnia-Herzegovina (ABiH) and buildings. Symbols of unity and shared space were attacked through graffiti or destruction, both destroying previously shared public space and deterring people from interacting with ‘the other’ (Bollens 2012, Grodah 2002). An interview with OSCE political officer in Mostar stated that

*‘churches, crosses, mosques are built where there is no objective need, it is a matter of politics. (...) People are (...) marking their territory with these kinds of objects, demonstrating higher power, sending a message to the other side that this is ours, we belong here, we are dominant here. Particularly in Mostar this symbolism is highly expressed’ (Interview with OSCE Official Rafitbegovic 2011).*

EUAM’s peacebuilding efforts to build a unified city with a central zone and shared, safe spaces for interethnic contact were thus met with radical efforts among ethnonational elites to claim spatial ownership and neutralise common space untainted by ethnicity through marking the city space and obscuring the presence of ‘the other’.

In contrast, collective but not necessarily coordinated actions by individuals may transcend the ethnic identities and ethnic space and established multi-ethnic spaces. The Austro-Hungarian era Gymnasium that incorporates ‘two schools under one roof’ has together with the United World College in Mostar (UWCiM) initiated contact between students of different “ethnic identity” grown up in different parts of the city with limited or no previous contact with other ethnic groups. UWCiM is a high school that admits students from all over the world and has an integrated education. According to UWCiM’s

former PR officer Meri Musa

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

This attempt at transforming identity and space is can be regarded as one outcome of the frictional encounters between the liberal peacebuilding discourse promoting shared spaces and civic identity and local practices.

#### *MITROVICA*

In Mitrovica, like in Mostar, international peacebuilders (initially UNMIK, later replaced by ICO) promoted a civic identity and aimed to reintegrate the city, which in the aftermath of the conflict was politically, socially, economic and spatially divided along the River Ibar. However, efforts to unify Mitrovica ran counter to ideas of ethnic dominance held by Serb and Albanian local elites. The Serbs’ ‘hold your ground’ mentality aimed to counter the ‘Albanian advancement’, thus making the Serbs unreceptive to international ideas that were deemed as either naïve or anti-Serb. Consolidating the Serb ethnicity was regarded as the only viable way of survival for Serb community in Mitrovica (Interview with NGO activist Lazarevic 2011). Unable to safely express their identity during the Milosevic-era, the Albanians were after the game-changing events in 1999 not prepared to make substantial concessions vis-à-vis the Serbs, which were regarded as the historical oppressors.

The international peacebuilders’ attempts to construct shared public spaces, by moving already existing mixed markets, building the ‘Ibar Bridge’ in the city centre and establishing Kosovar institutions in northern Mitrovica to facilitate reconciliatory interethnic contact and promote a unifying identity was met with resistance. The idea that Serbs and Albanians would come together in these shared spaces, renew broken bonds, and forge new relationships was impossible to implement (Interview with anonymous EUSR Official 2011). Thus, the local practices to ‘secure’ dominance of Mitrovica by ethnifying the

cityspace with ethnic markers, exercising social pressure, and controlling spatial strategies clashed with the international peacebuilding discourse causing severe friction around identity reconstruction and its spatial expressions. Thus, northern Mitrovica is today crowded with Serbian flags, text in Cyrillic, offensive graffiti, and extreme Serb nationalists, infamously known as the 'bridge watchers', guarding the bridges deterring people to cross to the north side (Interview with Head of CBM Sylva 2011). On both sides stigmatization were used to discourage people from maintaining cross-community relations, and both threats and violence are used to exclude 'the other' and the divides were used to provide security for each community on 'their side'.

Frictional and awkward encounters between international peacebuilders' ideas and practices and the local context influenced the perception of identity and its links to space. The divided Mitrovica became two cities in one and people lived together separately and as a consequence people experience spatial paranoia, feeling safe only in 'their' space, thus cementing the divide (Interview with EULEX official Carlsson 2011, International Crisis Group 2000a, 2002, 2005, International Crisis Group 2011). The frictional engagement between the international peacebuilders pushing a liberal discourse and local resistance produced pockets of multi-ethnic space where contact across the divides occurs. There are a few spaces for multi-ethnic interaction or spontaneous encounters that can help foster civic identity. The Bosniak Mahalla is such a site where both Serbian and Albanian traders do business, own shops, and interact with each other. Due to lower prices certain shopping malls in the south attract Serbs, and due to higher wages Albanians are interested in work in the north multiplying the sites of contact, which over time may contribute to replace the ethno-nationalist discourse and reconstruct ethnic identities.

#### **PROMOTING LOCAL OWNERSHIP – GENERATING SCRIPTED AND CRITICAL AGENCY**

The international peacebuilding discourses around local ownership, local agency and local participation has certain limitations (Donais 2009, Pugh 2012). Edward Newman, for example, argues that local initiatives are seen as "legitimizing external control: giving the appearance of local ownership" (Newman 2009:26-53), which in reality is superficial and a means of

marginalising opposition. Local agency is in this international liberal peacebuilding discourse coded as belonging to the realm of backward localness. Often, the international peacebuilding discourse excludes certain agencies, empower some, while ‘disciplining’ others, effectively ‘scripting’ local peacebuilding efforts. In many peacebuilding sites frictional encounters have the potential to create new agencies and the international discourse of local ownership produces both scripted and critical agency (Tsing 2005:16). Thus, the working of power through liberal peacebuilding and a set of dispositions inherent in liberal peacebuilding shapes the effects of agency and the ability of individuals to shape the post-conflict environment and their lives.

Scripted agency refers to local actors compliance with the liberal peacebuilding discourse and related practices. It is a form of standardised agency recognisable in local actors co-option or compliance with liberal peacebuilding discourse in different post-conflict locales where peacebuilding interventions take place (Mac Ginty 2012). Resistance towards the liberal peace is viewed by the representatives of the liberal peacebuilding as obstructing the transition from war to peace. Local objectives conflicting with international aims are regarded as backwards and local methods to reach these objectives are perceived as counterproductive. In the divided city the results may be co-option where elites pay lip service to the international peacebuilding objectives. In some circumstances scripted agency is a self-disciplining agency that enrolls in the peacebuilding project of the internationals and accepts relations of inequality thus ensure the reproduction of power relations in their everyday acts and relationships.

Yet, the frictional interplay between international peacebuilding and local practices may also generate ‘loopholes and gaps’ for critical agency (Mitchell and Richmond 2012). It is often regarded as “agency from below” that advances an alternative, everyday agenda for peace from the official peacebuilding processes. “Resistance is the essence of such critical agency” and critical agencies play a major role in unsettling the liberal peace, shaping peacebuilding processes and in innovation for new forms of peace (Richmond 2011). Hence, critical agency is made possible through the combinations and contradictions of liberal peacebuilding and ethno-nationalist governance that unintentionally produce social groups sharing a common experience, for

example being forced, or more or less voluntarily choosing, to move to the part of town where their ethnic group is in majority. The shared experience creates possibilities for those individuals to recognise common interests and mobilise for change (Li 2007, Scott 1998). These critical agencies resist the nuance-blind categorisation of their cities and oppose the international peacebuilding approach that groups them with other members of ‘their’ assigned ethnic belonging. They refuse to acknowledge scripted reconciliation efforts without substance where people are brought together to ‘reconcile’. Thereby they resist making ethnic identity a counterproductive focus in peacebuilding. In contrast to the standardised approach to secure participation and ownership inherent in the international peacebuilding discourse critical urban agencies take a different approach when they strive to enrich their communities and provide events have substance and added value.

#### *MOSTAR*

In Mostar local ownership of the peace and the peacebuilding process were hijacked by ethno-nationalist elites, co-opting the liberal peacebuilding by paying lip-service to its political buzzwords. Liberal norms were included in party programs, in the constitution, and adopted in laws. However, party programs and laws are secondary to politics and everyday practices (Magnusson 2011). In practice, the political elites mimicked the liberal peacebuilding discourse on equal rights and non-discrimination of minorities in order to create space for ethno-national practices that divided Mostar into “two cities in one” (Interview with OSCE political officer Rafitbegovic 2011). In the everyday, ethnic belonging usually triumphs merits and competences, as party membership often is required to receive employment (Interview with political scientist Lastic 2011). Furthermore, ethno-nationalist elites claim to strive for a joint curriculum, while actively trying to keep the educational institutions ethnically separated in order to prevent interactions across ethnic boundaries (Interview with head of Mostar City department for education Sadovic 2011). By officially accepting the liberal peacebuilding discourse spaces were produced where political elites can impose ethno-nationalism as other actors not mimicking this discourse become marginalised.

While consistently being omitted from the formal peacebuilding process, some actors took advantage of the frictional encounters between the international

peacebuilding discourse and the practice of the ethno-nationalist elite resisting both misdirected international peacebuilding initiatives and the ethno-nationalist governance. The Youth Cultural Centre Abrasevic (OKC Abrasevic) is one example of an organization that tried to overlook interethnic differences and bring youth together. Actively challenging the ethnification of space, OKC Abrasevic transformed a part of the former battle frontline on the Austro-Hungarian Boulevard into a multicultural venue. On a regular basis the OKC Abrasevic organised seminars, movie screenings, workshops, and exhibitions as well as provided working space for local artists and musicians (Interview with Head of OKC Abrasevic Coric 2011). In interviews with teachers of the Austro-Hungarian Gymnasium located at the former frontline, they described small initiatives among certain teachers to establish contact between their Croat and Bosniak pupils. Mostar's education department implicitly supported such initiatives as it tried to integrate schools physically through reconstruction e.g. placing the institutionally separated medical high schools of Croats and Bosniaks in the same building. A similar cooperation is found between individual professors at University Džemal Bijedić of Mostar located in the east and at University of Mostar located in the west. They established a joint course on human rights and intercultural relations with mixed classes held at altering locations, making students cross divides both relationally and spatially (Interview with theology professor Dilberovic 2011, Interview with history professor Hakalovic 2011, Interview with head of school at UWCiM Mindoljevic 2011).

These initiatives rooted in local communities demonstrate individuals expressing critical agency that are usually not perceived as political. However, in contrast to international peacebuilding and its approach to local ownership and acceptance of the scripted agency's adherence to the multi-ethnic 'agendas', local grass-root initiatives depict critical agency generating innovative modes of adaption to post-war situations and show coping mechanisms evolved in the everyday.

#### *MITROVICA*

The demands posed and expectations held by external peacebuilders, such as EULEX, UNMIK, KFOR, ICO concerning the activities and actions of local actors in Mitrovica are more or less identical to other post-conflict situations.

To be a partner in peacebuilding local actors were expected to pay tribute to the multi-ethnic society, respect minority rights, believe in equality before the law and the rule of law, cherish languages, traditions and history of all communities, while ‘promoting a spirit of peace, tolerance and inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue’ (Ahtisaari 2007: articles 1-3). While the Serbian political elite rejected this discourse and view most external actors as anti-Serb, the Albanian side mimics it and adopted the externally drafted constitution. Thus the Serbs were not regarded as a partner in peacebuilding, while the Albanian’s rhetorical commitment to the liberal peace, inclusion of all citizens, and respect for equal rights made them the preferred interlocutor in Kosovo. Yet, the everyday practices failed to match the rhetoric. For example, discrimination by the Albanian majority against various minorities e.g. Serbs, Romani, Gorani, Egyptians, Turks is widespread. In southern Mitrovica Serbs felt intimidated and little was done to address the security issues of minorities. Speaking Serbian was potentially provocative, the Serb cemetery was continuously vandalised and no official reparations were undertaken (Interview with EULEX official Carlsson 2011, Interview with University of Mitrovica PR officer Mikic 2011, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2012). In Mitrovica the problematique concerning local agency is the same as in most peacebuilding projects. Actors deemed as unimportant or not complying are excluded and their actions portrayed as obstruction, as elaborated by the former head of CBM Idrizi:

*‘This local ownership, it does not exist. All strategies are formed and written somewhere else; the people are never asked about anything, they are never included into anything. That is why the situation is like it is; it is the wrong approach towards the problems in Mitrovica that have led to this situation [the divide]. A sustainable progress and development cannot be achieved because the right actors are not included, these are people that live here, work here, and plan to stay here, not these from the outside. The IC are giving more money to NGOs from Belgrade then from here, resulting in that people from Mitrovica do not have a platform, nor structure, and these from Belgrade, or Pristina, do not have the feeling for Mitrovica. You cannot expect them to achieve good results’ (Interview 2011)*

When observing the frictional interplays between international and local actors,

it becomes clear that some actors resist both the shallowness and counterproductive outcomes of international peacebuilding discourses and the dubious acceptance of faked elite reconciliatory rhetoric and their contradictory practices. One such example of critical local agency is CBM (Community Builders Mitrovica), a local organisation that works through active participation and identifies approaches that bring people together, signalling that informality and respect for opposing views might have a more prosperous future than referring to legal rights and moral entitlements. CBM embodies this approach, when it turns its attention to everyday issues such as, reconstruction, employment, and supply of cultural and social activities (Interview Idrizi 2011). This home-grown approach that involves mixed groups of actors, ethnically neutral initiatives, and a belief that people want to live their lives in peace, has earned CBM activists respect from both sides (Interview with anonymous Serb NGO activist). CBM actively defies the urban frontier of Mitrovica as its activists cross the bridges daily, trying to bring people together (Interview with former head of CBM Idrizi 2011). They organise Mitrovica Rock School, which works to promote interethnic contact between young people and has one premise on each side of the river Ibar. Through music people from both sides interact and these contacts have spillover effects to their parents (Interview with Head of CBM Sylva 2011).

While it is hard to measure the impact of such initiatives, they seem to demonstrate that a multi-ethnic society can function even if it does not demonstrate the traits imagined by the international peacebuilders. CBM, for example, provides an alternative voice in contrast to both ethno-national elites and unrealistic international peacebuilders. These are examples of how the urban place can provide people with opportunities to come together, meet and interact moving societies forward, as well as how frictional encounters can create unanticipated positive outcomes.

## **5. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The international/local interplay in three spaces of friction, as demonstrated here, forms post-conflict societies in unpredictable ways as ideas, actors and practices are transformed. New insights are gained concerning the actual materialisation and outcome of this transformative interplay. It demonstrates



how global ideas are dependent on and interconnected with the particularities where they are materialised. Friction demonstrates that reality in a given space is not found in the universal or the particular, but in the intersection where transformative processes occur when the two confluence (Interview with head of CBM Syla 2011). The analysis of this interplay shows that friction is a useful tool to examine ‘the awkward, unequal, unstable and creative qualities of interconnection across differences’ (Tsing 2005), between global peacebuilders and local agencies, which transforms the liberal peace’s ideas, actors and methods, forming new post conflict environments and as well as being formed by them.

Encounters between universal ideas of the international peacebuilding discourse and the particular practices found in Mostar and Mitrovica have been far from frictionless. When using the divided city as a diagnostic site, this article has been able to observe frictional encounters between international discourses and local practices. This frictional peacebuilding has produced unexpected outcomes through a fluid push-and pull process filled with uncertainty and non-linearity.

#### **DEMOCRACY VS. ETHNOCRACY**

Regarding the externally imposed framework of liberal democracy, local elites in both Mostar and Mitrovica resisted its ideational and institutional implication, seeing it as a threat to their efforts to secure war gains and maintain ethnocratic governance. The local power-holders resistance and rejection of liberal democracy forced the international actors to concessions regarding the democratic structures. In Mostar this meant that the local elites could co-opt the political institutions by paying lip-service to buzzwords of democracy thus escaping both international pressure and the envisioned democratic governance. In Mitrovica lowered democratic standards allowed the Albanians to co-opt the democratic institutions, which in turn alarmed the Serbs to reject the external framework all together. Through frictional encounters, international ideas became both resisted and co-opted by local agencies, a process which transformed the understanding of democracy. The subsequent frictional outcome in both cities was exclusion of non-nationalistic actors, cemented ethnocratic power-structures, and a zero-sum discourse.

However, while the conflict continued within the political institutions, frictional peacebuilding formally united Mostar into a framework that was accepted by the two sides that are now forced to interact and, to a limited extent, compromise. Mitrovica, on the other hand, was and continues to be institutionally disconnected into two ethnocracies that function without contacts across the divide.

#### **CIVIC IDENTITY VS. ETHNIC IDENTITY**

The creation of shared spaces was either resisted or rejected in both Mostar and Mitrovica. Attempts facilitated by external actors have by local elites been met with an increase in the ethnification of space, as well as the destruction of formerly shared spaces and memories, in order to secure spatial dominance in 'their' parts of the city.

However, the international discourse has also been able to ideationally connect with alternative ideas in both cities, held by actors in favour for more interethnic contact and a shared city. These have in turn, through friction, adapted the external ideas in order to make the ideas resonate with local settings and practices. The outcome of frictional encounters is fairly comparable in both cities as space has become or remained ethnified, subsequently affecting spatial strategies and cementing the divide. Nonetheless, within these spatial divides small neutral pockets of shared space have either been sustained since before the conflict or created by local actors in the aftermath. There adapted international ideas are articulated in opposition to hegemonic ethnic discourses.

#### **SCRIPTED VS. CRITICAL AGENCY**

In both Mostar and Mitrovica the encounters between ideas about local ownership and local agency caused unexpected outcomes in terms of scripted and critical local agencies. In Mostar and Southern Mitrovica local elites, faced with international pressures, accepted or co-opted the international discourse by setting their own goals aside, or just pretending to practice what the international peacebuilding discourse preached. Such strategic adoption severely limited the space for non-complying agency. Northern Mitrovica deviated from this, as the international ideas were rejected together with the scripted agency. Frictional peacebuilding in Mostar and southern Mitrovica

provided a space where ethno-nationalist actors could hijack the democratic institutions by demonstrating a rhetorical commitment to liberal democracy. In northern Mitrovica the critical agency persisted using a mono-ethnic political discourse resisting external pressure. The loopholes created by frictional peacebuilding meant that actors excluded from the peacebuilding process could use their agency outside the formal peacebuilding processes either to support or undermine peace.

What can be concluded is that the frictional processes and outcomes that can be assessed in Mostar and Mitrovica are disordered and international liberal peacebuilding ideas have been negotiated and mediated in encounters with local practices resulting in unexpected and at times unwanted, hybrid and ambivalent outcomes. Neither city is governed democratically, yet Mostar and Mitrovica are not complete ethnocracies. The processes and resulting outcomes have not been univocal. International ideas have been changed by encountered local realities, while local practices have been altered and challenged by the international practices. Often the encounters have been conflictual as the international peacebuilding discourse has been rejected, resisted or co-opted. Other times the encounters has been characterised by sympathy and mutual goals. Friction is necessarily a relational process, meaning that ideas, practices and actors will both change and be changed by through their interaction.

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