

International Symposium
Cities against Nationalism?
Kent Interdisciplinary Centre for Spatial Studies (KISS)
University of Kent (18th June 2019)

Program & Book of Abstracts



The Cities against Nationalism? one-day international symposium hosted by Kent Interdisciplinary Centre for Spatial Studies (KISS) and School of Anthropology and Conservation, aims at investigating the relatively under-theorized research field of urban geopolitics and nationalism. The main focus will address the rising tension between urban and national logics of space, that is, between 'thinking space like a city', and 'thinking space like a nation'. Given the recent resurgence of ethnic and territorial nationalism, the symposium will explore the rising tensions between national and urban regimes, with particular reference to the plight of minorities and immigrants. The discussion generated by the symposium aims to make a contribution to the theorization of nationalism, human geography and urban studies.

Location:

University of Kent, Canterbury, CT2 7NR, School of Anthropology and Conservation, Marlowe Building, Swingland Room, see map [here](#)

11.30AM: Arrival & Coffee:

School of Anthropology and Conservation, Marlowe Building, Swingland Room.

12.00AM: Welcome: **Jonathan Rock Rokem**, University of Kent

12.05PM: Session I: Cities in Europe against Nationalism?

Chair: **Michael Gentile**, University of Oslo

Francesco Chiodelli, Gran Sasso Science Institute, Italy

Resisting exclusionary nationalism-populism in the urban arena? The contradictory case of urban policy for migrants in Italy

Abigail Gilbert, Barking and Dagenham Council, London, UK

What role for "New Municipalism" in addressing the Populist Impulse?

Igor Calzada, University of Oxford, UK

Small European Stateless City-Regions: Constructing (Civic/Metropolitanised) Nationalism?

Amny Athamny, University of Toronto, Canada

Dutch Cities: Going Dutch or Not?

Respondent: **Mori Ram**, SOAS/UCL, UK

1.15PM: Lunch

2.15PM: Session II: Contested Cities against Nationalism?

Chair: **Camillo Boano**, UCL, UK

Nufar Avni, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

Between the national and the urban: The double-edged sword of Neighbourhood Councils in East Jerusalem

Prof. James Anderson, Queen's University Belfast, UK

How do cities shape nationalist conflicts?

Nada Elfeituri, UCL, UK

The Re-Emergence of Traditional Governance in Cities of the Middle East and North Africa, The Case of Benghazi Libya

Gruia Badescu, University of Konstanz, Germany

Towards syncretic place-making: Architectural practice and resistance to nationalism in conflict-cities

Respondent: **Sobia Ahmad Kaker**, Goldsmiths, London, UK

3.30PM: Coffee

3.45pm: Keynote lecture: **Oren Yiftachel**, Ben Gurion University and UCL, UK

Urban Displaceability and the rise of (Neo)Nationalism

Respondent: **Gruia Badescu**, University of Konstanz, Germany

4.45PM: Discussion: ALL

Public Evening Lecture

5.30PM: Drinks reception (**School of Anthropology and Conservation Reception**)

6.00PM: Public Lecture (**Room: Grimond LT3**)

Welcome: **Rob Fish**, University of Kent

Public Keynote Lecture: Michael Gentile, University of Oslo

Geopolitical Fault-Line Cities in a world of Contested Cities

Respondent: **Prof. James Anderson**, Queen's University Belfast, UK

Vote of thanks: **Jonathan Rock Rokem**, University of Kent

Concluding Discussion

8:15PM: Symposium Dinner (for Symposium participants)

Symposium Abstracts

Session I: Cities in Europe against Nationalism?

Francesco Chiodelli, Gran Sasso Science Institute, L'Aquila, Italy

francesco.chiodelli@gssi.it

Resisting exclusionary nationalism-populism in the urban arena? The contradictory case of urban policy for migrants in Italy

Italy is currently a paradigmatic case of an exclusionary nationalist and populist government, composed by the cooperation of a rather classical and well-established right-wing party (the League, which mixes nationalism, neo-liberalism and moral/religious conservatism) and a new unconventional populist movement-party (the Five Star Movement). One of the pillars of this government, which marked out the first year of its life, is the rejection of ethnic-cultural diversity. Such rejection materializes in several actions against immigrants and is epitomized by a new “security decree”, approved in early December 2018, which reduces the rights of migrants and asylum seekers. The security decree raised a rather wide opposition by both the civil society and several center-left mayors, who announced their intention not to apply the decree in the light of its inhuman and criminogenic character.

Against this backdrop, several cities (such as Milan, Naples and Palermo) started being viewed as main sites and drivers of resistance against the current exclusionary government, in particular with reference to the field of policies on migrants.

The presentation addresses critically the effectiveness and veracity of this opposition of some Italian cities to the nationalist and populist government, showing that: i) some features of the current exclusionary policies towards ethnic-cultural diversity can be traced back to some norms and practices that characterized also left-wing local authorities during the last decade; ii) such call for protecting ethnic-cultural diversity is always selective and avoid including thorny issues such as religious diversity.

Abigail Gilbert, Barking and Dagenham Council London, UK

Abigail.Gilbert@lbbd.gov.uk

What role for “New Municipalism” in addressing the Populist Impulse?

Following decades of proactive multiculturalism policy and fallout of the 2008 economic downturn, liberal nation states are disintegrating as anti-migrant sentiment surges. In this context, Katz and Nowak (2017) suggest cities can “thrive in an age of populism”. This territorial rescaling and return to the local is in part reflected in New Municipalism – with a range of brands (“Sanctuary cities”, “Fearless Cities”, “Resilient Cities”) and strains of broadly socialist ideology at play. Often, identity and economic reform are different sides of the same coin: Jackson characterised by black economic empowerment, Barcelona by migrant activism around housing rights. Yet, in the UK, the most progressive municipal experiments (e.g.

Preston) have been in stable and homogenous communities (<80%White British) and led by bureaucrats rather than civil society. In turn, questions of identity, culture and citizenship have been deemed neither necessary nor desirable.

This paper is threefold in its analysis. It first presents an analysis of narratives framing British debate about migration and socialist transformation, building towards a model of ideal types. It then explores the implications of this for developing a municipal project which seeks to sustainably counter populism. Finally, it interrogates how this might present in practice, looking at the case study, Barking and Dagenham. With a recent electoral history of the far right BNP, and White British community making up 37% of the borough in 2017 – down from 80.9% in 2001 – this site is chosen to reflect lessons from Holston (2009) that ‘sites of metropolitan innovation often emerge at the very sites of metropolitan degradation’.

Igor Calzada Mugica, University of Oxford, UK

igor.calzada@compas.ox.ac.uk

Small European Stateless City-Regions: Constructing (Civic/Metropolitanised) Nationalism?

A widespread hegemonic assumption by urban scholars asserts that the generic category ‘nationalism’ must inevitably and necessarily be presented negatively, opposed to the progressivist, metropolitan, and urban citizenship view. Nonetheless, already in 1979 Berlin noted that ‘nationalism’ seemed the strongest force in the world, shedding light on the potential link between civic nationalism and the emancipatory role of cities (alongside regions) through claims of the ‘right to decide’ as a new version of a metropolitan-based ‘right to the city’ (Calzada, 2018, 2017). More recently, Tamir (2019) has argued that ‘nationalism’ could be an ideology that revives participatory, creative, and egalitarian virtues, while answering many of the problems caused by neoliberalism and hyperglobalism (Fukuyama, 2019), and that ‘nationalism’ might be essential to democracy at its best. This contrasts with the univocal assumption and epistemologically neutral position taken by many progressivist urban scholars who overlook and bind nationalism to a hegemonic negative, anti-urban category as one-size-fits-all, missing out the pervasive side effects of state-centric banal nationalism (Billig, 1995; Koch & Paasi, 2016). This paper therefore proposes that the term ‘nationalism’ is a slippery concept, and – despite the related methodological criticism – affirms the ethnic–civic distinction as it is widely used, accepting that as a theoretical framework it may remain problematic (Brown, 1999; Lecours, 2000; Maxwell, 2018; Miley, 2007). Based on previous published fieldwork research, then, this paper suggests a complementary view to the study of nationalism, given recent developments in metropolitanising small European stateless city-regionalised nations such as Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Scotland. My main hypothesis in this paper is that these three nations are rescaling their respective nation-states (Spain and the UK) in different ways, despite that all of them (i) are being bolstered by their metropolitan hubs (Barcelona, Bilbao, and Glasgow) and (ii) generate a stateless ‘civic nationalism’ category rooted in the metropolitan ‘right to decide’, blending nationalism and metropolitanism/cosmopolitanism (Guibernau, 2013).

Amny Athamny, University of Toronto, Canada

(amny.athamny@gmail.com)

Dutch Cities: Going Dutch or Not?

In recent years, Dutch urban centres host Syrian refugees who fled Syria following the ongoing war. These refugees re-establish their lives under conditions of rising nationalistic sentiments manifested in the recent Dutch elections (rise of the Forum voor Democratie). Consequently, the public debate is on the integration of refugees into the Dutch society and preserving Dutch national identity. With cities being historically a destination for immigrants and refugees due to their size, the economic opportunities they offer, and their relative tolerance towards 'strangers', many Syrian refugees choose Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht to be their new home.

I conduct in depth interviews to answer how Syrian refugees navigate their daily life in the Dutch urban centres on the micro level between grass-root organizations and other institutional actors. Furthermore, I ask how this navigation shapes their belonging, their sense of place-making, and ultimately their urban identities. Moreover, I examine if such urban identities oppose to, tolerate, or harmonize with the Dutch national identity. In other words, I put to test the concept of fragile urban identities within the wider context of urban/regional identities vs. (Dutch) national identity, and inquire about the relationship between them, whether it is dynamics of opposition, tolerance or harmony. Lastly, it is worth noting that in my research I focus on the gendered aspects of urban identities, and how Syrian refugee women in particular construct it while examining issues of personal safety, anonymity, and freedom of movement.

Session II: Contested Cities against Nationalism?

Nufar Avni, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

(nufar.avni@mail.mcgill.ca)

Between the national and the urban: The double-edged sword of Neighbourhood Councils in East 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 seek to support the East Jerusalemite community in a 'depoliticized' way on the other. Meanwhile, extreme nationalism is growing ever more prevalent in 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.

Nada Elfeituri, University College London, UK

(nada.elfeituri.18@ucl.ac.uk)

The Re-Emergence of Traditional Governance in Cities of the Middle East and North Africa, The Case of Benghazi Libya

Traditional forms of territorial governance and control in the countries of the MENA region have evolved since these countries gained independence, through the various political and military means of authoritarian regimes, and this can be seen most notably in the urban centers. But this status quo was shattered following the 2011 uprisings. The complete collapse of the government system in many of these countries has led to the re-emergence of these traditional modes of governance, which can be witnessed most clearly on a city level. But these systems have had to adapt and transform to the contemporary situation of cities, particularly the 'new' modes citizenship, nationalism and social relations that have developed since independence, as well as the wave of revolutionary patriotism that was sparked after the start of the protests. This articulation has affected the spatial dimensions of the cities and poses a new challenge for the planning and design of cities in the MENA region. The aim of this paper is to investigate that case of Benghazi and the rise of tribalism that the city has witnessed following the revolution and civil war. It will look at the tribal history of the city in light of colonization and Gadhafi's policies, as well as the 'oppositional' nature of the city against the regime. It will link this history to the events of the 2011 revolution and 2014 civil war during the breakdown of governance, analyzing the spatial effect of the rise of tribalism in the transitional process.

James Anderson, Queens University Belfast, UK

(J.Anderson@qub.ac.uk)

How do cities shape nationalist conflicts? *

The question is rarely asked much less answered - a blind spot for conflict and urban specialists alike: the former rarely notice urban locations or grant them any causal significance; the latter are preoccupied with how conflict shapes the city, not how the city shapes the conflict. And it is a difficult question because the *same* urban factors can produce diametrically opposite effects – intensifying and prolonging conflict, or reducing, even helping resolve it, depending – crucially - on wider geopolitical circumstances, whether imperialist provocations or benign peace-keeping. But we can begin to see the immediate impact of urban settings in terms of: 'rural-urban' and 'urban-urban' contrasts; the *intentionality* of specifically urban actors; and the equally if not more important *unintended* effects of urban structures, processes and symbolism. Cities are not the cause of the conflicts - which arise from clashing nationalist ideologies and struggles for economic and political power - but the cities shape them in many different and often contradictory ways, whether ethno-nationalist conflicts of contested statehood or simply right-wing 'populist' or 'neo-'nationalist conflicts scapegoating minorities, for clearly there are overlaps between them.

- Based on Chapter 2 of ***Contested Holy Cities: The Urban Dimensions of Religious Conflict***, Mick Dumper (ed.), Routledge Religion and Politics Series, 2019.

Gruia Badescu, University of Konstanz, Germany

(gruia.badescu@uni-konstanz.de)

Towards syncretic place-making: Architectural practice and resistance to nationalism in conflict-cities

This paper discusses the role of space and architectural reconfigurations in processes of resistance to nationalism by examining the practice of syncretic place-making, shaped by initiatives and movements from below to include different voices in the negotiation and representation of the past. It analyses how city-makers respond to new socio-political and cultural challenges through the production of places and memory practices that include concerns for diversity. I define as syncretic place-making the process of drawing from multiple traditions in a diverse place to create a contemporary architecture celebrating diversity in memory and identity. It is syncretic in the contemporary anthropological understanding of Charles Stewart, referring to mixture and diversity expressed through practices of proximity and convergence. The paper highlights examples from a number of European settings, starting with the example of rebuilding Sarajevo after the 1990s wars.

While post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina is usually associated with nationalist politics, divisive memory practices, and an architecture mobilizing distinctive, competitive identities, this paper highlights a set of alternative practices. The practice of architecture offices like Amir Vuk Zec and Studio Non-Stop in Sarajevo aim to shape spaces of pluralism, thus evoking a resistance to nationalist hegemonic productions of space. Their syncretic place-making reconstruction drawing from century-old diversity and mixture becomes a celebration of urban cosmopolitanism and openness. Nevertheless, it opens other forms of exclusions and conflict, as it also sustains the imaginary of the city under attack from the margins. The paper discusses the frictions of such approaches by also relating it to attempts to evoke plurality in design in the broader European context, from Copenhagen to Barcelona. All in all, the paper highlights both the potential and the challenges of syncretic place-making when dealing with both older and newer forms of difference, musing on larger debates on diversity, nationalism and place-making.

Afternoon Keynote

Oren Yiftachel, Ben Gurion University and UCL, UK

Urban Displaceability and the rise of (Neo)Nationalism

Nationalism and urban studies have developed into two of the most important fields of research in the social science. Yet, these fields rarely converse, leaving the interaction between nationalism and urbanism relatively unexplored and under-theorized. Such 'conversation' is more needed than ever, given the rapid rate of urbanization and the 'return' on (neo)nationalism in recent years. Using world-wide examples with a focus on Israel/Palestine, the lecture will explore such interaction by focusing on the nature of urban citizenship in the current age. Drawing on theories of 'grey spacing' and 'everyday bordering', It will develop the concept of 'displaceability' as a central, yet often overlooked, dimension of urban citizenship. Displacement from urban locations, powers or rights, it is argued, is on the rise, born of the interaction between the nature of contemporary capitalist urbanisation,

accelerating immigration, and the recent wave of state-centred, populist (ethnic/racial) nationalism.

Under such conditions, contemporary urban regimes, mainly but not only in the global south-east, increasingly confine residents to a state of 'permanent temporariness'.

Consequently, growing numbers of residents – mainly immigrants, minorities and the young – are placed under the 'shadow' of potential displacement. This combination creates a state of urban coloniality, which increasingly defines urban societies and regimes. Against these settings, the lecture invokes the concept of 'equal metrozenship' as renewed normative horizon for urban imagination, articulation and mobilization.

Evening Public Lecture

Michael Gentile, University of Oslo, Norway

[\(michael.gentile@sosgeo.uio.no\)](mailto:michael.gentile@sosgeo.uio.no)

Geopolitical Fault-Line Cities in a world of Contested Cities

In this talk, I discuss the geopolitical fault-line city, comparing it with the more established concept of the ethno-nationally divided city. The key differences between the two relate to the character and origin of the problems underlying conflict. In divided cities, the principal concerns are mostly local and related to social and spatial justice, discrimination, security, residential segregation, and uneven political representation. In geopolitical fault-line cities, on the other hand, there are severe disputes about geopolitical alignment, foreign policy, and the overall character of government.

Having introduced the concept of the geopolitical fault-line city, I proceed by linking it to the cases of two major cities in east-central Ukraine: Kharkiv and Dnipro. I will show that the categories of "Ukrainian", "Russian" or even "Russian-speaking" are of relatively little salience in these cities, contrary to the (now slowly fading) narrative of ethnic polarization that has been haunting many academic and especially media portrayals of Ukraine. What matters, instead, is self-identification as "European" or "Soviet", imaginary supra-national communities that are geopolitical at heart. Finally, I will attempt to show when, where and how the geopolitical fault-line city concept may be of use to scholars studying conflict in cities located beyond Russia's incandescent margins.

Respondent: James Anderson, Queens University Belfast, UK