

Locating Urban Conflicts: Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Everyday,

Wendy Pullan and Britt Baillie (Eds), 2013, Palgrave Macmillan, 288 pages, ISBN: 9780230368903, £ 55.00 (paperback)

Locating Urban Conflicts is an edited volume that brings together 12 chapters by leading scholars and researchers discussing how conflicts that stem from the larger issues of ethnicity, nationalism and religion can be understood as problems rooted in cities. Addressing the significance of everyday practices in contested cities, urban conflict is examined using diverse research methods gathering multifarious data that are textual, spatial, material and environmental. The book is structured based on three themes: 'Spatial Horizons', 'Reassessing Divisions' and 'Being Modern'. Each of the themes while discussing the centrality of cities and conflict that is reflected in the insightful editors' 'Introduction' (Chapter 1), also offers interesting perspectives on the often overlooked domain of spatial practices in understanding urban conflicts.

In the first section, 'Spatial Horizons', the chapters look at various ways in which urban spaces play a pivotal role, and are also defined and/or transformed by conflict. Wendy Pullan's Chapter 2 introduces a significant term, 'conflict infrastructure', which informs how physical manifestations of planning decisions impact and reconfigure the spatial framework of everyday life of ordinary people in cities. In the next two chapters, both Caroline Humphrey (Chapter 3) and Michael Dumper (Chapter 5) emphasise the impact of the various levels of physicality of urban spaces that play a significant part in conflict development. The former chapter examines the central role of the Odessa steps in the staging of violence in the city and the latter explores how restricted spaces develop as a hub for religio-national conflicts. Felipe Hernandez and Maxmillan Sternberg (Chapter 4) explore conflict in the context of immigration and how it impacts both demography and conflict itself. The authors throw light on the immense impact of continued migration and re-categorisation of individuals as citizens on the overall understanding of contested cities. The discussion in the chapters allows the reader to gradually unravel the intertwined nature of urban spaces and conflict. Discussions on temporality of urban spatial practices in cities and conflict enable an understanding of the deep rootedness of the phenomenon studied.

In the second section, 'Reassessing Divisions', the chapters explore how complex conflicts are viewed from both sides as situations for reassessing the 'other' and for making the situation favourable for their own. Craig Larkin (Chapter 6) explores how the memory of conflict lingers and is passed down to the post-war generation, shaping the renegotiation process in the present day Beirut, while Britt Baillie (Chapter 7) delves into the ways in which memorials act as 'boundary markers' reinforcing the invisible divisions existing between ethnic Croats and Serbs. The first two chapters in this section introduce the power of the intangible aspects of cities that impact the response of people towards negotiating differences and conflict, and the next two chapters offer a reassessment of urban conflict through a political lens. Hillel Cohen (Chapter 8) highlights the importance of consistent efforts in terms of joint activities and face-to-face Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, as these can be potential drivers in alleviating conflicts. In Chapter 9, Amneh Badran argues that the

supposedly different positions taken by many Israeli political parties and activist groups, when analysed, present a similar conception of Jerusalem's urban division. All the chapters in this section are insightful in opening new trajectories towards understanding the potential of reassessment of both the tangible and intangible aspects of urban conflict.

In the final section 'Being Modern', the chapters explore the role of technologies and contemporary practices in decision-making and the emerging new forms of capitalism when interacting with urban conflict. In Chapter 10, Salim Tamari studies the various concepts of change and development in three cities in late 19th and early 20th century Palestine. James Anderson (Chapter 11) examines the role of censuses and demographic engineering in 1920s Belfast and 1940s Jerusalem, with his research presenting interesting parallels with the work of Hernandez and Sternberg in Chapter 4. In Chapter 12 and Chapter 13 the authors discuss the notion of urban divisions at two different scales in cities; the historic Berlin wall division and segregation issues developing at the residential level. Allan Cochrane dedicates Chapter 12 to the way in which West Berlin's capitalist and East Berlin's communist practices has played a role in the dynamic changes of the city centre, with the Berlin wall considered as a relic which has almost entirely been erased. Milena Komarova and Liam O'Dowd (Chapter 13) investigate the rigidity of segregation in the residential domain in the face of neo-liberal regeneration projects. This section is particularly significant as it progressively embraces the inevitable impacts of technology and emerging new forms of transformation of urban conflict.

The three themes, while emphasizing spatiality at different levels, reveal the power of the city as a physical, symbolic and living entity defining urban conflicts. The book presents itself as a well-integrated collection of chapters around the theme, representing a new way of studying urban conflict today. The authors' diverse perspectives, guided by their respective areas of expertise, stimulate the significance of exploring the complex interrelationship between spatial practices and conflict in contested cities. The editors acknowledge that the view of the book is partial, as it focuses on selected cities, yet the succinct discussions and outcome make it a significant contribution, offering multifarious views of understanding contested cities. The book clearly opens up several ways to understand city as a phenomenon that impacts the course and development of conflict. As Henri Lefebvre (1991;32) noted "a revolution [will take] place when and only when, in such a society, people can no longer lead their everyday lives", one of the forceful aspects of this book is that the concept of urban conflict is grounded in the context of everyday life which throws light on the often ignored domain of ordinary people in the larger canvas of urban conflict. It is particularly enlightening when the discussions reveal how ordinary people are pulled into unexpected violent territories as conflict deeply fractures relationships in cities. The book emphasises the criticality of contextualising conflicts which enables comprehending several implicitly interconnected issues.

Locating Urban Conflicts is a well-edited and well-balanced book with high quality contributions based on rigorous research. The visual form of urban conflicts, presented in terms of maps, individual sites and larger geographic context, allows the reader to engage with the various issues discussed in the chapters. This is a particularly engaging feature and elevates the book to an invaluable tool for any

researcher interested in urban conflict studies. The three themes studying the phenomenon of urban conflict enable the reader to comprehend the multiple and overlapping layers of power, politics and space in fracturing and/or reconfiguring life of ordinary people in cities. As such, it is well-placed to offer a rich domain for understanding various ways to locate urban conflict “both inside and in between cities” (page 1) and emphasises the notions of socio-spatial practices in conflict studies. Although the authors begin the book by strongly emphasising the role of cities, the focus on spatiality gets somewhat diluted in later chapters. The second and third sections especially largely address political decisions and policy-level issues in contested cities. Including additional chapters which focus on the spatiality of cities and conflict could make *Locating Urban Conflicts* even more appealing for a wider audience. Examining the role of cities in urban conflict, the book is definitely one of the seminal works which delve into the deep relationship between people, everyday life and cities.

References

Lefebvre, H., 1991. *Critique of everyday life. Vol. I. Introduction*, London: Verso.

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