

***Book Review***  
**Divided Cities: Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar,  
and Nicosia**  
**By**  
**Jon Calame and Esther Charlesworth**

**Daina Cheyenne Harvey**  
College of the Holy Cross

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Our world is becoming increasingly urbanized. In the last couple of years we've reached the point where half of the world's population lives in cities or towns. What's more, that percentage is quickly increasing and much of it represents dramatic population shifts in the developing world where in addition to sectarian and ethnic divisions, there is also an increasingly sharp economic divide. Calame and Charlesworth's book is therefore quite timely.

In *Divided Cities* they look at the causes and consequences of urban partitioning in five cities. In this multi-case analysis they describe the history, the context, the size, porosity, and actors behind the partitioning of Belfast, Beirut, Jerusalem, Mostar, and Nicosia. These cities were chosen as illustrative cases of the circumstances surrounding the experiences of those who plan and live in physically divided cities in order to discover the patterns of partitioning in the hope that "future efforts to protect vulnerable communities [will be]...less burdensome than the barricade" (xi) (more on this later).

Their main finding is that physical partitions are often a self-fulfilling prophecy and that the long term effects, which can remain for years after the partitions are removed, far outweigh the short term benefits of dividing cities. As they note, most of these short term solutions become long term problems, exacerbating sectarian and ethnic strife, and generating problems that both differ from and outweigh the original social problems. In short, walls seem to offer a putative solution to discrimination and urban violence that begets more discrimination and violence.

They begin the book by placing the partitioning of cities in the larger realm of violence that takes place in cities (such as the marked rise in civilian deaths in war) and by noting the increasing physical segregation within cities. They note, however, that the physically partitioned city has a number of genealogical referents, such as the racial ghetto, redlined cities, and gated communities and spend most of chapter two looking at some of these antecedents. Here they show that urban life has typically been “walled” and that these walls have created disparate living conditions for those living on opposing sides. They then quickly go on to begin their five case studies.

In each chapter they provide a handy table to note the “basic facts” surrounding the partitioning of the respective city. The table and the chapters in general are immensely helpful not only for providing the particular background for each city’s division, but for demonstrating the overall patterns of partitioning. These snapshots provide evidence of the spatial patterns, historical developments, and the cognitive routines that give way to the demand for (or acceptance of) physical partitions. The chapters depict that while not inevitable the arrival of partitions does not entirely surprise residents. The authors show that time after time the partitions themselves becomes sites of urban violence and even after they are removed (if ever) their boundaries remain violent reminders of exclusion. As one of their interviewees says of “The Boulevard” in Mostar, “[f]irst, it was a physical war division line...and now...a border in a psychological sense. It is a psychological barrier; something which is always in one’s mind...each crossing of the Boulevard refreshes one’s memory” (117). And as one might imagine, the exposure to violence and the mnemonic effects of divisions are not equally distributed among the population. The poor and those with little prospects of upwards mobility are much more likely to be vulnerable to the ill effects of partitioning. In this way the authors demonstrate the partitioning is in its most simplest form another boundary making device used by those in power to exclude others from the benefits of urban life.

One of the interesting outcomes of these chapters is the degree to which divided cities are a result of larger neocolonial projects. While Belfast is most likely seen as the clearest example of this, and Jerusalem the best (though probably most easily forgotten by Westerners), Beirut, Nicosia, and Mostar were all to one degree or

another divided by or because of outsiders. Neighboring countries or pan-factions highlight ethnic or religious differences along historical fractures causing brief conflicts to escalate into everyday violence. One wonders what these divided cities would be without the longstanding socio-political antagonisms of others.

Chapter eight inverts historical notions of the implied meanings of walls--as a sign of a successful contract between residents and officials to provide security for residents--to mean a failure and a broken "urban contract". As noted earlier by the authors, partitioning typically exacerbates urban ills. Here they assert that at best divisions delay durable solutions. While they can provide short term relief to civil war or ethnic strife, in the long run partitions simply become a bad (and overused) policy mechanism; divided cities represent the cascading of urban problems. The authors poignantly note that spatial remedies are not adequate without accompanying social remedies.

Chapter nine represents responses to partitioning by practitioners of the built environment. Professionals are in a precarious position. "The divided city is a physical crisis nestled within a political crisis carried forward by a raft of social ills" (171). Most professional engagements with divided cities therefore results in accusations of partisanship and even being noncommittal can be interpreted is a sign of support for the division itself. The result has often been an urban stasis where the professional employs a *laissez faire* strategy to deal with the social problems underlying the divisions (as the authors note, no engagement = no complicity = no responsibility). When practitioners do engage the divided city it is primary through market solutions or symbolic attempts at restoring urban nostalgia, both of which are by definition exclusionary. To play an essential role in divided cities urban practitioners must realize the social needs on both sides of the partition. In an age of neoliberal policy, however, it might be naive to expect urban professionals to eschew the political and economic in favor of the social.

The final chapter looks at patterns of partitioning. Here again the authors note that partitions are not the exception to the urban rule, but in fact are increasingly more likely to pop up in a city near you. In brief, most physically segregated cities develop in the following ways: the merging of political and ethnic identity; the clustering of ethnically homogenous groups; an extension in the field

of political interactions; hardening and eventual concretizing of physical boundaries; consolidation; and, the social neutralization of partitioned areas. But as with the profile of divided cities that immediately follows, this sequence is heavily generalized and variations (or even contradictions) are under emphasized.

While the majority of the book is spent exploring the case studies, the social disruption of divided cities, especially how the disruption is experienced, is oddly absent. While they base their observations on five years (1998-2003) of ethnographic research and interviews, the number of interviews, approximately fifty-five, seems underwhelming for such a large comparative project. Most interviews are with other urban professionals and policymakers and not those affected most by the violence and disruption of urban partitioning, the citizens living near the partitions. Hence, the implications for human rights, suffering, health outcomes, cognitive effects, or the ecology of divided cities are left to others to explore. The author's themselves note the lack of "systematic research" (117) or "reliable studies" (139), the reliance "on speculation" (97), and the inability for the social and psychological impacts of partitioning to "be even roughly estimated" (60), but it seems that they were in an unique position to add to that body of evidence rather than simply ponder its absence.

Another critique I have is that while the social conditions that generated the partitions they examine differ, their similarities far outweigh their differences. They note that divided cities have many "cousins", but the readers is left with the impression that they spend too much time on one particular family member. I would have welcomed a few cases that looked at other types of divisions, such as where partitioning is accomplished through railroad tracks or other architectural devices (dead ends or freeways) or rivers or green space; cases where it seems to be less disruptive (i.e. Texarkana or Baarle-Hertog); or cases where the division is, for the most part, celebrated (Rome and Vatican City). Relatedly, they also often note the possibility of partitioning in US cities, but this seems unlikely given their five case studies. Ethnic divisions and disruptions persist in the US (and often accompany one another as seen in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina), but the possibility of a Cincinnati, Los Angeles, or Washington D.C., (all possibilities according to the authors) becoming physically divided seems to not only overlook they

ways they are already socially and mentally gated (do you need to physically divide a city where the habitus of residents is already divided?), but purports that there are many more sufficient conditions for partitioning that may have been ignored.

Furthermore, their goal of revealing the patterns of partitioning in hopes of reducing the likelihood of physical division in the future seems to be at odds with the “symptoms” of divided cities (7), which can be found, more or less, in all urban areas, and their main findings, particularly that partitions are often the product of outside forces (proxy wars initiated and orchestrated by agents whose interests extend beyond the municipal boundaries” (11-12)) and that while the partitions may be rooted in habitual, taken-for-granted physical divisions within the space of the city, the partitioning itself is often done by city planners or politicians with particular short term interests with, at times, questionable motives. The reader is thus left wondering if partitioning is inevitable are there better ways of partitioning cities or is this form of urban violence something we are simply stuck with. A larger question might be where to place the study of divided cities. Does it fall under the general purview of urban inequality or urban apartheid or a more particular project such as David Harvey’s “right to the city” or Stephen Graham’s “disrupted cities” or Loic Wacquant’s “urban outcasts”.

Their book, however, is as they note in the epilogue on the repartitioning of Jerusalem, a small step to figuring out the larger problem of divided cities and urban problems that weaken the urban contract. While they only want to outline the “broadest causes and circumstances of partition” (x), and while I am weary of castigating them for doing something other than what they intended to do, I wish they would have taken a couple of additional steps towards a more rigorous analysis of divided cities. Perhaps it is because they outline the problem of partitioning for the urban contract so well, that the reader wishes there was more. Overall, however, the book is a rich summary of these five cases and provides social scientists with a lot to think about (and hopefully to do something about as well).