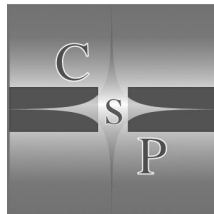# Cultural Practices, Political Possibilities

Cultural Practices, Political Possibilities

Edited by

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

For In-spirants

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

POLITICAL POSSIBILITIES OF THE CULTURAL

ROHEE DASGUPTA

Culture has long been regarded as one of the most complicated concepts in the social sciences, possibly over theorised. Its vague senses of particularity and the almost universal recognition of that assumed particularity, place culture as one of the central global concept. Its ubiquity and tangled senses require an extended vocabulary for framing the politics embedded in it. As the name suggests *Cultural Practices, Political Possibilities* attempts to explain the political significance and overlaps of cultural constructions as witnessed in global-local clashes, convergences of texts and contexts, within the state and community, identity, the environment and the self. Since the rhetoric of culture is descriptively inadequate and politically reactionary, the volume aims to show how the sphere of the cultural can be read politically to construe versions of cultural politics as factionalizing, identitarian, situational and particularistic in their links, affirmations and consequential divides. Each contribution, in its unique way explores the performative asymmetries, contradictions and paradoxes in diverse cultural interactions that shape new areas of political investigation.

The volume stems from an interdisciplinary research seminar entitled *Possibilities of Cultural Politics* jointly organized by In-spire e-journal of politics, international relations and the environment (www.in-spire.org – presently renamed as In-spire journal of law, politics and societies) and Keele World Today Society in May 2006 at the Research Institute of Law, Politics and Justice, Keele University. The event was funded by C-Sap, the Higher Education Academy subject network for sociology, anthropology and politics, University of Birmingham. Most papers in the seminar analysed the power, properties, limits and possibilities of cultural politics situated within a range of case-study based contemporary discourses in-environment, in-practice, in-identity and in-conflict. In-spire seminars are transdisciplinary in their objective and its proceeding in print likewise

offers a varied narrative based on the many modes of practices in the contemporary politico-cultural spectrum. The contributors' link relevant thinking on culture and political analysis through respective case-studies or case-study based theoretical approaches consequentially harbouring a linguistic assortment of multinational geo-styles.

Initiated in 2001 by former postgraduates Steve Morris and Victoria Taylor in the School of Politics, International Relations and the Environment (SPIRE – restructured now as School of Politics, International Relations and Philosophy), the journal In-spire (www.in-spire.org) aims to create a borderless enterprise of scholarly research in the social sciences that interconnects critical global perspectives. In-spire eventually broadened its subject focus to include areas like Ethics, Law, Sociology and Criminology in 2007 and is presently based in the Research Institute of Law, Politics and Justice, Keele University.

The aim of the volume is to read cultures through political interventions in a bid to bring up the tensions and inextricably linked inconsistencies within contexts bounded in socio-histories and institutional strategies of needs and claims. More specifically the book evokes a critical understanding of cultural practices and their implications to facilitate insights about global politics. The sections in the book reflect a diversity of opinion, an integration of ideas whose work transcends academic disciplines, challenging conventional thinking about what is or might be appropriately attributed as political. In a disparate body of themes and approaches, a common thread that emerges in this collection is the conjuncture of political constructions through which cultural practices come into effect – the authors interpret the cultural as a complex metaphor and correlate the representation of the local life perceived in it against the multi-layered political negotiations of the global order.

When culture is taken as a tool of inquiry, it becomes relational. Cultural analysis has a lot to do with the construal of the ebb and flow of politics. Consequently cultural meaning gets reconstructed, renewed, through gaps and silences, even through strategies and forces creating a situation that becomes habitual, sometimes beyond the conscious control of society. This is precisely where the ethical struggle on accountability between the individual and the social, the global and local takes place. The collection of essays are an awareness of the same; they reflect on the political possibilities of cultural practices which besides expanding our vision for understanding the local-global discourses provide varied tools for

mediation in a differentiated cultural analysis giving rise to new form of articulation and engagement with society. For exploring the political possibilities of the cultural, we need to inevitably recognise the inclusive stakes of the politics involved in it; thus some of the authors critically reverse the scale to build this trajectory while examining vis-à-vis the cultural constructions of the political. The book sequences itself out in three sections – *practices of identity, culture, difference, conflict* and *cultural environments*.

Section I: Practices of Identity

Culture creates nominations, recognitions which in turn remake an irresolution of identity through the opposing struggles of racial positioning both from within and outside the community. The section on *practices of identity* reads the resilient prevalence of this transparent narrative as deeply problematic and explores the primary sources of ascribed identity it marginalises through intersections of gender, class, sexuality; the realities of multiple identities, spaces and allegiances. They present a political rhetoric on social ramification of identities in reductive visions of belonging, (dis)entitlement, reconstruction, equality and difference. The purpose here is to think through some idiosyncratic practices of identity, played out in territorial space, in the reconstruction and renewal of rights, through governance, legislation and politico-historical imagination to gauge the troubled ethical considerations of what it means to be different and how difference itself is constituted.

Lucinda J. Thompson interprets Jerusalem's identity politics manifested in its spatial practices. Through visual ethnography, she observes four 'snapshots' – the Knesset, Jerusalem's Central Bus Station, Mea She'arim and the World Pride event. With each, she critically assesses power relations within intra-communal struggles not just restricted to Israeli-Palestinian. Thompson gives an account of spaces and sites where identity is plugged out to challenge the situated frameworks and explains the competing "sense of place" or characteristic demarcations of territory created by different communities through a rage of factors like security practices, posters on walls, dress codes, sounds of church bells, or calls of the muezzin, each representative of an alternative interpretation of the city and the various types of claims to belonging of its parts at a set time and manner. The snapshots of the vibrant city for Thompson offer a 'competing interpretation of Jerusalem' and substantiate the challenge of the appropriated alternative (dis)entitlement to the spaces through the

perceived identity of the individual –often subjected to different reactions and approaches that re-distributes the narratives of belonging and ascriptions. Individual identity in Jerusalem's quarters Thompson observes 'can be both subjected to an identity imposed on their person and they can be agents in the imposition of their identity on the spaces of Jerusalem.'[1]

In her chapter, Jane H. Krishnadas examines the recognition of women's rights and their relationship with the processes of social reconstruction in the earthquake affected areas of the state of Maharashtra, India. Through a collation of diary observations and textual analysis of NGO, State Government and World Bank reports, Krishnadas analyses rights as the intersectional axis in the lives of the local women with the external reconstruction process, that changes their situations by raising consciousness through policies, programmes and legislation shaping a collective experience of rights-bearing. She shows how transnational agencies and policy relation between the global and the local is a multilayered cultural practice and analyses women's experiences in the reconstruction process to present a methodology for the political possibilities of transforming spheres of social relations. Krishnadas maps a three-dimensional intersectional methodology from 'grid to sphere' to suggest the importance of understanding the co-constitutive relationship between women's everyday cultural, material and spatial experiences in the reconstruction process to promote a multiple approach reflecting a pluralist alliance of identity towards reflections of agency, influencing the relocation of rights. Her narrative of women's organising advocate agency as a reiterative practice of social engagement through which gender and identity gets redistributed. The concept of transnational gets restructured from the global to local to reassert the local consciousness both in its public and private sphere reconstructing women's rights in 'multiple spheres of justice', transforming the politico-historical coordinates of recognition and mobility – through coalitionary politics of state policy, informal legal spheres, World Bank, non-government organisations and women's programmes on rehabilitation. But ultimately their cultural, material and spatial rights – an intersectional journey, gets recognised, revalued, relocated and 'discursively' transformed through a feminist rights strategy of 'mutual' reflection.

My chapter, also an ethnographic study focuses on contemporary Polish-Jews in Poland and engages with the practices of adopting multiple

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[1] Thompson Lucinda J., A sense of the city: four snapshots of Jerusalem, p.17.

identities which inevitably brings a shift in identity through a sense of hyphenated accountability referred in my chapter as Polish-Polish-Jews. I explore the idea through cosmopolitics, a concept in identity politics based on shared democratic, moral and contested cultural values amidst paradoxes of state transitions. What happens when the notions of the familiar other is adopted in the self? What conscious adjustments are made in terms of giving up ones previous self to renew *the other* in life? I argue that continuous variation of culture with its known divides while creating an in-depth awareness of history forms an autonomous transaction of identity which goes beyond the universal principle. The notion entails a change of knowledge and moral perception through volition and conscious reflection to recreate a positive discrimination with a redemptive vision for the future. However, this 'cosmopolitan' renewal of the existing contentious minoritarian identity is often seen as unauthentic and 'suffers' a continuous exclusion and inclusion, in and outside communities in Poland, in turn questioning its civil norms.

Marijana Sevo addresses the role of politics behind the construction of the notion of the other and reads it through the ethics of encounter. Sevo explains what constitutes the Roma identity as a different 'other' while questioning the concept of the authentic subaltern, examining Gayatri Spivak's discussion on the necessity of naming. She uses a wide-range of literature to substantiate the 'Roma problem' in Europe – an identity debate involving a double move of *alterity and difference* whereby the rejection of the Roma is unacceptable to modern citizenship, initially as an 'alienating strategy' but later succumbs to the political processes of integration and assimilation. The difference is yet again relegated as a subject of the law. While posing questions about the claims on human rights and associated notions of political responsibility of the Roma, Sevo takes two instances – when the Roma collided with the expectations of the modern ethical and political imagination in 1999 while fleeing Kosovo and the more recent influx of the Roma into EU nations. She discusses key theoretical approaches in particular the notion of Michael Shapiro's 'ethics of encounter' to legitimise how political possibilities of cultural representation is worked through a renegotiated knowledge of security discourse.

Section II: Culture, Difference, Conflict

Following the varied acknowledgement and recognition of social identity the next set of essays in *Culture, Difference, Conflict* focuses on the

maintenance of cultural privileges – freedom of speech, security, wealth in a world order increasingly under the threat of violence, economic interventions, conflict and war. Since the experiences do not bode well, the writers suggest a possibility of alternative difference in conflict towards cultural principles and cultural values of democracy in the sphere of state politics and global security studies.

Andreas Krebs astutely reads Omid Shabani's application of Habermas' theory of constitutional patriotism to Canada. Krebs evaluates and critiques Shabani's claim that the model of constitutional patriotism works well to preserve Canada's ethnic diversity. Constitutional patriotism supports the increasing difference of political organisation which weakens the spirit of nationalism, in so doing facilitates the formation of multi-ethnic Canadian polity paving the way for broader civic engagement including accommodating immigrants. Krebs' claim here is that in attempting to contain diversity by applying the theory of constitutional patriotism, both Habermas and Shabani fail to spot the fundamental 'problem' of *difference*. Krebs portends that if political theory is to succeed in providing relevant descriptions of and prescriptions for contemporary politics, precaution towards cultural diversity needs must be taken from the start rather than as a leaving it to be solved in the future.

Mohd Azizuddin asserts the need for the freedom of expression and explores theoretical debates concerning the liberty of political speech; how political speech merits constitutional protection and its differences from non-political speech in Malaysian politics. The discussion surrounds the questions on the regulation of free speech and the debate on 'Asian values' in Malaysia, drawn from the backdrop of stringent contesting ideas of the West, advocating the values of liberal democracy, and the East, representative of conservative tradition. Mohd Azizuddin explains that Southeast Asian states and Malaysia in particular have aggressively resisted human right to communication and "free speech" in the democracy discourse for the purposes of manipulating internal state security. He reads into the problematics of the state control over media, the state suppression of criticism from opposition parties, trade unions, NGOs and the restrictive state laws that reject to ratify the international laws on civil and political rights which ensure protection of fundamental right to speech as an impediment to sustaining democratic growth.

Monica Ingber thinks through the problem of political violence in Iraq which is much discussed on the grounds of the recent discourse on the

state. Taking Iraq as a site of investigation, Ingber explores the relationship between violence, complicity, and the state to consider the possibilities of alternative complicities so far accounted in recent literatures only in terms of accountability of the other states and their leaders, multinational corporations, economic sanctions, and/or interventions. Ingber suggests that the complicities hold politico-legal underpinnings which are formative and not particularly criminal; instead, they serve as state-building and nation-building practices that come to authorise violences to be carried out in name of the self-preservation of the state, but paradoxically also lead to violence against the state's own population. While reviewing the recent literature, Ingber speaks about the evidence of such cultural influences on strategic thought that offers potential for future advances of analysis both in security studies and politics.

Amalendu Misra argues from a liberal perspective to contribute to our understanding of the challenges in post-conflict reconstruction when the state for whose 'welfare' the effort is made becomes hostile to the security project. Taking the example of conflict resolution in Somalia, he looks at the nation's complex and transitional system of governance justifying the claim that 'a country or a society will have a lower probability of success if it is characterised by low level of trust, civil war, inter-ethnic or communal violence, breakdown of institutional order and lack of experience with liberal values.'[2] Reflecting on discourses of conflict, risk and rescue Misra identifies that the commitment of recovering a collapsed state and the accompanying anarchical society is a matter of equal liability between the external interveners and the indigenous actors. He attempts to trace whether any of the recommendations that are usually reserved for collapsed states on their road to recovery and reconstruction can be applied to the Somali nation caught in overlapping spheres of clan and ethnic divide.

Clare James traces the development of cultural relativist approaches in security studies and international relations from mid 1970s to the present. She examines and reviews strategic culture theory through the works of Snyder, Klein and Johnston and finally explores contemporary constructivist approaches to security. James recommends that adoption of clear definitions and empirical research strategies will facilitate to present culture as a significant factor influencing state's strategic behaviour as it

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[2] Misra Amalendu, Somalia and the liberal theory of post conflict reconstruction, p.178.

will inevitably render much standing to the plurality of the cultural, effectively challenging 'aculturalism' that continues to dominate security discourses.

Section III: Cultural Environments

The positioning of the cultural within the environment implicates a response to the 'progressive' functioning of the environmental networks/(con)texts with transnational concerns and the disparities in such interlinked processes affecting cultural diversity, resource sharing and human organization. The section raises questions about how cultural perceptions of environment can be read politically. The chapters discuss the concept of environment in relation to philosophy, political economy; policy making, governance and offer a rich line of enquiry to explore how global homogeny and hegemony while governing/exploiting natural resources overlook the cultural variable within it failing to provide a long-term solution for the created politics of difference.

While most chapters talk about a sense of positioning and a location of belonging Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos reverses and plays with rhetoric when discussing the space inside the environment to talk about an absence of manifestation and a manifestation of absence. He finds it difficult to provide *the environment* a definitional certainty not for its cultural relativism based on the inequities of the North and South but because of 'the tangible boundaries of ignorance that separate aesthetics from survival, preference from existence, quality of life from the plainness of being.'[3] For Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, cultural relativism is about a manifestation of an absence of a space from which an ontological argument about law, environment and prepositions arises. He looks at an absence which casts a shadow of an understanding of what the environment might be. Through this absence or space he takes seven etymological turns to probe into 'a law that has forgotten its environment, a system that has lost its shadow, and an environmental law that has never encountered its adjective.'[4] While attempting to bridge the distance between the inside and the outside, stability and mobility of cultural values, he suggests that environmental law constantly evolves around an unfamiliar source of information, cognition and questioning only to be transgressed by the very unpredictable nature, its object of protection.

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[3] Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos Andreas, In Environment of the Law p.218-219.
[4] Ibid, p.219.

Justice aims to fill the gap of this constant transgression, but only inconclusively.

Hannes R. Stephan gives an understanding of international environmental cooperation (IEC) as a realm of cultural politics and argues that the existing regime theory despite its liberal visions, versatility of thought and international coalitions has failed to accommodate the socio-cultural diversities of regional or domestic politics. He justifies his argument by examining the 2000 Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB) in the template of a wider system of economic governance. Analysing the theoretical perspectives on the IEC, Stephan provides a critique of the systemic culture-blindness of rationalist regime theories and their failure in recognising the divergence in policy-making. He points out how policies often delineate national sovereignty as an example of political differentiation to enforce the need for 'protective cooperation' against established patterns of governance, creating a political impasse in the process. Stephan incisively traces the normative sources of liberal political philosophy that emerges through the writings on the CPB to explore the images of world order that lie behind the drive towards the coherent cooperation of the CPB rendering its intent of 'benign global integration'[5] rather deceptive.

Chukwumerije Okereke writes about the cultural politics as witnessed in the environmental conflict of the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria a typical example of contradiction between the liberal project of global cultural homogenisation and resistances from particularistic forces seeking to preserve their unique social identity, cultural landscape and the environment. Through a broader cultural discourse, Okereke correlates African relationship with the West as well as the politics of state building in Africa, especially Nigeria. Focusing on the various intersections between culture and power politics in Nigeria he shows how these shape the nature of the Niger Delta crisis. Relating the case-study to the wider practice of globalisation and resistance within the context of Global Environmental Change (GEC), he argues that the elitist homogenisation policies of the federal government aided by the western governments and multinational oil companies are mostly responsible for the inattention to the cultural variables necessary in essentially solving the Niger Delta conflict.

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[5] Stephan Hannes R., Cultural context and international environmental cooperation: the Cartagena protocol, p.235.

Bülent Gökay reasons the advancements made in industry and technology over the last century and the whole success of world capitalist economy sustaining everyday lifestyles, made possible by cheap energy. He talks about the political economics of oil consumption and presents a caveat for us to think twice over the fallacious assumption that 'there will always be plenty of it.' Oil, a primary source for industrial growth and certainly not an infinite reserve, is soon reaching its productive peak which will follow a decline 2% to 3% on a yearly basis while the demands of its usage will continue to rise resulting in less energy available for everything. He provides statistical evidence of the major crisis about to hit our lives which will inevitably result in increasing our living costs from food production to industrial goods to health care. He comments on how governments due to power politics while networking energy resource sharing are deliberately not creating the awareness about the problems of peak oil.

Darrell Whitman envisions ecological practices as cultural politics conditioned by the systems of political economy that organise the production of food, shelter, and transportation. Historically, these systems of production have evolved through four primary stages, from basic hunter-gather systems, to subsistence agriculture, to feudally organised surplus agriculture, and then to industrial forms. Each of these systems of political economy develop human-human and human-nature relationships as a reflection of these systems of production, which then become the frame within which cultural forms of politics, such as ecological politics, take place. He argues that this leaves a hierarchy of politics that orders relationships according to their ability to serve or frustrate the purposes of particular political economies. Taking California as a site where the historical development of political economy produces a dominant form of industrial capitalism that now dominates much of the world, Whitman offers a cautionary tale about the limits of cultural and ecological politics in the presence of powerful ideological forms of political economy. A form that has reshaped the social and cultural anthropology of California over the last century and reduced the possibilities for cultural politics to those that can be materially commodified and economically instrumentalised only for market purposes.

All of the above are kaleidoscopes of cultural contemporaneity that designate ways of critically looking at the world where cultural practices ascribe and interpret signified meanings through which social and political actors' function, with an aim to create coherence between the

homogeneity-heterogeneity of the global-local.[6] And I shall conclude with the recognition of this possibility. The book holds likely cultural outcomes in different regions of global society which presents a reassessment of its politics and asks what we might deem to be most worthy of our attention. Of course the matter denies the possibility of any easy prognosis and accordingly none of the authors hold an easy answer. Scaling longstanding developments the claim is made that something radically new has happened only since the new situations or terms rose to prominence which calls for alternative political possibilities in (re)constructing and valorising the cultural. The compilation thus proposes (re)constituting cultural constructions of the political. While the local has to come to terms with the global, the global should also acknowledge the plural versions of the naturally contravening local to ensure an inclusive consideration of the semiotics and shared intelligibility of cultural practices.

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[6] Robertson, Roland "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity." in *Global Modernities*, Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (Eds). London: Sage Publications, 1995.pp.25-44.

SECTION I:

PRACTICES OF IDENTITY

CHAPTER ONE

A SENSE OF THE CITY:
FOUR SNAPSHOTS OF JERUSALEM

LUCINDA J. THOMPSON[1]

Jerusalem seems like the crossroads between Israeli and Palestinian political paths. Geographically, it is a dead-end, Amos Oz wrote that people never pass through Jerusalem on their travels elsewhere, but that they come to the city and stop.[2] If you stay in Jerusalem for long enough, however, neither of these characterisations seems appropriate. One influential group may territorially dominate the city, but its everyday life - on the streets, in the shops and cafes, on public transport, in religious spaces and recreational sites - is characterised by a range of different senses of Jerusalem as a particular city. As a city whose holiness is shared by three major religions, whose streets are divided between two ethnic groups, and which is visited annually by tourists from around the globe, it is subjected to a broad range of identities and affiliations.

To identify with Jerusalem is to invoke a set of practices, all of which culminate in the staking of a claim to the city in whole or in part. This argument does not only apply to the usual suspects of conflict in Jerusalem, the Israelis and the Palestinians, but to others such as ultra-Orthodox Jews, secular Israelis, gay Jerusalemites, religious figures, and even tourists. This phenomenon can be described as a range of competitions to interpret Jerusalem according to the assumptions and customs of particular identity groups, and a range of spatial practices which inscribe a 'sense of place,' the way people think about a place or their personal feelings for it, on the city, in part or in whole.

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[1] I wish to thank Professor Costas Constantinou for his critical reading and comments on the previous drafts of the chapter. Also, thankful to Zehra Aziz-Beyli for the helpful discussions and exchange of ideas.
[2] Amos Oz, *Under this Blazing Light: Essays*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 175.

Jerusalem can be interpreted in many ways; the Old City has four quarters, home to Muslims, Armenians, a range of Christians from several different denominations, and Israelis, both Jewish and secular. The rest of Jerusalem consists of East Jerusalem, mostly inhabited by Palestinians, and West Jerusalem, mostly inhabited by Israelis. West Jerusalem itself is fragmented, shared between religious and secular Israelis. Increasingly, East Jerusalem is fragmented between Palestinians and Israeli settler groups who procure properties, forming archipelagos of non-Palestinian neighbourhoods throughout the district. Daily society is characterised by several other categories, for example between members of the public and security personnel, between males and females and between tourists and Jerusalemites. Each of these groups encounters and interprets Jerusalem in different ways, challenging and being challenged by their encounters and inscribing their own interpretations on the spaces around them.

The chapter presents detailed snapshots of Jerusalem through the lens of some interpretive communities and the conflicts (sometimes compromises) between them in order to look at the phenomenon of a 'sense of place' within the context of urban conflict. Contrary to traditional approaches to conflict in Jerusalem, the cases do not focus on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the ethnic struggles between the two groups, rather it serves as a backdrop for other struggles which happen in the city. Analysis of the cases will suggest that 'senses of place' in Jerusalem are a significant part of relations of power and intra-communal struggles which are not restricted to Israeli-Palestinian relations.

The spaces described in these snapshots have been produced and maintained through different understandings of Jerusalem, and challenged and appropriated by alternative claims to the same spaces. This can be pinpointed in sites where there is a palpable 'sense of place' or characteristic demarcations of territory by different communities, which is in turn manifested in spatial practices.[3] The sense of place can be created by factors as diverse as security practices, posters on walls, dress codes, sounds of church bells, or calls of the muezzin, each of which speak of alternative interpretations of the city; of whose it is, who can claim parts of it at what time, and who can claim to speak for it. In a city as diverse as Jerusalem, however, there are competing senses of place in many areas, and the four sites I describe are characterised by struggles between

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[3] Erez Tzfadia, "Trapped Sense of Peripheral Place in Frontier Space," In Haim Yacobi (Ed.), *Constructing a Sense of Place: Architecture and the Zionist Discourse*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 121.

competing interpretations of Jerusalem. The Knesset, for example, is a site of contrasting discourses of sanctity which reveal a wider debate between religious and secular Israelis in Jerusalem. Jerusalem Central Bus Station is the culmination of a Jerusalem-wide security-identity framework, which reinforces certain categories of identity to promote security not only in the bus station but also in other parts of the city. Simultaneously, the bus station is also a case where security procedures have been breached and caricatured in relation to the thorny issue of disengagement from settlements in the Gaza Strip. Mea She'arim, Jerusalem's ultra-Orthodox Jewish district, is a site of unique identity, highlighting discourses and actions around an alternative political struggle in Jerusalem. Spatial regimes in this site impose conditions on individuals to which they must conform in order to be admitted entry. Finally, the locus of the World Pride event in Jerusalem exemplifies a struggle for Jerusalem in its entirety, between those who see it as a holy city which would be defiled by a parade celebrating homosexuality, and those who want to see Jerusalem in more diverse ways.

These cases have been researched by means of visual ethnography including the observation and personal experience of sites, supplemented by background research in order to present a critical analysis of each case. In particular they highlight that traditional holders of power are not the only agents influencing the interaction between environment and identity. Other parties of influence can be members of the public, religious figures, tourists and proponents of counter-cultures, all of whom are also involved in attempts to inscribe a particular sense of the city on their surroundings. Similarly, these cases shift the image of conflict in Jerusalem away from traditional sites of conflict such as the *Haram al-Sharif*/Temple Mount site to more obscure sites which reveal alternative aspects of Jerusalem's identity politics.

It is also worth bearing in mind that the interpretations of Jerusalem are fragmentary; the way the city feels to different people can be influenced by *who* someone is or *where* and *when* someone is in the city.[4] Thus in some sites there are different identities which would not be so obvious or

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[4] Akhil Gupta, James Ferguson, "Culture, Power, Place: Ethnography at the End of an Era," in Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (Eds.), *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology,* (London: Duke University Press, 1997), 13 and Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in Stuart Hall, David Held, Anthony McGrew, *Modernity and its Futures,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.280.

dominant in other sites, in other sites there may be competing identities, producing competing "senses of place." [5]

Finally, the perceived identity of an individual can also affect their reception in certain places. An individual can become subject to different reactions, approaches, authorizations (or lack of) based on their perceived identity, for example as Orthodox Jew, Muslim, priest, or soldier. Individuals are part of a dynamic of identity in Jerusalem whereby they can be both subjected to an identity imposed on their person and they can be agents in the imposition of their identity on the spaces of Jerusalem.

Snapshot 1: The Knesset. Photo Lucinda J. Thompson.

The Knesset stands out as one of the most striking buildings in Jerusalem. It is a flat-roofed, square structure lined by columns, sitting at the top of a hill overlooking western Jerusalem. In appearance it seems both modern and classical, bearing diminutive resemblance to the ancient

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[5] Erez Tzfadia, "Trapped Sense of Peripheral Place in Frontier Space," In Haim Yacobi (Ed.), *Constructing a Sense of Place: Architecture and the Zionist Discourse*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p.121.

Greek Parthenon, symbolic of both the democracy of the ancient city-state, and the religious connotations, symbolising the centrality of religion to Israeli affairs. When the Knesset complex at Giv'at Ram was completed, however, one of the first debates in the plenum concerned the naming of the building and its relation to ideas of sacred space. The Hebrew word *mishkan* was mooted, a term which meant dwelling place or building, but which had religious connotations in its biblical meaning of 'tabernacle.' In the course of the debate, religious members of the Knesset argued that a biblically based term should not be used in the context of the Knesset, a secular place in which the authority of God was ignored. One member even described the use of the term as a "distortion of holy values."[6] Eventually the term *mishkan* was approved, but today this debate has been revisited, subject to a *volte-face*, whereby some religious politicians now see the Knesset building as 'sacred.' A brief overview of the case and related dynamics highlights a range of disputes over the category of sacred space and the place of Jerusalem in religious and political narratives.

In 2006 a member of Knesset, Otniel Schneller, asked that a group of homosexual youths be denied entry,[7] arguing that it would turn the Knesset into a modern day "Sodom and Gomorrah." Schneller's request suggested that the presence of homosexual youths would profane the building, unilaterally designating the Knesset holy ground and declaring it off limits to whoever posed a threat to its sanctity through their behaviour, attitude, or even sexuality. The request was condemned by a member of Schneller's party (Kadima) as returning Israel to the "darkest periods of the Middle Ages." [8] Coming from a relatively moderate party like Kadima, Schneller's remarks might seem out of place, but he describes himself as very right wing,[9] implying that he would be naturally opposed to homosexuality. How had the Knesset eventually come to be seen as a

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[6] Knesset Record, Volume 46, p. 2518, August 31, 1966, cited by Susan Hattis Rolef, "The Knesset Building at Giv'at Ram: Planning and Construction," *Cathedra* July 2000, no. 6, Knesset web pages,
(http://www.knesset.gov.il/building/architecture/eng/article1_eng.htm 05/08/2007), n 25.
[7] "MK Schneller asks to ban gay youths from Knesset," *Jerusalem Post*, 22 June 2006,
(http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1150885825935&pagename=JPost%2
FJPArticle%2FShowFull, 5 August 2007).
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] Yossi Klein Halevi, "A Right-Wing Settler and the West Bank," *The New Republic*, 22 June 2006
(http://www.tnr.com/doc.mhtml?i=20060703&s=halevi070306, 29 September 2007)

sacred space, and in what sense, given the earlier response to its naming? The name 'Knesset' has its roots in the gathering of Jews in Jerusalem after their return from exile in Babylon. Under the leadership of Ezra, they met with the purpose of rebuilding the Jewish Temple, which had been destroyed when the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem. Thus, the name of the new government and its building had religious-national connotations associated with the re-establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

On the one hand, the perception of the Knesset as sacred space could be invoked by the religious symbolism in its interior design. The entrance to the main building, for example, is a set of bronze doors with traditional religious depictions of destruction and exile of the ancient Israelites, their subsequent ingathering and the redemption of the land, discourses couched in biblical tradition. The wall behind the Speaker's podium in the plenum, the main assembly, is an abstract, stone-cut mosaic relating a connection between the earthly Jerusalem and the spiritual, heavenly Jerusalem. The Chagall Hall, named after the artist whose works adorn the wall, is decorated with three large tapestries depicting biblical events, the relation between God and Israel, and the centrality of Jerusalem to the land of Israel. Thus, the Knesset interior is a constant reminder of the rich religious heritage of the state of Israel. While many Israelis may be secular in belief and practice, in cultural terms, their everyday life is frequently influenced by the tradition and heritage of Judaism. Rich symbolism in itself, however, does not make the Knesset building sacred.

On the other hand, as the seat of power, the Knesset can be interpreted as sacred space in a non-religious way, resembling Mircea Eliade's description of the sacred as "an encounter with power, fecundity and the source of life."[10] The sanctity of the building permeates through its association with the government of Israel, making it a shrine to political ideals such as democracy and freedom of speech, even when it seems to be dominated by secularism. Government buildings in other states can be seen in similar ways; Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. is one example.[11]

The significance of the Knesset in Jerusalem is also intensified by discourses reinforcing the holiness of the land of Israel, emphasising the

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[10] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, (Trans. Willard R. Task), (London: Harvest, Harcourt Inc., 1987), p. 24.
[11] See for example Jeffrey F. Meyer, *Myths in Stone: Religious Dimensions of Washington, D.C.*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)

centrality of Jerusalem, a Jewish holy city, as its capital. It is no small coincidence that the name of the Knesset has connotations with a legend about the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. In place of the religious Temple, the Knesset building serves as a sacrosanct institution of the modern state of Israel, a site where religious beliefs and customs can be superimposed onto the spaces as if they were traditional religious buildings.

This is not a monolithic perception of the Knesset. Neturei Karta, a Jerusalem based group, reject the establishment of the state of Israel, referring to the Knesset as a "House of Rebellion," and "the Knesset of the heretics".[12] Jews who support Neturei Karta do not even approach the Western Wall because they believe it has been polluted by secularism and the influence of Zionism. One wing of this group is extremely radical; its leader Rabbi Moshe Hirsch was Yasser Arafat's minister for Jewish Affairs,[13] and in recent years this faction has shown firm support for the policies of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.[14] This same group, like Schneller, view homosexuality as a profanity, but would make no distinction between the streets of Jerusalem and the interior of the Knesset in terms of banning homosexuals. To this group, the Knesset is another manifestation of an illegitimate, profane government. While the actions and beliefs of Neturei Karta are at an extreme end of the spectrum, other religious groups have shown similar behaviours in other sites, demonstrating that the Middle East conflict has repercussions on domestic politics in unconventional areas. This can be seen in the second case, Jerusalem's Central Bus Station.

Jerusalem Central Bus Station is a large, three-storey building situated in northwest Jerusalem, which opened in 2001. One of the reasons for commissioning a new station was to ensure that passengers entering and

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[12] Neturei Karta, "Recent Activities and Events: Protest of Israeli Elections January 28, 2003," Neturei Karta web pages
(http://www.nkusa.org/activities/demonstrations/012803elections.cfm, 26 September 2007).
[13] Neturei Karta, "Neturei Karta Rabbi Moshe Hirsch meets with President Yasser Arafat – 16 September 2003," Neturei Karta web pages
(http://www.nkusa.org/activities/recent/hirsch091603.cfm, 26 September 2007).
[14] This was condemned by the moderate wing of Neturei Karta in posters around Jerusalem neighbourhoods. "Neturei Karta," *Wikipedia* web pages
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neturei_Karta, 26 September 2007).