

Conflict in Cities and the Contested State

Several articles in this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* are devoted to an examination of the nature of Jerusalem as a divided city. It is based on the work of a five-year British research project entitled *Conflict in Cities and the Contested State* based in the Universities of Cambridge, Exeter and Queen's University, Belfast.¹ The project does not look at any or every kind of divided city. The focus of the project are those cities which are divided as a result of ethno-national and religious conflict and, in particular, those cities that are in conflict due to the contestation over the legitimacy of the state in which they are located. Conflict in Bradford, for example, would not be included in our study since the legitimacy of the state is not contested in that part of the UK. But Belfast is part of the project since the legitimacy of the British state in Northern Ireland has been contested by Irish republicans.

The project focuses on such divided cities in Europe and the Middle East and in particular, Belfast and Jerusalem where we have two multidisciplinary teams of researchers and research partners. The teams comprise of political scientists, geographers, architects and urbanists, sociologists and political anthropologists and we bring our different conceptual frameworks and research methodologies to bear on the subject. We also have researchers in Berlin (where we are interested in the legacy of division) Brussels (which is being held together through various consociational devices) Mostar (where the role of EU and UN intervention is critical) Nicosia (the

iconic divided city but with some shared infrastructure) Beirut (a city with a history of violent divisions and possibly on the cusp of re-division) Tripoli (where a refugee camp-city divide is dominant) and Kirkuk (which is possibly unravelling into Kurdish, Arab and Turkoman areas as you read this).

The main avenue of our enquiry is the ways in which conflict at the national level has an impact in cities and the role of cities, especially with respect to their everyday life, in perpetuating, ameliorating and even transforming these larger conflicts. Our working assumption is that conflict in cities cannot be completely eradicated. Cities are, due to the high concentration of people, through the competition over resources and over symbolic locations, inevitably going to be arenas of conflict. The aspiration for a wholly harmonious city is misplaced. The question is how conflict can be channelled into constructive forms where difference, in terms of ethnicity, religion, society or politics, becomes a positive aspect of urban life. Ultimately we are interested in understanding how a divided city can become viable for all of its inhabitants.

By examining this relationship between the politics of contested states and the dynamics of urban conflict across a number of similar but also different cities we hope will produce a number of critical observations. For example, one of our findings is that while cities can be geographically divided, populations share urban spaces temporally. The same space is used by different ethnic groups at different times and this can take place without conflict. Another example is that hard divisions such as walls and fences may bring short-term security for a particular segment of the city's population, but they also produce unintended consequences such as the creation of frontier areas, population change and the emergence of uncontrolled enclaves.

The Jerusalem team is led by Dr Wendy Pullan (Cambridge, Department of Architecture and Professor Michael Dumper (Exeter, Department of Politics) and currently comprises seven full-time and part-time researchers. It is concentrating on four main areas of research: the impact of closure and the Separation Wall, the role of holy places, how the city absorbs and manifests conflict, and finally, the modalities of control. The short articles in this issue are taken from the research findings of the project.²

To some extent they are a work-in-progress as the project has another 3 years to run and the work data and analysis is subject to constant review, but they give a flavour to the work of the project. Comments and feedback via our website will be most welcome.

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Endnotes

- 1 The full title of the project is: Conflict in Cities and the Contested State: Everyday Life and the possibilities for Transformation in Belfast, Jerusalem and Other Divided Cities. The project is funded by the main UK social science funding body, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). For further details of our research framework and programme of the Project, please see our website: www.conflictincities.org. Additional examples of the project's work are on the Working Papers page of the website.
- 2 Conflict in Cities and the Contested State, funded by the ESRC (RES-060-25-0015)

Fawzia Hammami translated Sylvaine Bulle's article from the French in the "Border Zones" issue of JQ (38). Her name was inadvertently dropped from the credits.