

Parallel session 3B-1.1

Sharing public space

Tuesday 12 November, 11.30 – 13.00

IAS Forum

Chair: **Dr Yasminah Beebeejaun**, Associate Professor, The Bartlett School of Planning, UCL

Contextualising Religiosity: Religious Parades as Temporal Desecularization of Urban Landscape. A view from Acre

Prof. Nimrod Luz, Associate Professor, Kinneret College on the Sea of Galilee

This paper explores the tangled relationship between religions, belief systems and urban infrastructures, focusing on religious parades as a temporal desecularisation of city landscape. My aim is not only to account for the ways in which both religion and urban space are transformed by current socio-political processes, but also to show how the city's landscape is changing through new expressions of religious materiality. I argue that critical urban theories should pay greater attention to the growing impact of religions and religious groups on contemporary cities. Focusing on religious parades of different religious groups in Acre (spelled also Akko, 'Akka) – an ethnically mixed, culturally diverse, and multi-religious city situated in the north of Israel on the shores of the Mediterranean – I want to account for the ways religious groups are temporarily taking hold of urban infrastructures as part of their emerging urban citizenship. These parades not only challenge the city's secular governing logic but also allow religious groups to position themselves against rival groups in Acre. Marrying Bourdieu's (1980, 1985, 1991) theory of religion as a field of symbolic goods to Knott's (2005, 2008, 2010) seminal exploration of 'locating of religion', I advance the concept of 'religiocity' to reveal how, through the mediation of cognitive mechanisms operating at multiple entangled levels, the spatial manifestations of religion influence urban infrastructures and diversity, and also serve as a field where ideas, resources, identity politics and belonging are discussed, contested and altered.

Sharing common ground: making refugee voices audible through play

Catalina Pollak, Lecturer, University of East London; PhD candidate, UCL

This paper will reflect upon the participatory action research project (PAR) Migrating Proverbs which explores interdisciplinary tactics through play for the production of new forms of engagement and social integration between Syrian refugees and the local Turkish population living in the highly contested area of Onder, Altindag in Ankara, Turkey.

In the context of the current migration crisis, the production of social integration projects in urban migration strongholds is a necessity and a social challenge. The daily exchange and interaction of host and guest communities sharing the same territory is potentially one

charged with social tensions and spatial frictions. Building cultural bridges amongst these communities seems imminent for the development of socially sustainable neighbourhoods. Spanning from socially engaged practices to socio-spatial interventions in public space, from documentary ethnography to alternative forms of mapping, the paper will offer an insight into the range of methodologies explored and discuss their contribution towards: a) understanding ideas of identity, locality and place among the refugee community; b) exploring the development of capabilities and identity politics through different forms of representation in public space; and c) enabling spaces of empathy by building 'common ground' interaction between local and refugee communities.

Policing the sidewalks: politics of street vending in Tehran

Dr Mojgan Taheri Tafti, Lecturer, University of Tehran

Drawing on six months of ethnographic field research in three well-established commercial strips in Tehran, this paper engages with the heterogeneous, contradictory and performative realm of contestation over public space in the city. It explores in detail the ways in which the actual interactions, alliances and contestations between different actors – including state entities, shopkeepers and the passer-by – offer differentiated possibilities for street vendors as a heterogeneous group to negotiate their claims to urban spaces.

Current scholarship on street vending in cities of the global south has mainly focused on street vendors' politics of resistance against the state's revanchist and exclusionary policies. This article draws from, and seeks to contribute to, this literature by considering the strategies of, and the shifting associations between, a broader range of actors – in addition to street vendors and state entities – and the ways in which they shape and reshape street vending as performed and diversely constituted practices. For this purpose, I apply Rancière's concepts of police and politics to sketch out a more complex picture of street vending in Tehran. In each site, I examine how different actors, including street vendors themselves, are involved in policing the sidewalks and how these practices differed in different locations. I explain that in the absence of the state's full-scale confrontation, multi-actor contestation, collaboration and competition shaped new dynamic orders in sidewalks, whereby trading was allowed, albeit with forms and intensity tolerated by the state and the powerful. Within this new order, some vendors were transformed into the agents of policing the sidewalks, while individual vendors with lower resources were consistently pushed out of busy areas. In the light of deep inequalities between vendors, I argue, the literature on 'politics of resistance' needs to address more explicitly the differentiated opportunities, practices and experiences of street vendors.

Virtual Resistance, Material Consequences: Countering State Projects in (Semi-) Authoritarian Russia

Dr Sven Daniel Wolfe, Postdoctoral Researcher, University of Lausanne

Over the past decade, Russia's increasing authoritarianism (Gel'man 2015) has resulted in a number of dramatic confrontations between state agents and the general population. While street protests and (sometimes violent) police arrests are the most visible outcomes of

these confrontations, the street and the square are not the only places where Russian dissent takes place. Beyond the physicality of marching in public places, the past years have seen a surge in oppositional voices on the Russian internet, taking shape in independent blogs and oriented around local issues. These are then propagated beyond their immediate territories – and indeed beyond Russian borders – through social media, including but not limited to YouTube, Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Building on research that identifies digital spaces as a new sphere for the political (Arora 2015; Vlavo 2012), this paper investigates the material impacts of virtual opposition. Unlike research that connects online activism with mass protest (Radchenko, Pisarevskaya, and Ksenofontova 2012), this paper focuses on the micro level, examining individuals who have engaged in virtual protest – often using the poor quality of urban infrastructure as a starting point – and exploring the consequences of their digital engagements. The paper contrasts the cases of Alexander Valov and Maria Motuznaya, an activist in Sochi and a resident of Barnaul, respectively, with those of Ilya Varlamov and Dmitry Ivanov, two of the Russian internet’s most popular urban and political bloggers. On the basis of these four cases, the paper develops a typology of strategies engaged by Russian virtual activists in order to avoid punishment in the context of increasing political closure. It also details the responses of state agencies to these four individuals and explores why Varlamov and Ivanov are allowed to continue working while Valov is in prison and Motuznaya in exile.