**Peacebuilding and Spatial Transformation: Peace, Space and Place,** by Annika Björkdahl and‎ Stefanie Kappler, London and New York, Routledge, 2017, 166 pp., £90.00, ISBN 9781138924154

War and peace are part of the political landscape situated between place (material locality) and space (the imaginary counterpart of place) (p. 18 *ff*.). War occurs in certain geographical territories, which are often the centre of conflict themselves. Over the course of a conflict, these territories become emotionally charged with meaning and symbolism, thus making the transformation from being a place to a space that is important for the conflict parties and individuals involved in war. This meaning and symbolism radiates as a cause of conflict until the violence ends and post-conflict peacebuilding commences.

Peacebuilding researchers and practitioners working on conflicts around the world are well aware of these phenomena, which have major implications for the possibility of the peaceful transformation of conflicts. It may thus come as a surprise that the transformation of ‘warspaces’ into ‘peacespaces’, and the role of agents in these processes, have not been studied extensively so far.

Annika Björkdahl and‎ Stefanie Kappler’s *Peacebuilding and Spatial Transformation: Peace, Space and Place* is the first comprehensive study of the processes of transforming spaces and places ‘to represent and manifest peace’ (p. 2). With their innovative study, the authors provide deep and stimulating insights into the ways in which sites of warfare and suffering can be reinterpreted as spaces that carry the ideas of peace and reconciliation. The interdisciplinary analysis combines ontological assumptions from conflict research, human geography and ethnography, thus adding refreshing new perspectives to the existing literature. By way of multi-site ethnography, the authors analyse sites in five conflict-affected countries – Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Northern Ireland, South Africa and Cyprus – through the lenses of space, place, time and peace. In doing so, they provide invaluable and context-specific insights into the spatial politics of each conflict.

In adopting the social constructivist approach, the authors are able to conceptualise the material locality (place), the construction of its imagined counterpart (space) and the agency that ‘manifests itself in transformative practice and therefore becomes visible over space and time’ (p. 24–25), contributing to or obstructing the transformation of a space to take on a more peaceful meaning and allow for reconciliation after large-scale war.

The authors provide interesting insights into the tremendous role geographical structures play in post-conflict peacebuilding, for example with regard to spatial apartheid in South Africa (Chapter 6). Spatial apartheid continues to obstruct peace today, more than 20 years after the official end of political apartheid – something that is hardly ever studied in peace research. Yet, it is exactly these prevalent power structures, mirrored in spatial divides and linked with structural constraints – race, gender, class and social status, for example – that continue to be a source of conflict and grievance.

While the book makes a very strong theoretical contribution, a slight weakness lies in the authors’ case selection. The introduction notes that the three main criteria for case selection were: the transformative dimension of the site; the symbolic and material presence of war and/or peace; and the possibility of reading the site through a focus on transitional agency (p. 7). While the criteria are reasonably clear, they are vague enough to apply to a dozen other cases. Thus, the question arises: why not choose the most contentious of all sites in the past few decades, the city of Jerusalem? US President Donald Trump’s controversial recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the subsequent outbreak of violence is only the most recent event in a history of social construction of the city as a space of contention, peace and worship for millions of people. Other potential sites of interest include conflict cases in sub-Saharan Africa, where the legacies of colonial times, arbitrary border demarcation and the construction of power relations among ethnic groups are some of the main issues underlying conflict. Places of violence from the Second World War also carry a strong symbolic meaning for survivors and their descendants – today and far into the future. A more historical perspective on the topic could have provided a stronger contribution towards the relation between space and place with time.

However, this minor shortcoming does not detract from the fact that *Peacebuilding and Spatial Transformation* makes a strong contribution to critical peace research that tackles questions of peacebuilding and reconciliation from a spatial perspective. In this sense, it will not only be of interest to scholars of peace and conflict studies, human geography or international relations; it has value also for practitioners and those working in the realm of international peacebuilding.

The book’s findings also stimulate a critical view of attempts at ­– and templates of – peacebuilding on sites of war, in which the heavy influence of national and international actors reproduces particular power structures and dynamics, and contributes to their very own (re)interpretation of spaces and places in light of their own histories and policy agendas. Thus, it will not be surprising in future to see more references to the concepts of space and place when talking about the possibility of transforming ‘warscapes’ into ‘peacescapes’ (p. 2).

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