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Towards Sustainable Post-War Reconstruction: Reflecting on City-Making and Conflict

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1. Introduction

One of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 11 is the reduction in the number of deaths and economic losses related to disasters. In an era of climate change action, environmental change mitigation is an essential focus of sustainable development goals, and water-related disasters are exemplified as a priority area of SDG 11. Disasters such as floods cannot simply be categorized as "natural disasters", as the impact of human action on the environment is now more visible than ever. The SDG 11 targets do not directly refer to specifically human-made disasters such as warfare or challenges to human safety such as urban conflict and violence. Nevertheless, as this chapter will argue, war and conflict are important challenges for sustainable development in cities and communities. It is estimated that in 2013, up to 1.5 billion people were living in fragile and conflict-affected states (Muggah 2014). Moreover, urban gang violence affects many of the urban areas of the Americas, while armed conflict continues in various areas of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. According to war sociologist Mary Kaldor (2007), the wars of the past have given way to *new wars*, blending characteristics of international warfare with guerrilla tactics, involving more civilians than ever before and taking place in cities rather than on field frontlines. Kaldor's paradigmatic new war was the one in Bosnia and Herzegovina of the 1990s, followed by numerous conflicts in the 21st century. Bringing into focus the experiences of cities that have experienced such warfare and urban violence, this chapter discusses the challenges caused by conflict affecting the potential to reach urban sustainability goals. Moreover, it showcases the dimensions of sustainability and the horizons of possibilities in urban situations that involve conflict and warfare.

In order to achieve the goal of sustainable cities and communities, the challenges of urban conflict need to be better understood. This chapter argues that the sustainability of urban development and that of peace are related. It thus connects Sustainable Development Goal 11 on cities and communities with the focus of SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions. It acknowledges the diversity of conflict situations and urban violence today and focuses on urban strategies in the aftermath of war, with post-war reconstruction seen traditionally as an "opportunity"

to improve urban environments. It scrutinizes reconstruction in its relationship to the achievement of sustainable cities and communities. First, reflecting on the experience of conflict cities in the Balkans and the Middle East, this chapter highlights the challenges of urban development in cities experiencing violence. I argue that conflict leads to predicaments in cities that cannot be responded to with city-making "as usual". Consequently, concerns related to violence and conflict transformation have to inform city-making in order to achieve sustainable peace. Critical engagement with the past, with conflict, and with the structural reasons for conflict is key to this process. An approach based on design or urban development as usual is not enough, as shortsighted decisions can actually sustain conflict when band-aid design or economic development ignores the structural roots of conflict, including deeper socioeconomic tensions and unbalance. Second, this chapter highlights a set of conceptual strategies and transformative practices that emerged in the experiences of these cities. It explores agonistic urbanism (Pullan 2015), which focuses on the rechanneling of contestation into transformative engagement and frictions. Moreover, it discusses two strategies derived from my research on post-war reconstruction in the Balkans and the Middle East: reflective reconstruction, which implies engagement with the conflict and its structural roots in city-making, and syncretic place-making, which focuses on diversity and is by no means reduced to conflict alone. As such, this discussion fits the global context of our increasingly diverse cities.

2. On Urban Conflict and Violence

There are multiple voices which argue that the city of tomorrow will be marked by violence, having already identified a condition of urban fragility and conflict across multiple geographies today; there is even talk of feral cities, affected by gang violence or a general loss of state control (Norton 2003; Muggah 2015). This is based on the recent urbanization of conflict worldwide. In contrast to the World War Wars and the guerrilla "peasant wars" (Wolf 1969) of the twentieth century, violent conflict has become a more urban phenomenon (Beall 2006, 2007; Pullan and Baillie 2013). Many cities today are affected by war destruction and displacement or by gang warfare and violent crime. The emergence of fragile cities, where the social contract is not functioning well, foreshadows a possible dystopia of feral cities, lost from states to a pre-modern style control by violent gangs over specific urban territories—the modern state, after all, has been defined in connection to its monopoly over armed violence (Beall et al. 2011, 2013; Muggah 2014). Contemporary fragility, also associated with the loss of power and control of states over urban territories, refers to entire urban ensembles, as well as particular areas and neighborhoods,

such as Brazilian favelas. In some cases, fragility relates to what Beall et al. (2011) call civic conflict, directed by various groups against the state. Yet, other cities become arenas of violent conflict between groups, from gang warfare in Central America to ethnoreligiously defined militias in various places in the Middle East today or in the Balkans in the 1990s. These conflict cities can feature either violent conflict or transformed forms of conflict, implying underlying tensions that can be re-sparked. In 44% of wars between 1990 and 2005, for instance, conflict resumed in the first five years after violence stopped (Barakat 2005). Moreover, even in the non-violent aftermaths of war, the rechanneling of conflict makes the clear-cut post-conflict category unsatisfactory, as conflict simply morphs into other forms and, in contemporary cities, does not seem to end but rather to transform (Pullan and Baillie 2013).

Violent conflict affects cities in a myriad of intertangled ways. It destroys not only built environments but also social environments, engendering fear and a lack of trust. Both dimensions have to be considered by city-makers working in urban contexts experiencing violence. When conflict is associated with the destruction of homes or displacement, it triggers a traumatic stress reaction in people, described by psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove (2016) as "root shock", the loss of meaningful places of belonging for people. While Fullilove discussed root shock in the context of the destruction of African American neighborhoods in US cities, it is a potent concept that can be used to explain the trauma of displacement during war. In cases of war destruction, consequently, place-making becomes essential for healing from such traumas, with architects, urban designers, and planners having the challenge to bring meaning and sense back to material worlds. Yet in many post-disaster recovery schemes, relocation, rather than reconstruction, is often the chosen approach, which delinks people from places of meaning (Sadiqi et al. 2017). When working with displaced people, there is also a challenge in providing a sense of re-emplacement through both housing provision and the recreation of social networks. Post-war reconstruction is, then, also about restoring a sense of place for both pre-war locals and displaced people in the city.

In cities undergoing conflict, everyday life continues and adapts in various ways. Many areas still have signs of urban vibrancy. An exception is cities under siege, like Sarajevo in the 1990s or several urban areas in Syria in recent years, which have undergone a severe depletion of resources and ongoing attacks. Even here, despite continuous threats, people often do everything possible to continue their routines in order to mentally endure the stress of war. For instance, in Sarajevo under siege, people would attempt to go to their jobs or have work meetings to

maintain a semblance of normality, while their routes to work would be the targets of sniper shootings and grenade explosions (Maček 2009). In cities which do not experience sieges, however, while conflict ravages parts of the city, other city areas keep functioning, creating a sense of apparent "normality". Similarly, in cities experiencing high levels of gang violence, there are often territorial or temporal dimensions to this violence, i.e., city dwellers will avoid parts of the city at particular times or all the time. This mixture of functioning city areas and zones directly affected by war is characteristic of both cities undergoing war, such as cities in Syria, Yemen, and Ukraine today, or fragile cities in a variety of contexts.

Conflict cities and fragile cities have been approached differently through urban policy. Security-based approaches are most prevalent in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia. Conflict resolution and, more recently, conflict transformation have been applied in situations of ethnic/religious conflict. Both academic research and policy decisions have often separated these two types of violence-affected cities. Nevertheless, their manifestations are often similar. From Rio de Janeiro to Belfast, many cities have witnessed pacification programs but also material interventions. Some, like fences and walls, are seen by Rodgers and O'Neill (2012) as forms of infrastructural violence. Others, like libraries and cable cars in Medellín, Colombia (Figure 1), were depicted as marks of a renewed state presence in neighborhoods affected by violence and have been celebrated, though not without increasing critical scrutiny (Ortiz and Boano 2019). The question that remains for all these kinds of cities is, what kind of urban interventions and broader policy tools foster sustainable peace and safety for all? In fact, dealing with urban violence and conflict in fragile cities could benefit from the insights emerging from cities which underwent war with regard to strategies of approaching violence, memory, and how urban interventions relate to conflict transformation.

Figure 1. Social infrastructure in Medellín: Metrocable and associated public spaces as a mode of linking informal settlements with the central city. Source: Photo by author.

3. City-making and Conflict

3.1. Insights from Post-War Reconstruction

In the aftermath of war, the process of urban reconstruction is one beset by many questions and decisions. Some are functional, such as concerns regarding how to deal with housing needs after wartime destruction and the arrival of displaced people—often, cities, notwithstanding the level of destruction, are recipients of displaced people from ravaged areas of the countryside and other urban areas. Moreover, functional issues to solve include the recovery of infrastructure and recreation of the economic base. Others are formal: how should cities be rebuilt? Questions to address here include how many of the old structures should be recovered and the extent to which should reconstruction be thought of as an opportunity to build better cities. These questions dominated after the Second World War but also in the reconstruction of Beirut in the 1990s, and they continue to do so in the debates on

reconstruction in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Ukraine today. In any case, reconstruction is often a comprehensive program of urban development, as it crosses different sectors. The challenge for city-makers is how to transform this into an integrated process and avoid haphazard developments that work against the city in the long run.

In the aftermath of war, regarding cities as mere venues for institution rebuilding and economic growth overlooks the social and economic challenges of the population. As Beall et al. (2013) have argued, failing to address issues like urban employment, housing, and services sets the stage for the possibility of the occurrence of a different form of conflict: a civic conflict against the new state. Post-war reconstruction workers in Afghanistan have emphasized that reconstruction can be sustainable only by the provision of livelihood opportunities through identifying and strengthening skills in the local community and creating jobs (Sadiqi et al. 2017). The support for socioeconomic development, jobs, and capacities, allowing people to lead safe lives without deprivation, thus becomes another essential dimension to be considered by city-makers in the urban development of areas in the aftermath of war or undergoing conflict.

In my engagement with urban residents as well as professionals working in conflict areas, one aspect which emerged was that working towards solutions for practical problems often helps the community to concentrate on the future rather than traumas of the past. For instance, discussing communal garbage policies or the trajectory of a road can galvanize forms of community engagement across conflict lines (Bădescu 2015). Here, the participation of the community is key. Despite community participation being touted as essential in post-war reconstruction, in many contexts, there is a lack of engagement with community views. For instance, in the protracted reconstruction of Afghanistan, there was a lack of involvement of the community, with government policies and even NGO work not engaging with the lived realities of people (Sadiqi et al. 2017). Nevertheless, the emphasis on bottom-up change can, at times, favor voices within communities that are already in positions of power; therefore, work with communities has to avoid tokenism and easy fixes (Hilhorst et al. 2010). A social mapping of the community, with an understanding of the context, tensions, and actors involved through careful research, is thus essential for the involvement of stakeholders. Community participation and instilling a sense of local ownership in projects are, however, essential for the sustainability of reconstruction.

Post-war reconstruction has been seen as an 'opportunity' to improve urban environments according to the sensibilities of the time. At various times, this included showcasing modernity through CIAM-infused rebuilding schemes, car-oriented cities,

or, on the contrary, carefully restoring heritage. In recent decades, reconstruction has been connected to sustainability itself. The rebuilding of the Beirut Central District after the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 was branded as a rebirth for Beirut as an economic capital of the Middle East. It showcased state-of-the-art architecture and design, including high-quality sustainable practices. The Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of the Beirut Central District (Solidere) boasted flagship sustainable projects, from the greening of the Normandie landfill, which resulted from war debris, to the defensive system against potential tidal waves and the construction of neighborhoods that offer the "feeling of living in nature" (Bădescu 2011). Nevertheless, reconstruction practice has also been unsustainable. For instance, in Beirut, again, the demolition of still-standing buildings in order to erect a homogenous "heritage district" (Figure 2), aside from the ironies involved in destroying to build heritage, has resulted in a high level of suspended particulates that have affected the urban environment and the health of residents (Nasr et al. 2009).

Figure 2. The reconstructed Beirut Central District: rebuilt heritage buildings on the right, with the contemporary makeover of the Beirut souqs on the left. Source: Photo by author.

Yet, beyond sustainability as an urban project comes the question of the sustainability of peace, which is also the focus of UN Sustainable Development Goal 16. In the newer understanding that conflict does not end but is transformed, what becomes key is the sustainability of livability in cities prone to conflict. SDG11 include essential elements of such development, citing targets of safe and affordable housing, the protection of the poor and of people in vulnerable situations, public spaces that are safe, inclusive, and accessible, and the safeguarding of cultural heritage, which are all important elements in reconstruction after war and essential for social peace. Nevertheless, beyond these concerns of livability comes another aspect of sustainability: interrogating conflict in its causal dimensions and problematizing forms of structural violence still existing in society. As philosopher Theodor Adorno (1959) argued, after war, destruction, and dictatorship, societies which do not engage with the structural roots of violence and address them will face the challenge of recreating the conditions for sustained conflict.

City-making in post-war situations or continuous violence contexts is not an easy task. An "urban development as usual" approach is not enough, as swift choices can feed conflict when short-sighted action ignores deeper, socio-political issues. There were voices who called for professions in the built environment to be more involved in conflict resolution. For instance, Esther Charlesworth (2006) advocated for an "architects without borders" approach and worked towards a code of practice, a Hippocratic Oath for architects in war situations. Yet, the key concern here should not be whether design or urban planning can or cannot lead to reconciliation or peace. Undoubtedly, the work of socio-political processes is key to those aims. Instead, I argue that design interventions in cities can play a role in fomenting conflict or keeping wounds open: it is more the consequence than the intention that matters here. In Belgrade, the lack of reconstruction of ruins after the 1999 NATO bombing is a continuous reminder of the bombing, and it feeds various victimhood-centered narratives in society, obfuscating debates about the responsibility of the Serbian state during the wars of the 1990s (Bădescu 2019b) (Figure 3). Notwithstanding the intentionality of authorities, it is the consequence of non-reconstruction that matters. For reconstruction, the key is not only to bridge spatial challenges with social concerns (Barakat et al. 1998) but also careful consideration of possible impacts in a volatile situation. As such, it is more important to think about the possible consequences of architectural interventions in urban spaces than to design or plan for sustainable peace.

Figure 3. Ruins in Belgrade, sustaining victimhood narratives. Source: Photo by author.

Recovering the built environment is an important goal of reconstruction. Housing is often a priority. However, temporary housing tends to remain permanent; therefore, a design that is more versatile for longer term use is needed (Barakat 2003; Peacock et al. 2018). Moreover, housing alone is not enough to rebuild communities and has to be accompanied with the provision of possibilities for livelihoods (Jansen and Löfving 2009). This is particularly important for understanding the resettlement of refugees or internally displaced people: younger people, for instance, are looking more for economic stability in their lives rather than to return to their places of origin, even with all their emotional connections to these places (Bădescu 2015; Jansen 2007).

Another focus of reconstruction is symbolic buildings. In reconstruction work, significant attention has been given to the rebuilding of key buildings and high-quality design. However, this has frequently not been matched with concerns regarding functionality and usage. While helpful for recovering the sense of place of communities, a focus on the rebuilding of cultural landmarks can backfire when the needs of people are not met in parallel. For instance, the flagship reconstruction of

Mostar Bridge, destroyed in 1993 by Bosnian Croat forces, was touted by the World Bank as a symbol of reunification and reconciliation between Muslims and Croats (Figure 4). In contrast, the Bulevar, a central Mostar avenue that functioned as a frontline during the war, remained in ruins, including its former shops, hospitals, and schools. This left much of the local population frustrated with the reconstruction of heritage that was more celebrated by the Muslims (the bridge was a typical Ottoman construction) and was not necessarily functional (there were other bridges that were used by more people) (Calame and Pasic 2009). In Homs and Aleppo, official heritage buildings, including monumental and religious sites, have recently been rebuilt, while neighborhoods have not, which critical voices in the diaspora see as an act of disregarding their role in community heritage and memory (Azzouz 2020). In Sarajevo, the reconstruction of the National Library of Bosnia took 22 years, but aside from a few exhibits, it only hosts temporary functions of the City Hall, not serving the community otherwise. In Beirut, the high-quality Central District stands empty, as properties were sold to a now largely absent elite from the Gulf, a far cry from the dynamic mix existing before the war. The Solidere-run reconstruction created, in the words of a local architect, an upmarket version of its former self. The sense of vibrancy was lost. While it was based on high-quality design, the reconstruction evicted the medley of people that once made Beirut's central streets so dynamic and lively and replaced the shops and souqs with a large outdoor shopping complex that has been compared to a duty-free shop. Solidere invited a plethora of starchitects, from Arata Izosaki to Rafael Moneo and Ricardo Bofill, to design the space. The masterplan was designed by Angus Gavin, formerly a member of the London Docklands Development corporation. Nevertheless, the emphasis on starchitects and high-end products has led to the sacrifice of the center's vibrancy and mix. The high-quality reconstruction could provide the framework for a future of reappropriation by city residents. However, at the moment, this is merely potential. Only a socially minded reconstruction can recover the city for its people.

Figure 4. The bridge in Mostar. Source: Photo by author.

Architectural reconstruction is political and, at times, an expression of symbolic violence. As such, the erasure or transformation of the built environment can be associated with the marginalization of particular groups or with new discourses of domination in a post-war setting; thus, the direct violence of war can be continued with these forms of symbolic violence. In Beirut, while most sacral objects in the rebuilt city were carefully reconstructed, the construction of a large Sunni mosque in Martyrs' Square, the city's central public space, gave a sense of the power of the Sunni prime minister who managed the reconstruction process (Figure 5). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the post-war reconstruction of mosques and churches contributed to the recovery of cultural life. On the other hand, the change in forms—taller minarets and church towers which were rebuilt up to seven times larger than the originals in Mostar—accentuated a sense of competition and antagonism between groups. These monuments speak to a continuation of violence in symbolic forms and are thus materializations of animosities and continuing conflict.

Figure 5. Post-war mosque in Beirut. Source: Photo by author.

3.2. International Actors

International actors can often take part in acts of symbolic violence, whether intentionally, being motivated by various economic and geopolitical interests, or through the consequences of particular choices (Bădescu 2024). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, the interventions led by the many international actors taking part in the reconstruction of religious buildings, shopping malls, or monuments reflected the cultural practices of their home countries: Salafi practices in mosques built by Saudi Arabia, malls which do not serve alcohol, schools called "Serbia" sponsored by the Belgrade government in the Republika Srpska, etc. (Bădescu 2016).

International actors bring different political platforms to the forefront, and as such, they often neglect the interests and wellbeing of cities and their populations. When the platform is state consolidation, attention is often given to state building, with capital cities being an arena of international institutions, while urban authorities and agendas are marginalized, a phenomenon called "over-governance" by Daniel Esser (2009). For instance, in Kabul, international decision makers worked with national authorities, often bypassing local authorities, placing national security concerns above city planning and leading to the uncontrolled growth of the city (Beall and Esser 2005). Similarly, in Sarajevo, a central area near the train station intended to become the new campus of the university, with an already approved masterplan, was overturned through state intervention to be turned into the new US embassy, despite the fact that the USA never asked for the site in the first place. This highlighted how national-level politics bypassed local decision making but also the public interest of the community of students and residents. Instead of a campus in a parklike, open setting, Sarajevans now face the long, opaque wall of the large, securitized university compound (Bădescu 2016). Moreover, international funding can boost the credibility of the government or opposition parties associated with such flows, which has an impact on local and national politics. For instance, in Kigali, the high influx of international money for reconstruction projects strengthened the grip of the ruling party over the city and even the entire country (Goodfellow and Smith 2013).

While governments have frequently welcomed such international involvement, local architects, planners, and communities have often felt side-stepped. The critiques against a form of parachute-in international practice which is insensitive to local context have been addressed by many locals. In my research, it emerged that many such interventions occurred as a quick fix and mostly alienated local actors (Bădescu 2016, 2019a, 2019c). Moreover, through a lack of participation, these interventions

created urban environments that felt foreign or created other sources of resentment. The discussions about the reconstruction in Syria have also highlighted the important role that international actors are expected to have. With many properties sold by the fleeing middle classes to Saudi and Iranian investors and with Lebanese entrepreneurs excited about the prospects of reconstruction, there is the possibility that international actors, with their economic and geopolitical interests, will dominate the reconstruction of Syria's cities. A workshop I organized in Beirut in 2017 with Lebanese and Syrian architects brought together critical voices addressing the mere import of urban models and seeing reconstruction as a market for opportunistic, international real estate and urban development experts. In contrast, the importance of the local can be highlighted through the ongoing efforts of Syrian architects and NGOs on the ground in cities like Homs and Aleppo, as well as in the Syrian diaspora. These local actors have been mapping existing destruction, undertaking necessary work to avoid the collapse of buildings, and planning for coherent reconstruction plans that both recreate a sense of home and bring forward a more sustainable form of urbanism (Al-Sabouni and Scruton 2016; Azzouz 2019; Munawar 2018).

3.3. Reflective Reconstruction

Approaching reconstruction after war or ongoing destruction, as with any other act of urban redevelopment, suggests a return to "normalcy". Urban residents see the recreation of the city, marking its return to a functional, normal urban system. Yet the question emerges as to what extent the sheer act of violence needs to be engaged with. Is looking towards the future the way to overcome war? Psychologists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich 1975) described the over-emphasis on reconstruction in West Germany as a source of societal blockage in working with the past, creating an inability to mourn and to come to terms with the past. A reliance on city-making as a way to merely reshape the future without engaging with the legacy of a past war and crimes or ongoing violence is moot. Many societies emerging from violence and war prefer to ignore the traumatic past. Yet such amnesia in the urban realm reproduces unequal relationships of power, favors those who seized power during the war, often with violent methods, and foments animosity.

Second, as conflict often morphs, ignoring what happened does not solve it. In particular, in contemporary wars, where the end of violence seems distant, as well as in cities experiencing violence, urban interventions need to be contextualized and understood in relationship to the conflict situation. Let us take the example of a new park. Creating a park in between two neighborhoods is wonderfully

sustainable in many cities, yet in one in which there is tension between the two communities neighboring the park, the green area will serve mostly as a divider and not a connector. If there is ongoing violence, it will remain a no-go area with the perception of unsafety.

City-making , then, has to engage with the past or present of violence. I call this a *reflective reconstruction*, in which societies have the opportunity to ponder the existence of violence in societies. The ruined church memorials in some European cities underline the horrors of the Second World War to today's residents. However, in Belgrade, the ruins of the NATO bombings in the center of the city trigger similar feelings of victimhood and are rarely read as a humanitarian intervention designed to stop the violence of the Serbian state, the explanation frame provided by NATO. The question of essential consideration here is how a reflective reconstruction communicates messages to the viewer. American architect Lebbeus Woods visited Sarajevo during the siege of the city and proposed a scheme of reconstruction in which all buildings would maintain some destruction mark, including so-called *scars* and *scabs* (2008). For many locals, this was too radical, as they did not want to live in a city bearing scars of warfare everywhere and therefore being in a state of continuous remembrance of the war. However, after the reconstruction of most of the ruined buildings, the civil society asked for such a ruin-memorial in the building of the Oslobođenje newspaper. This memorial would have highlighted not only destruction but also the resilience of the newspaper staff who resisted during the siege and continued their news activities despite the violence and attacks on the building. The initiative, however, did not come to fruition, as the ruined building was turned into a hotel, depriving the city from such a reflective reconstruction.

In approaching memory and dealing with the past in reconstruction, the balance between understanding, on the one hand, that urban memories and heritage are essential for people to have a sense of place and a sense of home and, on the other, the aspirations of local citizens for a better city is key. In the Syrian city of Homs, a mapping project conducted with city residents showcased the places of meaning and memory that participants saw as part of the city's urban identity, as well as their own entanglements with the city. From heritage sites to cafés as sites of social interaction, this mapping highlighted the city as a bundle of places of meaning. According to residents of Homs, such spaces embodying urban memory should be reconstructed and brought back to life. Participants also mapped their visions of improvement for the city. Most saw reconstruction as a process of both bringing back and creating new urban structures, with only a small minority advocating for a form of rebuilding that is exclusively new (Azzouz 2019). The memory mapping and social mapping of

visions for the city need to be in dialogue for a meaningful solution that comes to terms with the past but also sets the stage for a livable, sustainable city.

3.4. Agonistic Urbanism

Cities are marked by contestation, an unavoidable condition triggered by change. Contestation can lead to violent conflict in certain situations, but it can be channeled more constructively through generative forms of civic engagement. This engagement can be consensus-based. However, consensus is either hard to reach or seen as unsatisfactory for all parties. As such, urbanists like Wendy Pullan (2015) suggest the need for an agonistic urbanism, where conflict is channeled through debate and friction, through an understanding of agonism derived from Chantal Mouffe and Ernest Laclau. For the two, democracy occurs through the confrontation of ideas; similarly, for Pullan, agonistic urbanism implies harnessing contestation as an engine of urban change, creating platforms for debate and spaces for encounter. Larger cities in fragile states offer unique opportunities for channeling contestation into agonistic engagement rather than violent conflict. As Goodfellow (2013) showed, Kigali offers the best opportunity in Rwanda to channel conflict to political and not violent action, through a connected, ethnically inclusive civil society, an autonomous private sector, and existing institutions. Agonistic urbanism thus implies using the power of the urban to foster interaction and include a diversity of voices.

3.5. Syncretic Place-Making

One of the transformative practices I encountered in the field is the harvesting of the diverse building traditions in a given place, as well as its intangible heritage, in order to foster a continuity in the sense of place and the sense of home among urban residents. I call this "syncretic place-making", as it brings together different traditions, without sacrificing cultural characteristics, as assimilation does, operating through practices of proximity and convergence (Bădescu 2022). In Sarajevo, the work of architects like those at Studio Non-Stop and Amir Vuk Zec aim to capture the genius loci and multiple traditions into a contemporary architecture of ambiance, suggesting the role of Sarajevo as a bridge between cultures. Amir Vuk Zec describes his architecture as a blending of elements of diversity, bridging elements of the Ottoman and Habsburg pasts, as well as cultural motifs shared by the various ethnicities and religions of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In his words, his architecture is a "Bosnian pot" of mixity. Thus, difference is at the core of the city's identity, and such a design celebrates it, as opposed to the architecture that embodies particular, distinctive identities in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. For instance, Amir Vuk's

Turkish Cultural Centre in Sarajevo has a continuous façade open to the street, among the frontages of the Habsburg times, yet it is rooted in the Ottoman concept that the interior is the essence of a house, welcoming visitors through a narrow side street, leading to a spacious central courtyard, reminiscent of Sarajevo's traditional avlijas. The standout feature, the doksat-jutty, not only defines the street front but also links the building's function with the city's vernacular (Figure 6). Studio Non-Stop also designs structures that pay homage to diversity, even including office buildings that are defined as a Balkan Puzzle, showcasing the heterogeneity of the region.

Figure 6. Syncretic Place-making in Sarajevo: Amir Vuk Zec's Turkish Cultural Center. Source: Photo by Sandro Ledler, ©Amir Vuk Zec place-making, used with permission.

Key to the work of these architects is the sense of place of a city of diversity, thus using difference as something to celebrate and not as a factor that creates conflict. While most city-making in Sarajevo mirrors a generic international design brought in by foreign investors, these local articulations of contemporary place-making constitute a form of resistance. By capturing the power of place, this approach facilitates the sustainability of the urban experience after war.

4. Conclusions

This chapter discussed the predicaments of urban development in conflict situations and the aftermath of wars, arguing that the sustainability of urban development and that of peace are related. Reconstruction in conflict cities offers insights for contemporary situations of ongoing violence in increasingly fragile cities by revisiting the promise and limits of design, highlighting the need for integrated, multi-sectorial approaches, and advocating for the role of a meaningful conversation about the legacies of the past and the visions for the future, also understood through an agonistic lens. As such, this chapter shows not only that engaging with conflict is an important challenge for the SDGs of sustainable cities and communities but also that cities and the built environment are relevant for achieving the goals of SDG 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions.

This chapter outlined conceptualizations of alternative modes of engagement with conflict, from agonistic urbanism to syncretic place-making. Approaches like syncretic place-making and reflective reconstruction identified in relationship to conflict cities are examples of sustainability and resilience against all odds for the cities in the world beset by frictions as well as increasing migration and diversity. While a key conclusion is that architecture and city-making cannot stop conflict, despite deterministic assumptions made by some practitioners, what sustainable cities can do is help us to think critically about the possible consequences of urban development acts in fostering conflict or rechanneling it. The inhabitants of all cities, in an epoch of migration, mobility, and increasing diversity, can ponder about such forms of syncretic place-making, which make cities homes for many. These initiatives and practices, from Sarajevo to Homs, highlight configurations of spaces of hope and new horizons of possibilities. Difference can be seen not as a fault line fomenting conflict but as a source of creativity and advancement, as well as a source of inspiration for better cities. This fits the context of all our increasingly diverse cities for sustainable futures.

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