3
The Promise of Peace

Introduction

When warring parties commit to and sign an agreement, the shared sense of relief but mainly hope that murder, destruction and violence abates often masks feelings of disappointment and loss that stem from compromise. The promise of peace that emerges in the euphoria of a ceasefire or an agreement is often revealed in people’s instinctive responses to news that violence could cease. In Northern Ireland, Bosnia and elsewhere, the collective response is highly visible in people celebrating together (often only within communities) on streets and at landmarks. On the 31 August 1994, when the IRA announced a ‘complete cessation of military operations’, nationalist and republican communities across urban landscapes such as Belfast and Derry city welcomed this by celebrating on the streets – with cars adorned in Irish flags and horns being blown. This public demonstration of support for the ceasefires displayed the sense of relief and hope; yet such an expression was not mirrored on the Unionist/Loyalist communities, where cautious optimism reigned. The physical expression of hope evidenced in the street celebrations lay in the promise that peace could be accomplished in Northern Ireland and that there would be an end to the bloodletting. As with peace processes that are explored throughout this book, the dawn of peace was far from grasp. Seventeen months later and signalling the end of the IRA 1994 ceasefire, the killing of two people in an IRA bomb in London’s Docklands underscored the fragility of peace processes. Two years on from the Docklands bombing, the leaders of the Ulster Unionist Party, Social Democratic and Labour Party, Sinn Féin with other smaller parties reached agreement on Good Friday, 10 April 1998. This was the first of the three agreements that have characterised the Northern Ireland post-agreement era. Twenty
years on from the IRA ceasefire, Northern Ireland, as illustrated in Chapter 4, has undergone significant and substantive transformations as a consequence of the processes of agreeing and building peace. Yet, inter-communal segregation and an absence of shared space are accentuated time and again at interfaces across the Belfast cityscape during commemorative events and anniversaries.

Likewise, Bosnia remains troubled by the wars of the 1990s. While people celebrated the Dayton Agreement at that time, the sense of celebration and public expressions of hope and relief soon abated. Twenty years on, the celebrations of the Dayton peace agreement are not marked in Bosnia by mass demonstrations or celebrations, but the war is scapegoated for the continued dysfunctional governance as well as general malaise. For within Bosnia, territory and space remain dominated not only visibly but also invisibly by the legacy of the war. Ethnic cleansing has left previously inter-ethnic spaces monoethnic and Sarajevo as a Bosniak monolith. Sarajevo remains imprinted by the Sarajevo Roses which mark spots on streets and places where many were killed during the siege. These visible symbols commemorate the deaths, disappearances and crimes that dominated life in the town for much of the 1992–1995 war. Speaking about the siege of Sarajevo, the prosecution at the International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia recalled that ‘not since then had a professional army conducted a campaign of unrelenting violence against the inhabitants of a European city so as to reduce them to a state of medieval deprivation in which they were in constant fear of death. In the period covered in this Indictment, there was nowhere safe for a Sarajevan, not at home, at school, in a hospital, from deliberate attack’ (ICTY v Stanislav Galic 2003). Within the town, the hub at Markale market also was witness to a massacre on 5 February 1994 leaving 68 civilians dead and thousands injured. Street after street, site after site, the reminders of the devastation and destruction of the war period are commonplace in Sarajevo and also across the landscape of the former Yugoslavia. These reminders and physical commemorations that pepper the landscape carry political and social significance and as we demonstrate throughout the following chapters, imprint upon the continuing political processes because of the way in which people remember, memorialise and commemorate their pasts.

In both Northern Ireland and in Bosnia, the ceasefire declarations and the agreements that were signed signalled a new opportunity rather than resolving the conflict. They were opportunities to undertake more difficult and protracted negotiations about issues that could not at earlier stages be part of a negotiation or an agreement. For instance,