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The Politics of Heritage: Cityscape and Nationalism

Urban conflicts are often rooted in conflicting claims to a city's past. In these contested cities, memorial structures are much more actively connected to the needs of the present. Even after the active stage of conflict has subsided, memory battles can become a means of continuing the struggle to legitimize power relations and claims to territory – protracting conflict indefinitely. Heritage or memorial sites can play many roles in such cities where they may serve as territorial boundary markers that actively discourage the presence of rival groups, or they may even act as active memorial repositories that are used to collect and highlight immediate struggles. Even those elements not created intentionally to serve as memorials, such as war traces and remnants of conflict in the city, can be used by young people – who have no actual memory of the conflict itself – to explain continuing confrontations and contemporary everyday struggles of segregation, prejudice, and mistrust. While heritage in the city may be destroyed, reassembled, or reconstructed to broadcast strictly defined nationalist meanings and portray particularistic visions of the past, it retains the potential to reveal alternative or pluralist pasts. Indeed, because questions of heritage and commemoration are much more connected to ongoing processes, these contested sites perhaps present valuable opportunities for rethinking major questions of commemoration. This paper will examine the ongoing negotiation of these memorial markers in Beirut, Belfast, Jerusalem, Nicosia (Cyprus), and Vukovar (Croatia).

Anita Bakshi is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Cultural Analysis (CCA) at Rutgers University. Following several years in architectural practice she received a PhD in the History and Philosophy of Architecture from Cambridge University, where she was a member of the Conflict in Cities and the Contested State research group, and a convener of the Cities Seminar at The Centre for Research in the Arts, Social Sciences, and Humanities (CRASSH). Her current book project, *The Reserve of Forgetting: Embodied Knowledges and Contested Places*, develops an interdisciplinary theory of 'embodied knowing' in relation to place and place-based memories. Through examples from fieldwork in Cyprus, it illustrates the role that place can play as an additional resource for memory and history in divided societies, and develops the use of mapping and visual research methodologies for contested urban environments. This research formed the basis for a UNDP-funded exhibition of maps and drawings, entitled *Reconstructing Nicosia's Buffer Zone – Topographies of Memory*, organized with the Association for Historical Dialogue and Research in Cyprus last year.