Change and Difference in State-City Relations: ‘NORMAL’ AND ‘DIVIDED’ CITIES

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Ethno-nationally divided cities are mostly studied through individual case studies. A more systematic comparative approach to how they differ from each other and from “normal” cities is developed in terms of the historical transitions to capitalism, nationalism, and (as a consequence) informal empires. This alternative to a “global cities” comparative urbanism hinges on capitalism’s partial separation of economic and political power and the relative depoliticization of “normal” cities embedded in national states. Divided cities in contested states buck this tendency, but the pressures toward “normality” suggest they are potentially fruitful sites for reducing ethno-national conflict.

Bridging Divides?
The Old Bridge, Mostar’s Stari Most
Change and Difference in State/City Relations:
‘Normal’ and ‘Divided’ Cities

James Anderson

Abstract: Ethno-nationally divided cities in contested states are mostly studied through individual case studies, but a more systematic comparative model can be developed with three overlapping ‘levels’ of causation: empire, nation and urban spaces. To see how these changed historically, and how ‘divided’ cities differ from so-called ‘normal’ ones and from each other, this paper is on change and difference in state/city relations.

It critiques three exceptional scholars – Charles Tilly, Peter Taylor and Saskia Sassen - who bridge the usually separate fields of urban studies and studies of states and nations. However, their economistic limitations call for an alternative approach in terms of three (uneven, often incomplete, sometimes reversible) historical transitions – to industrial capitalist production, to nationalism, and (as a consequence) to informal empires.

These transitions - especially capitalism’s partial separation of political and economic power - largely define contemporary state/city relations, producing a partial ‘depoliticization’ of ‘normal’ cities embedded in the homogenized space of national states. The big exceptions are divided cities embroiled in contested state territories where the ‘high politics’ of state sovereignty and security are often popular concerns down to local neighbourhood level. Differences between divided cities can also be understood in terms of the three transitions. Conversely, their on-going pressures towards urban ‘normality’ suggest that the divided city is a potentially fruitful site for reducing ethno-national conflict.
Introduction – Context

‘Other divided cities’ include: Brussels, Bilbao, Montreal, Mostar, Nicosia, Beirut, Tripoli (Leb.), and Kirkuk... historic cases such as Danzig, Dublin, Helsinki, Trieste... [Project cities in bold]

Belfast Research Modules:
• Built Environment;  Demography;  and General Urban/Geo-Politics [today’s focus]
• ‘Peacewalls’ and Interface Areas – the teenage generation
• The ‘Religious’ City – religion in its own right
• From Conflict Management to Conflict Resolution
• Public Space and the City Centre – gender: mothers with young children

Jerusalem Research Modules:
• Holy City/Holy Places – heritage politics, the ‘City of David’, Islamic movements
• Impacts of the Separation Barrier – on politics and everyday life
• Conflict Management – policing and security
• Agonistic Urbanism – the general urban containment of conflict
Figure 6.1. Map of Mostar’s partition, 1992–1995. Mostar is located at 43°30′N, 17°48′E, 45 km inland in the southeastern portion of Bosnia along the Neretva River. Bosnia-Herzegovina is bounded by Croatia to the southwest and by Serbia and Montenegro to the East. Mostar lies 464 km east of Rome and 352 km southeast of Vienna. Authors.
Figure 7.1. Map of Nicosia’s partition 1963–2008. Cyprus is the third largest island in the Mediterranean Sea and lies off the southern coast of Turkey and the western shore of Syria. The capital Nicosia is located at 35°10′N, 33°21′E at along the Pedieos River and situated almost in the center of the island. Nicosia lies 327 km northwest of Damascus and 661 km southeast of Izmir. Authors.
The ‘ethno-nationally divided city’ category: Questions and challenges

... which a case by case approach cannot adequately handle. Questions such as:

What difference does the urbanization of ethno-national conflict make? ‘Not much’ is the implicit answer of most scholars of ethno-national conflict who blithely ignore cities. Urban scholars reciprocate by ignoring ethno-nationalism.

Working hypothesis: cities make a big difference, though complicated - urban conditions (e.g., high density populations, class power concentrations, durable built environments, urban functionality) invite, intensify or prolong conflict, but they can also moderate or reduce it - depending on urban circumstances and actions at state levels...

Challenges include combining usually separate research fields; analysing how ‘conflict’ factors interact with ‘normal’ urban processes (e.g., de/industrialization, sub/urbanization, property development...) within ‘divided’ cities - the most promising area for conflict reduction.

Are ‘divided’ cities - historical left-overs of no general significance? Or harbingers of more troubled urban futures? They’re relevant to comparative urbanism... especially across the global North-South divide, rather than assuming ‘fundamental incommensurability’. But high levels of abstraction are required. ‘Explaining’ by ‘controlled experiment’ or holding variables constant (e.g., Varshney 2002 on variations in Hindu-Muslim violence in Indian cities) is neither desirable nor possible ... we have many more variables than cases and want to understand the two-way interactions between cities and conflicts.
‘Divided’ Cities - An Explanatory Model: Empire, nation and urban spaces

• So we’re aiming somewhere between the impossible/undesirable ‘scientism’ of a ‘controlled experiment’ and merely inductive generalizations from case studies...

• ...for a more systematic, thematic, partly deductive approach using 3 overlapping ‘levels’ of causation which create and reproduce conflict in ‘divided’ cities – but also have ameliorative potential where all 3 levels contribute to conflict reduction.

• **EMPIRE** - the ethno-nationally divided cities generally emerged from already-politicized, *pre*-national ethnicities (mainly of religion), at the insecure edges of traditional territorial empires (British, Ottoman, Hapsburg, etc.; Belgium/Brussels a partial exception). *Informal* empires – ‘great powers’, ‘the international community’ – constitute the wider context of today’s ‘divided’ cities and states.

• **NATION** - the level of the national state, contested national territories and statehood, conflicting nationalist ideologies - including relations with the ethnicities of religion, language, and culture as factors in their own right.

• **URBAN SPACES** - the city’s internal physical and social structures, its symbolic and material spaces, relations with territorial hinterlands, and with other cities in city-network space. The sites of interaction - or ‘tug of war’ - between ‘conflict’ factors and ‘normal’ urban processes - the latter intensifying or reducing conflict depending on circumstances, largely determined at ‘nation’ and ‘empire’ levels.
Change and difference in state/city relations: Six steps in the argument

1. **State formation and ‘Global City Networks’ paradigm** – critiquing positives and negatives in Tilly, Taylor and Sassen’s different accounts of state/city relations.

2. **An alternative approach** in terms of transitions to capitalism, nationalism and informal empires, and capitalism’s separation of ‘politics’ and ‘economics’.

3. **The ‘normal’ implications for states, state/city relations and cities** of these transitions, including the partial ‘de-politicization’ of cities.

4. **Exceptions to ‘normal urban de-politicization’** - especially ethno-nationally divided cities as the most sustained, systematic exceptions.

5. **Differences between divided cities** are partly understandable in terms of the unevenness, weaknesses or even partial reversals of the transitions.

6. **‘Divided and normal’** - ‘normal’ processes within ‘divided’ cities suggest they are potentially fruitful sites for ameliorating ethno-national conflict.
1. State formation and the Global City Networks paradigm: Charles Tilly on capital and coercion in European state formation

- Tilly (1992) - the historical expert on the state/city’s oscillating ‘love/hate’ relationship - associates cities with capital, states with coercion. States protect capital but also take it. State type depends on the mix of capital and coercion:
  - Coercion-intensive: high on coercion/low on cities and capital (e.g., Tsarist Russia).
  - Capital-intensive: the reverse - high concentrations of cities and capital, relatively low coercive capacity (e.g., historic city-states - North Italy and the Low Countries).
  - Capitalized coercion: both urban/capital and coercive capacity highly developed - the winning formula of (proto)national states (e.g., Britain and France from 17th c.)
  - Add a possible 4th type: ‘failed’ state-building project/‘divided’ city – where both capital and coercive capacity are too low – for the extra demands of fully successful state-formation/nation-building at the insecure edges of empire?

- But Tilly’s ‘the state makes war and war makes the state’ fits the 17th /18th century better than the 20th /21st. Too economicistic – no ideology (religion or nationalism). No distinction (or periodization) between merchant capitalism and industrial capitalist production. The LSE Fragile States/Cities group (Beall et al 2011) found that Tilly’s model no longer fits because urban elites no longer have the power to bargain with state rulers (which supports the ‘normal de-politicization’ of cities argument).
Cities – from city-state to national state embeddedness... to ‘stateless’
global city networks? Limits of the paradigm

• Peter Taylor (2007) and Saskia Sassen (2006) - leaders of urban studies’ Global City Networks paradigm and its main basis for comparative urbanism – skillfully establish the historical embedding of cities in national states up to the 1970s. But to argue that ‘globalization’ since the 1970s means cities are now ‘flowing free’ of national states towards ‘statelessness’ and ‘city-based globalization’. Accept former, reject latter?
• Taylor outlines the ‘rise and fall of the mutuality’ between states and cities – from antagonistic medieval relations in territorial states, or cities having their own competing city-states, to a mutual complementarity with the rise of ‘national’ states since the 17th century - cities provided the state with capital, the state protected the cities, and the cities lost political power. Until ‘globalization’ arrived in the 1980s and ...
• State/city mutuality has been broken, their relations again became antagonistic, national embeddedness declined, and cities were now autonomous global actors.
• But his evidence is thin: UK not in ‘Euroland’ but London the financial centre for Euros?
• Similarly, Sassen’s longer, more nuanced account is strong on 300 years of ‘national embedding’ or ‘assembling’; but it is so nuanced and qualified as to be very weak on the 30 years of ‘dis-embedding’ or the ‘dis-assembling of the national’ by ‘globalization’.
• ‘Surprisingly inconclusive’ was the verdict of Swedish sociologist Goran Therborn (2011) but not so ‘surprising’. 30 years undoing 300? And their case resting on the shaky grounds of the alleged ‘decline of the nation state’? Hence the qualifications and partial retractions, especially since interventions in the 2008 banking crisis showed the state’s continuing centrality, and the weakness of cities/city networks in response to the crisis.
• For Therborn the ‘end of the paradigm’. For our purposes the need for an alternative.
2. An alternative approach: Transitions to capitalist production, nationalism/national states, and informal empires

- Many straws in the wind blow in the same ‘decline of the nation state’ direction – but overall the argument is ‘grasping at straws’. The ‘space of places’ has not been superceded by a ‘space of flows’ (one of Manuel Castells’ not-so-clever notions).
- Despite ‘globalization’, ‘normal’ cities are places and remain firmly embedded in other places called states, while also involved in network flows. ‘Divided’ cities are (relatively even more?) locally embroiled, in national/state conflicts about place.
- Instead of relating one-sidedly to flows in city networks, we need dimensions of change and difference linked to cities and to states, ‘normal’ and ‘divided’; covering politics, ideology and culture as well as economics; and (rather than privileging 30 years of ‘globalization’) allowing for longer, spatially varied periodizations more appropriate to ‘divided’ cities (and ‘normal’ ones) in different regions/periods...
- So we start late 18th century in western Europe with the Industrial and French Revolutions for the transitions to capitalism and nationalism, respectively, which together produced the third, imperialist, transition to informal empires. Transitions developed unevenly in time-space, and reversible (eg., state interventions in crisis).
- Also more appropriate for a comparative urbanism of ‘normal’ cities? For Jennifer Robinson (2011) global North/South commensurability lies in all cities now experiencing global city networks, but the three transitions arguably give stronger, longer, wider bases for comparison - or, at the very least, necessary complements.
Capitalism's partial and contested separation or ‘contradictory unity’ of ‘Politics/Economics’

• Historically state/city relations usually involved class differences: eg., states and landed classes met cities and merchant capitalists. But ‘now they’re all capitalists’, and a main state/city differentiator is capitalism’s partial separation of ‘politics/economics’.

• Ellen Wood (1995) locates this separation within the capitalist mode of production. In pre-capitalist production economic surpluses were extracted from the producers (e.g., slaves, serfs) by extra-economic - ie., political - means: direct physical force and/or ideological/religious ‘persuasion’. In contrast, surpluses in capitalism are extracted from ‘free labour’ (workers) by ‘economics’ through the ‘free market’ - the ‘politics’ of physical enforcement apparently absent from the ‘economics’ of production/exchange.

• But the separation is partial. Politics and physical force are still essential but are indirect, displaced to the level of the national state as the enforcer of property rights - which excludes us wage-workers from using the means of production (e.g., land, machinery, etc.) for ourselves, and we’re forced to sell our labour-power in the ‘free market’.

• This separation/displacement enables capitalists, including foreign capitalists, to extract surplus from wage-(or salaried) labour by what appear ‘purely economic’ means without ‘politics’ being involved. Ideologically this is crucial in ‘squaring the circle’ between nationalism’s doctrine of political independence and the economic realities of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the international inter-dependencies of ‘globalization’.
‘Politics/Economics’ and the Nationalist and Imperialist Transitions

- In partially separating ‘politics’ and ‘economics’ the capitalist transition made possible what the nationalist transition required. Politically, the partial separation is a precondition for ‘national self-determination’ in that the nationalist claim to sovereign independence has plausibility only because it’s confined to ‘politics’, with economic production and FDI excluded from consideration. Conversely, and despite nationalism, the separation allows foreign-owned production and exploitation to be widely accepted - as merely ‘economic’ rather than ‘political’.

- In general, ‘economic rather than political’ applies to the global city networks - they are not asserting political independence from states (Therborn accuses the paradigm of reducing cities to the zip codes of multinational corporations).

- The separation also meant economic exploitation in foreign countries no longer needed the direct political control of formal empire, thus facilitating our later, third transition to informal empires operating through politically independent states. But with ‘economic’ city networks matched ‘politically’ by networks of military bases.

- Within state territories, the partial separation of ‘Politics/Economics’ strengthened the institutional ‘division of labour’ between the state and the cities, respectively.

- [The institutionalized separation provides a material basis for the ideological disciplinary separation of Politics and Economics; and of national conflicts from urban studies, while helping account for the latter’s tendencies towards economism.]
Qualifications - Ellen Wood and David Harvey

- Wood is very clear on state *politics* as security/enforcement, on the increase in the *economic* power of capital (private) relative to political power, and on their basic if ‘contradictory’ unity. But it’s at the expense of ignoring the state’s economic roles.

- In practice the partial, contested (and reversible) ‘Politics/Economics’ separation varies greatly - from wider separation in ‘anti-state’ neo-liberalism (US, UK) to much narrower separation in the state capitalism of state-owned enterprises.

- Harvey is rightly critical of Wood for downplaying states as *economic* managers of national economies - crucial even in neo-liberal regimes despite their rhetoric.

- But Wood’s unitary view of national states and the global economy as basically constituting a single capitalist system is preferable to Harvey’s (2003) dualistic notion (misappropriated from Giovanni Arrighi 1994) that while the economy follows a ‘capitalist’ logic, states follow a different ‘territorial logic’. If they do it’s part of a bigger capitalist logic. [Arrighi in fact applied both logics to *medieval* state strategies - so it’s doubly ironic that Harvey who stresses the *modern* state’s management of capitalism sees it following a ‘territorial’ *rather than* a ‘capitalist’ logic, though he does emphasise that the two logics are entwined.]

- The (reversible) separation of ‘Politics/Economics’ to laissez-faire extremes may explain recent trends better than the one-directional and epochal ‘decline of the state’ thesis. And if decline, it’s perhaps more of democracy than of the state *per se*? 
3. ‘Normal’ implications for states, state/city relations and cities

- **The more obvious results of the transitions included**: huge leaps in the scale of urbanization and industrialization; and big increases in the state’s infrastructural power to centralise and over-ride the *de facto* if not *de jure* political autonomy of cities and urban elites, thanks largely to capitalism; but also...

- ...supported ideologically by nationalism’s re-scaling of political identities and aspirations up from local, including city, levels to the national level; and the political homogenizing of national space which reduced urban-rural political distinctions.

- The transition to informal empire (pioneered by the British Empire in 19th c. South America, and the USA after WWI, but the global norm only since the 1960s) meant less direct political control over nominally independent states, especially if states assert their *political* independence (Achilles’ Heel of informal empire/of US hegemony?).

- **Less obvious results included**: spatialization of the ‘politics/economics’ division between states and cities, with partial ‘de-politicization’ of the city...

- National states monopolised the ‘high politics’ of sovereignty, security and the national economy; and sometimes reduced the ‘low politics’ of urban policy to central state *dictat*, with the category ‘urban’ often largely drained of *political* meaning - or *any* real meaning by some accounts as all of (western) society is now in a sense ‘urbanized’.

- **The structuring of urban spaces** - instead of the pre-capitalist territoriality of *political* process or decree (eg., the original Jewish *ghetto* in Venice, or Jerusalem’s Old City), we have the *economic* market spatiality of land values and distance-decay gradients...
Figure 2.2. The New Jewish Ghetto in Venice, c. 1550, occupied an island linked to the city by three easily defended bridges. It was carefully engineered to protect the city from the Jews and the Jews from the city. Authors. J+C+E+cq
Figure 8.10 The urban density surface. Land value and intensity peak at points of greater accessibility on major arterials. (Reprinted by permission of the University of Chicago Department of Geography, from J. Simmons, The Changing Pattern of Retail Locations, Research Paper No. 92, 1964.)
4. Exceptions to ‘normal urban de-politicization’

• The exceptions include: official *capital cities* which contain, embody, symbolize national statehood and institutions; cities as occasional *sites of mass protests* (eg., Cairo recently); or of *overt class or ethnic conflicts*; but especially *ethno-nationally divided cities* as the most sustained, systematic exceptions.

• They were sometimes created by the capitalist as well as nationalist transition, with urbanization/industrialization bringing in different ethnic groups or ethnic divisions from rural hinterlands, to a previously more homogeneous city [eg., Poles to ‘German Danzig’, Catholics to ‘Presbyterian Belfast’].

• They are exceptions in that political mobilization is more continuous. Reversing ‘normal’ patterns, the ‘high politics’ of state sovereignty/security are often local ‘everyday’ concerns; and *political* structuring systematically trumps the ‘economic’.

• The city’s spatiality is more territorial, more similar to the older *politically*-determined pre-capitalist ‘city of quarters’... though there’s no necessary continuity, and ‘normal’ economic structuring - of property prices, etc. - still operates to some degree ‘underneath’ or in competition with the politics of conflict (see below).
5. Differences between divided cities in different regions, periods, cultures, or development contexts

• Differences between divided cities (e.g., in western Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and beyond) are partly understandable in terms of the uneven development, relative weaknesses or even partial reversals of the capitalist and nationalist transitions, and the benign or malign effects of informal empires (e.g., the constructive US role in Northern Ireland compared to Israel/Palestine; EU v. Russia vis a vis Serbia in the Balkans conflict).

• The transitions provide dimensions for ‘measuring’ cities - all are now in a world shaped by capitalism, nationalism and informal empires, and some have been for two centuries.

• But capitalism and nationalism are strongly developed in western Europe, less so in the Balkans, with implications for different levels of socio-economic development and commodification, proletarianization, urbanization with or without industrialization, and urban-rural class structure differences; and variations in the administrative, military and ideological capacities of states and of oppositional national movements.

• Eg., nationalism in the Middle East often took weak ‘pan-Arab’ forms rather than particular territorial identities; and the nationalist transition has arguably been partly reversed with ‘Arab nationalism’ largely dis-credited (e.g., by regimes like Iraq), allowing an Islamic re-assertion or adaptation of religion as a political force in its own right?

• And the Iraq invasion/occupation was arguably a (costly) reversion to formal empire - which demonstrated why informal empire is now the only real alternative?
6. ‘Divided and normal’ – urban interactions leading to conflict reduction?

- The working hypothesis is that the same or similar urban conditions intensify or moderate conflict – things ‘can go either way’ depending on city and state circumstances. But there is systemic potential for positive conflict-reducing outcomes in the fact that the transitions embody pressures for ‘normality’, and ‘conflict’ processes are countered in a ‘tug of war’ by ‘normal’ ones within the divided cities (e.g., suburbanization, property development, de-industrialization, etc).

- For example: housing built for Jewish settlers in East Jerusalem is rented to Palestinians who pay 20% more – property developers are more interested in extra profits than the political project of transforming demography. In Belfast property development is beginning to erode residential segregation – interestingly this is widely accepted as ‘natural’[‘normal’, only ‘economics’?] , whereas if done by city planning it would be seen as ‘political’ and bitterly opposed. Probably the biggest factor de-segregating employment in Belfast was de-industrialization which demolished large, Protestant-dominated workplaces (e.g., shipyards, engineering factories).

- But the biggest potential of the city for conflict reduction lies in its possibilities for cross-cutting (e.g., class, gender, ecology) politics. And in urban functionality – for the city to function as a city, co-operations across the ethno-national divides are essential.

- I said Nicosia was ‘completely cut in two’ by the state border dividing Cyprus. Not quite true. Below ground it has a single sewage system. It was completely impractical to divide that in two. And it led the two mayors administering North and South Nicosia [friends and both architects] to initiate a Master Plan for their city to become a re-united and ‘joined up’ Nicosia once again ... though of course that happening also depends on action at national and international levels.
Conclusions

The cities are subject to three overlapping levels of causation and all have to be taken into account:

• urban processes in urban spaces
• states, national territories and nationalism, and
• informal empires operating through national states and global capitalism.

With the urbanization of populations and their conflicts, divided cities are now the key sites of ethno-national conflict; and the most promising for reducing conflict because of the counteracting force of ‘normal’ urban processes.

For a comparative urbanism of ethno-nationally divided cities, a focus on state/city relations and the variable transformations of the capitalist, nationalist and imperialist transitions provides a more comprehensive and insightful approach than the ‘global city networks’ paradigm. Reversible transitions are preferable to the one-directional and questionable ‘decline of the nation state’ thesis.

They may also be better than ‘global networks’ for a comparative urbanism of ‘normal’ cities? At the very least, they provide a necessary complement.
The capitalist transition's partial separation of ‘Politics/Economics’ applies to state territoriality more generally and was discussed in relation to state borders and facilitating economic ‘globalization’ (Anderson 2001, 2012), as well as with respect to transforming ‘normal’ state/city relations. Ideas about the complex interweaving (rather than simple opposition) of imperialism and nationalism, and about ‘divided’ cities emerging from pre-national ethnicities already politicized by traditional empires, emerged out of work on the Irish/Belfast case (Anderson and O'Dowd 2007). The critique of the ‘Global City Networks’ paradigm is not a criticism of excellent work on ‘networks and flows’ per se, but rather a criticism of how this particular aspect of cities has been one-sidedly inflated at the expense of also seeing cities as places, in places called states, i.e., inflated into a systematic misreading of contemporary state/city relations.

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