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# Divided Sarajevo. Representations and Sense of Belonging across the Boundary

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses the extent to which the territorial partition of Sarajevo affects people's spatial and social practices on a daily basis. Discussing the results of my interviews and ethnographic research I argue that the boundary crossing does not provide itself evidence of social bonds and exchange between the inhabitants of the two sides. On the contrary, what emerges from the contexts is a rooted division that does not manifest through open resentment towards the counterpart, but rather through indifference expressed by a separated, self-referred sense of belonging.
Spatial narratives and practices highlight that the symbolic relevance accorded to the boundary has been renegotiated throughout time; nevertheless, different and less visible dynamics intertwine in reproducing the division. Although crossing the boundary is not represented as a stressing emotional experience, that does not consequently imply the restoring of social interaction and exchange between the inhabitants of the two sides. On the contrary, the different spatialization of daily practices and the contrasting representations elaborated by the inhabitants reflect a parallel dynamic in which people from the two sides develop their own sense of belonging and cohesion simultaneously neglecting the counterpart. As such, Sarajevo and Istočno Sarajevo are represented and experienced as separated cities by inhabitants themselves.

**Keywords:** divided city, spatial practices, sense of belonging.

## Introduction

The end of the war in Bosnia coincided with the peace agreement signed in Dayton, Ohio, USA, in November 1995 by the president of the three republics interested by the conflict: Alija Izetbegović for Bosnia, Slobodan Milošević for Serbia and Franjo Tuđman for Croatia.[1] The international accord ratified the Washington agreement signed in 1994 institutionalizing the internal line of division that Bosnian Serb

1 For a detailed retracement of historical events see Pirjevec (2001).

nationalists had self-declared during the war and recognizing two different institutional entities within the state territory. With some spatial adjustments the Inter-Entity Boundary Line (IEBL) divided the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina from Republika Srpska, two autonomous administrative entities provided with separated constitutions. The agreement also recognized the spatial unit of Brčko as an autonomous district directly put under the state sovereignty.

The boundary line peripherally crossed the area of Sarajevo so that the city was split into two autonomous local administrations; the old town center and several surrounding neighbourhoods became part of the Croat-Bosniak Federation while the area included within Republika Srpska's territory coincided with a suburban district and was renamed *Istočno Sarajevo* (Eastern Sarajevo).

After the IEBL was drawn some suburbs of the city controlled by Bosnian Serb troops during the war became part of the Federation. Within a short time Bosnian Serb inhabitants of those areas became the target of a double attack: while Bosniak gangs occasionally harassed them expressing their resentment, Bosnian Serb nationalists began to destroy their properties in the attempt to force them to abandon Sarajevo. Such attacks went in parallel with a massive Serb nationalist propaganda that pictured Sarajevo as an unsafe place for Bosnian Serbs and incisively promoted their resettlement within the new born Republika Srpska. Therefore Bosnian Serbs progressively left Sarajevo moving to the new city of Istočno Sarajevo and to surrounding municipalities (Sekulić 2002; Bollens 2007; Mazzucchelli 2010). At the same time people escaping from ethnically cleansed territories and seeking shelter in Sarajevo during the war rarely returned to their home villages, definitely settling in the city. Such processes led to a strong homogenization of the population in national terms so that nowadays Sarajevo is constituted for about 80% by Bosniaks and for 12% by Bosnian Serbs, while before the war the ratio was 50% and 30%; on the other hand, Istočno Sarajevo is mainly populated by Bosnian Serbs[2]. The boundary has a purely administrative nature, it is not marked by any physical element of separation and it is not militarized; as such, it can be freely crossed from both sides.

Within such context, this paper discusses daily practices of interaction and space use pointing out the generative power of division beside the lack of physical elements of separation. As many scholars have pointed out[3], the absence of physical barriers does not represent a sufficient element to foster cooperation, exchange and social encounter in post-conflict urban contexts.

2 For an overview of post-war demographical changes in Sarajevo see Stefansson (2006) and Bollens (2007).

3 I particularly refer to the contributions provided by studies on borders and divided cities (Bollens 1998a, 1998b, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2009, 2010, 2012; Newman and Paasi 1998; Pringle and Yiftachel 1999; Paasi 1999; Kliot and Mansfield 1999; Newman 2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c; Kostovicova 2004; Kolossov 2005; Cella 2006; Anderson 2008; Calame and Charlesworth 2009).

As such, boundaries do not need concreteness to exert their influence; on the other hand, social practices and representations are equally able to affect spatial configurations and symbolical meanings attributed to them.

Within the spatially partitioned context of Sarajevo, this paper discusses the extent to which the territorial partition affects social interaction between inhabitants living across the boundary; on the other hand, it points out how social relations and daily spatial practices contribute to redefine the impact of the separation and renegotiate its divisive power.

As we will see, spatial and relational practices on a daily basis reflect the existence of two parallel and detached social contexts; as such, the divisive power is daily reproduced through practices and discourses of inhabitants from both sides.

## Spatial practices and narratives

By looking at inhabitants' spatial practices, I discuss the extent to which the separation affects people's space use on a daily basis; moreover, I focus on representations and discourses concerning the partition in order to shed light on meanings attributed to the boundary.

During my fieldwork, narrations about boundary crossing often emerged both during interviews and unrecorded conversations. Considering the experiences and narratives related to the immediate post-war period as well as those referring to the present situation, it emerges that for many people the separation and its spatial demarcation have lost most of their former emotional burden.

After the Dayton agreement was signed, international forces (IFOR) took control over the new institutionalized line. Despite the end of the war, episodes of violence did not immediately stop, and from time to time news reported reciprocal offensive actions carried out by armed gangs still active in the area. Moreover, the Bosnian Serbs remained in Sarajevo became the target of a double harassment, since Bosniak groups openly addressed their resentment to them, while the most extreme supporters of Serb nationalism deliberately attacked them and their properties in order to force them to resettle in the new institutionalized territory of Republika Srpska (Dušan Sehovac, DISS, *Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs*, unrecorded conversation).

In such a strained atmosphere, the overwhelming emotional burden lasted in people's mind for long. While the war had come to an end, the distressed civilian population on both sides of the boundary had to deal with their reciprocal feelings of resentment.

"Honestly at the beginning, during the war, I hated them. I hated everyone during the war. At the beginning you could not see the other part; you could only

see what was happening to you. You can't see the other people and how they live. I knew only that we were being attacked, my mom died during the war, I had friends who died during the war… And from my perspective I could not see that the same things were happening to the other people as well. We were the good side and they were the bad side" (K., Istočno Sarajevo).

Episodes of violence slowly decreased, the situation progressively stabilized and civilians were enabled to cross the boundary in safety. Moreover, soon after the war the international community started several programs to foster the process of reconciliation, and in Sarajevo many NGOs began activities including inhabitants of both sides of the new boundary. Nevertheless, only few people could initially deal with the emotional stress caused by crossing that line. As many of my interlocutors told me, such an experience entailed a double source of strain: on the one hand, people going *to the other side* often perceived a general feeling of diffidence caused by their presence; on the other hand, they had to face the moral judgment of those blaming them for going to the former enemy's territory.

The experience of a Bosnian Serb interviewee who started working for an NGO in Sarajevo is particularly enlightening in this sense.

"So I started to work there [in Sarajevo] but I had problems on both sides when I started. With my people, because to go there you have to pass the street where the border is and people can see that you're crossing that street. So if you cross the street, everyone knows that you've crossed the border. So people hated me. And then, there they know that I'm not part of their people: you know, just by saying my name they know that I'm not Muslim, and that was the hardest part for me, maybe even harder than the war itself. At war, you know, you are on one side and you are with your people. But then, when the war ended, it was even harder. Some people spoke ill of me because I was going to work with them" (V., Istočno Sarajevo).

Feelings of mutual distrust and resentment had lasted long after the war, progressively vanishing but not disappearing. Even when individuals could move across the two sides of the boundary without any risk, for many of them the recognizable origin of their names and surnames continued to represent a serious deterrent. Most people were concerned about the likelihood of being recognized as members of the national counterpart by simply introducing themselves, especially Bosnian Serbs who used to live in Sarajevo (Field note, 17.10.2011).

Eighteen years after the war, the situation is rather different from the one recalled by my interlocutors. For many people of both sides the crossing experience has become a usual practice and the feeling of discomfort connected to being *on the other side* has progressively vanished since the post-war time.

To a different extent, people from both sides cross the boundary quite regularly, and the psychological strain described above seems to have vanished.

Both during interviews and unrecorded conversations my informants always minimized the emotional burden connected to the spatial division of Sarajevo; rather than awkwardness, the most widespread representation involves a general discourse of indifference. Both the people who experienced the war and those who did not emphasize how the boundary itself does not particularly affect them nowadays, pointing out that crossing it does not entail any kind of emotional stress. Some interlocutors highlighted the fact that they do not even realize when they pass the line as they never pay attention to the road sign. Of course, the discomfort in talking about sensitive topics during a recorded interview probably led interviewees to foster and exaggerate the attitude of indifference declared in their answers in the attempt to appear politically correct.

"I don't feel any problem and I would say that it's the same for people that I know. When you go to the airport, and I go there every day because of of my job, you have to cross the boundary and you are in Istočno Sarajevo, sometimes I stop to have a coffee there but it's nothing, if you ask me or any of my colleagues" (N., Sarajevo).

"I think it's invisible, it doesn't mean anything. If we had some kind of wall that separates us it would be different, but since there is not, I think it's not an issue" (O., Istočno Sarajevo).

"People may think there is a border between Sarajevo and Istočno Sarajevo, but for me there is just one sign on the road, it's just a sign" (V., Istočno Sarajevo).

In particular, narrations referring to different time periods further show the diminishing effect of the experience of going *to the other side*.

"The first time I went there I was 22, and I was going to Belgrade for the first time, so I had to catch the bus in Lukavica. Even if there were no walls you could feel the tension, there was no material division, but in fact there was, I have to say that I was scared, well, not scared, but I felt uncomfortable. […] It was strong because you could still see all the damaged buildings and the traces of the war, you could really feel what happened. […] Now I have to say that I don't see this separation anymore, I mean, the division is still there, but I don't pay attention to it anymore" (S., Sarajevo).

"I was here and I remember how it was soon after the war. Even if you could go to the other side, people felt uncomfortable and would not do so. I did not do it myself. Now it's different, and I would say that it doesn't affect me anymore, when I cross the boundary I almost don't see it, I don't know if it is because I got used to it or what, but it's just like that now" (V., Istočno Sarajevo).

People from both sides cross the boundary to different extents, some of them do it on a daily basis, others cross it only on rare occasions, others never do so. Beyond such different habits, the crossing experience has become a quite usual practice mainly related to utility reasons; as such, it has completely lost its emotional burden for people living on both sides, and daily spatial practices are much less conditioned by the separation.

In terms of daily spatial practices, for Sarajevo's inhabitants the main reason to go to the other side is the availability of cheaper products, but beside short visits to buy daily consumption goods, people go to the other side quite rarely. Moreover, this habit appears to be more common among residents of neighborhoods like Dobrinja and Alipasino Polje, located close to the boundary line, while for inhabitants living farther this practice appears less convenient. On the other hand, economical activities, NGOs as well as UN and EU agencies located in Sarajevo also provide job opportunities for residents of Istočno Sarajevo who come to the city on a daily basis. In addition, Sarajevo's cultural offer represents a further element of attraction for people living on the other side, especially for younger people. Nevertheless, spending leisure time in Sarajevo does not represent a usual custom but rather an exceptional practice related to special events, such as big concerts or the summer film festival (Field note, 16.10.2011).

The affluence of younger people from Istočno Sarajevo is further discouraged by some practical reasons. First, the absence of public transport connecting the two sides represents a crucial obstacle in this sense; considering that reaching the central area of Sarajevo takes approximately one hour, people rarely opt for this solution. Such inefficiency becomes even more effective considering that the possession of private means of transportation is not largely diffused among the younger generation. Finally, a factor that further prevents young people from regularly crossing the boundary is the existence of a university in Istočno Sarajevo; indeed, for several students the proximity of the services and the increasing provision of opportunities for leisure time activities contribute to reduce the interest towards Sarajevo (Field note, 15.05.2012).

According to Dušan Sehovac—a member of DISS, *Democratic Initiative of Sarajevo Serbs*—the post-war demographic alteration of Sarajevo still affects the social context, since very few people have maintained their social connections and friendships across the boundary: the majority of Bosnian Serbs who moved to Istočno Sarajevo after the war have built new relations progressively losing social bonds with their former home place; on the other hand, people in Sarajevo have almost no connection at all with their neighbours on the other side of the boundary (Field note, 28.11.2011).

Representations and interpretations provided by interlocutors on both sides of the boundary largely confirmed such a scenario. As such, the divisive power of the boundary is reproduced and fostered in more subtle but equally deep terms, preventing a real social encounter, fostering indifference towards the counterpart and reflecting the existence of two separated communities that have built a separated sense of belonging.

Therefore the changed spatial narratives and practices do not reflect a renovated social encounter and exchange, but rather a mutual attitude of indifference toward the counterpart. In this perspective the presence of the boundary does not prevent

people from going to the other side, but its divisive power manifests through the lack of interactions and social bonds between people living on the two sides.

The crossing experience has progressively lost its emotional burden for inhabitants of both sides, thus their spatial practices are scarcely affected by the territorial separation and are much more justified by practical utilities and advantages. Even if feelings of discomfort in going *to the other side* have vanished, they have been replaced by a general and reciprocal attitude of indifference; as such, the boundary is crossed to satisfy specific needs in the most convenient way, while social interaction remains scarce and superficial.

As I discuss below, the interesting aspect to highlight is the fact that the parallel sense of cohesion appears to be scarcely fostered by discourses on national and religious affiliation, but it is rather strengthened by the opposition between the urban and the rural world.

## A different sense of belonging

Considering the post-conflict reconfiguration of space and the residential segregation occurred after Dayton, I aim to point out how people conceive the other side of the boundary by discussing their representations and narrations. Moreover, since Istočno Sarajevo has developed as an urban complex in the recent years, and considering that part of its residents have settled there only after the war, it appears to be particularly interesting to investigate their sense of belonging in spatial terms.

Identity can be expressed not only through discursive but also through spatial practices (Massey 1993), therefore the spatialization of everyday life assumes a crucial relevance in people's negotiation and production of symbolical and identitarian meanings. As I will discuss, such elements appear to be more relevant than national and religious affiliation in deepening the division between inhabitants of the two sides.

While in the first paragraph I specifically focused on the crossing experience, pointing out the changed symbolical meaning accorded to the boundary, here I discuss how spatial and relational practices carried out on a daily basis foster a reciprocal sense of extraneousness between inhabitants of the two sides. As discussed below, the way in which people experience space and negotiate a collective sense of belonging reflects a deep detachment towards *the other side*.

### Sarajevo: refusing the rural

Interviews, unrecorded conversations and spare time spent with people during my fieldwork provided evidence for the fact that it is not so usual for inhabitants

of Sarajevo to go to the other side. For the majority of my interlocutors the place across the boundary represents nothing interesting, with very little to do. The discourse underlying this practice is common for all my interviewees: Istočno Sarajevo has nothing more to offer than Sarajevo. Both in occasional conversations and during interviews, people gave account of the place describing it as the countryside, a rural area, a village that constantly struggles to look like a city. The only reason for people to go there is the chance to buy cheaper goods in shopping malls and markets, but apart from that Sarajevans express a sense of extraneousness and unfamiliarity with the place across the boundary. People do not have a direct experience of the place, except for short moments, and they seem not to be curious.

Indeed, on several occasions the explanation of my research interests resulted in surprise and puzzled reactions among people in Sarajevo, as for them Istočno Sarajevo had nothing special to offer. Some of them could hardly get the point of investigating such division, as—many of them argued—the boundary was just the separation line between two cities (Field note, 03.06.2011; Field note, 22.09.2011; Field note, 04.10.2011). The frequency of such comments and reactions among my interlocutors confirms the lack of connection between Sarajevo's inhabitants and the area across the boundary; sometimes such a declared extraneousness was expressed in very explicit terms, highlighting how indifference slightly translates into resentment.

"Just to be clear, when I say 'Sarajevo' I mean this Sarajevo, this is Sarajevo for me, that is just a part of Dobrinja for me, it's not a city, it's nothing" (S., Sarajevo).

The other side is commonly conceived as the countryside, and the fact that it is not part of the city anymore is not an issue for inhabitants. Descriptions and representations of the other side provide a picture where Istočno Sarajevo is just a rural area that pretends to become a city and, in vain, struggles to build an artificial urban identity.

"Istocno was part of Sarajevo, it was actually a suburban area and nobody used to go there because there was nothing. People used to pass by on their way to Jahorina or other destinations for holiday or something like that. It wasn't really a place where you would go, it was a suburb or even a rural area, I would say, and even if now they say it's a city, for me it remains a village" (L., Sarajevo).

"I have to say that Istocno is not a city; Sarajevo is a city, but not Istočno, because it doesn't have what it takes to be *a city*. If you go there you will only see 20 years old buildings, there's no old town centre, there's nothing going on there, nothing" (S., Sarajevo).

"I cannot say that Istočno Sarajevo is a real city, because it's not. In the city you can do many things, and so many people come in Sarajevo because it's bigger and you really have something to do here, more than in Istočno Sarajevo" (N., Sarajevo).

"We also make some jokes about Istočno Sarajevo, because it is a place which is so close and so far away at the same time. Really, it's a different place […] and people here don't really have any need to go there. There was nothing there before, it was just a countryside, even in Lukavica there was nothing, it was just a small place. People used to go there just to spend the week-end outside the city" (B., Sarajevo).

"Istočno Sarajevo is much smaller than Sarajevo, I can't say that it is a town, I would rather say that it's a sort of village next to Sarajevo. It's always been like that, even when it was part of Sarajevo. Sarajevo is the capital city, everything is here, and that remains a small town" (M., Sarajevo).

Such discourses stress the use of urban-rural division as a tool of differentiation: the spatial separation becomes a social *limit* (Simmel 1989) through which inhabitants of Sarajevo distinguish themselves from the rural world. Sarajevo is constantly represented as the "real" city through discursive strategies that stress urbanity as a desirable value. On the other hand, Istočno Sarajevo is conceived as an anonymous and uninteresting place, striving to be perceived as a new city, but it still remains a village. In my interlocutors' narrations, the creation of parallel institutions is often interpreted as an attempt to show off such an artificial urban identity.

"Before the war Istočno wasn't even a city, but now more people live there, and they have built a lot of buildings. They have their institutions, their offices and also a new university. But for me, considering the number of population, I don't see the necessity of building a new university, we already have it here in Sarajevo. There are not that many students, so it doesn't make much sense, unless you want to show that you have your city with your services and things like that. They pretend to be a city, but it is still a village for me" (S., Sarajevo).

Such representations and discursive practices highlight the extent to which the divisive power of the boundary is constantly reinforced. Relational bonds with people living on the other side are almost inexistent, as Istočno Sarajevo is generally excluded from the *frame* (Goffman 1974) within which social and spatial practices take place. As such, the boundary exerts its sociological function of distinction (Cella 2006), and spatial separation becomes a tool of in-group recognition and out-group contraposition.

## Istočno Sarajevo: reproducing the urban life-style

Spatial and relational practices carried out on a daily basis show the extent to which Istočno Sarajevo has been progressively redefined as the home place. This aspect appears particularly relevant, since a large portion of the inhabitants formerly lived in Sarajevo. As I will argue, for them the new settlement coincided with the rebuilding of a new sense of belonging and a progressive detachment from their birthplace.

Inhabitants' daily interaction and discursive practices contribute to provide the context with a strong identitarian connotation that fosters a new sense of belonging. As such, Istočno Sarajevo is represented and experienced by its inhabitants as a city, rather than the eastern side of a divided urban system; as I will show below, people produce and negotiate new meanings through the re-spatialization of daily practices typical of urban lifestyle.

In the last ten years, Istočno Sarajevo has been provided with a growing supply of services and structures, such as schools and a university, a hospital and a new sport centre currently under construction. Thus, the opportunity to enjoy proximity has limited the inhabitants' necessity to go to Sarajevo for basic needs or leisure time activities. Indeed, without giving the impression of a real city, but rather of a suburban area still developing, and without having any historical location that fosters the aesthetic value of the place, Istočno Sarajevo offers all the services and structures that individuals could need on a daily basis.

Despite the suburban feature of the environment and the absence of a proper old town centre, its central area offers bars and restaurants as well as clubs; their spatial proximity gives the impression of being in a quite populated place, and the place reproduces a sort of urban atmosphere, where people enjoy their leisure time meeting friends. People walking down the streets or sitting in bars and restaurants contribute to provide space with a specific meaning: through their daily social interaction inhabitants negotiate and elaborate a collective representation of that spatial context as the *centre* of a *city* (Field note, 14.05.2012).

Istočno Sarajevo is also provided with a university, and many students spend most of their time without ever going to Sarajevo. The central area is located only a few minutes' walk from the institution, so it is quite usual to join friends in some bar after classes. The university also offers a dormitory for students, providing further occasions to socialize and spend time together. In students' daily life Sarajevo does not represent a particularly attractive place.

"In Sarajevo I don't know anyone, and if I want to go out I don't know the places. Here my friends are always around, it is a small place but I like it, for example you can always meet someone from your university" (S., Istočno Sarajevo).

"We have pubs and clubs here, too. There is no point to go to Sarajevo. I never go. It's not because I don't want to go, but I have my friends here, so it is better" (L., Istočno Sarajevo).

Among adults, a representation of Istočno Sarajevo as the home place emerges as well. Even people who have jobs in Sarajevo and usually experience the city as their simple working place, and at the end of the day they *come home.* They rarely maintain relational connections, and social bonds are quite scarce across the boundary.

"Sarajevo is the capital city, it has cultural events, it is connected to all the other parts of the world […]. In Sarajevo you can go to cinema, theatre, to concerts. I

work there, and I go everyday, but then it's nice to come home in Istočno, because it is a quiet place and you have everything you need" (D., Istočno Sarajevo).

"I go to Sarajevo everyday during the week because of my work, but during my spare time I prefer to stay home. I don't have many friends there, because I only go for my job, so during the week-end I usually stay with my family and friends in Istočno" (V., Istočno Sarajevo).

The progressive provision of services and structures in Istočno Sarajevo has influenced the residents' experience of space, encouraging new spatial practices and fostering a lifestyle typical of urban environments rather than rural or suburban contexts. Through daily social interaction, inhabitants have rebuilt a new sense of belonging, simultaneously developing an emotional detachment from the other side of the boundary (Field note, 18.05.2012). Going to Sarajevo is usually conceived as a practice related to particular necessities, rather than a periodic occasion to spend leisure time. Istočno Sarajevo has progressively acquired a proper status of city for its inhabitants, therefore discourses of urban-rural division produced by residents of the other side appear radically contradicted.

"I don't like Sarajevo that much. It is too chaotic for me, so I never go, unless I really have to. Here you have everything you need, for you and your family: schools, sport centers, and so on" (J., Istočno Sarajevo).

The detachment expressed by people born in Sarajevo and resettled on the other side of the boundary further confirms this interpretation. Sarajevo is commonly represented and described as a place to go mainly for utility purposes, while the emotional bond to it is often minimized (Field note, 26.09.2011).

In this sense, discursive strategies of former inhabitants of Sarajevo highlight how the new context is represented and redefined as the new urban place. The emphasis involved in stressing a such new sense of belonging goes in parallel with a gradually developed emotional distance from Sarajevo, which is often represented in quite anonymous and detached terms.

"I was born in Sarajevo, but since I moved here I go there very rarely. My family lives here, my kids go to school here, I have my job. I like it here, I almost never go to Sarajevo […] I've never thought of moving back, it would not make sense for me" (M., Istočno Sarajevo).

"Sarajevo is ok, it has a lot to offer. But here it's ok as well. Ten years ago this place was not a town, but now it's developing more and more. Maybe it's not like Sarajevo, but it's becoming more efficient for people living here, and for me it's a nice place" (O., Istočno Sarajevo).

"I was born in Sarajevo, but I was pretty young when we moved, so I don't remember much. Sometimes I go with my friends if there is some special event, like a concert or something like that, but I don't go that often, so I don't have any favourite place" (S., Istočno Sarajevo).

As such representations show, Istočno Sarajevo is conceivable as an autonomous city not only in institutional and functional terms. The way in which people experience places and attach collective meanings to them contribute to fostering a new sense of belonging that makes Istočno Sarajevo a *city* for its inhabitants—including the ones who were born in Sarajevo—and reflect a progressive detachment from the other side of the boundary.

Urbanity is generally represented as a desirable value and a tool of distinction by inhabitants of both sides; on the other hand, people experience and perform their urban lifestyle in different spatial contexts, fostering a reciprocal sense of extraneousness and detachment.

Like Sarajevo, Istočno Sarajevo represents the new and separated *frame* (Goffman 1974) both in spatial and social terms, within which people negotiate and elaborate their representations and interpretation of reality.

## Conclusions

The empirical findings discussed in this paper proved how the presence of the boundary has progressively lost its emotional burden for inhabitants of both sides. On the other hand, the fact that the crossing experience has become a much more common practice does not directly imply a renovated social exchange among individuals. Rather, the divisive power of the separation is now exerted through less visible but equally affective dynamics that foster a mutual feeling of extraneousness and detachment between residents of Sarajevo and Istočno Sarajevo.

The functional configuration of the two spatial contexts contributed to shape daily practices of space use in different ways. In addition to the boundary, which is commonly crossed without concern, the autonomous development of the two sides has also progressively fostered diverging spatial experiences. In particular, the growing provision of services in Istočno Sarajevo has allowed inhabitants to enjoy proximity, shifting the main reference from Sarajevo to the new spatial context. Furthermore, the presence of the boundary contributed to fostering different senses of belonging which are experienced in spatial terms.

The most significant element involved as a tool of self-definition and distinction is represented by discursive strategies and practices that stress the urban-rural division. Spatial practices and representations prove that urbanity is conceived as a desirable value by residents of both sides; nevertheless, the different spatializations of daily practices and the different productions of meanings elaborated by the inhabitants reflect a parallel dynamic in which people across the boundary develop their own sense of belonging and cohesion simultaneously neglecting the counterpart.

On the one hand, people in Sarajevo compare the other side to a rural village where they go very rarely and only for utility reasons. They do not have any

relational connections across the boundary, and the place is excluded from what they conceive as their city. On the other hand, Istočno Sarajevo reflects the creation *ex novo* of a new community, provided with a new spatial reference within which daily activities are carried out, social bonds are strengthened, and a new connection with home is fostered. People in Istočno Sarajevo experience and represent space as the home place, carrying out practices peculiar to an urban lifestyle and experiencing the context as a proper city. Interaction on a daily basis contributes to shape the spatial context and its public spaces in *urban* terms. Therefore, from a peripheral suburb Istočno Sarajevo is transformed into a proper city by the social and spatial practices of its inhabitants. While Istočno Sarajevo has functionally developed as a separated urban system, its inhabitants have progressively redefined and negotiated a new sense of belonging and cohesion. Sarajevo is then conceived as another city, and even the people who were born there have lost their emotional ties to it. On the other hand, people in Sarajevo have assisted to this process with indifference and detachment, employing the separation as a spatial reference to celebrate their urban identity in opposition to the counterpart's rural character.

As such, it is possible to argue that the territorial separation resulted in the creation of two cities, rather than in the existence of a divided one. Indeed, Sarajevo and Istočno Sarajevo represent two separated urban systems not only in institutional and functional terms, but primarily in people's representations. Moreover, the unproblematic circulation of people does not imply a renovated social exchange and encounter, as the divisive power still affects inhabitants in a less noticeable way. Indeed, the diminishing of mutual distrust and bitterness does not reflect the achievement of a definitive reconciliation and social mixture, but rather an indifferent acceptance of the status quo where the counterpart is neither openly refused, nor included, but rather ignored. Therefore, such a scenario entails a less visible but long-lasting and radical social division.

Within such a context, the risk of a new episode of violence or social and political strain is probably lower than in other divided cities; nevertheless, the worst implication of such a situation lies in the profound and probably definitive transformation of the context in a doubled and parallel social environment where people have progressively learnt to ignore each other even when sharing the same space. By looking at Sarajevo, the lesson we can learn is that the absence of the physical elements of separation is not sufficient to restore social encounters and exchange. In general terms territorial separation imposed as a solution to inter-group violence entails long-lasting consequences which are much harder to remove than physical barriers.

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