



# Spaces for Peace: Women's Agency in Mitrovica, Kosovo

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, civic space is defined as ‘the environment that enables people and groups (...) to participate meaningfully in the political, economic, social and cultural life of their societies’ (United Nations, 2020). Following this definition, civil society actors, such as women advocates, should feel safe to freely express their views and ‘effect change peacefully and effectively’ (United Nations, 2020). Since the Kosovo conflict in 1999, at the end of the breakup of Yugoslavia, women’s civic space has been considerably constrained by widespread ethnic/national division, alongside traditional patriarchal structures. During the conflict, while men were away fighting, many women left their jobs to protect their homes and take care of their families. This enabled women to experience more empowered roles, as they became the main decision-makers. After the conflict, however, as a result of fewer available jobs and re-emerging patriarchal views of women’s roles, women were expected to remain at

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home while men returned to work and regained their previous positions (both at work and at home). Double trapped by patriarchy and the ethnic/national divisions in the city, women felt silenced and powerless. In response, women from different ethnic/national communities started getting together to learn, work and travel as part of their participation in women's empowerment initiatives facilitated by local and international organisations. Today women continue to meet across communities within the context of their own local organisations/businesses, many of which are the direct result of women's participation in empowerment initiatives. This chapter considers women's cooperation across ethnic/national boundaries as a means to effect change in the constrained context of post-conflict Mitrovica. It does so by exploring women's accounts of their own trajectories, in particular their experiences of conflict and patriarchy in Mitrovica, and the meaningful changes that they were able to create for themselves and others. Women's spaces are discussed as spaces for peace built on high levels of inclusivity and support, and grounded in long-term friendships and caring relationships across ethnic/national groups. The main argument of this chapter is that women's cooperation in post-conflict contexts—spaces where women from different ethnic/national communities get together to learn, work and travel—should be seen as spaces for peace, a notion with the potential to transform the ways in which women's empowerment initiatives are viewed, conceptualised and delivered in post-conflict societies around the world.

The chapter is organised in the following way: after a brief description of the everyday context of Mitrovica, the chapter offers an overview of research concerning women and peace. The chapter proceeds with a discussion of the concepts of space and peace, before exploring the notion of *spaces for peace* which is central to the argument of this chapter. This is followed by a short explanation of how data was collected, and a presentation of the main findings concerning three civil society actions—learning, working and travelling together—exercised by the women who participated in this study. Finally, the main discussion explores how each action evolves within the context of women's spaces and how they contribute to peace and peacebuilding in Mitrovica. The chapter concludes by highlighting how conceptualising women's spaces as spaces for peace can lead to more sustainable forms of peace and should therefore be given more prominence.

## 2 THE CONSTRAINED CONTEXT OF MITROVICA

Mitrovica became a divided city in 1999, at the end of the Kosovo conflict (Castan Pinos, 2015). The river Ibar, which runs through the city, became the *de facto* border between Serbia and Kosovo, in effect dividing the Serb and Albanian communities which had lived peacefully side by side until 1989 when Slobodan Milosevic rose to power. As the new leader of Yugoslavia, Milosevic stirred half-dormant nationalistic feelings leading to the breakup of Yugoslavia (1991–1999), at that point the most violent conflict in Europe since World War II. As an autonomous province of Serbia, within the federal republic of Yugoslavia, Kosovo was the last territory to claim its independence. However, territorial claims from both sides led to disputes between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo that last until today.<sup>1</sup> Since the end of the conflict, Mitrovica, located 50 km south of the actual border with Serbia, has become a symbol of the dispute between the two communities and the divisions in the city are still felt today. The bridge over the river Ibar has been closed to traffic since 1999 and has been diligently monitored by international peace forces ever since. Although pedestrians are free to cross the bridge, many Serbs living north of the Ibar have never crossed the bridge to the southern part of the city, and Albanians in the south only venture as far as the *Bosniak mahalla*,<sup>2</sup> a shopping district on the north bank of the river. Other communities in Mitrovica—Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Turkish, Bosniak, Gorani, Montenegrin, Croat<sup>3</sup>—live on both sides of the river and are often caught between the rivalries between Albanians and Serbs. It is in this constrained context that, in the aftermath of the conflict, and often with the support of international organisations, women from different communities started to get together to learn, work and travel. Such activities were met with initial suspicion by the women themselves, but also by family and friends who considered meeting with ‘the other side’ as an act of treason. In addition, crossing the main bridge, or leaving their

<sup>1</sup> Serbia does not recognise the 2008 Kosovo declaration of independence. The governments of Serbia and Kosovo are currently involved in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue, an ongoing series of talks sponsored by the EU, aimed at resolving the dispute.

<sup>2</sup> Bosnian neighbourhood.

<sup>3</sup> For more information about the communities in Kosovo, please see: <https://www.ecmikosovo.org/en/Community-Profiles>.

neighbourhood to attend these activities, was often a dangerous undertaking due to sporadic outbursts of violence in the city. Despite this, women's participation in empowerment initiatives flourished and today, over 20 years on, women continue to get together in the context of their own organisations/businesses. Unfortunately, division and patriarchy are still prevalent in Mitrovica, and although women continue to educate and empower themselves through their organisations/businesses, their journeys are intertwined with complex power dynamics. While division in the city limits women's freedom to move and meet across communities, patriarchy continues to reinforce the idea that women should remain at home away from full participation in the political, economic, social and cultural life of Mitrovica. In addition, although independent, many women's organisations continue to be directly supported by international aid programmes (run by the European Union, the United Nations and the United States) forcing women to navigate complex and highly bureaucratic funding systems, while trying to keep their organisations/businesses viable.

### 3 WOMEN AND PEACE: TOWARDS A NOTION OF 'SPACES FOR PEACE'

The passing of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) in 2000 and further resolutions, which together are known as the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, gave women and girls a more visible role in post-conflict settings around the world. However, the implementation of UNSCR 1325, has been somewhat limited (Cockburn, 2011; Irvine, 2013). The positive impact of UNSCR 1325 on women's everyday lives in post-conflict 'appears to have resulted in both main-streaming, which has bureaucratized and diluted feminist goals, and side-streaming, which has isolated gender from other post conflict concerns' (Irvine, 2013: 34). On the one hand, the bureaucratisation of women's programmes via the UN and/or other international aid organisations has failed to look at the actual experiences of women in post-conflict settings. On the other hand, treating gender as somewhat removed from wider peace and peacebuilding processes (UN Women, 2018) has missed the opportunity to engage women in peace processes (Mazurana, 2002). As a result, women continue to be largely seen as victims of conflict rather than active agents for change (UN Women, 2018).

Furthermore, much of the implementation of UNSCR 1325 has been concerned with economic empowerment (Duncanson, 2019; MacKenzie, 2009), focusing primarily on providing women with access to opportunities (usually training opportunities), material resources and financial control (Porter, 2013). However, although crucial to changing women's positions in patriarchal societies, economic empowerment is only a small part of empowerment practices that critically engage with, and challenge, established power relations (Cornwall, 2016; Duncanson, 2019). One way to move forward is to understand peace and peacebuilding as gendered processes (De La Rey & McKay, 2006), in which gender relations and peacebuilding intersect, and to look at alternative peacebuilding practices (Bergeron et al., 2017), often led by women.

Recent research has shown that women and men conceptualise and understand peace differently (Justino et al., 2018), which has strong implications on how women and men engage with peace and peace practices after conflict. Justino et al. interviewed women and men in Afghanistan, Liberia, Nepal and Sierra Leone and showed that while men talked about peace as the absence of personal violence and armed conflict, women referred to peace 'at a more personal level, including in it access to basic needs for their families, such as food and shelter, absence of violence in the home, their children's ability to attend school, and unity in communities and families' (Justino et al., 2018: 922). The authors have also shown that both women and men understood the role of women as limited to the household, family and communities, in effect preventing their participation in the more formal peace processes at national and international levels. This study is not only supported by previous research (De la Rey & McKay, 2006; Mazurana & McKay, 1999), it also suggests that similar findings can be found in different post-conflict settings around the world. It becomes clear that gender, peace and peacebuilding cannot be dissociated from each other, and that neglecting gender undermines peace and peacebuilding processes (Duncanson, 2016; Mazurana, 2002).

Early work by Cockburn (1998, 2007) paid particular attention to how women negotiate and organise around differences across ethnic/national lines after conflict. Cockburn's early research looked mainly at organisations which are explicitly anti-war and occupy relatively visible positions in society. However, women in post-conflict settings around the world cooperate every day at the local level, in much less visible spaces, often enabled by local organisations. This chapter views such everyday cooperation as a civil society response to the constrained context of Mitrovica and begins

to explore cooperative actions as spaces for peace. The concepts of *space* and *peace* have been widely explored and have recently been put together in what is called the ‘spatial turn in peacebuilding’ (Brigg, 2020). Similar to the local turn in peacebuilding (Leonardsson & Rudd, 2015), the spatial turn in peacebuilding highlights local practices and knowledge, as opposed to the prevailing, often Western, view of peace and peacebuilding processes. In a similar way, this chapter offers a localised view of peace and peacebuilding but attempts to move a step forward by highlighting not only local knowledge but, most importantly, the role of the relationships that emerge from local responses to conflict and post-conflict, such as women’s cooperative actions in post-conflict Mitrovica.

Social relations are an integral component of space and, as a result, space is inevitably influenced by the complex power structures that produce, and are (re)produced in, everyday interactions (Massey, 1994, 2005). As Massey (1994: 2) defiantly states, ‘(...) the spatial *is* social relations “stretched out”’. In other words, space can not be seen as static, it should instead be understood as a process that evolves over time, as relations are formed and transformed and as (local and global) power relations shift. To understand women’s cooperative actions in post-conflict settings as women’s spaces means exploring the relationships that are formed and transformed as the result of such interactions, at the same time paying particular attention to the power relations that are at play.

To look at women’s spaces as spaces for peace puts the spotlight on how relationships that are formed as the result of women’s cooperation can contribute to peace and peacebuilding. This chapter builds on Galtung’s (1969) distinction between negative and positive peace. While negative peace refers to the absence of physical violence, positive peace refers to the absence of social violence, or the pursuit of social justice. This distinction offered, for the first time, the possibility to think about peace as social justice, something that can only be achieved with deep commitment to building a more inclusive society based on equal rights and equal access to opportunities. Building on the concept of positive peace, and consequently on the idea of the durability of peace, Lederach (1997, 2012) explored different ways in which individuals and groups at local, national and international levels can (ideally) work together in what he called an *infrastructure for peace*. It is within such an *infrastructure for peace* that civil society actions emerge as powerful tools in peace and peacebuilding processes, particularly in terms of reconciliation which Lederach defines as ‘the point of encounter where concerns

about both the past and the future can meet (...) [a] space for the acknowledging of the past and envisioning of the future as the necessary ingredient for reframing the present' (Lederach, 1997: 27). Reconciliation can thus be understood as a space of encounter, a social process whereby new relationships are formed and transformed (Askins, 2016; Peterson, 2017, 2019; Valentine, 2008; Wilson, 2017). This idea of encounter is important to understand how individual trajectories intersect to create particular opportunities for relationships to emerge. Individual trajectories, once separated, become (inter)connected enabling individuals to acknowledge and negotiate differences (Leitner, 2012; Piekut & Valentine, 2017). Seen as such, women's cooperative activities after conflict, can be seen as spaces of encounter, or reconciliation practices, which enable women to negotiate their differences and forge new relationships. In a similar way, this chapter looks at women's everyday cooperative actions as spaces where differences can be negotiated, established categories (ethnic, national, gender, age, class, etc.) can be challenged (Amin, 2002) and, ultimately, where prejudice can be reduced (Allport, 1979). Allport's early suggestion that under optimal conditions contact can reduce prejudice have been widely tested (Pettigrew & Troop, 2006), and although such conditions may not be available, or even possible, in post-conflict settings (McKeown & Dixon, 2017), initial interventions such as women's empowerment initiatives can act as powerful triggers for the development of cross-group relationships, leading to more structural social changes.

To summarise, this chapter argues that women's spaces emerge as an important response to the constrained setting of post-conflict Mitrovica by challenging ethnic/national divisions and traditional patriarchal structures. In these spaces, women are able to freely express and develop their views, at the same time contributing to peace and peacebuilding processes by creating new relationships across ethnic/national lines. As discussed, such spaces are understood as spaces for peace, which have the potential to build more sustainable forms of peace.

#### 4 SPACES FOR PEACE: WOMEN'S AGENCY IN MITROVICA

The qualitative data presented in this chapter was collected in Mitrovica between October and November 2018. A series of in-depth interviews were conducted in Albanian, Serbian and English with women from different ethnic/national communities aged between 23 and 74 years old.

Interviews conducted in Albanian and Serbian were facilitated by a local interpreter. Common to all women was their participation in women's empowerment initiatives immediately after the conflict, and the subsequent creation of their own organisations/businesses. Interviews focused on women's reflections about their participation in initial empowerment initiatives as well as on current activities in the context of their own organisations. Interviews were guided by three main research questions: (1) How do women position themselves in the context of their everyday lives in post-conflict Mitrovica?; (2) How do women engage with each other in women's spaces, and how do they articulate in/exclusion within such spaces?; and (3) How does the wider socio-political context of Kosovo and Mitrovica influence women's trajectories, particularly their engagement with women's spaces, and how does this engagement translate into peace and peacebuilding practices? All interviews were translated and transcribed by a lay translator.

Data was analysed using Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014), which enabled the organisation of the data in progressively more comprehensive categories. In addition, Positioning Theory (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003; Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999; Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990) enabled a particular focus on women's positionalities, and the use of inclusive/exclusive categories of belonging to describe women's positions in relation to particular groups. The analysis that follows focuses on women's own understandings of the spaces they are part of, and discusses how new relationships contribute to more sustainable forms of peace.

#### 4.1 *Learning/Training Together: Encountering the 'Other'*

As discussed in the introduction, in the aftermath of the conflict, many international organisations introduced and facilitated empowerment initiatives designed to equip women with new knowledge and/or skills. These training courses encouraged women to generate their own income to support their families, and included women from different communities. For many, this was the first time they had come face to face with members from 'the other side' of the conflict, as Rabiye explains in the extract below:

(...) For me, it was very hard in the beginning, when we had trainings with Serbs. The Red Cross sent us to Tirana, [to] Budva in Montenegro, we stayed with Serbs for the first time, it was very hard but then I came



out of it with friends! Now they call me often, they come here to see me, they visit me.

Rabije, an Albanian woman who works as an NGO assistant, lost several members of her family during the conflict. The way in which Rabije moves from initially using the classic categories 'us' versus 'them' to employing the more inclusive category 'friends' to describe her encounter with Serbs, is a powerful indicator that initial encounters can trigger new relationships that challenge established prejudice (Allport, 1979; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Also evident in Rabije's reflection is that initial encounters are not a point in time, but evolve over time (Valentine, 2008). By focusing on the friendships that Rabije still maintains today with the Serb women she met in the early 2000s, she alludes to the powerful bond that challenges the divisions that surround them.

At the same time, these spaces enabled women to reflect about their own positions and connect to each other around a shared understanding of their current realities, as Ajmane reflects in the extract below. Currently, Ajmane runs a successful baking business supplying different supermarket chains in Kosovo, and when asked about the importance of having participated in initial training courses facilitated by a local NGO, she replied:

The name<sup>4</sup> is very good, very accurate, because (...) it gives women access to information, to open her eyes, to know where she stands. That's where I got inspired to also create an NGO that deals with women issues only. Maybe I'm being a bit egoistic, but men have almost everything, women don't.

For Ajmane, also Albanian, training courses are much more than formative experiences, they are also spaces where women can reflect about their position in society. She uses the pronouns 'her' and 'she' not to refer to someone in particular (Mühlhäusler & Harré, 1990), but to evoke a shared identity as women.<sup>5</sup> In a similar way to Rabije's use of

<sup>4</sup> Ajmane refers here to the name of the organisation which facilitated the training course in which she took part. In English, the name translates as 'opportunity'.

<sup>5</sup> Clarified by the translator. Although there are obvious grammatical errors in this and subsequent extracts, errors were intentionally left uncorrected to stay true to the original conversations in Albanian and Serbian.

the category ‘friends’, Ajmane uses the category ‘women’ as a superordinate category. However, while ‘friends’ evokes a more personal bond, ‘women’ evokes a bond routed in similar experiences of patriarchy. Both categories, however, allude to a different kind of bond that is explored in these spaces, a bond that challenges both ethnicity/nationality and patriarchy in Mitrovica. For Ajmane, the realisation of the imbalance of opportunities between women and men inspired her to create her own organisation, a conscious action that defies traditional patriarchal structures in Mitrovica. At the end of our conversation, when asked about the role of initial training courses in enabling new relationships, she replied:

[Training courses were] a path that more or less oriented us as women, before our relationships were more ambiguous.

In this extract, Ajmane explicitly uses the category ‘women’ as a new, more defined, way to relate to other women. As discussed in the previous section, women often feel insecure and intimidated when taking part in women’s empowerment initiatives (Justino et al., 2018), which becomes more pronounced for women of ethno-religious minorities (Myrntinen & Popovic, 2019). For the women in this study, to meet as ‘women’ provided an alternative framework on which new relationships could develop, and taking part in initial training courses offered the first opportunity for women to distance themselves from patriarchy as well as relationships based on ethnic/national divisions. This new framework creates ‘sites of unnoticeable cultural questioning or transgression’ (Amin, 2002: 969), in which traditional categorisations become more flexible and relationships can, as a result, be transformed. This more defined way of relating to each other, suggests a process whereby women (re)negotiate their differences in favour of a more inclusive category. This is of particular importance in post-conflict settings as a closer look at how the more inclusive category ‘women’ is constructed can offer new insights about alternative models of post-war reconstruction (Bergeron et al., 2017), that are not only context-specific, but also challenge neoliberal ideas and ideals of peace and peacebuilding.

As previously mentioned, initial training courses were often a steppingstone for women who went on to create their own organisations/businesses. Sebahate, a participant in an initial training course who has created her own organisation, is now in a position in which she is able to offer training courses about preserving fruit and vegetables (her own

business) to women who are interested in the same activity and, potentially, in building their own businesses. This multiplying effect creates subsequent spaces for peace, in effect increasing the number of women who can benefit from these opportunities. When asked about the training courses and the women who take part, she responded:

Yes. They all are the same, as long as they have the will to work!

Sebahate positioned the women taking part in her course equally along a shared interest and a similar disposition—*the will to work*. As such, training courses are not only constructed around a more inclusive category—‘women’—they are also based on engagement, or the ways in which individuals are willing and able to work together (Amin, 2002). The effectiveness of these spaces lies ‘in placing people from different backgrounds in new settings where engagement with strangers in a common activity disrupts easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiates new attachments’ (Amin, 2002: 970).

Training/learning together can thus be seen as a space for peace in which different individual trajectories intersect, creating relationships that challenge ethnicity/nationality as well as patriarchy.

#### 4.2 *Working Together: Building Relationships*

Currently, the majority of the women in this study get together to work in the context of their own organisations/businesses. The ways in which women described their organisations allows for the exploration of how relationships are transformed from initial encounters into more meaningful relationships or friendships. For Dragana, a Serb woman who is the director of a women’s organisation in the northern part of the city, her work is intertwined with more personal relationships to which she alludes in the extract below. At this point in the conversation, she was asked how often the group meets:

But we need to meet often. Because we are friends, privately, and we... the idea is to... ‘economic development for women’.

For Dragana, friendship is an important element of her organisation. What is interesting about the extract above, is the way Dragana describes her organisation, as a group of friends (informal), with a very defined

objective which is almost certainly informed by the very formal process that she had to go through to set up her organisation. During the conversation Dragana described how difficult it was to navigate the complex process of applying for international funding. Despite this, she was very proud of the fact that her application was successful. What is clear from Dragana's statement above, is that in women's organisations the lines between private/informal and public/formal can become blurred. This blurring of boundaries can be seen both as a confirmation that women see peace more along the lines of positive peace (Justino et al., 2018) and as an alternative model of post-war reconstruction (Bergeron et al., 2017).

Highly inclusive categories were also often evoked by Dragana, and when asked about the situation in the aftermath of the conflict, she responded:

(...) it was very difficult time for all women, for all people in Kosovo and for Serbs and for Albanians it is the same situation. And I was always thinking how I can get some money to be... to live better, like everyone...

In evoking wider categories to talk about the impact of the conflict—'*all women*', '*all people in Kosovo*', '*Serbs*', '*Albanians*', '*everyone*'—Dragana not only highlights the commonalities of '*all people in Kosovo*' in the aftermath of the conflict, she also makes clear that working together across ethnic/national boundaries is a step towards a universal goal—'*to live better, like everyone*'—echoing one of Allport's (1979) 'optimal conditions' whereby individuals see themselves as members of the most inclusive category—common humanity. Throughout our conversation, Dragana often spoke about an ideal place where differences were not important. The way Dragana constructed her response, connecting all people in Kosovo around similar experiences of conflict and post-conflict reaffirms her role as an active agent creating/promoting change for herself, other women and, more generally, developing a view of the future where commonalities supersede differences. In a similar way, Zymryt, a Turkish woman who is the head of a women's organisation in the southern part of the city, also chose to emphasise what is common about the women in her organisation:

No, there is no difference, altogether, all the same. Together we create, altogether, [there is] no difference if you are Albanian, Bosnian. Doesn't matter, there is no difference, it is equal for us.

Zymryt explicitly states that ethnic/national categories are not relevant (although they are acknowledged), which enables the development of a shared group identity based on equality—'*It is equal for us*'. In the context of women's organisations/businesses, ethnic/national categorisations become, once again, less salient in favour of a new form of collective identity, reshaped around work and based on common experiences and closer relationships.

Although women's descriptions of their organisations often linked past and present experiences, their actions are oriented towards the future. The way women reflected about the spaces created by their organisations/businesses, linked different moments in their trajectories, which means they are not isolated from each other but connected in a continuum that extends into an open-ended future (Massey, 2005). To view, and engage with, women in post-conflict settings as active agents for change, requires an understating of women's spaces as processes of transformation that are constantly evolving and are, therefore, not fixed in a particular time and space. Furthermore, such spaces should be understood within the lived experience of individuals, their journeys and their thoughts about the future. As spaces for peace, women's organisations have the potential to create real social change.

### 4.3 *Travelling Together: Consolidating Relationships*

Trips outside Mitrovica were initially linked to training courses facilitated by international organisations, and the women in this study mentioned travelling together as their preferred activity when taking part in empowerment initiatives. As a result, some women's organisations now organise their own trips. Zehra, a Bosnian woman who is the head of a women's organisation in the northern part of the city, highlighted how travelling together can be boundary-breaking. At this point in the conversation, Zehra alluded to the difficulties of moving freely between the two sides of the river Ibar:

Yesterday it was Saturday, we went to Novi Pazar. I am the first to send Albanian women in Novi Pazar, I took the bus from a Serbian company, and sent women there.

Novi Pazar is a city in Serbia, a few kilometres north of the actual border with Kosovo. For Zehra, it was important to say that she was '*the first to send Albanian women to Novi Pazar*'. Travelling together creates opportunities for 'prosaic negotiation and transgression' (Amin, 2002: 972) and although travelling is not linked to traditional everyday spaces such as working spaces, these trips offer the best opportunities for regular (cultural) exchange in the context of a divided city such as Mitrovica. If moving freely within the city is difficult, travelling together offers the opportunity to meet and consolidate friendships away from the divisions of the city.

Travelling together also offers a much-needed break from the traditional role of wife and mother as Mykereme, a housewife from the Ashkali community, so passionately explains:

(...) We need, and we have the right, us, women, especially us from the community, we always did housework, these things, but now with these trainings we got out, we got aware[ness] and we are very happy that we take part in meetings with women.

Like Ajmane, Mykereme evokes similar experiences of patriarchy and sees travelling as a means to challenge it. Although Mykereme talks particularly about the women in her community, she speaks in relation to a larger group of women—'*us, women*'—in effect positioning women in her community alongside women, more generally, within a patriarchal society. Travelling together also emerges as a space for peace enabling women to remove themselves from their everyday realities and connect with each other in ways that were otherwise very difficult or, at times, impossible.

Learning/training, working and travelling together have evolved within the context of women's spaces, and constitute powerful civil society actions with the potential for developing more sustainable forms of positive peace. Grounded in women's experiences and emerging new relationships, these actions can form the basis for long-lasting social change. Therefore, recognising women's spaces as spaces for peace is the necessary

first step to transforming the ways in which women's empowerment initiatives are viewed, conceptualised and delivered in post-conflict contexts around the world.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In the constrained setting of Mitrovica, the women in this study revealed incredible drive for change built on more inclusive categories that are grounded in their everyday experiences. This chapter demonstrated how women's participation in empowerment initiatives transcends the wish/need to provide for their families or taking control of their finances. Women's empowerment initiatives, and the resulting organisations/businesses, create opportunities for new relationships to be formed and transformed and provide a different framework whereby women can distance themselves from patriarchy and ethnic/national divisions. Despite the criticism directed at UNSCR 1325 (Adjei, 2019; Cockburn, 2011; Cohn et al., 2004) and the WPS agenda, there is a need to move beyond these debates and recognise the importance of the changes facilitated by women's empowerment initiatives for the women themselves (Bergeron et al., 2017; Duncanson, 2019). Using the notion of spaces for peace can focus the attention on women's contributions to peace and peacebuilding by highlighting their voices and agency. Women's agency is however not limited to their actions—learning/training together, working together and travelling together—but extends to the kinds of relationships that are formed and transformed as the result of their actions. Ultimately, it is in the context of these relationships that women challenge the *status quo* and can thus create a different future for themselves and others.

Understanding women's spaces as spaces for peace can help us move beyond general ideas of peace and peacebuilding and focus our attention on the everyday lives of the individuals who are affected by conflict and its legacies. These informal, less visible, spaces for peace need to be considered and integrated in a more sustainable *infrastructure for peace* (Lederach, 2012) as important civil society responses to post-conflict with the potential to create real change. Once women, and the spaces they create, are locally, nationally and internationally recognised as driving elements in processes of social change, we can start transforming the ways in which women's empowerment initiatives are viewed, conceptualised and delivered in post-conflict contexts around the world.

**Acknowledgements** This chapter is based on my Ph.D. research. I would like to thank the Doctoral College of Loughborough University (UK) for awarding me a full research studentship in the School of Social, Political and Geographical Sciences as well as the John Guest Phillips Travelling Scholarship for funding part of my fieldwork in Mitrovica.

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