



Protesting at the crossroads: Framing ‘in-between places’ in spatial analyses of contention



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ABSTRACT

Bridging anthropological understandings of “non-place” (Augé, 1995) with insights on the “in-between city” (Sieverts, 2003), this paper advances the concept of *in-between place* as a useful heuristic device through which to examine spaces of contention outside the city. Focusing on a single protest organised by youth activists in Wadi Ara in the summer of 2013, it uses frame analysis to interrogate the power of roads, particularly the nodal power of inter-urban crossroads, in enabling Palestinian protest in Israel. In so doing, this paper seeks not only to address the creative efforts to be seen and heard on the margins of an ethnocentric regime, but to contribute to a wider decentring research agenda that would move beyond the city in concrete and analytical terms.

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All street protests operate according to a set of generalizable logics. Della Porta and Diani (2009, pp. 170–8) list three: the “logic of numbers”, the “logic of damage” and the “logic of bearing witness”. While this typology provides a useful starting point from which to examine the importance of place in protest, it fails to grapple with the spatial conditions that enable, or interrupt, the satisfaction of these logics of protest in practice. If, for example, it is intuitive that the logic of numbers serves to signal the worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment (Tilly, 2008, p. 71) of a cause, then it is equally intuitive that the absence of an easily accessible space to display and communicate that force of numbers represents a fundamental challenge to satisfying the logics of protest in practice. Similarly, the distance of political claimants from major political and economic centres frustrates the capacity of protestors to disrupt prevailing power dynamics and effect political change. Ultimately, the lack of easily available, accessible as well as sufficiently sizable and central public spaces to protest not only limits the possibilities of capturing and transmitting opposing narratives and “moral messages” (Della Porta & Diani, 2009, p. 176) to multiple audiences, but also reduces the very visibility of claims and claimants in the first place.

Spatial analyses of protest, however, continue to assume a city-centred bias. The uprisings which spread across the Middle East

from January 2011 captured international attention and ignited political imaginations in large part because these protests were clearly embedded at key symbolic sites in major cities which (for a time at least) became endowed by association with an almost talismanic quality of revolutionary significance (Fregonese, 2013; Ramadan, 2013). The spatial order of so-called “rebel cities” (Harvey, 2012), which centre on a typical cityscape of squares, boulevards and roundabouts, rendered these sites “iconic” (Wallach, 2013) and made the protest events taking place within them both familiar and accessible, legible and intelligible to multiple audiences around the world.

Yet, many communities have limited access to these symbolic sites as well as to many of the spatial signifiers which help to visually anchor and “index” (Spencer, 2011, p. 18) protest in the eyes of external audiences and connect it to the “global street” (Sassen, 2011). Socially, politically and geographically marginalised in a growing number of “spaces apart” (Moulin, 2010) such as borderland areas, urban slums, rural peripheries, refugee camps as well as a whole range of other ethnic and socio-economic enclaves outside the city, access to the city for a vast number of people today is often heavily circumscribed if not precluded altogether by uneven patterns of distribution, connectivity, mobility and wealth. Nonetheless, as the events of the Arab uprisings have shown, protest events taking place on the margins are not only common but are often very effective. Thus, scholars have increasingly recognised the need to “move beyond the city” in concrete and analytical terms to engage

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with the complex ways in which political contention “stretches outwards” from the city (Uitermark, Nicholls, & Loopmans, 2012, p. 2546).

Spatial analyses of protest in an ethnocratic regime – that is, in “a non-democratic regime which attempts to extend or preserve disproportional ethnic control over a contested multi-ethnic territory” (Yiftachel, 1999, pp. 367–8) – requires going a step further. The “nixing” (King-Irani, 2007) of Arab cities in Israel through processes of land confiscation and enclosure as well as through uneven and unequal planning processes (Gradus, 1984; Khamaisi, 2006; Yacobi, 2009; Yiftachel, 1999), ethnically-differentiated regimes of (im)mobility (Blatman-Thomas, 2017; Handel, 2014; Kotef, 2015) and (in)visibility (Hatuka, 2016) has not only underscored the importance of politics on the margins (McGahern, 2016b), it has decentred the (Arab) city in processes of Palestinian contention, creating new geographies of protest in the process.

A small, but growing, body of work exists which examines “spatial alternatives” – that is, “different ways of relating to, analyzing, using and organizing space” (Gazit & Latham, 2014, p. 64) – in Israel-Palestine. Protest events at The Wall, checkpoints, at the edges of divided cities as well as at destroyed villages (Baylouny, 2009; Gazit, 2009; Pallister-Wilkins, 2011; Tawil-Swouri, 2011; 2016; Hatuka, 2012; Dibiasi, 2015) reveal a long-standing pattern of contention outside the city. This paper contributes to this scholarship by drawing attention to the importance of inter-urban crossroads as another alternative site of protest outside the city in Israel-Palestine. More broadly, however, it seeks to contribute to the wider scholarship by using this case study to illustrate the importance of *in-between places* in spatial analyses of protest and political contention.

Building on a critique of Marc Augé’s (1995) concept of “non-place”, the concept of *in-between place* proposed here incorporates insights from urban studies, particularly work on the “in-between city” (Sieverts, 2003), to show how urban infrastructure and the circuitry of roads produces meaningful spaces of contention outside the city. Focusing on a single protest event which took place in the summer of 2013 at an inter-urban crossroads in the Wadi Ara region, it examines two different framing techniques – of “enframing” space (Mitchell, 1988) as well as of “collective action framing” (Benford & Snow, 2000) – through which this in-between place was transformed into a meaningful and politically significant space of contention.

The paper proceeds as follows: Beginning with a theoretical elaboration of the concept of in-between place, the paper outlines its methodological approach to frame analysis. Attention then turns to the case study. Following a discussion of the politics of roads in enframing space in Israel, it examines the strategic choices and collective action frames used by the activists to frame their protest at Wadi Ara. The paper concludes with a discussion of the broader significance of in-between places within spatial analyses of urban politics and collective action.

1. In-between places

Focusing on the urban conditions which restrict or facilitate individual and collective liberties as well as possibilities for political change in practice, scholarship examining the right to the city has tended to focus on struggles to (re)shape the city (Harvey, 2003; Lefebvre, 1996; Marcuse, 2009) from within it, whether through protest, participatory planning processes or the politics of everyday life. The city, however, is not synonymous with the urban. It represents just one part of a broader urban “totality” that shapes and influences social interactions and relations (Lefebvre, 2003). To speak of the urban, therefore, requires not only that we move “beyond the square” (Sharp & Panetta, 2016) in spatial analyses of

contention but that we look beyond the city as well in order to recognise a wider range of spatial alternatives and possibilities for contention.

Doing so in practical terms represents a challenge. If the urban is everywhere, there is a tendency for differences between types of places to collapse, and for those places where urban conditions are less recognisable or visible to disappear under the weight of larger, more recognisable and familiar ones. With a few notable exceptions, efforts to move beyond the city in analyses of urban politics have struggled to do more than extend their analytical scope of enquiry to the suburbs, banlieues, *ashwiyyat*, *favelas*, refugee camps and other enclaves on the city’s edges (Addie, 2016; Garreau, 1991; Li, 2009; Soja, 1996; Young & Keil, 2010). While these studies effectively demonstrate the negative effects of “peri-urbanization” (Coward, 2009) or “splintering urbanism” (Graham & Marvin, 2001) upon the communities who reside there, they nonetheless perpetuate a city-centred or metropolitan view of urban life which does not adequately reflect or represent the distribution of population groups as well as respective struggles for social and political justice today.

Studies examining the effects of ethnocratic governance on Palestinians in Israel have also struggled to break with this city-centred view. A focus on “mixed cities” (Gazit & Latham, 2014; Yacobi, 2009; Yiftachel & Yacobi, 2003) – those large Jewish cities (such as Jerusalem, Haifa, Jaffa or Lod) with a significant Palestinian minority population “most of which were, before 1948, grand Arab cities that were defeated and whose original Arab majority populations were displaced” (King-Irani, 2007: 180) – remains popular. With their particular demographic make-up and patterns of concentration, mixed cities are useful case studies for the study of ethnic expansionism and control as well as of conflict urbanism (Misselwitz, 2006). Nevertheless, only ten per cent of Israel’s 1.8 million Palestinian citizens live in “mixed” cities (Jabareen, 2014). Subject to a process of “urbanization without cities” (Khamaisi, 2004) and denied the right to live in 942 Jewish localities (Jabareen, 2015, p. 20), the vast majority of Palestinians in Israel (90 per cent) live in approximately 78 Arab-only urban localities of varying size that are distinctive not only in terms of their lower socio-economic standing, underdeveloped urban infrastructure and public services vis-à-vis Jewish localities but by patterns of regional fragmentation (in northern, central and southern enclaves or pockets of settlement), as well as physical and geographic separation from Jewish symbols and centres of power (McGahern, 2016a).

A more radical “relational reading of place” (Amin, 2004, p. 34) is, therefore, required; one that does not assume traditional dialectics of centre and periphery (Young & Keil, 2010) with the (expanded) city at its centre. Bridging two related concepts – the concept of “non-place” and that of the “in-between city” – this paper advances the concept of *in-between place* as a means of doing this. Building on anthropological understandings of place, Marc Augé’s (1995) concept of non-place has proven a popular reference point for the study of a wide range of interstitial spaces such as motorways and highways, but also airports, supermarkets and hotel lobbies. Worthy of examination, we are told, because they are “the real measure of our time” (Augé, 1995, p. 64), a non-place is understood to be a consequence, function and a condition of “supermodernity” because of the way in which it produces a uniquely individuated, dislocated and solitary experience of travel. This experience of travel, Augé explains, results in a detached and simplified way of being and seeing in time and place; a “distinctive optic” (Scott, 1999, p. 11) which creates a certain type of tunnel vision which detaches both the traveller and the experience of place from the ordering and rationalising processes which have produced it. The geometric line of the road, the limited presence of

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