The spatial turn in peace and conflict studies: contributions, limitations and opportunities for research on space–time heterogeneity

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The spatial turn in peace and conflict studies: contributions, limitations and opportunities for research on space–time heterogeneity

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ABSTRACT
The spatial turn in peace and conflict studies brought valuable insights about space in (post-)conflict contexts. Nevertheless, critiques of this literature call for further engagement with spatial heterogeneity. I suggest that analyzing space–time relationships is a promising avenue, as understandings of space are substantiated by heterogeneous temporal experiences. To capture space–time heterogeneity, I introduce the concept of ‘spatio-temporal conflicts’, which draws attention to how actors construct spatial narratives based on heterogeneous and conflicting temporalities. I illustrate the analytical usefulness of this concept by employing it to explore conflicting space–time narratives around the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in post-war Mostar.

Introduction
This article reviews the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies1, a turn that has gained traction in the field after key publications over the last decade (e.g. 2022b, Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Björkdahl, 2013; Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a; Brigg, 2020; Brigg & George, 2020). Works within this research agenda have claimed that peace and conflict scholars often analyse spatial settings but rarely use ‘space’ as a central concept (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Chojnacki & Engels, 2016). Against this backdrop, the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies brought ‘space’ into the spotlight to better understand how space relates to war and peace (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a, 2022b; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017). This turn, despite being a relatively recent development in the field, has already made significant contributions to understanding space in (post-)conflict societies. Conceptually, the spatial turn brought an innovative conceptual toolkit to peace and conflict studies. These included concepts such as space, place, and place-making, used by scholars to understand how war and peace are spatially emplaced and structured.2 Moreover, scholars have also developed their own conceptual tools such as ‘peacescapes’ (Björkdahl, 2013; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017), ‘ethnoscapes’ (Björkdahl, 2013; Dijkema & Korajac, 2022), ‘peace
spaces’ (Vogel, 2018) and ‘spaces for peace’ (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2022a, 2022b) to
describe places where war and peace are emplaced. Empirically, research within the
spatial turn in peace and conflict studies has covered different empirical contexts and
shown that war and peace are materially grounded in space (see, for instance, Björkdahl
& Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a, 2022b; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Brigg & George, 2020).

The spatial turn in peace and conflict studies is relatively new in the field, and scholars
are still critically reflecting upon the advantages, shortcomings and ways to develop this
research agenda. Megoran and Dalby (2018) propose a broader examination, urging
scholars to consider not only local peacebuilding agency but also the complex roles of
geopolitics, great powers, and power relations in contested processes of (re)constructing
(post-)conflict spaces. On a different note, Brigg (2020, p. 535) critically argues that the
spatial turn in peace and conflict studies tends to not ‘sufficiently engage the socio-spatial
difference of diverse peoples’. The author suggests that this research agenda should
engage more with difference by exploring the heterogeneous ways in which diverse
peoples perceive and conceptualize space, place and cognate concepts that are used in
this research agenda. Claske Dijkema, in a dialogue with Annika Björkdahl, criticized
the binary logic inherent in concepts such as ‘peacescapes’ and ‘warscapes’, which tend
to draw attention to either spaces of peace or spaces of war. For being binaries, these
conceptual tools can hinder researchers from adequately capturing heterogeneous attitudes
towards space in (post-)conflict societies. Despite criticizing the spatial turn in peace and
conflict studies from different perspectives, scholars tend to converge on the observation
that this research agenda lacks sufficient engagement with spatial heterogeneity and
difference. Therefore, advancing this research agenda necessitates in-depth involvement
with distinct actors and their heterogeneous understandings and influence over space
(Megoran & Dalby, 2018), a comprehensive exploration of diverse peoples perspectives
(Brigg, 2020), and moving beyond conceptual frameworks that rely on binary distinctions
which simplify social reality (as noted in Dijkema’s critique).

Building upon these critiques, I propose that investigating space–time heterogeneity in
(post-)conflict societies can enhance scholars’ ability to analytically capture spatial hetero-
gegeneity, thereby advancing the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies. Research within
critical geography recognizes that time is a constitutive dimension of space (e.g. Crang,
This is because ‘[a]ll of the attempts [to define space] depend on a reading of both history and geography’ (Massey, 2005, p. 189). Thus, actors make sense of space based
on their individual and collective memory, expectations, interpretations and experiences
of the past, present and future (Crang, 2011; Ho, 2021). Time has an objective dimension
(e.g. calendars, years, duration, events in time) (Ellegård, 2019) but it also has a lived
dimension which draws attention to the heterogeneous ways in which the flow of time
is experienced (Adam, 1990; Crang, 2001, 2011; May & Thrift, 2001; Mueller-Hirth,
2017; Munn, 1992). Due to the heterogeneity of temporal experiences (Adam, 1990;
Mueller-Hirth, 2017) which inform narratives about space (Ho, 2021; May & Thrift,
2001), different actors often display heterogeneous, sometimes ambivalent, spatial
narratives and lived experiences. Therefore, engaging with space–time requires being
attuned to the multiplicity of space as well as to the distinct lived experiences of time.

However, as I elaborate later on, research about space in post-conflict societies often
foregrounds the spatial rather than its temporal elements. Key sufficiently explored the
works within the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies often lack theorization of the relationship between space and time (see, for instance, Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016) or limit the ‘time’ dimension of space to refer to the capacity of agency in transforming spaces of war over a certain period (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Forde, 2019b; Kappler, 2017). This has also been the case within the geographies of peace research agenda that has also been committed to understanding the socio-spatial facet of peace. This body of research has also fallen short in analytically investigating the temporal aspect of space. Similar to the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies, peace geographers simply bring in the ‘time’ dimension to acknowledge the variation of peace across space, time, and scale (see, for instance, Kobayashi, 2009; Koopman, 2014; Macaspac & Moore, 2022, 2024; Megoran, 2011; Williams & McConnell, 2011). There remains a tendency to prioritise spatial analysis over temporal considerations in empirical studies, despite the potential insights temporal analysis could provide to understand attitudes towards places in (post-)conflict societies.

To help further debates on space-time in both research agendas, in this article I develop the concept of ‘spatio-temporal conflicts’, which draws attention to how different actors mobilise time and temporalities in their heterogeneous and often conflicting narratives about space. This conceptual tool prioritises the study of spatio-temporal heterogeneity and allows scholars to capture the multiple, sometimes ambivalent and contested, ways in which space and time come together in narratives about space in societies affected by armed violence. In this article, by defining spatio-temporal conflicts, providing an analytical framework to capture such conflicts and demonstrating how the concept can used to comprehend empirical realities, I expect to further debates within the spatial turn and geographies of peace research agendas and inspire scholars from these fields to reflect upon the space-time heterogeneity in (post-)conflict societies.

This article is structured as follows. It begins with a review of the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies, where I discuss its key theoretical underpinnings, analytical foci and critiques directed to this research agenda. As I demonstrate, the critiques diagnose, from different standpoints, the tendency of the spatial turn to overlook spatial heterogeneity. Moving forward, I present space–time heterogeneity as a new and promising research field which could help address the limitations of the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies. I discuss the role of heterogeneous understandings of time impact in how space is (re)framed and narrated. After setting the theoretical basis for a new research agenda on space–time heterogeneity, I introduce the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts and provide an analytical framework. This is followed by an empirical application to understand conflicting narratives about the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in post-war Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), which will help illustrate how the spatio-temporal conflicts conceptual tool can be operationalized. In the concluding section, I summarize the main points made in this article and reinforce the relevance of space–time heterogeneity for researching (post-)conflict spaces.

The spatial turn in peace and conflict studies: an overview

This section consists of an overview of the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies and it is divided into three main parts. First, I briefly present the concept of space, understood by peace and conflict scholars as social and relational, which is the key theoretical underpinning of this research agenda. Second, I discuss the analytical
foci of the spatial turn and show how this research agenda has put a lot of effort into understanding how space materializes social relations which either sustain conflict divides or promote peace in (post-)conflict societies. The last section brings in the critiques that have been directed to the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies. The aim is to demonstrate that, albeit from different perspectives, the authors behind these critiques are calling for more engagement with spatial heterogeneity, an aspect of space that requires further exploration in order to move this research agenda forward.

**Key theoretical underpinning: space as social and relational**

The spatial turn in peace and conflict studies builds upon key concepts from critical geography to understand space in (post-)conflict societies. Researchers within this research agenda have built upon geographers’ understanding of space as social and relational, which stresses that ‘space is continuously being made, unmade, and remade by the incessant shuffling of heterogeneous relations’ (Doel, 2007, p. 809). This conceptualization implies that the materiality of the world is not a neutral, autonomous product. Rather, space is connected to social processes, ideas, and lived experiences (Doel, 2007; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005; Soja, 1989).

From authors such as Henri Lefebvre (1991, pp. 38–39), the spatial turn has borrowed his triadic understanding of space that gathers three co-constitutive and simultaneous dimensions of space: (1) perceived space, which refers to the materiality of space, (2) conceived space, which refers to the pre-conceived ideologies and social understandings that orient the production of space, and (3) lived space, which highlights the subjective, sensory and bodily experience of space and the ways humans interact with its material (perceived) and symbolic (conceived) dimensions (e.g. Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Chojnacki & Engels, 2016; Fischer, 2016; Gusic, 2020a).

Drawing on Doreen Massey (2005), the spatial turn literature has highlighted the relational and heterogeneous aspects of space (e.g. Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Elfversson et al., 2023; Forde, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Volčić & Simić, 2016). Massey (2005) sees space as relational and drives attention to how people and their spatial practices give meaning to places at a particular point in space and time. These social relations across space and time are, according to Massey (2005), essentially heterogeneous as people have moveable identities. This ultimately means that the uses of and meanings attributed to space are potentially contingent, polysemic and ambivalent. In a similar vein, spatial turn scholars have recently reminded us that space ‘is never ahistorical or apolitical but always contingent, it comes and goes, it is loaded with power, and reflects the outcome of present and past political struggles’ (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2022b, p. 660).

**Analytical foci and contributions: space, peace and war**

Analytically, peace and conflict scholars have applied the ideas of space as *social* and *relational* to emphasize the everyday co-constitution of places and their roles in promoting peace or deepening conflict divides in (post-)conflict societies (see, for instance, Björkdahl, 2013, 2015, 2018; Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a,
2022b; Björkdahl & Gusic, 2013, 2015; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, 2020; Forde, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Olivius & Hedström, 2021; Vogel, 2018). This research agenda has been particularly interested in how everyday subjects utilize their agency to transform (post-)war spaces through spatial practices (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2022a, 2022b; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Briggs & George, 2020; Macaspac & Moore, 2022; Megoran & Dalby, 2018; Olivius & Hedström, 2021). This shows through in the first monograph connecting space and peace, where Björkdahl and Kappler (2017, p. 25) employ the concept of place-making, defined as the capacity of agents ‘to give physical presence to an ideational space’, to understand how actors emplace peace or war through their spatial practices. Therefore, the focus of the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies, and also the geographies of peace literature (see Macaspac & Moore, 2024; Megoran & Dalby, 2018), has been on how agents build and sustain spaces for peace and conflict, with a particular emphasis on local actors and their everyday activities and peace activism (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a, 2022b; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Vogel, 2018).

Research within the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies has brought important insights into how space sustains war structures, segregation and antagonism in (post-)conflict societies (e.g. Björkdahl, 2013, 2015, 2018; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Dijkema & Korajac, 2022; Gusic, 2020). For instance, Björkdahl (2015) shows how the spatialization of ethnic identities serves as the basis for the production and maintenance of places in the city of Mostar – such as the Old Gymnasium – that fragment the city based on ethnicity. Analyzing Belfast, Gusic (2020) shows how sectarian geographies are produced through spatial practices that demarcate ‘ours’ versus ‘theirs’ spaces. Such spatial practices include the use of offensive graffiti honouring paramilitaries, flags, and kerbstones and lampposts painted either in the U.K. or Ireland colours to demarcate the Unionist or Loyalist areas in the city (Gusic, 2020). Dijkema and Korajac (2022) discuss three war monuments in Brčko, a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina split into three municipalities administered by Bosniak, Croat and Serb political groups. They show that three monuments in these different municipalities reinforce ethnic polarization by making use of mutually exclusive symbols (Dijkema & Korajac, 2022). To make sense of how segregation and ethnicity relate to space, some authors have utilized concepts such as ‘warscapes’ and ‘ethnoscapes’ (e.g. Björkdahl, 2013, 2015; Björkdahl & Gusic, 2013; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Dijkema & Korajac, 2022), which drives attention to places that are (re)produced by building upon war cleavages or mutually exclusive ethnic identities, respectively (Björkdahl, 2013; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017).

As far as the connection between space and peace is concerned, scholars have produced fine-grained analyses of places where agents’ spatial practices help to transform segregated sites and build peace in (post-)conflict societies (e.g. Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a, 2022b; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Forde, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Vogel, 2018). Research on this theme has covered a wide array of empirical contexts such as Belfast (Gusic, 2022), the Buffer Zone in Cyprus (Vogel, 2018), Cape Town (Forde, 2019b), Mitrovica (Gusic, 2022; Silva Huxter, 2023), Mostar (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Cole & Kappler, 2022; Forde, 2019a, 2019c; Gusic, 2022), and the Southwest Pacific (Brigg et al., 2022), and demonstrated how agents engage in place-making practices which are aimed at creating and transforming places to
foster inclusivity, security, tolerance and, ultimately, peace. Places that are products of such spatial peacebuilding agency have been represented through different conceptual terms. ‘Peacescapes’, for instance, is a term first developed by Björkdahl (2013, 2015) to understand how places fostering tolerance, diversity and civility contribute to building peace in urban settings. This concept has been picked up in other works (e.g. Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017) and has also influenced the development of alternative yet similar terminologies, such as ‘peace spaces’ (Vogel, 2018) and ‘spaces for peace’ (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2022a, 2022b). Together, these innovative empirical findings and conceptual tools demonstrate how space can support the diffusion of values connected to peace such as tolerance, resistance, civility and diversity.

The spatial turn in peace and conflict meets critique: limitations and ways forward

As demonstrated above, by employing conceptual tools such as peacescapes, peace spaces, warscapes and ethnoscapes to analyse (post-)conflict societies, the spatial turn has brought important insights to peace and conflict studies and the geographies of peace. Nevertheless, for being relatively new field of research, scholars are still critically reflecting upon some limitations of their analytical foci and conceptual tools (e.g. Brigg, 2020; Brigg & George, 2020; Megoran & Dalby, 2018). In this section, I discuss three critiques and make a point that, despite having different theoretical standpoints and suggestions, the scholars behind these critiques call for a sustained engagement with spatial heterogeneity in (post-)conflict societies.

One critique has been put forth by Megoran and Dalby (2018). The authors analyse the work of Björkdahl and Kappler (2017) and argue that their analytical focus on local peacebuilding agency is not sufficient to explore all types of spatial relations (re)producing places in (post-)conflict societies, a shortcoming that they also identify within the geographies of peace scholarship. Even though they highlight the relevance of looking at local peacebuilding agency and attempts to change space at the local level, they critically stress that geopolitics and power relations should not be overlooked in analyses of space in (post-)conflict societies. Thus, Megoran and Dalby (2018, p. 263) recommend scholars interested in space in (post-)conflict societies to engage with ‘understanding and interrogating the multi-layered, nested geographies of geopolitical actors including states, regional blocs, global inter- and non-governmental organizations, Transnational Corporations (TNCs), the architectures of international finances, offshore territories and what Sassen calls ‘assemblages’ of these’. This, therefore, demands a broader engagement with how spaces are produced not only by local agents but also by a heterogeneous group of geopolitical actors who participate in the (re)production of space.

A different critique has been put forward by Brigg (2020, p. 536), who argued that the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies exhibits ‘the same problematic characteristics of much European-derived dominant knowledge: It tends not to give a full account of itself (even on its own terms) as it does not fully emplace itself, and it tends not to engage the socio-spatial difference of diverse peoples other than through its own political ontology’. As the author explains in the critique,
part of the issue is that the extant spatial turn continues to centre the ‘transformative capacity of agency’ (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, p. 19; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017) in ways that are rather too anthropocentric and Eurocentric. There is a need, then, to grapple with sociopolitical challenges in many complex and diverse societies, including those dealing with colonial and conflict legacies. (Brigg, 2020, p. 537)

Emphasizing the different ways through which aboriginal groups relate to space and place, the key argument is that many European-derived concepts cannot fully capture what space, place, scale, and security mean to diverse groups. One of Brigg’s (2020) recommendations is that scholars engage with heterogeneous and vernacular knowledges of space and place and what these terms mean for people’s everyday realities rather than imposing its own conceptual toolkit over research subjects.

During the 2021 Swisspeace Colloquium, Claske Dijkema criticized the binary reasoning underpinning the concepts of ‘peacescapes’ and ‘warescapes’ after a lecture held by Annika Björkdahl, a prominent scholar within the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies.3 Dijkema pointed out that these concepts were treated in the spatial turn literature as binary opposites and asked whether one could state that a warscape has been turned into a peacescape. Björkdahl accepted the critique and acknowledged that these conceptual tools can indeed reproduce flawed binary logics that have been previously challenged within peace and conflict studies (see, for instance, Keen, 2000; Klem, 2018; Shinko, 2008). Björkdahl elaborated that her previous research sought to unpack the war/peace binary, but recognized that the ‘peacescapes’ and ‘warescapes’, for treating these places as spatially different, inadvertently reinforces a dichotomous thinking around war and peace. The scholar ended the reply by stressing the need to critically reflect upon the concepts scholars design and what are their consequences for analysing empirical realities.

Dijkema’s critique resonated with me because, in my own research on space in post-war Mostar, it has been particularly challenging to categorize places using such stark binary concepts as they make it difficult to capture spatial heterogeneity. One good example is the case of the Youth Cultural Centre Abrašević (OKC Abrašević) in Mostar. This place emerged with revolutionary and anti-fascist ideas (Forde, 2019c) and has often been represented as a place fostering peace and challenging conflict divides and power structures in Mostar (e.g. Björkdahl & Gusic, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Forde, 2019a, 2019c; Gusic, 2020, 2022). Björkdahl and Kappler (2017), for instance, argue that OKC Abrašević is ‘a space in which social divisions can be challenged’ (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, p. 87) and a peacescape that seeks to ‘emplace a non-ethnic peace based on pan-Yugoslav nostalgia by creating a place where youth from different communities can meet and feel at ease, thus challenging the obvious dividing line(s) of Mostar’ (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, p. 87). Forde (2019c) echoes this and frames Abrašević as a place for ‘socio-spatial agency’ which contributes to building positive peace. However, my conversations with interlocutors in Mostar complicate this picture. During a narrative walk with a research participant – J. – in Mostar, OKC Abrašević was described to me as a ‘slightly alternative, kind of cafe or whatever, club, whatever, bar, however you want to call it … for people who disagree … I would say those are people who disagree with the more, I don’t wanna [sic] say extreme, but … But kind of different ideologies, right?’. I then reacted and asked if the place was somehow contested. J. did not witness ‘any kind of contestation as such’ but critically reflected
upon the relevance of OKC Abrašević in improving structural conditions for Mostarians: ‘To me, it [OKC Abrašević] doesn’t quite match the everyday preoccupation or interest of an average Mostarian or of a majority of Mostarians’. They expanded on this and argued that, for those living in post-war Mostar, ‘[t]here’s so many other things to think through, to worry about, things such as, you know, making enough money or raising your kids or the healthcare in this country, right?’. This indicates that the place, despite doing important work, is unable to address structural post-war issues that impact people’s everyday lives and experiences of peace in Mostar. Another participant, on the other hand, openly expressed frustration with Abrašević’s current lack of broader political, transformative and radical engagement in the city of Mostar. As explained by this participant, the activists involved in the creation of the place had revolutionary ideas and stood against power and political structures. Nowadays, however, the participant believes that this component has been lost and co-opted by international donors funding activities at OKC Abrašević. They then joked that Abrašević moved from being a transformative and radical movement to becoming simply a pub where people go for art and drinks (Personal communication, 2023), thereby challenging the transformative role that is often raised in some works within the spatial turn.

Albeit from different angles and theoretical standpoints, the anecdote above and the critiques constructed by Megoran and Dalby (2018), Brigg (2020) and Dijkema, all point to the need for further research engaging with spatial heterogeneity in (post-)conflict societies and the diverse ways in which actors relate to space. Megoran and Dalby (2018) call for further research on how space is constructed not only by local peacebuilding agency – which has been a common theme amongst scholars from the spatial turn – but also by broader geopolitical actors and by the agency of less territorialized features such as the flows of capital. This demands a thorough engagement with the multiple actors participating in the (re)construction of space and with the ‘power geometries’ (Massey, 1991) that produce and are produced by such a process. Brigg (2020, p. 535), by arguing that the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies sometimes does not ‘sufficiently engage the socio-spatial difference of diverse peoples’, points to the need to engage with difference and heterogeneity – be that in the concepts that are used or in how scholars engage with diverse groups in (post-)conflict settings. Finally, Dijkema’s point about the difficulties of using binary tools to capture nuance also hints at the need for conceptual tools which would provide a better understanding of diverse and ambivalent attitudes towards space.

Building upon these critiques, I argue that new conceptual tools, which move away the analytical foci from the emplacement of peace or war, are needed in order to systematically capture the heterogeneity of spatial relations that (re)make space in (post-)conflict societies. In this article, I take a first step in this direction by suggesting that a thorough investigation of space in relation to time can help scholars from the spatial turn in peace and conflict and geographies of peace research agendas to (1) engage with spatial heterogeneity in empirical analyses and (2) understand how different events and interpretations of time help explain heterogeneous attitudes, uses and experiences of space in (post-)conflict societies. An engagement with the temporal dimension, I argue, improves our understanding of why places are sometimes contested and how different meanings collide and overlap due to heterogeneous temporal views.
Key theories of space within Geography often define space as intertwined with time (e.g. Hägerstrand, 1970; Ho, 2021; Kellerman, 1994; Lefebvre, 1991, 2004; May & Thrift, 2001). Time, which often seems ‘so ordinary and apparently transparent in everyday life’ (Munn, 1992, p. 116) is nevertheless an important dimension. Societies organize themselves using temporal references such as diurnal cycles, days, months, years, seasons, timetables, and schedules, which are all ways of making sense of a sequence of events (Adam, 1990; May & Thrift, 2001). Thinking time in terms of quantifiable markers such as the ones just mentioned renders ‘time’ some objectivity and possibility of measurement (e.g. measure the number of hours between two points in time) (Ellegård, 2019). Post-modern geographers recognize this objective dimension but emphasize the multiple and heterogeneous social understandings of time and how these affect interpretations and uses of space (Crang, 2001; Ho, 2021; Kellerman, 1994; Massey, 2005; May & Thrift, 2001). May and Thrift (2001, p. 2), for instance, highlight the importance of recognizing social time ‘as multiple and heterogeneous, varying both within and between societies, and individuals according to social position’. Based on similar considerations, Crang (2001, p. 206) frames time not in absolute and objective terms but as ‘an experience of flow rather than being a series of static images enchained in a sequence’. Hence, what is at stake for post-modern conceptualizations of time is that time is heterogeneous because it is lived, interpreted and experienced differently in space and over distinct periods (Ho, 2021; Kellerman, 1994).

Geographers invested in theorizing and understanding space thus indicate that any attitude towards space always gathers spatial and temporal elements, which can be potentially heterogeneous and ambivalent (Ho, 2021; Kellerman, 1994; Massey, 2005; May & Thrift, 2001). Massey (2005, p. 130), for instance, explores places as ‘spatio-temporal events’, a confluence of an understanding of the ‘here’ (space) and the ‘now’ (time). Through this, the author wants to draw our attention to the fact that meanings attributed to places depend on two aspects. First, it depends on a relational understanding of the place itself (the ‘here’, the spatial) and its social function. Second, the way one relates to a place depends on temporal trajectories and understandings of history, past, present, and future, which are mobilized to interpret spaces and places at a particular point in time (the views of the ‘now’). Therefore, every understanding of a place gathers the spatial and the temporal, geography and history, space and time (Massey, 2001, 2005). For this reason, Massey (2005, p. 18) emphasizes that

time and space must be thought together: that this is not some mere rhetorical flourish, but that it influences how we think of both terms, that thinking of time and space together does not mean they are identical […], rather it means that the imagination of one will have repercussions […] for the imagination of the other and that space and time are implicated in each other.

Even though this indissociable space–time relationship is well established within Geography, the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies has not paid significant attention to this relationship. In the first edited volume advancing this research agenda, the space–time relationship is not theorized or analytically mobilized (see Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016). In some other works, the terms ‘time’ and ‘temporality’ are at
times briefly discussed (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, pp. 21–24; Forde, 2019a, pp. 6–7) but followed by analyses where the time dimension does not come forward as a key analytical variable in empirical interpretations. Björkdahl and Kappler (2017, pp. 21–24), for instance, include time in their book and argue that ‘a spatial analysis that has as its goal to make visible agency therefore essentially needs to include a time analysis as well’ (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, p. 22). The authors indicate a connection between time and agency and argue that ‘agency is therefore an inherent part of time, that is, the ways in which actors make sense of a series of events in connection with each other’ (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, p. 22). At times, the authors recognize time as a lived experience that therefore requires interpretation of events. Yet, a clear definition of ‘time’ – or of how a ‘time analysis’ should be done – is lacking in their work. A more thorough engagement with the heterogeneous lived experiences of time could improve the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies by adding a deeper understanding of how agents’ takes on time provide rather heterogeneous spatial practices and attitudes towards space.

The geographies of peace research agenda, despite inheriting from Geography the conceptual proposition that space and time are intertwined, often dig deeper into the spatial rather than the temporal dimension. In the early cry for a geography of peace, time has not been framed as a key factor for understanding space and peace (see, for instance, Kobayashi, 2009; Megoran, 2011; Williams & McConnell, 2011). In later works, peace geographers theoretically touch upon time or temporality to recognise that peace varies across space, time, and scale (e.g., Bregazzi & Jackson, 2018; Courtheyn, 2018; Koopman, 2014; Macaspac & Moore, 2022, 2024; Megoran & Dalby, 2018; Megoran et al., 2014, 2016; Williams, 2013; Williams et al., 2014). Indeed, peace geographers such as Koopman (2014: 111) use temporality and cognate concepts simply to acknowledge that ‘[p]eace means different things at different scales, as well as to different groups and at different times and places’. However, the empirical foci of more recent works within the geographies of peace often foregrounds the spatial at the expense of the temporal. Therefore, similar to the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies, there has been a lack of empirical analysis which emphasise the social and relational composition of time and how it relates to space and inform spatial experiences. This aspect, I argue, deserves more careful attention given the potential of heterogeneous imaginations of time in helping to understand heterogeneous and sometimes ambivalent attitudes towards places in (post-)conflict societies.

If we define time as an experience of flow (Crang, 2001), and acknowledge that such experience significantly influences actors’ perceptions and conceptualizations of space (Ho, 2021; Kellerman, 1994; Lefebvre, 2004; Massey, 2005; May & Thrift, 2001), it becomes imperative for scholars into spatial dynamics within (post-)conflict societies to devote attention to the intricate relationships between space and time. In the upcoming section, I contribute to filling the space–time gap in the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies and geographies of peace research agendas by developing the ‘spatio-temporal conflicts’ conceptual tool. This tool, I argue, would allow researchers to not only explore the heterogeneity of space but also to understand how such heterogeneity is directly intertwined with multiple times and temporalities that inform spatial experiences.
**Spatio-temporal conflicts: a conceptual alternative**

In this article, I propose that space–time heterogeneity in (post-)conflict societies can be explored through the concept of ‘spatio-temporal conflicts’. This section is dedicated to developing and defining this conceptual tool. I start by tracing the roots of my theoretical thinking. In two sub-sections, I provide an analytical framework to capture spatio-temporal conflicts and briefly apply the concept to understand the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in post-war Mostar.

Different literatures within peace and conflict studies informed my theoretical thinking around the concept of ‘spatio-temporal conflicts’. Research exploring the nuances and conflictive meaning-making of places in (post-)conflict contexts has made me reflect upon the differences in how space is understood and appropriated by city dwellers (e.g. Kappler, 2017; Mannergren Selimovic & Strömbom, 2015; Olivius & Hedström, 2021). In addition, studies on time and the politics of time, albeit being disconnected from debates on space, confirmed the existence of conflictual temporalities in transitional contexts (see Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020; Hedström & Olivius, 2022; McAuliffe, 2021; Mueller-Hirth, 2017; Mueller-Hirth & Oyola, 2018). Mueller-Hirth (2017, pp. 188–189), for instance, captures such temporal heterogeneity through the concept of temporal conflicts, defined as ‘differences in experiences, constructions, and uses of time among people, groups, societies, or institutions that can give rise to or legitimate power relations’. Through this conceptual tool, the author uncovered how victims in post-conflict South Africa are still heavily informed by past experiences of violence and victimization despite the social pressure of leaving the past behind and moving forward (Mueller-Hirth, 2017). Together, these studies have approached heterogeneity of time and space from different analytical angles.

Building upon previous research emphasizing struggles over spatial meanings (Kappler, 2017; Olivius & Hedström, 2021) and Mueller-Hirth’s (2017) notion of temporal conflicts, the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts zooms in on spatial and temporal heterogeneity simultaneously. I define spatio-temporal conflicts as relational conflicts resulting from divergent temporal understandings that actors utilize in their narratives about and/or attitudes towards space in societies affected by armed violence. Therefore, ‘spatio-temporal conflicts’ offers two main insights. First, it directs our focus towards multiple narratives and different temporal elements articulated in actors’ understandings of space and place. This enhances our comprehension of how temporal elements shape the spatial experiences and understandings of actors in such settings. Second, it highlights the often conflictive and ambivalent understandings of space when heterogeneous narratives are put into dialogue. Therefore, the use of the ‘spatio-temporal conflicts’ conceptual tool would allow scholars within the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies and geographies of peace to analytically investigate spatial and temporal heterogeneity in empirical analyses.

Spatio-temporal conflicts are sometimes explicit but at times we can only grasp them indirectly. Conflicts about space and time can be explicitly manifested through mass protests and social movements, for example. Olivius and Hedström (2021), for instance, show how minority groups in Myanmar gathered in organized protests to challenge narratives of the past recollected through the statue of General Aung San, represented by the government as the ‘benefactor of an ethnically inclusive nation’ (Olivius & Hedström,
Arguing that this conceals the past of repression against minorities, minority groups contested the space and its attempt to (re)tell the past in a visible and organized manner. While this example is an explicit conflict around the meanings of space and time, less visible spatio-temporal conflicts can also be captured. The multiple temporalities of the ‘home’ are a good example of how a place can host conflicting temporalities such as the ‘rest time’, but also ‘work time’ sometimes carried out at home outside of regular working hours (Shaw, 2001), and the unpaid work time, which include providing care and emotional work, a type of labour typically carried out by women in the home (Davies, 2001). In contexts such as these, where the spatio-temporal conflicts are less visible, it is the role of the researcher to trace connections between conflicting spatio-temporalities. Research that seeks to establish traces between less-obvious relations has been recognized in postmodern thinking as ‘bricolage’ (Hammersley, 2008). As noted by Hammersley (2008, p. 138), ‘[i]n contemporary French usage, ‘bricolage’ refers to ‘do it yourself’, and ‘bricoleur’ is usually employed to refer to a ‘handyman” (Hammersley, 2008, p. 138). Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic (2018, p. 44), inspired by the idea of bricolage, ‘adopt the qualitative practice of ‘enquiry-as-bricolage’, in which narratives produced at diverse sites and by various agents are put in dialogue with each other’. I take inspiration from Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic (2018) to propose that researchers can act as bricoleurs to promote dialogue between different narratives and, therefore, capture less explicit conflicts between actors’ spatio-temporal understandings.

One might wonder whether conflicting spatio-temporal narratives are a particular feature of specific locations, such as urban or rural, or areas of ongoing violence or post-conflict settings. Scholars such as Crang (2001), Lefebvre (2004) and May and Thrift (2001) have shown that the density of the urban space produces multiple temporalities and social times. Thus, Crang (2001, p. 189) argues that one should not see urban environments as a ‘singular abstract temporality but as the site where multiple temporalities collide’. Studies on rural spaces have made similar observations and argued that such sites are also composed of multiple temporalities (e.g. Englund, 1999). In addition, scholarship on the relationship between space, peace and war, has highlighted the spatialities of peace zones which contest the violence around them (e.g. Macaspac, 2023) and also the continuity of war structures in the aftermath of armed violence which contest the peace process (e.g. Gusic, 2020). Therefore, the existence of – and conflicts between – multiple temporalities and spatialities across these different settings suggests that spatio-temporal conflicts are not restricted to specific areas. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that the empirical application in this article is limited to analysing Mostar, an urban area in a post-war context and that further research is needed to expand the empirical coverage of this conceptual tool.

Operationalizing the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts can help improve the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies and geographies of peace research agendas as well as bring innovative findings. First, the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts (in)directly responds to previous critiques of the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies. It recognizes the relevance of different actors – from local to global – as recommended by Megoran and Dalby (2018) and invites us to reflect upon whether their spatio-temporal understandings collide. This concept also partly tackles Brigg’s (2020) concern by looking at how different actors make sense of space without imposing a conceptualization of what space is or should mean to them. Binary conceptualizations – Dijkema’s concern – are
also avoided through the idea of spatio-temporal conflicts, as it invites scholars to explore nuance and pursue spatio-temporal heterogeneity in their empirical analyses. Second, the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts gives centrality to time and how it connects to actors’ understandings of space. By doing so, it furthers both the spatial turn and the geographies of peace research, which so far have had little engagement with space–time heterogeneity in societies affected by armed conflicts. Finally, the incorporation of the time dimension through the spatio-temporal conflicts conceptual tool allows scholars to make sense of the role played by notions of time in how space is conceived, perceived, and ultimately lived. This, therefore, provides a more robust interpretation of heterogeneous uses, meanings and attitudes towards space in societies affected by armed conflicts.

Analytical framework: actors, temporalities and spatial narratives

Now I turn my attention to developing an analytical framework that allows one to analytically investigate spatio-temporal conflicts. I suggest that spatio-temporal conflicts can be captured by zooming in on the actors and their temporal views connected to their spatial understandings of space manifested in spatial narratives. Accordingly, I suggest three aspects that should be used as analytical components for understanding and capturing spatio-temporal conflicts, which are: (1) actors, (2) temporalities and (3) spatial narratives.

First, I follow existing research within the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Elfversson et al., 2023; Forde, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c) and adhere to a relational approach to space. Therefore, this analytical framework suggests spatio-temporal conflicts as unfolding from direct or indirect relations between actors and their narratives. Multiple actors participate in the idealization, organization and constant (re)production of space (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005). As Kirsch and Flint (2016, pp. 40–41) rightly pointed out, ‘[c]ities, regions and countries are constantly being shaped by the decisions of a variety of actors’, especially in a (post-)war context where different actors mobilize themselves to produce spaces for war and to reconstruct space after armed struggles (Kirsch & Flint, 2016). This reconstruction process involves multiple actors and power relations, and therefore it is ‘frequently a conflictual process, or may set the stage for subsequent violence’ (Kirsch & Flint, 2016, p. 42). For this reason, this framework does not specify which actors should be under analyses. I follow Megoran and Dalby (2018) in their suggestion that analyses of space in (post-)conflict societies should also take into account actors involved in broader geopolitical games without disregarding agents at the local level. Thus, I acknowledge that it is important to look at varied actors, such as local political elites, international donors and organizations, members of local organizations engaged with peace and conflict and city dwellers. The concept of spatio-temporal conflicts is precisely an invitation to reflect upon how multiple actors mobilize their temporal understandings in narratives of space, how narratives intersect and whether these conflict with each other.

Second, since the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts zooms in on the temporal dimensions of meanings attributed to space, temporalities become a central component of this conceptual tool. Broadly conceived, temporality refers to ‘the state of existing within or having some relationship with time’ (Ho, 2021, 1668). The term is also
employed to understand how a sense of time is manifested in human experience (Hoy, 2009, xiii). Mayhew (2015) argues that ‘temporality is concerned with the way in which a sequence of events, a kind of history, is physically experienced by those who live through them or experience them’. Therefore, thinking about time and temporality in relation to space allows one to understand how temporalities, narratives of past, present and future, and temporal references such as events are weaved together in actors’ understandings of space (May & Thrift, 2001) in societies affected by armed violence. This requires an understanding of the positionality of actors, as ‘identity axes impact the way temporality is experienced spatially’ (Ho, 2021, 1669). Temporalities are, therefore, a key dimension for the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts as this seeks to identify and interpret how temporalities inform human experiences of space.

Finally, I suggest that spatial narratives are a good entry point to identifying temporalities connected to understandings of space in societies affected by armed conflicts. Narrative ‘refers to story or stories, pointing to the ways in which humans construct disparate facts that they encounter in their everyday lives and cognitively weave them together in order to make sense of reality’ (Mannergren Selimovic & Strömbom, 2015, p. 193). As Mannergren Selimovic (2015, p. 233) notes, narratives are built in different societal spheres ranging from the institutional, national and everyday scales. To identify spatio-temporal conflicts, a particular type of narrative is of significance. I propose that one should look for spatial narratives as they help to uncover ‘how we perceive various places, whether through direct or indirect experience, and how we interact (or don’t) with these places and why’ (Schlemper et al., 2018, p. 607). Therefore, an engagement with actors’ spatial narratives creates opportunities for understanding how and which temporalities are invoked in actors’ representations of their spatial experiences in (post-)conflict societies.

**Spatio-temporal conflicts around the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar**

In this section, I illustrate the spatio-temporal conflicts conceptual tool by analysing how heterogeneous interpretations of the past and future come together in actors’ spatial narratives about the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in post-war Mostar. By zooming in on such narratives, the aim is to highlight the interrelation between space and temporalities in (re)producing this site. Inspired by the idea of enquiry-as-bricolage (Björkdahl & Selimovic, 2018; Hammersley, 2008), I assemble different materials to understand narratives about the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in post-war Mostar. I bring in spatial narratives collected through ‘walking and talking’ (Ramsden, 2017) sessions with research participants during two research stays in Mostar (one between January and February, and the other between June and July, 2023), which I put into dialogue with other narratives from participants and organizations cited in Cateux (2021).

The Partisan Memorial Cemetery was designed by the architect Bogdan Bogdanović as a form of tribute to the deceased Yugoslav Partisans who lost their lives in combat to free Yugoslavia from the occupation of the Nazis and Fascists during World War II (Murtić & Barišić, 2019). After its inauguration in 1965, the monument became widely used by Mostarians for social purposes (Cateux, 2021; Murtić & Barišić, 2019) and it also became a landmark in the city (Murtić & Barišić, 2019). Especially after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995, the monument became neglected,
violently targeted by hooligans, and frequently vandalized with Nazi symbols, and it is nowadays a contested space within the city of Mostar (Cateux, 2021; Murtić & Barišić, 2019).

During a walking and talking session with G., a Mostarian who has lived in the city for most of their life, the participant demonstrated great concern about the future of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery. As explained by the participant, because of the socialist roots of the Partisans, the monument is often contested as ‘not all people do identify with these [socialist] structures, with this, what you call, political arrangement’. For this reason, G. highlighted that the monument is ‘neglected, deteriorated, very often devastated’, which in their spatial narrative is a source of concern about the future and conservation of this cultural heritage site. In their imagination of the future, G. suggests an open dialogue about the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in order to deconstruct the negative views young Mostarians have about the place:

What I want to say is that we need to face and to try to build the dialogue, and to talk and communicate if there is a problem and an issue. Because if this way of treatment continues […] and if the younger people will inherit it – inherit that narrative as it is right now – I don’t know what the future is, then. It’s, it’s quite contested, you know, because you have young people who were born much after the recent, I mean, the war in nineties, who have this kind of a hate, hate towards something they don’t know anything about. Another level of hate still existing.

The interview excerpt shows that, for G., the future is very uncertain because of how generations remember and transmit their beliefs to youth. To cope with this temporal uncertainty, G. suggests open dialogue and communication about cultural heritage as key strategies to reducing such uncertainty, encouraging negotiation about the meaning of the memorial, and helping de-construct hateful narratives about the place.

In January 2023, B., a research participant who lived in Mostar for years, took me to the Partisan Memorial Cemetery. B. started their narrative of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery by stating that this is a place where they had spent a lot of time both alone and with friends. B. articulated their accumulated space–time memories at the Partisan Memorial Cemetery to (re)imagine the future of the place and to reflect upon the role it should (but currently does not) occupy in post-war Mostar, thereby recognizing the neglection aspect raised by G. B.’s position was that people in Mostar should reclaim the monument in the future: ‘I think it should be given back to the Mostarians, and I think it should be a park for everyone. And that it should still be, of course, the Partisan Cemetery […] It has always been a social place where people would come, meet, picnic, you know’. Sociality was a key aspect of B.’s past experiences at the Partisan Memorial Cemetery and this drives this (re)imagination of the future of the place. As B. mentioned, they used the place in the past to ‘escape the city with friends’. Therefore, these accumulated space–time experiences are marked by sociality, a sociality which existed in the past and is connected to B.’s suggestion that people should reclaim the right to communal and social spaces in the city of Mostar.

Both spatial narratives discussed above focus on the local specificity of the place and its role for everyday life in post-war Mostar. However, Cateux’s (2021) analyses of how a local organization – the Center for Peace and Multi-Ethnic Cooperation Mostar (CPMC) – used a renovation process to promote the Europeanization of the Partisan
Memorial Cemetery challenges the local specificity of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery. The renovation led by CPMC was initiated in 2017 and the reinauguration of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery took place on a symbolic date for Europe: May 9, 2018, also known as ‘Europe Day’ (Cateux, 2021). The author observed that ‘Europe’ was pretty much on the agenda during the reinauguration. For instance, the CPMC chose to play the European anthem and the European Delegation in Bosnia and Herzegovina took part in the event. Cateux (2021, p. 88) shares that the chief of the European Delegation ‘gave a speech during which he stressed how this day was important in the post-war history of Mostar, a day spent celebrating values shared by Europeans’. In 2019, the CPMC organized a commemoration day for the Partisan Memorial Cemetery, which advanced similar narratives. Cateux (2021) shows that the CPMC spatial narrative continued to emphasize the Europeanness of the monument and what it represents, thus demonstrating an attempt to (re)articulate the past of the place through this spatial narrative which emphasize its role as an European heritage site. By analysing a press statement by CPMC, Cateux (2021, p. 90) identified that the ‘organisers stressed that the ceremony was not only dedicated to Mostarian victims of the Second World War, but to all the victims of barbarity. The statement also stresses that the ceremony was dedicated to all the innocent victims of the last war in BiH and in all the ‘ex-Common State’ (‘širom bivše zajedni´cke države’), indirectly referring to Yugoslavia’ (Cateux, 2021, p. 90).

This attempt to recollect the past and future of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery to fit into a European framework was not received without due contestation (Cateux, 2021). One correspondent from Cateux’s (2021) research, for instance, had strong opinions about such an attempt. The correspondent was particularly negative about the idea that the monument should honour all victims of Nazism and the dead from the revolutionary period in the Balkans alike:

Did you see they projected the European flag in Partizansko last May? (...) And now, this ceremony … for all the victims of all the wars on February 14 … What is this? Do you know about this EU thing about the victims of Communism? Now, it puts what happened during NOB (Narodno Oslobodilačka borba or Struggle for the national liberation) on the same level than crimes committed by fascists during the Second World War. It is like saying partisans were the same as the Nazis” (...) So now local fascists can go on bragging about the “Yugoslav Communist terror”. (Interlocutor cited in Cateux, 2021, p. 91)

As this excerpt indicates, the CPMC’s attempt to fit the place into a European narrative erases the local spatial specificity of the place (a tribute to victims of fascism and a symbol of local anti-fascism), and it also ignores other aspects highlighted by G. and B. It overlooks both the sociality aspects raised by B., and the relevance of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery as a Yugoslav (Cateux, 2021) and anti-fascist symbol (as also pointed out by G.). By erasing the local specificity from its spatial narrative, the CPMC makes a trans-scalar connection which dislodges the local symbolism and entrenches the Partisan Memorial Cemetery with European meanings, values, history of opposition against fascism and socialism. Moreover, it (re)articulates the future by suggesting how the Partisan Memorial Cemetery should be memorialized, namely as a tribute to victims of Nazism and Fascism and individuals who lost their lives during the socialist time in Yugoslavia.
All these spatial narratives hold very distinct, somewhat ambivalent, understandings of the past and future of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery, thereby confirming the relevance of employing the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts to understand the complexity of space in societies affected by armed conflicts. I have shown this by exploring a wide array of actors: current and former city dwellers such as B., G. and Cateux’s (2021) informant, local organizations such as CPMC and international actors such as the European Delegation in BiH. In each spatial narrative, the future becomes a temporal referent which is crowded with actors heterogeneous anticipations about the future, feelings, hopes and frustrations, such as the maintenance of the anti-fascist symbolism (G. and Cateux’s (2021) informants), sociality (B.), uncertainty (G.), open dialogue and communication (G.) and the Europeanization of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery (CPMC and European Delegation in BiH). Therefore, the differences in how the past is recollected and the future reimagined are not just minor details in spatial narratives about the Partisan Memorial Cemetery, but it is rather the temporal dimension that influences the way actors interpret and represent this space in post-war Mostar.

Conclusions

Research within the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies has brought an innovative conceptual toolkit to the field and offered rich, fine-grained and innovative insights into how space relates to war and peace. Despite these great contributions to the field, the spatial turn is relatively new and under development. In this process, critical thinking plays a vital role in improving this research agenda and in thinking creatively about less explored research avenues. The article highlighted three critiques to this research agenda, and I explained that – despite having different theoretical perspectives and recommendations – these critiques diagnosed the need for further engagement with spatial heterogeneity within the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies.

Building upon this critique, I proposed further research on space–time heterogeneity as an alternative to fill this gap. The article demonstrated the usefulness of zooming in on how heterogeneous understandings of space are substantiated by distinct lived experiences of time. The concept of spatio-temporal conflicts, which I developed as an alternative, is one way to make sense of spatial heterogeneity as it drives our attention to how distinct understandings and lived experiences of time impact actors’ narratives of space in societies touched by violence. By applying the concept to interpret narratives about the Partisan Memory Cemetery, I illustrated the benefits of this conceptual tool. These include the possibility to analyze different actors – from local dwellers to local and international organizations – and to explore the power relations and tensions arising from such spatio-temporal narratives. Moreover, this conceptual tool also provides an improvement understanding of how time was integral to the actors’ attempts to (re)tell the past and (re)imagine the future.

Exploring space–time might not be the only alternative for engaging with spatial heterogeneity. Yet, considering the scholarly attention given to space–time matters in geographical thinking, and how understudied this dimension has been both within the spatial turn and peace geographies research agendas, it is worth exploring this research
avenue further. This article takes a first step in this direction and I expect that it will encourage fruitful conversations about space–time relationships amongst scholars interested in the role of space in (post-)conflict societies.

Notes

1. The term ‘spatial turn’ was first coined by the geographer Edward Soja (1989), who stressed the relevance of space as a social product and emphasised that space was an overlooked category in all social sciences. In this article, to avoid repetition, I sometimes use the term ‘spatial turn’ to refer to the spatial turn within peace and conflict studies.

2. Another important research agenda is the geographies of peace, a field that has engaged these concepts to discuss issues related to peace (see, for instance, Macaspac & Moore, 2024).

3. The dialogue has been recorded and is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQ5HXo7GnsQ.

4. Interviews carried out in Mostar were ordered alphabetically. Therefore, the letter used here and in other parts of the article does not stand for the participants’ names, which are anonymised for ethical purposes.

5. I prioritise the use of gender-neutral language.

6. Through these snippets, I do not wish to affirm that one narrative is more factual or representative than the other. Instead, I use these anecdotes simply to show that being open to the heterogeneity of space can allow participants to express their own views, which might potentially be ambivalent and contingent.

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