



Parallel session G1

Nationalising the urban frontier? Cities and the rise of (neo)nationalism

Monday 11 November, 16.00 – 17.30

Garden Room

Chair: **Prof. Oren Yiftachel**, Chair of Urban Studies, Ben Gurion University of the Negev, Beersheba

Discussants:

Prof. Camillo Boano, Professor of Urban Design and Critical Theory, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL

Dr Moriel Ram, Research Associate in Israel Studies, SOAS University of London

How do cities shape nationalist conflicts?

Prof. James Anderson, School of Geography, Queen's University Belfast

This question is rarely asked, much less answered – a blind spot for conflict and urban specialists alike. The former generally focus on nationalism at state level and rarely notice urban locations or grant them any causal significance; the latter, when they do focus on nationalist conflicts, are usually preoccupied with how conflict shapes the city, not how the city might shape or counter the conflict. Moreover, it is a difficult question because the same urban factors can produce diametrically opposite effects, depending largely on wider geopolitical circumstances – either intensifying and prolonging conflict, or, in other circumstances, countering nationalist ideologies and reducing conflict. For example, multiple ethnicities in the close proximities and high densities of the city may lead to ethno-national conflict, but can also facilitate multicultural cooperation, especially, perhaps, in large cities. So, in exploring the potential of cities and city life to counter nationalist conflict and chauvinistic populism – the main focus of this paper – we need to also take the negative effects of urban locations into account. Their effects – negative and positive – can be conceptualised in various ways, of which three seem particularly important: (1) ‘rural-urban’ contrasts between life in the countryside and in the city – now, in highly urbanised societies, at least partly transformed into ‘urban-urban’ contrasts between large cities and smaller or more rural centres; (2) the intentionality of urban actors in groups and classes which are specific to, or generally concentrated in, cities; and (3) the equally if not more important unintended effects of characteristically urban symbolism, structures and processes.

Between the national and the urban: The Complex Role of Neighbourhood Councils in East Jerusalem

Dr Nufar Avni, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

In almost every possible way, everyday life in East Jerusalem has been heavily shaped by the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian national struggle. East Jerusalemites are considered neither Israeli nor Palestinian citizens and their residency status in the city is kept under systematic scrutiny. This precarious position does not fit neatly into geopolitical theories. Building on interviews with local activists and leaders in different neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem, this paper will discuss the meaning of urban citizenship in this unique context. It will particularly focus on the role of the Neighbourhood Councils, a sub-municipal government tier that supposedly represents the local community. The NCs are situated in a difficult position, perceived as part of the municipality and the occupation on the one hand, but seeking to support the East Jerusalemite community in a 'depoliticised' way on the other. Meanwhile, extreme nationalism is growing ever more prevalent on both sides of the city. I will demonstrate these contradictions, and explore the complexity of the local 'opposing' the national in (East) Jerusalem's fragmented space, where efforts to build a strong civic society are often perceived as compromising one's national identity.

Dis/b/ordering urban space

Dr Kathryn Cassidy, Associate Professor of Human Geography, Northumbria University

Urban spaces have been key sites within which people have come together to challenge (neo)national bordering regimes in a range of different ways. The advent of everyday bordering and internalization of bordering regimes has opened up new spaces to resist processes and practices of bordering and create alternative urban securities. Resistance has included both established existing migrant support organisations but also a range of new campaigning and advocacy groups. Some more visible and well-established initiatives have been a focus of attention for political and urban geographers, e.g. open borders and cities of sanctuary. However, research has only just begun to emerge on how these more recognised forms of resistance intersect with mundane practices of 'quiet politics'. Our view of resistance in human geography has not kept pace with the more emergent and fractured understandings of the political and power. In this paper, I argue that we need an understanding of cities as spaces of dis/b/ordering. Whilst de- and rebordering involve shifting interpretations of what is within and beyond a border (and consequently declare persons and objects as either familiar or foreign), dis/b/ordering includes debordering, but also incorporates how ordinary residents move beyond it to challenge more broadly everyday bordering and their own involvement in it. Dis/b/ordering brings together a range of different attempts to disrupt contemporary national bordering regimes, but is particularly attendant to everyday mundane acts as well as how residents of urban spaces challenge the underlying b/orders that support the bordering of nation-states.

Bridging the Urban and (Neo)National Divide: Bringing Geopolitics and Nationalism into the Mainstream of Comparative Urban Studies

Dr Jonathan Rock Rokem, Lecturer in Human Geography, University of Kent

This paper's objectives are twofold: firstly, from a theoretical perspective, to advance the cross-disciplinary field of urban geopolitics bringing geopolitics and nationalism into the mainstream of urban studies, and to enhance our understanding of cities as geopolitical

hubs of migration and nationalist conflicts. And, secondly, to construct a multidisciplinary comparative research agenda to re-frame urban contestation as a dynamic and mobile process. I explore the relational and contrastive value of comparisons across different 'contested cities', pointing at the significance of learning from non-conventional cases normally excluded from academic debates, moving beyond the so-called global urban theory producing the usual suspects. I will expand on my recent empirical research from the EU-funded Marie Curie *Contested Urbanism* project (2015-2017) involving spatial and social analysis of public transport infrastructures in Jerusalem and Stockholm, coupled to statistical analysis of their urban geopolitical position. In so doing, I argue that it is timely to start learning from, and compare across, different urban geopolitical settings, offering instead multiple access points from which to explore the ever-expanding range of (neo)nationalist conflicts, contestations and ethno-cultural formations shaping the future world of cities.