

## UC Irvine

### UC Irvine Previously Published Works

**Title**

B(u)ypassing conflict: Urban redevelopment in nationally contested cities

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5dd587kz>

**Journal**

Journal of Urban Affairs, 45(5)

**ISSN**

0735-2166

**Authors**

Shtern, Marik  
Bollens, Scott A

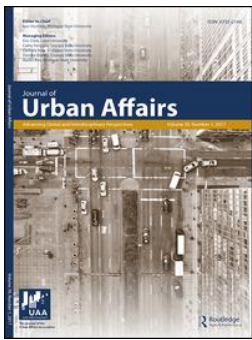
**Publication Date**

2023-05-28

**DOI**

10.1080/07352166.2021.1890609

Peer reviewed



## B(u)ypassing conflict: Urban redevelopment in nationally contested cities

Marik Shtern & Scott A. Bollens

To cite this article: Marik Shtern & Scott A. Bollens (2021): B(u)ypassing conflict: Urban redevelopment in nationally contested cities, Journal of Urban Affairs, DOI: [10.1080/07352166.2021.1890609](https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2021.1890609)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/07352166.2021.1890609>



Published online: 31 Mar 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



# B(u)ypassing conflict: Urban redevelopment in nationally contested cities

Marik Shtern<sup>a</sup> and Scott A. Bollens<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; <sup>b</sup>University of California

## ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates the role and impact of neoliberal redevelopment strategies in inner-city urban regeneration projects in Belfast, Beirut, and Jerusalem. As governments in these nationally contested cities struggle against embedded geographies of antagonism and segregation, neoliberal and market-based approaches have arisen in the production of new city center spaces in these contested cities. This comparative analysis examines Titanic Quarter in Belfast, Solidere central district in Beirut, and Mamilla Mall in Jerusalem. The cases utilize similar modes of urban reproduction and share common limitations. We find that neoliberal regeneration in contested cities is politically effective and financially successful. Yet, these market-based strategies heighten class-based exclusion and have been a disinterested agent in efforts to bridge urban ruptures associated with ethno-nationalist segregation and past violence. We conclude that analysis of how these projects can contribute to equitable peacebuilding not be subordinated to market prerogatives in more comprehensive project development plans.

## Introduction

Intergroup segregation is common in cities that have experienced violent political conflict (Calame & Charlesworth, 2009). In particular, deeply entrenched residential segregation among lower income populations is resistant to change. At the same time, landscapes of intergroup encounter are emerging in upper-middle-class neighborhoods and in city centers (Gaffikin & Morrissey, 2011; Herrault & Murtagh, 2019; Shtern, 2016; Shtern & Yacobi, 2019). The shift at the end of the 20th century to neoliberal urban governance has affected these contested cities (Peck et al., 2009; Smith, 2002). This economic restructuring is most evident in inner-city redevelopment projects which have become focal points in cities such as Jerusalem (Shtern, 2016), Belfast (Etchart, 2008), and Beirut (Makdisi, 1997). The common attribute of these efforts is utilization of a for-profit model to regenerate areas in and near the inner city and to re-create a new urban image that seeks to transcend the conflict.

This article evaluates redevelopment in Belfast, Beirut, and Jerusalem, focusing on its effectiveness in creating new urban spaces to be shared by members of antagonistic groups. Each city is located in a different stage of conflict intensity and employs different citywide policy strategies. Belfast is in a post-conflict era, with some social mixing and gradual housing desegregation (Herrault & Murtagh, 2019). Beirut deals with political instability, renewed civil unrest and increasing socio-economic disparities. Jerusalem is amidst ongoing, at times violent, ethno-national conflict, with hyper-segregation in housing and increasing desegregation in labor and recreation. In each of the cities, a neoliberal scheme of urban renewal was employed as part of a top-down effort to address the legacies and impact of past and present conflicts.

This comparative assessment provides the opportunity to examine urban neoliberalism in the context of nationally contested cities, illuminating the contemporary intersection between global capitalism and growing ethno-nationalist sentiment in cities worldwide (i.e. Elgenius & Rydgren,

2019; Manza & Crowley, 2018). We also contribute to the study of urban geopolitics and its focus on the intersection between political conflict and urban space (Fregonese, 2012; Graham, 2011). With numerous cities in the world experiencing ethnonational discord, analyzing the connection between urban-developmental and geopolitical spheres can reveal spatial-political dynamics common to many of these cities (Rokem et al., 2017).

The first part of this paper discusses urban development planning in contested cities, urban neoliberalism and the intersection between them. We then examine Titanic Quarter and city center in Belfast, Solidere central business district in Beirut, and Alrov Mamilla Avenue in Jerusalem. We then discuss the impacts of neoliberal redevelopment in contested cities on intergroup relations and urban divisions.

## Contested cities and neoliberal urban redevelopment

Many cities entail socio-economic or ethnic/racial intergroup cleavages. In most cases, these disputes are negotiated within an acknowledged political framework. When the urban conflict involves a national dimension, an additional level of division arises that imprints itself at the municipal level. In such situations, a broader conflict over sovereignty, nationalism, territoriality, and historic claims transforms everyday disputes of urban life into matters of deep political conflict (Benvenisti, 1996; Bollens, 2012).

The nationally contested city is commonly robust with ethnic-religious demarcation of settlement and mobility patterns (Gaffikin & Morrissey, 2011). Such urban ethnic space creates intergroup separation in housing, work and leisure activities between the antagonistic communities (Boal, 1999; Makdissi, 1997). Deep, multilevel and resistant modes of segregation is a common attribute in these cities (Bollens, 2012; Herrault & Murtagh, 2019; Kliot & Mansfeld, 1999). The imprint of history, memory, and conflicting land claims creates a city unshared across identity groups. Deep segregation limits the possibilities of rapprochement by sustaining and emphasizing inter-group cultural differences, promoting separate social networks, elevating mutual prejudice, and reducing the likelihood of positive encounters (Peach, 1996). It also undermines urban vitality and economic sustainability by maintaining dual urban community facilities and constraining the local labor market (Boal, 1999). While segregation may seem a viable solution for policy makers who aspire to control violence, it becomes a significant obstacle on the path toward reconciliation (Gusic, 2020). The problem of ethnic segregation is particularly salient for policymakers during the post-conflict stage when they seek interventions to create a more normalized and shared city. Political efforts then increasingly address the challenge of building shared spaces (Gaffikin et al., 2016).

Planning systems face challenges in increasing shared space in contested geographies (Bollens, 2018). Policy interventions must consider adjacent communities and their sense of territorial ownership; if not, attempted shared space may become captured by one group or become neutral space that is antagonistic to all sides (Milena Komarova, Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice, Belfast, interview, March 24, 2016). Scholars point out that even when rival groups gain equal access, the initial focus on essentialist communal identities (Komarova, 2008) can lead to reproduction of intergroup territorial boundaries within the shared space (Abdelmonem & McWhinney, 2015). Without awareness of intricate urban ethnic micro-geographies, the shared space goal can become susceptible to political appropriation and manipulation by ethnic-sectarian interests (Gaffikin et al., 2008). After the trauma of conflict and violence, a common-sense instinct is to adopt a neutral, hands-off approach to city building that avoids confronting the volatile legacy of ethnic-sectarian divides (Bollens, 2012). A version of this neutral strategy is to use the private market to rebuild torn urban spaces. Calame and Charlesworth (2009, p. 184) describe how proponents of this tactic view it as “neutral and nonpartisan—guided by the invisible hand of the market rather than a political agenda.”

Scholars have examined the impacts of globalization and spread of the free market economy upon social and economic structures (Block & Somers, 2014; Harvey, 2005). *Neoliberalism* describes an economic-political ideology based on a belief in market competition as the most efficient mechanism for the generation of prosperity and liberty (Friedman, 2009). It favors privatization, free trade, deregulation, corporate tax breaks and cuts in social spending. Yet, neoliberal economies often rely on state intervention for the

promotion of capital accumulation (Block & Somers, 2014; Brenner et al., 2010). Moreover, it is adopted across states and organizations in varying hybrid formations (Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

Neoliberalization of urban governance and economies has been a catalyst of novel class-based restrictions on access to public, residential and commercial spaces (Rosen & Razin, 2009; Sassen, 2006; Smith, 2002). There has been the reshaping of social and political spaces through the privatization of municipal services and increasing social polarization and inequality. In particular, the redevelopment of city centers and public spaces through “public-private partnerships” has served to deny disadvantaged communities and minority groups their “right to city” (Harvey, 2005). Some eulogize city life and mourn the “erosion of public space” through the rise of private urban shopping centers in lieu of civic public space (Zukin, 1996).

Nationally contested cities are not immune to the taken-for-granted adaptation of neoliberal urban redevelopment strategies and the globalized model of capital-led urban regeneration (Leary & McCarthy, 2013). As the actively violent period of a political conflict recedes, the devastating effects of aggression, militarization and fortification with its subsequent economic decline and physical damage become the core problem of these cities (Graham, 2011). Post-conflict cities, still carrying the physical signifiers of division, can fail to flourish for decades (Pullan, 2013). Due to their economic fragility and dependency on governmental support, most nationally contested cities have not developed into major hubs of global capital flow. As conflict recedes, however, large-scale projects of urban redevelopment have taken place in such cities, where local central business districts bare the physical and symbolic scars of conflict.

Several studies have examined neoliberal urban renewal projects in Belfast (Komarova, 2008; Nagle, 2009; Neill, 2006; Shirlow, 2006), Beirut (Larkin, 2010; Nagle, 2017) and Jerusalem (Shtern, 2016; Yacobi, 2012). In these cases, urban redevelopment has sought to transform the city’s image from violent contestation into a space of normality and possibility. Urban critics have referred to this effort as a shallow masking of animosities and highlighted the creation of socio-economic marginalization, and the erasing of local heritage and damaging of city life (Larkin, 2010; Nagle, 2017; Shirlow, 2006). The common feature of these efforts is the attempt to achieve newness and neutrality regarding traditional contesting identities (Etchart, 2008). This requires the re-telling of local historical narratives, and restructuring existing notions of place, territory and memory (Ragab, 2011). As Murtagh (2008) observes (regarding the Titanic Quarter), “Difficult territories and pasts are sanitized with the zoning of new quarters that tell of a different social economic history.”

Literature on urban redevelopment in contested cities has focused on separate case studies. This paper builds on this literature and presents the first comparative analysis of the socio-spatial impact of private capital led urban redevelopment in nationally contested cities. The analysis is based on ethnographic fieldwork, including observations and interviews with stakeholders, business managers, planners and urban scholars. Overall, the authors conducted 19 interviews in Jerusalem, 52 interviews in Belfast, and 24 interviews in Beirut. We also consulted secondary sources, scholarship about the three locations, and internet news sources. One author has lived and worked in Jerusalem since 1981, while the other has investigated Belfast and Beirut across multiple decades of change (field research in 1994, 2010, 2011, and 2016.)

We acknowledge the limitations of comparative urbanism, contrasting three distinct urban spaces in which data sources are not always compatible and which operate in differing institutional frames of reference and historical and cultural trajectories (Dear, 2005; Nijman, 2007; Robinson, 2016). As Dear (2005) suggests, we employ a heuristic comparative device, based on the description of principal historical and geographical dimensions. We seek to find instances, “distributed across numerous urban contexts and produced within shared and interconnected processes” (Robinson, 2016, p. 2), yet without falling to deterministic universalization. What we examine in the nationally contested urban space are common trends and local distinctions in face of late-capitalism global urban convergence.

## Case studies

We chose to investigate inner-city redevelopment projects in Belfast (Northern Ireland), Beirut (Lebanon), and Jerusalem (Israel/Palestine) for three reasons. First, each city is the most populated

within its country and encapsulates deep-rooted cleavages based on competing nationalisms and arguments over sovereignty or state legitimacy. Second, the cities represent different points along the continuum from active conflict to attenuated political violence, allowing us to ascertain whether the outcome of urban redevelopment depends on the larger political environment. Third, planning authorities in the cities employ different planning strategies in addressing local intergroup relations. Belfast planning authorities are guided by peacebuilding goals that endeavor to constructively address cleavages, Beirut planners are largely silent on engaging with the sectarian divide, while Jerusalem authorities utilize strategies in pursuit of territorial domination.

In Northern Ireland, there has been incremental, uneven improvement since the historic 1998 Good Friday Agreement characterized by lessening of political violence but hampered by on-again, off-again institutionalization of Protestant-Catholic government. The peacemaking prospects in Israel and Palestine since the 1993 Oslo Accord have been diminished due to continued conflicts and unilateral Israeli actions in East Jerusalem and West Bank. The situation is one of unresolved political conflict with episodic violence in the city and region. The Beirut case was characterized by some stability after the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 between Muslim and Christian-aligned antagonists, but has experienced increasing tension between Shiite Muslims and Sunni Muslims since the assassination of the Sunni Prime Minister by Shiite-aligned assailants in 2005. Since October 2019, Lebanon has been in political crisis, with mass cross-sectarian demonstrations against the Lebanese government a daily occurrence.

### **Belfast: Titanic Quarter**

The April 1998 “Good Friday Agreement” allowed the transference of day-to-day rule of the province from Britain to a directly elected Northern Ireland Assembly, in which Protestants (Unionists/Loyalists) and Catholics (Nationalists/Republicans) share power. Organized political violence has lessened since 1998 compared to the horrific violent years of the “Troubles” (1968–1998) (Ferguson et al., 2015). Despite significant political instability in power-sharing government, sustained bouts of intercommunal conflict have not occurred. However, the physical legacies of the Troubles in Belfast are numerous—partitions, residential hyper-segregation of Catholics and Protestants, deep-rooted sectarian “ownership” of many neighborhoods that prevents accommodating members of one religious group in the other group’s “territory,” and provocative symbols (Frank Gaffikin, Queen’s University, interview, March 15, 2016; Dominic Bryan, Institute of Irish Studies, interview, April 12, 2016).

Traditionally a city of Protestant-Catholic residential segregation, separation intensified into “hyper-segregation” amid the horrific violence of an urban civil war and following the interventions of the British Army. Such segregation was instrumental in furthering community feelings of security in the face of extremely abnormal living conditions. The so-called “peace walls” were built initially to provide protection for neighborhoods against localized political violence, and over the long term have become spatial reflections of the underlying political and religious divisions (Frederick Boal, Queen’s University, interview, May 25, 2016). Soon after the Good Friday agreement, in 2001, 65% of the 51 electoral wards in the city contained 80% or more of one religion, while 43% contained 90% or more (Gaffikin et al., 2008). Segregation is most intense in working-class neighborhoods (Ian Shuttleworth, Queen’s University, interview, March 23, 2016).

Since the Good Friday peace accord, the Northern Ireland government has forwarded urban peacebuilding goals for Belfast. The objectives of *shared future*, *shared space*, and the ending of ethnic-religious division have been consistently asserted by successive governments. In 2005, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister for Northern Ireland (2005) released *A Shared Future—Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland*, in which it argues against continued community division between Unionists/Protestants and Nationalists/Catholics and advocates for sharing over separation. In late 2015, government issued a Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS; Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland [DOENI], 2015) to set strategic directions for new local councils. One of its core planning principles is “creating and enhancing shared space” and it defines shared space as “places where there is a sense of belonging for everyone, where

relationships between people from different backgrounds are most likely to be positive and where differences are valued and respected” (p. 18).

The intent behind these goals is to implement them across all urban spaces. However, the primary approach to creating shared space in Belfast has been to focus not on the problematic sectarian neighborhoods but on the regeneration of the city center. The 20 years since Good Friday has seen substantial investment in the city center and nearby areas. At the height of “the Troubles” in the mid-1980s, the city center was a high-security zone during the day and a “no-go-zone” at night. Today, no longer threatened by violence and subject to partitioning and checkpoints, the city center is an open and robust place of consumption and culture. Within the city center a new modern shopping center, Victoria Square (800,000 square feet), opened in 2008. Costing £400 million, it was the biggest and one of the most expensive property developments ever undertaken in Northern Ireland. During the 1990s, major investment in the revitalization of the downtown waterfront took place. This development was carried out by the Laganside Corporation, a non-departmental public body with the goal of regenerating large sections of land. A major conference and cultural center (Waterfront Hall), an office park and commercial area on a formerly decontaminated city gasworks site, and a major new sports arena and entertainment complex were developed in the 300-acre Laganside area.

One of the most significant developments has taken place north of the city center, at the old docks where the Historic HMS Titanic was built. Since the mid-19th century, the deep-water harbor and emergent shipbuilding industry served as one of the city’s main economic engines and source of trade and employment. The main shipyard was built and owned by a Protestant-Unionist affiliated corporation—Harland and Wolff—that constructed and repaired luxurious liners and armed vessels and aircraft during World War II. H&W employed mostly Protestant workers, while the small number of Catholic workers faced periodic discrimination (Johnson, 2014). Following the decline of hard industries in the UK during the 1970s, H&W searched for new opportunities for property development.

Harcourt Developments, a Dublin based property company, purchased the 185 acres of the former shipyard in 2003 for €67 million. Guided by a 2005 development framework created by a private consultant (Turley Associates, 2005), over US\$550 million has been invested in the quarter in its first decade to develop a large mixed commercial, tourist, education, retail, and residential area. There will be several million square feet of built space at the completion of the 30-year project. As envisioned in the 2004 Belfast Masterplan, the quarter is being developed as part of an economic corridor from the harbor lands in the north to a University complex in the south. Belfast City Council (2012) expects that development of the harbor lands would be integrated to the city core center. Most symbolic within the quarter is the iconic Titanic Museum (Figure 2), now one of the most popular tourist destinations in Europe and a contributor to a spike in tourism in Belfast. In the first 3 years of the Titanic Museum, over 2 million people visited; in addition, there was a doubling of cruise ship dockings in Belfast between 2011 and 2014 (Deloitte, 2015). To reduce private investment risk in this signature project and to “unlock the potential for further *private* developments” (italics are authors), Northern Ireland and Belfast governments funded about one-half of the overall £95 million Museum project (Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment, 2009). The latest developments in the quarter include approved plans to build a third luxurious hotel (237 bed) by the JMK group (BBC News, 2020), the Olympic House office building (McAleer, 2020) and a major distribution Center (Irish News, 2019). The continued investment and development indicate that the site provides successful revenues for the Titanic Quarter Ltd company (ibid).

The mission statement on Harcourt Developments’ Titanic Quarter website has scant references to political divisions in the city. On the contrary, there is emphasis on universal themes of urban development and economic progress. The area is described as a “futuristic” mixture of urban functions, “reflecting the achievements of history with the latest design approaches . . . Titanic Quarter is redefining what it means to work, live, play and stay in Central Belfast.” (*Titanic-quarter.com/about*). The Titanic Museum itself exhibits a depoliticized narrative of Belfast history disregarding the colonial context of the shipyard industry and the religious and nationalistic tensions within the city (Johnson, 2014). The museum’s outstanding futuristic design represents an attempt to create architecture-driven urban regeneration by establishing an iconic building as a new visual signifier of the city. By utilizing

the strong “brand” recognition of the Titanic story, there is the endeavor to foster a new imagery of the city beyond its violent conflicted history (David Coyles, University of Ulster, interview, April 4, 2016; Coyles, 2013; Neill, 2006).

Despite its economic and symbolic benefits and the city’s vision of the Quarter as a place “for everyone from every part of Belfast, a shared common ground” (Belfast City Council, 2004, 2015), an over-reliance on neoliberal revitalization runs risks creating a “twin-speed city” (Brendan Murtagh, Queen’s University of Belfast, interview, March 21, 2016.) One-part hosts post-conflict revitalization whose benefits privilege tourists, middle-class consumers and particular sectors of the economy; the other part consists of territorialized working-class community residents who do not feel part of revitalized space and are more rooted to local community space. In the waterfront locations of Laganside and Titanic Quarter, there is no evidence that adjacent disadvantaged communities have benefitted in terms of employment (Muir et al., 2015). Further, of the first 1,216 residential units built in these locations, there was no provision of social/affordable housing (Boland et al., 2017). Young professionals in the information, communication, and financial sectors dominate the residential market—a profile radically different from what is found in Belfast’s working-class neighborhoods. Community members in Protestant east Belfast and in Catholic west Belfast feel disconnected from the areas and question the existence of tangible benefits (Muir et al., 2015). In terms of the ability draw visitors from elsewhere in the city, the cost of a family day out in Titanic Quarter and Museum is beyond the reach of many impoverished families (Boland et al., 2017).

A private-capital driven approach to building shared spaces suffers from myopia because it sidesteps the fact that the city is fundamentally unshared across socio-economic sectors of the population. Whereas the middle- and higher-income residents of Belfast have good access via automobiles to a full range of city services and facilities, working-class communities of *both* religious backgrounds face barriers and obstacles that hinder their access to the benefits of the Titanic area and the city center (Mark Hackett, Hackett Associates, interview, March 29, 2016). Large road infrastructure, blighted areas, car parks, and vacant land encircle the city center and cut off access to those without a car (Belfast City Council, 2015). These zones of separation, in part intentionally created by planners and officials to disconnect the city center from violent neighborhoods during the years of the Troubles, constitute today a significant structural impediment to fuller sharing of the entire city. The massive Titanic Quarter redevelopment benefitted from not needing to intervene in problematic sectarianized space; however, the downside of its location in the old docks area is that it is distant from many working-class neighborhoods (see [Figure 1](#)).

Recognition of the dysfunctional spaces that separate working-class communities from the city center is part of metropolitan and city plans (such as Belfast City Council, 2012, 2015; DOENI, 2012). In September 2018, there was the introduction of a new bus rapid transit system (The Glider) in Belfast, as part of the effort to improve connectivity between the revitalized spaces and more distant neighborhoods. The first phase of the system included a designated service (G2) to the Titanic quarter (Belfast City Council, 2019). Efforts to advance employment opportunities for local residents at all skills levels include a 100,000 square foot distribution house planned next to Queen’s Road, which may provide the first major employment source in the Titanic Quarter for unskilled and manual workers (Irish News, 2019). Backed by government support, a successful TV/film studio has developed in Titanic Quarter that may provide employment diverse skill levels. These developments reflect a post-neoliberal transition, 15 years after project commencement, toward greater involvement by public authorities to try to re-balance the social costs of regeneration. Yet, it is too early to assess their broader impacts.

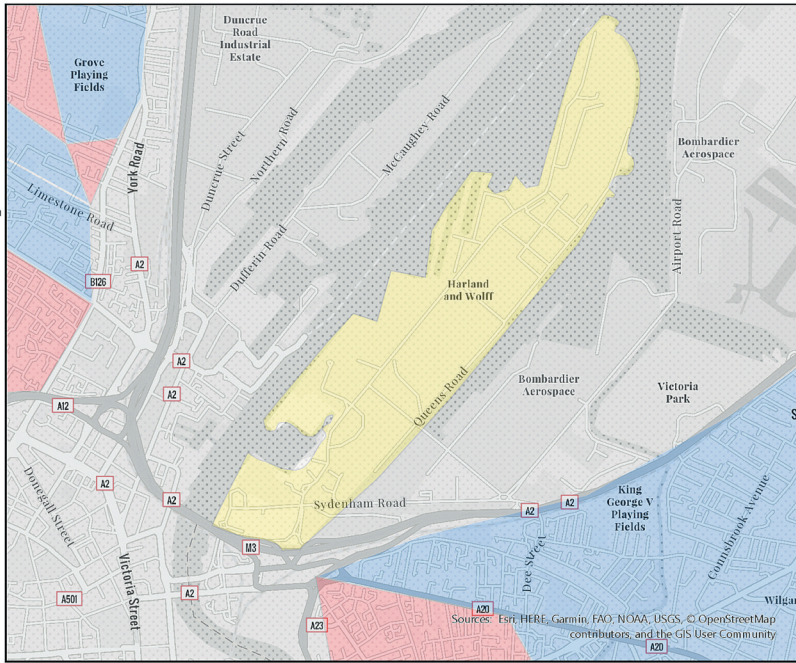


# Titanic Quarter, Belfast



## Legend

- Titanic Quarter
- Mostly Catholic Area
- Mostly Protestant Area
- Neutral Area



Cartography: Noam Lasker



Figure 1. Titanic Quarter area, Belfast.



Figure 2. Titanic Museum.

## Beirut: Central District

The central district of Beirut was devastated due to extensive targeting throughout the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990; United Nations Development Programme, 1997). It was a key site of fighting between Muslim/Palestinian and Christian militias because of its central strategic geography. It contained historically significant buildings from late Ottoman (late 19th century) and French Mandate (1920–1943) periods, and it had one of the highest concentrations of religious buildings (29 mosques and churches) in the world. The wartime violence turned it into an evacuated area next to the Green Line that divided Muslim west and Christian east Beirut.

In contrast to the sectarian character of many of the city's neighborhoods, downtown before the War was more "everyman's land" with a significant amount of heterogeneity; it was one of the few places in Beirut where people did not know to which sect they belonged (Mona Harb, American University of Beirut, interview, October 5, 2010). It was a place of mixture and interclass economic interaction (particularly in the souks and bazaars filled with artisans and traders) and of centrality (containing the major transportation node of urban region; Kassir, 2010).

A central challenge in the postwar rebuilding of the central district has been the extent to which it could rekindle these pre-war qualities and constitute a foundation for a less sectarianized city. There have been two postwar plans for redeveloping the central district. A 1991 plan commissioned by Lebanese government was financed privately by a foundation headed by Rafik Hariri (a Lebanese Sunni Muslim construction magnate with ties to Saudi Arabia). The plan sought to redevelop the city center as a mixed-use center with open space and modern infrastructure. It proposed substantial demolition of the historic core, and called for its replacement by modern buildings, skyscrapers, underground expressways and the building of a Champs-Élysées-type boulevard passing through the historically focal area of Martyrs' Square (Kassir, 2010; Shwayri, 2008). Criticism of the plan by architects and academics focused on the large bulldozing and destruction of heritage and this resulted in the production of a revised plan in 1994.

This 1994 plan, approved by the Lebanese Cabinet, established a private share-holding company to manage the entire city center reconstruction process (Shwayri, 2008). This company, Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut (known by its French acronym Solidere). Amidst the fragmented and sectarianized politics of Lebanon, Solidere was established to institutionally protect it as a corporate, profit-making entity able to pursue its own agenda of city center redevelopment—with minimal intrusion by political officials and immunity from the country's antagonistic politics (Oussama Kabbani, former town planning manager, Solidere, interview, October 13, 2010). Rafik Hariri and the Solidere company were able to monopolize the reconstruction of central Beirut (Kassir, 2010). They justified their exclusive focus on the central city district on the basis that it would most productively boost the national economy by positioning Beirut as a global city. Hariri's role in redevelopment led him to become the leading political figure in the post-civil war period (Lebanon's prime minister from 1992 to 1998 and from 2000 to 2004).

Solidere is a private tax-exempt, joint-stock corporation made up of property rights holders and investors holding stock in the downtown area. It was formed pursuant to Lebanese legislation from the 1960s that enabled the creation of real estate companies to manage reconstruction in severely war-damaged areas. Solidere, as allowed under Lebanese law, expropriated almost all property in the central district and transformed these parcels into shares in the country. This controversial action was undertaken because property ownership was fragmented into about 60,000 previous owners and tenants, and complex in ownership titles. The company was initially capitalized with over US\$1.8 billion, about 60% as contributions in kind of property rights holders and about 40% as cash subscriptions from outside investors.

The land-use component of the 1994 plan by Solidere downsized some of the gigantism proposed in the 1991 plan and showed greater sensitivity to the historic core and heritage. The

planning area in the 1994 plan covered 472 acres (see Figure 3). When fully built out, the vision called for about 100,000 residents living in the central district alongside about 40,000–60,000 jobs (Solidere, 2007). The plan subdivided the city center into 10 sectors and “built-up area” (BUA) guidelines recommend floor space densities within each sector; overall, 50.5 million square feet of new built space is anticipated. Flexible mixed-use policies and guidelines were used enabling a degree of flexibility (Angus Gavin, urban development head, Solidere, interview, October 21, 2010). In the early years, the Solidere board of directors stressed that the project had to be financially sound, and this meant constructing buildings with floor areas and heights as much as allowable under the plan (Angus Gavin, interview). The board pushed hard to rebuild the center before the country’s strong antagonistic political influences might intercede.

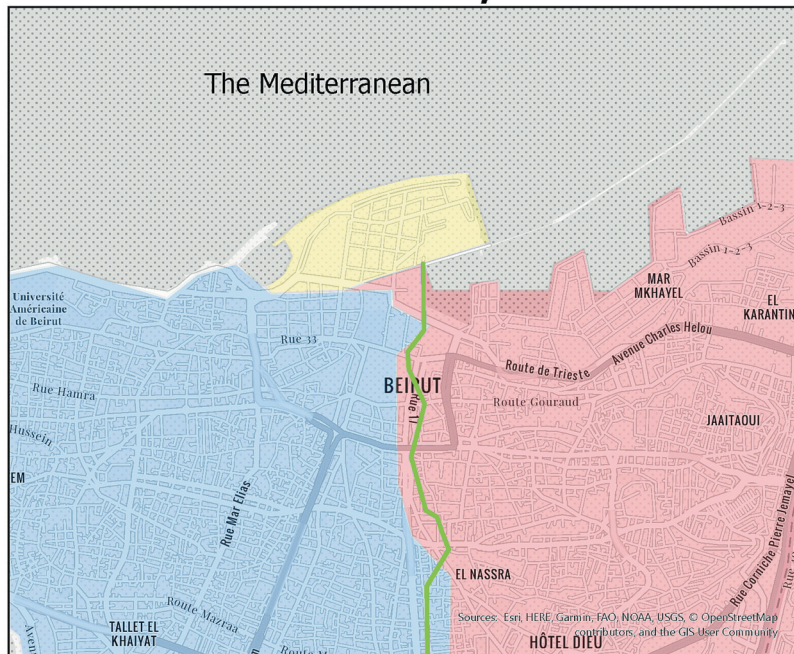
The Solidere plan has not foregrounded or explicitly considered how central district redevelopment would enhance intercommunal relations. The corporate brochure highlights building and infrastructure improvements and preservation of ancient Roman, Phoenician, and Hellenistic heritage, but is silent, except for superficial statements, on how such development will affect intercommunal relations (Solidere, 2004). Solidere planners have assumed a neutral professional stance toward sectarian issues. Sectarian issues and claims have not been an explicit part of the building process; “it’s not something we talk about much,” acknowledged Angus Gavin (interview). There was the emphasis on economic development over inter-communal reconciliation. One source recounts how “the intent was to have consumerism and commercialization neutralize sectarian difference” (Jamal Abed, planning director, Millennium Development International, interview, October 11, 2010). Another describes, “we totally eradicated old sectarian property claims; going from the power of the history and social continuity to the power of capital, and capital has no sect” (Oussama Kabbani, interview).

## Solidere District, Beirut



### Legend

- Christian Neighborhoods
- Sunni Neighborhoods
- Solidere District
- The Green Line



Cartography: Noam Lasker



Figure 3. Solidere District, Beirut.

Design professionals evaluate Solidere's architectural success as impressive, including immaculately rehabilitated buildings from the French Mandate and late Ottoman periods (Saliba, 2003; Trawi, 2003). However, this praise is overshadowed by strong criticism by local architecture and urban professionals and academics that the central district is an island of privilege cut off from the rest of the city. The main contention of criticism is that its reconstruction and rehabilitation serve an international network of investors and customers plugged into a world capitalistic circuit and neglects the needs of most of the local population (El Chami, 2012). The clean and cordoned-off quality of the central district (Figure 4) supports criticism that the profit-making criteria used by Solidere has produced an elitist and exclusionary zone (Kassir, 2010). Privatized, uniformed security personnel protects the private domain and ongoing development projects. Solidere's precinct exists in a universe separate from the remainder of the city, in a world of "ghettoized opulence" (Kassir, 2010, p. 537).

Postwar reconstruction has been chained to the profit motive. Many commercial outlets are oriented toward high-income consumers, while luxury residential towers and buildings have targeted expatriates and foreign clients, based mainly in the gulf. The bypassing of local interests for higher-income cosmopolitan interests is conspicuous in the reconstruction of the Beirut Souks. The old souks were demolished by Solidere in 1994. These souks were connected with the ancient history of Beirut as a port city, a place where the city's mercantile population exhibited and traded local and imported resources and products. The variety of trades represented the various classes and groups that inhabited the city (El Chami, 2012). The new souks architecturally emulate the historic built fabric, but the pre-war social fabric of the souks, enabling of inter-communal economic mixing, were upended as property deeds of tenants and shop owners were expropriated in exchange for corporate shares. The souks' link to the original Lebanese identity and the character of the pre-war markets has been replaced by a concentration of luxury brands,



Figure 4. Solidere District, Beirut.

high-end retail outlets, and restaurants catering to higher-income customers and international visitors (Battah, 2014; El Chami, 2012).

Despite efforts by Solidere to restore and conserve primarily French Mandate period heritage buildings and to preserve archeological artifacts, the pre-war downtown as a microcosm of the country's diversity has been transformed into an island of commercial rationality isolated from the rest of the city. Large-scale demolition of many old central precincts associated with pre-war mixing of income and sectarian groups, the dismantling of the structure of pre-war land ownership, and domination by a profit-motivated privatized urban redevelopment regime has obstructed its capacity to be shared space. The differentiation of the central district from the rest of the city and country is illuminated by economic indicators. Amid a collapsing and chaotic economy in Lebanon in early 2020, Solidere's stock value was surging ([the961.com/this-companys-stock-in-lebanon-is-skyrocketing-despite-collapsing-economy/](https://www.the961.com/this-companys-stock-in-lebanon-is-skyrocketing-despite-collapsing-economy/)).

Architect and urban designer Hana Alamuddin (interview, October 7, 2010) observes that its architectural separateness constitutes more a Sunni-Saudi urbanism of compounds, enclosures, order, isolation and privacy than the more organic Ottoman urbanism of its past. The building of a global downtown constructs a layer of income segregation transposed onto a society already handicapped by sectarian separation. Witnessing a central city reconstruction that operates in isolation from larger city and regional needs, Kassir (2010, p. 530) calls it "an illusion" that has played a decisive role in "ensuring that the opportunities of post-war Lebanon would be squandered." While connections to external and global audiences have strengthened, the central district's internal value to all Beirut and Lebanese remains a significant challenge. With Solidere, one bears witness to the substantial distortions introduced into city redevelopment when profit making is insulated from the political arena and is used as the prime barometer for assessing central city welfare.

Despite the effort of the neoliberal approach to sidestep sectarian and political issues, the city center has become a site of contestation and mobilization. In 2005 and 2006, the central core was transformed into a site of sectarian political demonstration and protest. Three major squares in Beirut downtown (Martyrs' Square, Debbas Square, and Riad al-Solh Square) became political stages and sustained and derisive political mobilization. Robert Saliba (American University of Beirut, interview, October 11, 2010) observes, "2006 and after showed us that Solidere has not created a gated downtown after all." Further, since October 2019, mass cross-sectarian and cross-class demonstrations against the Lebanese government have filled the Solidere district. Although demonstrations have been inspired by a broad set of grievances, protest signs include "It's Called El-Balad (Downtown) not Solidere" and "Down with Solidere" ([the961.com/the-revolution-has-resurrected-old-beirut-in-the-heart-of-solidere/](https://www.the961.com/the-revolution-has-resurrected-old-beirut-in-the-heart-of-solidere/)). Solidere's elitist city center has thus become a site of contention that is a representative encapsulation of, and physical platform for, larger grievances of the citizenry against the government. Rather than being a neutral, benign force, Solidere has become a "tool of conflict" in a society with far too many already (Hana Alamuddin, interview.)

## Jerusalem: Mamilla Mall

Residential segregation between Israeli-Jews and Arab-Palestinians in Jerusalem has been structured through partisan planning policies since 1967, reinforced by political violence and high levels of voluntary self-segregation in both communities. While new neighborhoods in Jerusalem (including in East Jerusalem) were planned and constructed solely for the Jewish population, Arab neighborhood growth was limited through various restrictive planning regulations (Bollens, 2000). The "united" city is in reality two separate functional units, with separate neighborhoods, urban services and commercial centers. The Israeli municipality plan positions segregation as a positive asset:

In a multicultural city such as Jerusalem, spatial segregation of the various population groups in the city is a real advantage. Every group has its own cultural space and can live its lifestyle. The segregation limits the potential sources of conflict between and among the various populations. It is appropriate, therefore, to direct a planning

policy that encourages the continuation of spatial segregation with a substantial amount of tolerance and consideration. (Jerusalem Municipality, 2004, Chapters 7.2.2)

Segregation is imposed not only by the Israeli regime but enacted by the Palestinian political leadership as part of a struggle against the normalization of the Israeli occupation. Palestinians in Jerusalem self-segregate for the sake of cultural preservation, economic independence and political loyalty. They deploy long-term ethnonational strategies that reinforce segregation and entail denial of any type of collective or individual cooperation with Israeli institutions that can be interpreted as legitimizing Israeli occupation or endangering the solidity of the Palestinian national identity (Salem, 2005).

Convergence of imposed and voluntary segregation has resulted in 99% of Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem living in either a Jewish or an Arab neighborhood in 2017 (Choshen, 2019, table III/10). However, in the recent decade, spatial segregation in some spheres has loosened. The number of Palestinians from East Jerusalem commuting to Jewish spaces in Jerusalem has increased significantly (Shtern, 2019). Recent studies describe a resurgent Palestinian presence in Jewish areas of the city (Raanan & Avni, 2020; Rokem & Vaughan, 2018). Further, economic and cultural restructuring has produced cross-national class-based encounters in Jerusalem's shopping malls and in mixed residential areas (Shtern, 2016, 2019; Shtern & Yacobi, 2019).

The Mamilla Mall stands out as the largest, multi-use (residential, tourist and commercial) privately owned complex established in the city center of Jerusalem. The historical evolution of the compound is connected to the novel political geographies of post-1967 Jerusalem and the new economic and urban opportunities that emerged with the occupation and annexation of East Jerusalem by the Israeli government. With the physical reconnection of East and West Jerusalem in 1967, the former international border that partitioned the city was transformed into a 10-kilometer long and narrow undeveloped urban seam line stretching through the midst of the city—dividing Jewish and Arab neighborhoods. In the middle of that stretch of land was the historic district of Mamilla—formerly the city center of late-Ottoman Jerusalem and one of the few mixed Jewish-Arab residential and commercial areas during the British Mandate period (1920–1948). Mamilla at that time was strategically situated between the Old City and the new western city center. With deterioration of inter-communal relations in the city (and the country) beginning 1929, it became a buffer zone between Arab and Jewish Jerusalem. When the city was partitioned in 1949, Mamilla was cut in the middle by the new border; one part became a stone rubble no-man's land and another part a poor Jewish-immigrant neighborhood. With full Israeli control over the city in 1967, the former border neighborhoods emerged in the middle of the reconnected city. Teddy Kollek, the long-serving Israeli mayor of Jerusalem (1965–1993) pushed for extensive redevelopment of the inner-city seam line aiming to create a new modern city-center—and Mamilla was positioned as the jewel in the crown. He also wanted to gentrify the city center by relocating existing low-income Jewish residents into peripheral working-class neighborhoods (Kollek & Kollek, 1978).

In 1970, the Israeli government expropriated 25 acres of the central seam-line lands, including Mamilla. In 1972, a governmental-municipal company (Karta) was established to manage the planning, design, infrastructure improvements, handling of residential and commercial evictions in the proposed new site, and eventual selling and leasing of the properties to private developers. Although the government invested US\$90 million in the program, the Mamilla plan faced ongoing obstacles and challenges which delayed its completion for 40 years. At first, Karta recruited architects Moshe Safdie and Gilbert Weill to design the project. The initial proposed plan included the destruction of all existing buildings on the site and the construction of a modernistic compound of mixed residential, commercial, tourism and open space program (Safdie & Gilbert, 1975). The 27-acre plan was extensive and dense and met with international criticism and opposition from local politicians and conservation activists (Kroyanker, 1988). The final slightly reduced plan for the site (which included the partial conservation of some historic buildings) was approved in stages through 1979 to 1989. Another disputed decision of Karta was to employ a single private developer for the

whole project. In 1989, a single developer—British gambling corporate Ladbroke’s—was recruited to execute the construction.

In the beginning of the 1990s, parts of the compound finally began to emerge on the southern section of Mamilla—a luxurious Hilton hotel (today’s David’s Citadel hotel) and a lucrative gated community, David’s Village (Shtern, 2016).

In 1994, Ladbroke’s found itself in amidst of a criminal investigation and divested many of its worldwide operations including Jerusalem. The remaining section of the project, which included the heart of the plan (the commercial avenue, additional hotel, and parking lot) had to be refranchised to a new developer—Israeli real estate mogul Alfred Akirov and his Alrov corporation (Shtern, 2010). The Mamilla project at that point became fully privatized, the commercial part of Mamilla (symbolically renamed the Alrov Mamilla quarter) opening to the public in 2007.

The Alrov Mamilla Quarter includes a straight 270-meter narrow shopping alley with 200 shops topped by luxurious apartments that link the busy Agron/King Solomon streets of western Jerusalem’s CBD to the plaza in front of Jaffa Gate (the main entrance to the Old City that is in East Jerusalem) (Figure 5). The avenue (and the adjacent gated community and hotels) was designed in a neo-oriental style with Jerusalem stone domes and arches (Kroyanker, 2008). Its narrow layout and design resemble the restored Jewish quarter, but also integrates features of modern Middle Eastern Arabic architecture. The avenue is a hybridization of a street and a mall. It is organically built into the urban realm of the western CBD, but other than an amphitheater, there are no benches or rest spots along the avenue of shops and restaurants (Figure 6).

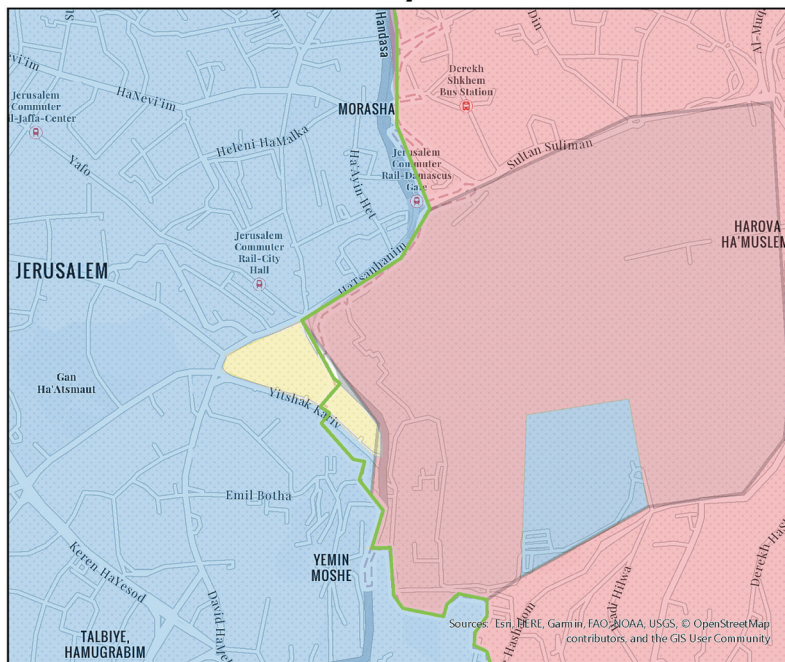
The project’s opening took place only 2 years after the end of the traumatic second intifada, and the Western city center and its residents were still recovering from 5 years of recurrent terror attacks. Yet, within a few months after opening, Mamilla was drawing more than 10,000 visitors per day. Its prime location

# Alrov Mamilla, Jerusalem



### Legend

- The Green Line
- Alrov Mamilla Quarter
- Palestinian Neighborhoods
- Israeli Neighborhoods
- The Old City



Cartography: Noam Lasker



Figure 5. Mamilla area, Jerusalem.



Figure 6. Mamilla area, Jerusalem.

between the Old City and the West Jerusalem CBD, its proximity to 15 hotels located in the city center and its huge underground parking lot made the avenue a popular pedestrian route and commercial success. Although Mamilla is clearly an Israeli compound and was built on expropriated land and resides at the boundary between the two parts of the city, its territorial identity is negotiated and contested by the stream of Palestinian customers and visitors (Shtern, 2016). In 2014, the management of the mall estimated that the number of Palestinian visitors in Mamilla was 20 to 25% of the total visitors. Mamilla draws Palestinians from all socio-economic levels, but the presence of the upper-middle classes is particularly marked (Bar Zvi, O., interview, July 20, 2008). The avenue is also a central employment center for young East Jerusalem Palestinians, who constituted approximately 66% of the quarter's total of 1,500 sales personnel in 2014 (Ben Moshe, S., interview, November 14, 2014).

Mamilla Mall is one of the most popular Israeli destinations for Palestinians from East Jerusalem (Shtern, 2016). The fact that the mall has no security checks at the entrance to the compound, the overwhelming presence of both Palestinian visitors as well as Palestinian sales personnel, and the compound's proximity to East Jerusalem, the Old City and the Arab central business district creates a site which is relatively inclusive for the Palestinian community (Shtern, 2016). Its location on the main tourist circuit into and out of the Old City identifies it as a tourist destination rather than Israeli home territory, even for local Israeli Jerusalemites. Many tourists coming to Jerusalem will inevitably walk through the Mamilla Mall on their way to the Old City and Jaffa Gate, which means that the number of foreign tourists at times exceeds the number of local Israeli and Palestinian customers at the compound.

The heterogeneous character of Mamilla and the gradual rise in the number of Palestinian customers has become part of the mall management's sales strategy. Shmuel Ben Moshe, CEO of Alrov, disclosed his role in creating its current social composition:

I have many Arab workers in the shops. It's intentional. It's because I want the Arabs that come to the shops to feel at ease when one of their own is serving them. It was tremendously successful, which was reflected not only in sales, but also in the fact that there is no vandalism or destruction of any kind, or anything like that. (Ben Moshe, S., interview, November 14, 2014)



This illuminates that processes of privatization of public spaces in Jerusalem have given rise to marketing strategies and policies that have the potential to foster intergroup encounters.

## Discussion

This comparative analysis of urban regeneration in Belfast, Beirut and Jerusalem illuminates the paradigmatic status that globally themed, neoliberal and tourist-oriented modes of urban redevelopment have reached in this era. Beyond this, however, this study enabled an examination of the intersection between free-market logic and nationally contested urban space. It is apparent that for decision makers seeking to foster urban regeneration in former urban battlefields, free market and globalized regeneration posit a less problematic, effective, and resilient solution. The consistent application of the market-based regeneration strategy across these cities suggests, at least from local leaders' perspective, that neoliberal landscapes of exclusion are a step forward from ethnonational landscapes of division. The inner-city mega-projects developed in these nationally contested cities, while drawing intense criticism about social costs and urban equity, have generated financial success and popularity among many consumers and tourists. This apparent economic sustainability is conspicuous given the background of these cities' geopolitics of embedded historic and ongoing animosities and the ever-present fear of regression to intercommunal violence. This circumstance requires analysts to probe questions concerning the impact of these projects in relation to the ethno-national antagonisms at stake. In this context, we focus our discussion on three outcomes of the neoliberal/ethno-nationalism nexus in terms of territorial identity, diversity, and timing.

### ***Territorial identity: Globalization and localism***

All three redevelopment projects were designed to achieve a "glocalized" sense of territorial identity. On one hand, the themes of the projects all draw from local narratives and traditions that predate conflicts. Belfast's Titanic Quarter relates to the era of shipbuilding industry of the late 19th century, Beirut's Solidere aims to emulate architecturally early 20th-century buildings, and Jerusalem's Mamilla is named after the first modern commercial-residential districts of the city. The narratives utilize a sentiment of nostalgia to a lost organic and more diverse urbanism of the past. Yet, while these historical narratives are utilized to brand the compounds in a romantic fashion, spaces are created that in practice focus on post-modern modes of consumption, modern architecture, and top-down planned production of urban space. While the façade is local, the interior is global and reproduces urban landscapes that are highly similar to other contemporary Western redeveloped city centers.

The globalization of contested urban spaces serves not only as a mechanism for capital accumulation but also provides a strategic political utility. It aims to trans-nationalize split territories through recreational escapism and imaginaries intended to enable antagonistic communities to participate without being subjected to claims of disloyalty or transgression. It produces bubbles of globalization within the urban realm that depoliticize the historical context of the conflict and contemporary ethnic disparities. A salient ingredient of this globalization of space is that these new landscapes are designed to attract global tourism as a form of economic stabilization. Tourism creates not only dependencies of commerce and labor across identity groups, but also contributes to an internationalization of the human-scape that visually dissolves the dichotomous "us vs. them" encounter. Nonetheless, the production of global enclaves within the contested cities comes with an expensive cost. It cynically seeks to commercialize local heritage through physical redevelopment, suppresses the past and present animosities and, at times, injects selective historic narration (the prioritization of Zionist history in the Mamilla case; the Sunni economic foundation of Beirut regeneration). While globalization seeks to overcome localization, embedded power inequalities are reproduced in the process of reimagining these places.

### ***Diversity: Class exclusion***

Redevelopment of inner-city projects in Belfast, Beirut, and Jerusalem based on profit driven logic have created urban spaces of socio-economic exclusion. Exclusion of the poor takes place through dominance of luxury housing and high-end retail activities in privatized public space. Reliance on for-profit activities and urban functions in the regenerated city space alters the connectivity of the city center to the rest of the urban area, establishing new class-based walls and restrictions. In both Belfast and Beirut, residents in adjacent neighborhoods do not have the economic resources to allow them to access new opportunities on a regular basis. This type of encroachment of the “right to the city” of local residents is not unique to the cities in our study, but rather characterizes neoliberal urban developments in many cities worldwide. At the same time, cross-group exclusion of marginalized groups produces cross-group inclusion of middle and higher strata. Most illuminating is the popularity of Mamilla Mall among upper class Palestinians. Nevertheless, spatial mixing that does occur is not necessarily egalitarian or representative because contemporary intergroup power inequalities creates one-sided dominance by the politically and socio-economically superior communities in the management, business ownership and customer profile, as in the case of Jewish Israelis in Mamilla (and Sunni Muslims in the Beirut case.) In their class exclusion, market-based strategies in the three cities constitute disinterested agents in addressing ethno-nationalist cleavages.

### ***Timing: During and after conflict***

An important divergence among the three cities is their geopolitical contexts. Each city is situated within a different level of intensity of conflict and distinct trajectory of conflict-resolution. This fact highlights the question of temporality in the context of neoliberal regeneration and its socio-political impact. While the above-stated similarities in financial success is attributable to relatively lower levels of violence in all cities in the last decade, the clouds of escalation are darker in Jerusalem than in Belfast and Beirut. This has a surprising and ironic effect on how one evaluates Mamilla’s impact on intergroup relations. As the political status in Jerusalem is at a stalemate, Mamilla’s functioning as a shared space is able to operate successfully outside the context of the larger political context. The asymmetrical power balance in Jerusalem exempts Mamilla from consideration as an intrinsic element of peacebuilding, lessening the political salience of mixing ethnic groups across income levels as a project goal. This mechanism of political decontextualization applies less to Beirut or Belfast. In these cities, inter-group relations and class divisions are stronger factors in how citizens perceive and evaluate these projects as part of post-conflict peacebuilding. Occurring after the end of intense conflict periods, Titanic and Solidere become important bellwethers to residents as to how former antagonistic groups will co-exist in the future. The burden is heavier in Belfast and Beirut than in politically gridlocked Jerusalem.

Despite the paradoxical advantage of neoliberal spatial mixing in cities such as Jerusalem, it should not conceal the real cost of urban regeneration in an ongoing asymmetrical conflict. In the long run, the negative trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the growing totality of Israeli dominance might eventually subject such strategic urban spaces to the logic and objectives of the Zionist project. In contrast, the more positive course toward political reconciliation in Belfast and post-conflict Beirut promise better chances for tuning these novel urban developments toward a more symmetric, equal and better intergroup spatial stitching and mixing. This is observable, for instance, in the recent government-sponsored efforts to increase social accessibility to the Titanic Quarter.

### **Conclusion**

This work contributes theoretically to understanding the intersection between urban regeneration and urban-based nationalistic conflict. Neoliberal urbanism has diverging outcomes and social costs in different political contexts. Most studies on neoliberal redevelopment in contested cities have critically

highlighted its socioeconomic and cultural costs. In this paper, we suggest a more holistic and comprehensive approach. Exploring the effect of neoliberal redevelopment in contested cities not only from the critical angle of the “multicultural” space of ordinary cities, but also through the prism of intergroup relations in an ethno-national space, as we have, illuminates a complicated, diverse and ambiguous social impact in the shadow of past and present political violence and division.

There is an instinct in cities divided by ethno-nationalist antagonists to adopt a neutral, hands-off approach to city building that is free of inflammatory nationalist meanings. An appealing feature of deferring to globalized market forces in the rebuilding of city districts is that it rises above the ethno-nationalist mire. As shown in our case studies, this invisible hand is obsessed with its own rewards and pays little attention to repairing ethnic ruptures within these urban areas. These market-based strategies heighten class-based exclusion and sidestep or subordinate efforts to bridge urban ruptures associated with ethno-nationalist segregation and past violence. Through its imposition of a global overlay detached from local realities, it introduces new class-based divisions while sustaining deeply rooted urban fractures. There exist resilient conflicting political alignments in Belfast, Beirut, and Jerusalem, a reality that postwar central district redevelopment sidesteps, thus becoming a disinterested agent in their perpetuation.

However, we have also found that neoliberal and global urban development have produced considerable financial success, revived urban industries of local and international tourism, and to some extent fostered peaceful, albeit de-localized, spaces of intergroup encounters. The production of de-politicized landscapes offers a spatial alternative to preexisting geographies of fear and mistrust. Moreover, it is apparent the policy makers have learned to alleviate some of the considerable social and cultural costs of such free-market impositions.

In light of the above, we recommend to urban planners and policy makers in contested cities that they measure the full range of costs and benefits of neoliberal models of urban redevelopment in the context of highly polarized urban disputes. Market-based solutions for political problems offer an attractive short-term and effective bypass that should not be easily dismissed in places where regression to political violence is a vivid possibility. Yet, the allowance and promotion of such projects by local governing institutions should be balanced with public sector strategies of social inclusion and cultural sensitivity in order to deal with the large side effects of increasing socio-economic polarization. Any intensification of class disparities runs the risk of reopening ethnic and nationalistic conflict since ethno-national boundaries often overlap with economic inequalities. We suggest that analysis of how these projects contribute to equitable peacebuilding be given equal consideration to that of market prerogatives in more comprehensive project development plans. Neoliberal projects that recreate materiality and space do not occur outside institutionally regulated processes. Such institutions, of which urban planning is of primary importance, should assure that neoliberal projects be effectively integrated with larger peacebuilding goals, or in the least with strategies aimed at more shared urban co-existence. With the current resurgence of populist and reactionary nativism in developed states foregrounding issues of ethnic and nationalistic identity, lessons from the application of urban neoliberalism in Belfast, Beirut and Jerusalem’s nationally fractured political geographies provides constructive insight into our more general understanding of contemporary urbanism.

## Acknowledgments

The authors are thankful for the generous support of the Israel Institute, the Leichtag Foundation, the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University, and the Warmington Endowment for Peace and International Cooperation at University of California, Irvine.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## About the authors

**Marik Shtern** is a postdoctoral fellow in the Geography Department and the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. His fields of research are the geographies of encounter, contested cities, and inter-group relations in Jerusalem. Shtern has published in leading journals in the field of urban studies.

**Scott A. Bollens** is Professor of Urban Planning and Public Policy at the University of California, Irvine, where he holds the Warmington Chair in Peace and International Cooperation. He studies the role of urbanism in cities and countries challenged by nationalistic ethnic conflict and political transformations. His new book (Routledge, 2021) is *Bordered Cities and Divided Societies: Humanistic Essays of Conflict, Violence, and Healing*.

## References

- Abdelmonem, M. G., & McWhinney, R. (2015). In search of common grounds: Stitching the divided landscape of urban parks in Belfast. *Cities*, 44, 40–49. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2014.12.006>
- Battah, H. (2014). 'Erasing memory in downtown Beirut.' *Al Jazeera Digital Magazine*. 19 January. Accessed 23 February 2018, [www.beirutreport.com/2014/01/erasing-memory-in-downtown-beirut.html](http://www.beirutreport.com/2014/01/erasing-memory-in-downtown-beirut.html)
- BBC News. (2020). 'Belfast's Titanic Quarter to get third hotel after plans approved.' *BBC News*, 23 January. Retrieved October 6, 2020, from [www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-51230521](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-51230521)
- Belfast City Council. (2004). *Belfast: The masterplan 2004-2020*.
- Belfast City Council. (2012). *Belfast masterplan review 2012*.
- Belfast City Council. (2015). *Belfast city centre: Regeneration and investment strategy*.
- Belfast City Council. (2019). *Belfast Rapid Glider transit service prepares for take-off*.
- Benvenisti, M. (1996). *City of stone: The hidden history of Jerusalem*. University of California.
- Block, F., & Somers, M. R. (2014). *The power of market fundamentalism*. Harvard University Press.
- Boal, F. W. (1999). From undivided cities to undivided cities: Assimilation to ethnic cleansing. *Housing Studies*, 14(5), 585–600. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673039982623>
- Boland, P., Bronte, J., & Muir, J. (2017, January). On the waterfront: Neoliberal urbanism and the politics of public benefit. *Cities*, 61, 117–127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2016.08.012>
- Bollens, S. (2000). *On narrow ground: Urban policy and ethnic conflict in Jerusalem and Belfast*. SUNY Press.
- Bollens, S. (2012). *City and soul in divided societies*. Routledge.
- Bollens, S. (2018). *Trajectories of conflict and peace: Jerusalem and Belfast since 1994*. Routledge.
- Brenner, N., Peck, J., & Theodore, N. (2010). After neoliberalization? *Globalizations*, 7(3), 327–345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731003669669>
- Brenner, N., & Theodore, N. (2002). Cities and the geographies of "actually existing neoliberalism." *Antipode*, 34(3), 349–379. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00246>
- Calame, J., & Charlesworth, E. (2009). *Divided cities: Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Choshen, (Ed.). (2019). *Statistical yearbook of Jerusalem 2019*. Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research.
- Coyles, D. (2013). Reflections on Titanic Quarter: The cultural and material legacy of an historic Belfast brand. *The Journal of Architecture*, 18(3), 331–363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2013.804855>
- Dear, M. (2005). Comparative urbanism. *Urban Geography*, 26(3), 247–251. <https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.26.3.247>
- Deloitte. (2015). *A new story: Titanic Belfast—Evaluation of the first three years*. Titanic Foundation.
- Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment. (2009). *Work progressing on £97million Titanic signature building*. Belfast City Council, Press Release, 4 December
- Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. (2012). *Belfast metropolitan area plan 2015*.
- Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. (2015). *Strategic planning policy statement for Northern Ireland (SPSS): Planning for sustainable development*.
- El Chami, Y. (2012). From multi-city to corporate city in Beirut central district. *Projective cities: Architectural association graduate school*, 26 April. Architectural Association. Retrieved February 22, 2018, from <http://projectivecities.aaschool.ac.uk/portfolio/yasmina-el-chami-from-multiplicity-to-corporate-city/>
- Elgenius, G., & Rydgren, J. (2019). Frames of nostalgia and belonging: The resurgence of ethno-nationalism in Sweden. *European Societies*, 21(4), 583–602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2018.1494297>
- Etchart, J. (2008). The Titanic Quarter in Belfast: Building a new place in a divided city. *Nordic Irish Studies*, 7, 31–40. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27653734>
- Ferguson, N., Burgess, M., & Hollywood, I. (2015). Leaving violence behind: Disengaging from politically motivated violence in Northern Ireland. *Political Psychology*, 36(2), 199–214.
- Fregonese, S. (2012). Urban geopolitics 8 years on: Hybrid sovereignties, the everyday, and geographies of peace. *Geography Compass*, 6(5), 290–303. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2012.00485.x>
- Friedman, M. (2009). *Capitalism and freedom*. University of Chicago Press.

- Gaffikin, F., Karelse, C., Morrissey, M., Mulholland, C., & Sterrett, K. (2016). *Making space for each other: Civic place-making in a divided society*. Queen's University.
- Gaffikin, F., & Morrissey, M. (2011). *Planning in divided cities*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Gaffikin, F., Sterrett, K., McEldowney, M., Morrissey, M., Hardy, M. (2008). *Planning shared space for a shared future*. Queen's University and Community Relations Council.
- Graham, S. (2011). *Cities under siege: The new military urbanism*. Verso Books.
- Gusic, I. (2020). *Contesting peace in the postwar city: Belfast, Mitrovica and Mostar*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. University Press.
- Herrault, H., & Murtagh, B. (2019). "Shared space in post-conflict Belfast. *Space and Polity*, 23(3), 251–264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2019.1667763>
- Irish News. (2019). *Titanic Quarter distribution centre plan set to go ahead*. Retrieved October 6, 2020, from <https://www.irishnews.com/business/2019/11/09/news/titanic-quarter-distribution-centre-plan-set-to-go-ahead-1760854/>
- Jerusalem Municipality. (2004). Local outline plan Jerusalem 2000. Report no. 4, the proposed plan and the main planning policies. Jerusalem Municipality.
- Johnson, N. C. (2014). Exhibiting maritime histories: Titanic Belfast in the post-conflict city. *Historical Geography*, 42, 242–259. <https://ejournals.unm.edu/index.php/historicalgeography/article/view/3270>
- Kassir, S. (2010). *Beirut*. University of California Press.
- Kliot, N., & Mansfeld, Y. (1999). Case studies of conflict and territorial organization in divided cities. *Progress in Planning*, 52(3), 167–225. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-9006\(99\)00010-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-9006(99)00010-0)
- Kollek, T., & Kollek, A. (1978). *For Jerusalem: A life*. Random House.
- Komarova, M. (2008). Shared space in Belfast and the limits of a shared future. *Divided Cities/Contested States Working Paper*, 3.
- Kroyanker, D. (1988). *Jerusalem—Conflicts over the city's physical and visual form*. Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies.
- Kroyanker, D. (2008). Revolution in presentation of Jerusalem. In O. Ahimeir & Y. Bar Siman- Tov (Eds.), *40 years in Jerusalem* (pp. 213–285). The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies. (in Hebrew).
- Larkin, C. (2010). Remaking Beirut: Contesting memory, space, and the urban imaginary of Lebanese youth. *City & Community*, 9(4), 414–442. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6040.2010.01346.x>
- Leary, M. E., & McCarthy, J. (2013). Conclusions and aspirations for the future of urban regeneration. In M. E. Leary & J. McCarthy (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to urban regeneration* (pp. 589–604). Routledge.
- Makdisi, S. (1997). Laying claim to Beirut: Urban narrative and spatial identity in the age of Solidere. *Critical Inquiry*, 23(3), 661–705. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448848>
- Manza, J., & Crowley, N. (2018). Ethnonationalism and the rise of Donald Trump. *Contexts*, 17(1), 28–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504218766548>
- McAleer, R. (2020). *Building work starts on £30m Olympic House in Belfast's Titanic Quarter*. The Irish News. Retrieved October 6, 2020, from <https://www.irishnews.com/business/businessnews/2020/06/30/news/construction-begins-of-30m-olympic-house-in-belfast-s-titanic-quarter-1987378/>
- Muir, J., Boland, P., Bronte, J., & McKnight, M. (2015). *The new waterfront: Who benefits? A report for the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors Research Trust and the Institute of Spatial and Environmental Planning*. Queen's University.
- Murtagh, B. (2008). New spaces and old in 'post-conflict' Belfast. In J. Anderson (Ed.), *Divided cities/contested states* (pp. 1–28). Conflict in Cities and Contested Nations.
- Nagle, J. (2009). The right to Belfast city centre: From ethnocracy to liberal multiculturalism? *Political Geography*, 28(2), 132–141. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2009.02.002>
- Nagle, J. (2017). Ghosts, memory, and the right to the divided city: Resisting amnesia in Beirut city centre. *Antipode*, 49(1), 149–168. <https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12263>
- Neill, W. J. V. (2006). Return to Titanic and lost in the maze: The search for representation of 'post-conflict' Belfast. *Space and Polity*, 10(2), 109–120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562570600921477>
- Nijman, J. (2007). Introduction—Comparative urbanism. *Urban Geography*, 28(1), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.2747/0272-3638.28.1.1>
- Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. (2005). *A shared future: Policy and strategy framework for good relations in Northern Ireland*.
- Peach, C. (1996). The meaning of segregation. *Planning Practice and Research*, 11(2), 137–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459650036297>
- Peck, J., Theodore, N., & Brenner, N. (2009). Neoliberal urbanism: Models, moments, mutations. *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 29(1), 49–66. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sais.0.0028>
- Pullan, W. (2013). Spatial discontinuities: Conflict infrastructures in contested cities. In W. Pullan & B. Baillie (Eds.), *Locating urban conflicts: Ethnicity, nationalism and the everyday* (pp. 17–36). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Raanan, M. G., & Avni, N. (2020, January). (Ad)ressing belonging in a contested space: Embodied spatial practices of Palestinian and Israeli women in Jerusalem. *Political Geography*, 76, 102090. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102090>
- Ragab, T. S. (2011). The crisis of cultural identity in rehabilitating historic Beirut- downtown. *Cities*, 28(1), 107–114. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2010.04.001>

- Robinson, J. (2016). Comparative urbanism: New geographies and cultures of theorizing the urban. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 40(1), 187–199. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12273>
- Rokem, J., Fregonese, S., Ramadan, A., Pascucci, E., Rosen, G., Charney, I., & Sidaway, J. D. (2017, November). Interventions in urban geopolitics. *Political Geography*, 61, 253–262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2017.04.004>
- Rokem, J., & Vaughan, L. (2018). Segregation, mobility and encounters in Jerusalem: The role of public transport infrastructure in connecting the ‘divided city’. *Urban Studies*, 55(15), 3454–3473. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098017691465>
- Rosen, G., & Razin, E. (2009). The rise of gated communities in Israel: Reflections on changing urban governance in a neo-liberal era. *Urban Studies*, 46(8), 1702–1722. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098009105508>
- Safdie, M., & Gilbert, W. (1975). *Mamilla: Background booklet for the outline plan and detailed construction plan for the Mamilla compound (Hebrew)*. Karta Company for the Development of Central Jerusalem.
- Salem, W. (2005). The anti-normalization discourse in the context of Israeli Palestinian peace-building. *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture*, 12(1), 100. <https://pij.org/articles/334/the-antinormalization-discourse-in-the-context-of-israelipalestinian-peacebuilding>
- Saliba, R. (2003). *Beirut city center recovery: The Foch-Allenby and Etoile conservation area*. Steidl Publishers.
- Sassen, S. (2006). *Cities in a world economy*. Pine Forge.
- Shirlow, P. (2006). Belfast: The ‘post-conflict’ city. *Space and Polity*, 10(2), 99–107. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562570600921451>
- Shtern, M. (2010). *In foreign fields: Interaction patterns between Israelis and Palestinians in mixed commercial zones in Jerusalem (in Hebrew)*. The Institute of Urban and Regional Studies, Hebrew University.
- Shtern, M. (2016, March). Urban neoliberalism vs. ethno-national division: The case of west Jerusalem’s shopping malls. *Cities*, 52, 132–139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2015.11.019>
- Shtern, M. (2019). Towards ‘ethno-national peripheralisation’? Economic dependency amidst political resistance in Palestinian East Jerusalem. *Urban Studies*, 56(6), 1129–1147. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042098018763289>
- Shtern, M., & Yacobi, H. (2019). The urban geopolitics of neighboring: Conflict, encounter and class in Jerusalem’s settlement/neighborhood. *Urban Geography*, 40(4), 467–487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2018.1500251>
- Shwayri, S. T. (2008). From regional node to backwater and back to uncertainty: Beirut, 1943–2006. In Y. Elsheshtawy (Ed.), *The evolving Arab city: Tradition, modernity and urban development* (pp. 69–98). Routledge.
- Smith, N. (2002). New globalism, new urbanism: Gentrification as global urban strategy. *Antipode*, 34(3), 427–450. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00249>
- Solidere. (2004). *Beirut city center: Developing the finest city center in the Middle East*.
- Solidere. (2007). *Annual report*.
- Trawi, A. (2003). *Beirut’s memory*. Ayman Trawi.
- Turley Associates. (2005). *Development framework—Titanic Quarter*. Turley Associates. <http://titanic-quarter.com/about/thedevelopment>
- United Nations Development Programme. (1997). *Mapping of living conditions in Lebanon*. United Nations. Retrieved December 3, 2010, from [www.undp.org.lb/programme/pro-poor/poverty/Povertyinlebanon/molc/main.html](http://www.undp.org.lb/programme/pro-poor/poverty/Povertyinlebanon/molc/main.html)
- Yacobi, H. (2012). God, globalization, and geopolitics: On West Jerusalem’s gated communities. *Environment & Planning A*, 44(11), 2705–2720. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a44612>
- Zukin, S. (1996). *The cultures of cities*. Blackwell.