

***Role of Public Policy in Deeply Divided Cities:  
Belfast, Jerusalem, and Johannesburg***

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This chapter explores the role of public policy in contested cities and the effects urban strategies have on the magnitude and manifestations of ethnonational conflict. It examines the lessons provided by city management of ethnic conflict, the rules and principles of city-building amidst group-based conflict, and the linkage between local and national peacebuilding,

***Deeply Divided Cities***

A disturbing number of cities across the world are susceptible to intense inter-communal conflict and violence reflecting ethnic or nationalist fractures. Cities such as Jerusalem, Belfast, Johannesburg, Nicosia, Algiers, Sarajevo, New Delhi, Beirut, and Brussels are urban arenas penetrable by deep inter-group conflict. In some cases (such as Jerusalem and Belfast), cities are the focal point for unresolved nationalistic ethnic conflict. In other cases (such as Sarajevo), the management of war-torn urban areas holds the key to sustainable co-existence of warring ethnic groups subsequent to cessation of overt hostilities. Common to many of these cities is that ethnic identity and nationalism combine to create pressures for group rights, autonomy or territorial separation. These cities can be battlegrounds between "homeland" ethnic groups, each proclaiming the city as their own (Esman 1985). The legitimacy of a city's political structures and its rules of decision-making and governance are commonly challenged by ethnic groups who either seek an equal

or proportionate share of power (such as blacks in South Africa) or demand group-based autonomy or independence (such as Palestinians in Jerusalem or the Quebecois in Montreal.)

This chapter explores whether city management of ethnic conflict provides lessons--either positive or adverse--for ethnic management at national and cross-national scales. The study examines inter-communal strife in the ethnically polarized cities of Belfast (Northern Ireland), Jerusalem (Israel and West Bank), and Johannesburg (South Africa). Each city encapsulates deep-rooted cleavages based on competing nationalisms and arguments over state legitimacy, and each provides a multi-decade account of urban policy and management in contested bicomunal environments. In addition, all the cities were engrossed in a transition process tied to progress on a broader political front.<sup>1</sup> Field research consisted of three months of in-country research in each city. Over 110 face-to-face interviews were conducted.<sup>2</sup>

I studied urban public policies that can have direct and tangible influences on ethnic geography. They are land use planning and regulation, economic development, housing production and allocation, capital facility planning, social service delivery, community participation, and municipal government organization. Each has substantial potential affects on urban ethnic conditions related to ethnic stability or volatility. These policies can maintain or disrupt territorial claims, they can distribute economic benefits fairly or unfairly, they can provide or discourage access to policymaking and political power, they can protect or erode collective ethnic/ cultural rights, and they can stifle or galvanize political urban-based opposition.

## ***Belfast***

### Background

Belfast encapsulates an overlapping nationalist (Irish/British) and religious

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<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem interviews occurred about 12 months after the signing of the Oslo I Declarations September 1993, Belfast interviews about five months after joint ceasefires announced by republican and loyalist paramilitaries, and Johannesburg interviews fifteen months after democratic national and provincial elections and amidst preparations for local government elections.

<sup>2</sup> I also investigated city, regional, and national plans and policy documents, implementing regulations, and laws and enabling statutes in terms of how they address urban issues of localized and national ethnic conflict.

(Catholic/Protestant) conflict. It has been since 1969 a violent city of sectarian warfare. The urban arena is hyper-segregated and of strict sectarian territoriality, with antagonistic groups both proximate and separate. Inter-community hostilities have required the building of fifteen "peacelines"--ranging from corrugated iron fences and steel palisade structures, to permanent brick or steel walls, to environmental barriers or buffers. The city of Belfast, like the country of Northern Ireland as whole, has a majority Protestant population. The 1991 city population of 279,000 was about 57 percent Protestant and 43 percent Catholic (Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)), although the Catholic percentage has been increasing over the last few decades due to higher birth rates and Protestant out-migration to adjoining towns.

Religious identities coincide strongly with political and national loyalties. The allegiances of Protestant "unionists" and "loyalists" are with Britain, which from 1972 to 1999 exercised direct rule over Northern Ireland. Catholic "nationalists" and "republicans", in contrast, consider themselves Irish and commit their personal and political loyalties to the country of Ireland to its south. The introduction of British direct rule was brought about due to the instability of the "Troubles" and because of widespread discrimination by the pre-1972 unionist-controlled Northern Irish government (Cameron 1969; Loughlin 1992.) Direct rule has resulted in "an almost complete absence of representative participation and accountability," with the locally elected 51-member unionist majority Belfast city council having severely constrained policymaking power (Hadfield 1992).

#### Urban Policy

The principles for Belfast urban policymakers and administrators are to: (1) position government's role and image in Belfast as a neutral participant not biased toward either "orange" (Protestant) or "green" (Catholic); and (2) assure that government policy does not exacerbate sectarian tensions by managing ethnic space in a way that reacts to, and reflects, residents' wishes.<sup>3</sup> This means in effect that policymakers condone the strict territoriality of the city, one that imposes tight constraints on the growing Catholic population while protecting underutilized Protestant land.

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<sup>3</sup> Assessment of Belfast policy based on interviews with government officials in Department of the Environment-Northern Ireland (DOENI) central office, DOENI Town and Country Planning Service (Belfast Division), NIHE Belfast Regional Office; the Central Community Relations Unit of Northern Ireland Office; and with academics who have been involved in Belfast urban policy formulation and evaluation.

City government has no comprehensive or strategic approach to dealing with sectarian divisions, with the town planning function having largely assigned sectarian issues to policy domains outside its responsibility. The 1987 plan for the Belfast Urban Area states that, "it is not the purpose of a strategic land use plan to deal with the social, economic, and other aspects involved" (DOENI 1987). It emphasizes instead the 'neutral territory' of the central city and its revitalization. Housing allocation administrators have designed a color-neutral set of criteria that have made them immune to discrimination claims. Yet, this neutrality has been found to reinforce the residential hyper-segregation of religions (Smith and Chambers 1989.) Agencies involved in constructing new development or housing projects, in contrast, undertake out of necessity tactics of engagement with sectarian neighborhoods that deviate from color-neutral principles and strict maintenance of ethnic territoriality. These policies 'at the sharp edge', however, have been ad-hoc or project-based actions occurring outside a strategic framework aimed at progressive ethnic management. In the end, British policymaking in Belfast has helped achieve short-term abstinence from violence, but it appears insufficient in a city of obstructive ethnic territoriality and differential Protestant-Catholic needs.

## *Jerusalem*

### Background

Jewish-Muslim religious, and Israeli-Palestinian nationalist, tensions intertwine in a city that defies exclusivity (I. Matar, American Near East Refugee Aid, interview; Elon 1989). The result on the ground is the creation of "intimate enemies" and a life of encounters, proximity and interaction, yet remote, extraneous and alienated (Benvenisti 1995, 1986). Having a 1996 population of about 603,000, the city is a site of demographic and physical competition between two populations.

The social and political geography of Jerusalem has dramatically changed from a multicultural mosaic under the pre-1948 British Mandate, to two-sided physical partitioning of Jerusalem into Israeli and Jordanian-controlled components during the 1949-1967 period. Since 1967, it has been a contested Israeli-controlled municipality three times the area of the pre-1967 city (due to unilateral and internationally unrecognized annexation) and encompassing formerly Arab East Jerusalem. The international status of East Jerusalem today remains as 'occupied' territory. Jewish demographic advantage (of approximately 3-1) within the Israeli-defined City of today's "Jerusalem" translates into Jewish control of the city council and mayor's office. This control is solidified by Arab

resistance to participating in municipal elections they deem as illegitimate.<sup>4</sup> The city of Jerusalem is surrounded on three sides by the Israeli-occupied West Bank, populated by approximately 1.7 million Palestinians and about 150,000 Jews (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 1998; Peace Now 1997.)

### Urban Policy

Since 1967, Israeli urban policymakers and planners have pursued the goals of Israeli control and security through policies that entrench a Jewish majority within the Israeli-defined City.<sup>5</sup> These policies have:

- 1) facilitated the pace and increased the magnitude of Jewish development to assert Jewish demographic strength.
- 2) influenced the location of new Jewish development in annexed areas to create an obstacle to "re-division" of the city.
- 3) restricted Arab growth and development to weaken their claims to reunified Jerusalem.

Large Jewish communities in strategic locations have been built throughout the annexed municipal area in order to establish a "critical mass" of Jews in the urban region after 1967 (Y. Golani and B. Hyman, Ministry of the Interior, interviews). Of the approximately 70 square kilometers annexed after the 1967 War, approximately 24 square kilometers (or about 33 percent) have been expropriated by the Israeli government. The "public purpose" behind such expropriations is the development of Jewish neighborhoods. These neighborhoods today in "east" Jerusalem are homes to approximately 160,000 Jewish residents. Since 1967, 88 percent of all housing units built in east Jerusalem have been built for the Jewish population (B'Tselem 1995).

Israeli planners have restricted through planning regulations the growth of Palestinian

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<sup>4</sup> Most Jerusalem Arabs in the annexed city have a "dual and ambiguous" legal position of being Israeli "residents" but not "citizens" (Romann and Weingrod 1991). They must pay taxes, are eligible for social security benefits and vote in municipal elections, but cannot vote in Israeli national elections.

<sup>5</sup> Assessment of Israeli policy is based on interviews with current and former government officials in the Municipality of Jerusalem, and the Ministry of the Interior; Israeli academics who have worked on government projects; and Palestinian officials and researchers in nongovernmental organizations.

communities within "Jerusalem." Restrictions take multiple forms: (1) land expropriation; (2) zoning regulations that constrain Palestinian rights to development; (3) use of road-building to restrict and fragment Palestinian communities; (4) "hidden guidelines" of Israeli plans which restrict building volume in Palestinian areas; and (5) the intentional absence of plans for Arab areas that obstructs infrastructure provision and community development. As a result, only 11 percent of annexed east Jerusalem, at most, is vacant land where the Israeli government today allows Palestinian development (K. Tufakji, Arab Studies Society, interview; Kaminker 1995.)

There has been over thirty years of Israeli partisan planning in Jerusalem. Such policymaking, however, appears paradoxically to have produced spatial conditions of urban and regional instability antithetical to Israel's goal of undisputed political control.

## ***Johannesburg***

### Background

Johannesburg anchors a geographically disfigured urban region of enormous and gross economic and social contrasts. As Wills (1988) states, "the shadow of apartheid planning will be evident in the geography of the city for years to come." The metropolitan region contains at least 2 million people and is approximately 60 percent black and 31 percent white (1991 Census; Mabin and Hunter 1993). The urban landscape is characterized by racially segregated townships, cities, and informal settlements/shantytowns created in response, directly or indirectly, to Group Areas apartheid legislation. An enormous proportion of basic needs is presently unmet, including housing, land tenure, and water and sanitation facilities. Income distribution is grossly skewed in the province and nationally. Black Africans inhabit several different "geographies of poverty" (Central Witwatersrand Metropolitan Chamber 1993). The two primary locations are Alexandra and Soweto townships, the latter being an amalgamation of 29 townships southwest of, and spatially disconnected from, Johannesburg (South African Township Annual 1993). Bricks-and-mortar housing was intentionally underbuilt since urban blacks were considered temporary and unwanted. Hostels were built to shelter workers in industrial and mining activities nearby, and are areas of significant tension politically, ethnically, and physically (Gauteng Provincial Government 1995). Backyard shacks in townships and freestanding shacks on vacant land in townships are characterized by near-inhuman conditions of living, lack of secure tenure, inadequate standards of shelter and sanitation, and lack of social facilities and services.

### Urban Policy

In 1995, local and metropolitan government in Johannesburg was restructured to politically link formerly white local authorities with adjacent black townships. Black majorities were subsequently elected in all four local governments and the Johannesburg metropolitan council. Post-apartheid city building principles aspire to stitch together apartheid's urban discontinuities and integrate the torn parts and peoples of Johannesburg.<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, policy is directed at alleviating the many short-term, crisis-related needs of the urban fringe poor pertaining to shelter, public health, personal security, and unmet basic needs for water, sanitation, and electricity. On the other hand, policy is seeking to create a compact and functionally integrated city where the poor are located close to central city employment and other urban opportunities. A major challenge for policymakers in post-apartheid Johannesburg is that they are trying to address distressing levels of unmet human needs amidst market-based urban 'normalization' processes—such as employment suburbanization—that threaten to reinforce apartheid's racial geography.

There is also amidst societal transformation a critical examination of urban policy practice. Two competing paradigms now exist—one connected to town planning's historic affinity toward regulatory control; the other rooted in anti-apartheid community mobilization and linked to a more expansive definition of development. The latter paradigm represents an historic attempt to create a system of social guidance that utilizes the legacy and lessons of social mobilization.

### ***Principles of Urban Coexistence***

The challenges of urban policymaking in Belfast, Jerusalem, and Johannesburg inform policymakers and planners in other urban regions in the world split by ideological conflict. But, lessons are also applicable to the growing number of multi-ethnic cities across the world that are not ideologically contested, but nonetheless reside close to the ethnic breaking-point. The problems and principles of city-building in polarized cities provide guidance to all those who cope with multiple publics and contrasting ethnic views of city life and function. Actions taken in contested cities by

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<sup>6</sup> Assessment of Johannesburg policy based on interviews with planners and public officials with the City, the Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council, Gauteng Province, and South African central government. Many were involved in the 1990-1995 negotiated transformation of Johannesburg local governance.

national and local policymakers can play critical roles in advancing or retarding inter-group tolerance and larger peace processes. The following principles of urban policymaking amidst ethnic conflict are put forth with the knowledge that strategies would necessarily be different between cities, which are currently experiencing conflict and those cities which are engaged in the early phases of peacebuilding.

1. Developing local democracy in highly diverse and conflicted settings will require moving away from majoritarian democratic forms toward the use of rules that require inter-ethnic agreement on common issues and the use of political incentives that inspire cross-group coalition building.
2. Cities and urban policies matter amidst broader conflict. Local policy can moderate, exacerbate, or passively reflect the broader historical conflict, and this is dependent upon the policy strategies chosen, the spatial, economic and psychological conditions and contradictions they generate in the built landscape, and the organizational and mobilization qualities of the oppositional group. "Partisan" planning exacerbates group-based conflict and, through its production of urban inequality and instability, creates arguments for its continued use. "Neutral" policymaking suspends antagonisms in the short term, but buys such abstinence from violence at the expense of reconciling competing ethnic visions. "Equity" policymaking, which would involve redistributing resources to the often materially disadvantaged 'out-group', appears to be a necessary component of urban policymaking amidst conflict, yet would likely be counterproductive if it occurs outside broader negotiations over sovereignty and political control. "Resolver" policymaking is needed which would go beyond urban symptoms of conflict to address root causes, seek to accommodate competing ethnic needs, and contribute such urban policy principles to national-level negotiations dealing with sovereignty claims, basic social structures, and power relationships.
3. Neutrality is not necessarily fair in governing contested cities. Neutrality and color-blindness in policy, when applied in urban settings of structural inequality, do not produce equitable outcomes. Governments must avoid the comfort of acting as benign outsider to ethnic conflict. Equality of opportunity is not sufficient when life choices have been constrained by societal expectations and actions. In other cases, seemingly uniform requirements dealing with land ownership or development can have disparate effects across cultures having

different values and customs.

4. The goal of urban policy should be accommodation, not assimilation. Urban policymakers should take stock of ethnicity and color, not dismiss it, and seek to accommodate the unique needs of each ethnic group. Urban policy strategies should be aimed at "co-existent viability" of ethnic groups having different objective and psychological needs, and should help define the terms of peaceful urban and metropolitan co-existence--in terms of territorial control, public service availability, and preservation of group identity.
5. Local citizen participation in contested cities must be carefully managed. Urban policymakers must find ways to balance intra-group community development and inter-group community relations. Policy should seek to improve and enrich the self-confidence and identity of deprived ethnic communities without solidifying ghettoization and inter-group separation.
6. Policymakers should incorporate non-technical, psychological aspects of community identity into a planning profession that heretofore has been biased toward objective and rational methods. An ethnic group under perceived threat has psychological as well as objective needs. Conflict will be most evident when one ethnic group is seen as ascending; the other descending. For a threatened urban ethnic group, psychological needs pertaining to viability, group identity, and cultural symbolism can be as important as objective needs pertaining to land, housing, and economic opportunities.
7. The process and practice of city-building should be re-conceptualized in order that it may inspire and support accommodative forms of local governance. Policymakers and planners in contested cities must address the complex spatial, social-psychological, and organizational attributes of potentially antagonistic urban communities. They must be sensitive to the multi-ethnic environments toward which their skills are applied, and to the ways that empowered groups legitimate and extend their power. Specifically, urban policymaking should, in its methods of analysis and decision-making, explicitly account for the importance of ethnic community identity, territoriality, and symbolism embedded in the urban landscape. Training and education of local administrators and officials through professional organizations and cross-community forums should prepare them to deal with the complex issues of city-building amidst ethnic difference. Students in higher education should be trained in the multi-dimensional analysis of ethnic neighborhoods. Practitioners and students should be exposed to the rudiments of ethnic impact analysis, qualitative surveying, conflict resolution, and

community relations techniques.

8. Urban policymaking should both respect ethnic territoriality where it constitutes a healthy source of community identity, and overcome ethnic territorial boundaries where they distort urban functionality and obstruct cross-community relations. Separation in urban settings breeds contempt. Learning of stereotypes is made easier if you do not know the other person. It is harder to demonize someone when you are interacting with them. Gates and boundaries (physical or psychological) in urban areas have two effects: (1) provision of safety; and (2) reinforcement of "the other" as threat. The goal of policy should not be integration per se, but a "porous" society where diversity can co-exist and communities are free to interact, if they choose.
9. In reconstructing urban regions racked by conflict, there should be clear articulation of the roles of governmental, private, and nongovernmental sectors in 'normalization' processes. Normalization of urban regions distorted by group conflict should emphasize reparative social justice, and not rely solely on a free economic market that would likely spawn new forms of urban and regional inequality. During urban reconstruction, local officials should seek to manage the re-ordering of urban space (in particular, the process of neighborhood ethnic and racial succession) in effective and humane ways, which account for the psychological, emotional, and cultural views of both established residents and in-migrants.
10. Urban policymaking should contribute practical principles, which foster co-existent viability and connect these efforts to larger peace and reconstruction efforts. Tangible urban-level efforts and diplomatic national-level negotiations should constitute inseparable parts of peace-making efforts. Local policies aimed at the basic needs and co-existent viability of competing ethnic groups are capable of contributing the sole authentic source of inter-ethnic accommodation amidst a set of larger diplomatic political agreements that may otherwise be susceptible to ethnic hardening and fraying. Political arrangements such as two-tier metropolitanism or power-sharing democracy that might emerge respond to the basic dual needs for sovereignty and political control, but represent agreements at the political level, not that of daily interaction between ethnic groups and individuals. Progressive and ethnically-sensitive urban strategies can be put forth to anchor these formal local agreements over power. A national peace without urban accommodation would be one unrooted in the practical and explosive issues of inter-group and territorial relations.

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