



Beirut's urban geopolitics from national independence to #Lebanonprotests

In this lecture I explore some of the intersections between geopolitics, conflict and urban space through different moments of urban (dis)order in Beirut from Lebanon's national independence through to the current protests. Critical approaches to sovereignty in political geography provide the contextual frame for showing how geopolitical discourses (scripts) around Lebanese sovereignty translate into the making and unmaking of specific urban spaces. Drawing on the idea of urban geopolitics, the lecture in turn highlights how Beirut's instances of spatial contestation are also embedded in specific international discourses around sovereignty and (dis)order. The moments considered in the lecture include aspects of the 1958 US intervention in Beirut, of the Two Years' War (1975-76), of the 2008 clashes and the 2019-2020 protests. An urban and grounded view of these different significant snapshots in Beirut's spatial politics allow to uproot assumptions about Lebanon as a weak state that tend to naturalise its instability as chronic or inevitable, and contextualise those assumptions within specific views and practices of sovereignty.

Readings

Introductory/theoretical readings

Barkan, Joshua. (2015). "Sovereignty." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Political Geography*, edited by John Agnew, Virginie Mamadouh, Anna Secor, and Jo Sharp. London: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

Graham, Stephen. (2004). "Postmortem City: Towards an Urban Geopolitics." *City* 8 (2): 165–96.

Readings on Beirut's spatial politics (historical and recent)

Bou Akar, H. (2018) *For the War Yet To Come* (Chapter 5: Planning Without Development) Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Fregonese, S. (2019) *War and The City. Urban Geopolitics in Lebanon*. London: IB Tauris.

Fregonese. (2012). "Beyond the 'Weak State': Hybrid Sovereignties in Beirut." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 30 (4): 655–74.

Optional reading on the current spatial politics

Fregonese, S. (2020) Elements of contestation. Sectarianism as extractive violence and Lebanon's revolution. *SEPAD report – Urban spaces and sectarian contestation*. Downloadable in PDF at <https://www.sepad.org.uk/report/urban-spaces-and-sectarian-contestation>