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Space, Time and Peace in Post-War Mostar

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Academic dissertation

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Abstract

Research on peace and conflict has increasingly examined how space shapes post-war societies. However, despite this spatial turn, time has remained analytically underdeveloped, often treated as a background dimension rather than as constitutive of how space is experienced and contested. This book addresses this gap by bringing space and time into the same analytical frame. The book aims to theorise and analyse the co-constitution of space and time in post-war urban life, examining how lived time shapes spatial meanings, conflicts over space, and the formation of subjectivities in the city of Mostar. It addresses three interrelated questions: how divergent experiences of space and time generate conflicts over the meanings and uses of places; how spatialities, temporalities, and selfhood are co-constituted in everyday life; and how this heterogeneity challenges dominant representations of post-war cities as either divided or at peace.

The study focuses on Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, a city heavily affected by the Bosnian War of the 1990s and often portrayed as an emblematic divided city. Rather than taking division as a starting point, the book approaches Mostar as a dynamic and heterogeneous urban landscape in which ruins, reconstructed heritage, and ongoing transformations coexist. These material conditions make visible how urban life unfolds across overlapping temporalities, where memories of war, experiences of the present, and expectations of the future intersect and shape how places are lived, narrated, and contested. Empirically, the book is based on a qualitative case study combining walking methodologies, semi-structured interviews, and follow-up conversations conducted between 2023 and 2025. This approach captures how different actors – including residents, political elites, and organisations – experience and interpret the city through diverse temporal registers.

The book develops two interrelated concepts to explore space-time in post-war cities. First, *spatio-temporal conflicts* capture how competing temporal experiences of pasts, presents, and futures shape conflicting interpretations of and claims over urban space. Second, *being-in-postwar-cities* examines how these spatio-temporal configurations are lived and embodied, showing how subjectivities are continuously formed through everyday engagements with the city. Methodologically, the study demonstrates that places such as war ruins, memorials, and redevelopment projects are experienced through heterogeneous temporalities, including nostalgia, trauma, waiting, stagnation, and aspirations for change. These heterogeneous temporalities generate conflicts over what places mean and what they should become, challenging simplistic representations of Mostar as either divided or at peace.

The book makes three main contributions. Theoretically, it advances a novel framework for analysing the temporal politics of space in post-war contexts, showing that conflicts over place are fundamentally shaped by divergent temporal orientations. Empirically, it provides a nuanced account of everyday life in post-war Mostar, demonstrating how urban experiences are structured by overlapping rhythms of waiting, acceleration, remembrance, and anticipation. Conceptually, it challenges dominant representations of post-war cities as either divided or at peace by foregrounding their heterogeneity, showing that they are better understood as dynamic environments where multiple space-times coexist, collide, and continuously remake urban life. Taken together, these contributions demonstrate that understanding post-war cities requires moving beyond space alone to recognise the temporal dimensions through which places acquire meaning, become contested, and shape lived experiences after war.

Keywords:

space, time, space-time, peace, post-war cities, post-war urban reconstruction, relational geographies, memory, spatio-temporal conflicts, being-in-postwar-cities, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mostar, walking methodologies.

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