ID 1638 | EVERYDAY NATIONALISM AND URBAN CULTURE – NORMALIZING NATIONALIST REPRESENTATIONS, DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES IN PUBLIC SPACE

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1 INTRODUCTION

Public space research has engaged in depth with progressive social and political movements which have appropriated and reframed public space as a political sphere and a space for local, lived democracy. However, urban public spaces have not only been the place of these progressive movements' protests and occupations in the face of crisis and austerity policies. I want to briefly sketch some of the different phenomena that show that public space has also become the place of anti-pluralist, xenophobic and nationalist protests: The Brexit-vote, a result of anti-immigrant sentiments and Euro-skipticism, brought increased xenophobic violence to public space. When the unleashed violence of terrorists has disconcerted public space yet again, the French government has extended the state of emergency curbing citizen's rights such as the right to assembly and protest. Another example of urban space being used for rightist and nationalist strategies is Turkey. After the failed coup in Turkey, thousands followed the call of Erdogan for a "Democracy Watch" in Taksim square, re-appropriating the symbol of the 2013 Gezi Park Protests against the government with national symbolism. In 2015 the rightist movement Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident (PEGIDA) came to a head with 10.000 citizens protesting in Dresden (Zeit.de).

These observations point to the relevance of urban public spaces in the operation of rightist political organisation. They postulate a closer look at urban public space as a central arena of the right's anti-pluralist, xenophobic and nationalist agenda. Furthermore, they expose the city a contested space of both progressive and rightist appropriations. The aim of this paper is to pay attention not to the overt protests and demonstrations but to expose everyday and popular nationalism in public space. It seeks to address the representations, discourses and practices that normalize nationalism in public space. The research therefore challenges the notion of rightist spaces as rural phenomena as well as it challenges the notion of urbanity at the heart of inclusive and cosmopolitan societies. Based on Bulut's (2006) definition of popular nationalism as "the exacerbation of nationalist feelings and the increased attachment to the idea of the nation in everyday representations, discourses and practices" (p.125) this paper points out the return of nationalisms to public space, drawing on the democracy watch protests and the popular festivities of the Austrian National Day. It aims to present first explorations of rightist appropriations and nationalism in public space to develop future research propositions.

2 EVERYDAY COSMOPOLITANISM

In the prevalent discourse on life in multicultural global cities, the mingling and mixing of diverse and different urban dwellers is often described as a huge potential to establish a cosmopolitan attitude. Many urban studies authors have underlined how the complexity and lived difference of urban life transforms us into cosmopolitan citizens, as we are confronted with various cultures, religions, ethnicities and lifestyles in our urban everyday life (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Caglar, 2002; Sandercock, 1998). To live our life in global cities we need to deal with this difference, and thus national or religious, essentialist notions of the city and its spaces are upset. Instead of building community and citizenship based on national, religious, or ethnic identity, the city becomes a possible contact point of shared identification across dividing lines (Caglar, 2002). These assumptions on urban societies' capacity of inclusion though have rarely been grounded with empirical research. As Müller (2011) points out, "academic interest has mostly focused on postulating an abstract ethics for an as yet unrealised cosmopolitan society" (p.2) instead of analysing the ordinary citizens' extant cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitanism is mostly explained in a normative approach, delineating a philosophy of world citizenship on the one hand, and a set of certain skills, attitudes and lifestyles, that constitute cosmopolitan subjects (Binnie et al., 2006). Still, there is a lack of empirical and more grounded work on cosmopolitanism, to substantiate the assumptions of urban life's potentiality of creating cosmopolitan attitudes. Defining cosmopolitanism as a social practice rather than the philosophy of world citizenship or a set of certain skills, attitudes and lifestyles, Müller (2011) found that an urban identity can supersede exclusionary national, religious or ethnic identity (p. 15). Still, "cosmopolitanism cannot be envisaged as an unproblematic transcendence of the everyday workings of power and national, ethnic and religious identities" (ibid. 16) but has to be viewed as an ongoing negotiation between existing identities, contact points and class structures. While Müller emphasizes the need for empirical work on urban cosmopolitanism, this paper aims to underline the need to discuss the existing identities, contact points and class structures as given in national, religious or ethnic belonging that have become visible in essentialist notions that seem to be just as prevalent as cosmopolitan attitudes in urban society.

Accounts of "Everyday Cosmopolitanism" (Bayat, 2003), "Everyday Multiculturalism" (Wise and Velayutham, 2009), or "Street-level Cosmopolitanism" (Radice, 2009) deal with citizens everyday practice of living together in multi-ethnic societies. In "Life as Politics" (2013) Asef Bayat formulated a practiced concept of cosmopolitanism: Everyday cosmopolitanism. Instead of ascribing the cosmopolitan idea(l) only to the educated world-citizen, in his research on the Middle East he discovers cosmopolitanism in the everyday life of the citizens who across ethnic or religious differences share a life and certain practices, living in peace. These concepts have aimed to fill the gap of theoretical literature of multiculturalism that a top- down approach has produced and offer a perspective that "explores how cultural diversity is experienced and negotiated on the ground in everyday situations" (Wise and Velatyutham, 2009, p. 2).

3 THE COSMOPOLITAN CITY IN CRISIS

Essentialist identification, and with this, essentialist notions of place counter the discourse on cosmopolitanism. These notions are based on the idea that nations represent homogeneous cultures where newcomers, like refugees, are out of place (Brun, 2001, p.17). As Stuart Hall points out, the modern character of nation states is not just a defined territory or political entity but producing meaning as a "system of cultural representation", in which "people are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the idea of the nation as represented in its national culture" (Hall, 1992, p.292). This discourse of national culture has always been imagined in relation and more so as opposed to an other. In recent years, with movements like PEGIDA or the political party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany cultural definitions of race have found their way into discourses about nationality and have unveiled that big parts of society reject immigration, and pointing to "a racism which avoids being recognized as such because it is able to line up 'race' with nationhood, patriotism and nationalism. (...) It constructs and defends an image of national culture – homogeneous in its whiteness yet precarious and perpetually vulnerable to attack from enemies within and without. (...) This is a racism that answers the social and political turbulence of crisis and crisis management by the recovery of national greatness in the imagination." (Gilroy cited in Hall, 1992, p.292)

Rightist and nationalist political organisation is still rarely analysed in its relation to public space. As nationalism has generally been depicted negatively in academic accounts, how can we understand the appeal of this construct? John Agnew (2013) deconstructs the critique of nationalism, as 1) nationalism does not simply appeal to an "imagined community", but it has created real and material communities of interest and identity through tying them to a state-organized territory; 2) Nationalism has, as opposed to liberalism and socialism, the mobilizing power through identifying an enemy against which the nation's territory needs to be defended; nationalism developed "in popular appeal alongside industrial capitalism and "modernization" in Europe" and can thus be expected to go in decline in the face of accelerated globalisation and international migration (Agnew, 2013, p.133). Whereas civic nationalism is framed around institutions and political principles, the Ethnic nationalism involves the exclusive identity of the people with the nation whereas civic nationalism involves the inclusive identity of the nation with the people. Thus, if ethnic nationalism is characterized by shared cultural loyalties, civic nationalism is all about shared political principles and institutions (ibid.,p.136). In contrast to the ideal of cosmopolitanism, nationalism relates community and identity to territory and space and therefore serves essentialist notions of space. Though concepts of everyday cosmopolitanism have tried to overcome its normative and elitist

bias, they have not achieved to answer questions of meaning and identity, where nationalism offers handy attachments.

Ebru Bulut (2006) defines populist and popular nationalism as “the exacerbation of nationalist feelings and the increased attachment to the idea of the nation in every-day representations, discourses, and practices which could be observed during the 1990s” (p.102). Based on Turkey’s social and political development she describes how we can understand increased nationalism through the social grammar it develops. This social grammar of popular nationalism is firstly present in pervading national symbols like the national flag or portraits of national leaders at home or in shops. Secondly, this nationalism acts as a form of problematization through which we can understand the world and attach meaning to it, determining categories and rules of discourse through which to think and speak and act (Bulut, 2006, p.129).

The current populist and rightist political backlashes in national politics in Europe and around the world stand in discrepancy to globalised economies and migration and the multicultural realities of cities today. These political backlashes, exposed by the Brexit vote and Trump’s election as President, have unsettled not just the national political classes, but upset members of the liberal middle classes and the metropolitan left. Despite their diverging political aspirations both neoliberal and leftist groups share their support of cosmopolitanism, which is violently rejected by the right. This research aims to help understand what Jeremy Gilbert (2017) has called the “crisis of cosmopolitanism” and its roots in and consequences for the metropolis. The differentiation between civic and ethnic nationalism as described by Agnew, as well as the account of popular nationalism offer valuable perspectives to analyse the celebrations of the national holiday in Austria and its contribution to what I have called everyday nationalism.

4 NORMALIZING NATIONALIST REPRESENTATIONS, DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES IN PUBLIC SPACE

4.1 FROM GEZI PARK TO “DEMOCRACY WATCH”

With the “Genie in a Bottle” Örs (2014) describes how the process of the Gezi protests in Istanbul in 2013 realized a reconceptualization of democracy in Turkey, especially through its spatial occupation (p.491). The public was upset with Erdogan’s project of destroying one of the few green spaces in Istanbul’s centre to rebuild the historical military barracks on Taksim square, a project evaluated as building on “anti-secular, islamist, neo-Ottoman ideologies” (Örs, 2014, p.494).

From a sit-in to hinder the destruction of the park the Gezi park demonstrations grew into a tent city, where LGBQT and feminist groups gathered next to Kurdish, religious groups and environmental activists and developed a community life where their various opinions and political ideas, that were otherwise not represented in the political parties in Turkey, could be expressed (Benhabib, 2013). The extremely violent clearing of Gezi park using water guns and tear gas ended the “Gezi utopia”, displaying the AKP’s and Erdogan’s government’s stance as being the only democratic body of relevance. The alternative political process of a pluralist democracy sharing values of cosmopolitanism, solidarity and peace represented a threat to the representative democracy in crisis and was thus attacked with full force (Örs, 2014, 497). As a consequence, the government banned all forms of gatherings or protests from Taksim square, paralyzing the once busy square.

The Gezi camp brought about many hopes for Turkish democracy: “Since Taksim Gezi protests erupted in May 2013, a new phase of democracy is starting to be defined in Turkey.” (ibid. 489) The aftermath of the failed military coup in Turkey on 15 July 2016 showed a yet unpredicted phase of turning democracy into autocracy: “Although the identity of the coup plotters remains unclear, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s subsequent crackdown on a wide range of his perceived opponents – including the detention of nearly one-third of the high command of the Turkish Armed Forces – could portend a period of sustained turmoil that would seriously strain Turkey’s international relations, exacerbate its already widening democratic deficit and inflict lasting damage on its social fabric.” (Stevenson, 2016) A few months later the fears about the crackdown seem to have come true, with a purge of all critics, throughout political parties, independent media, educational institutions and NGO’s under the state of emergency.

Coming back to the spatial aspects of this political crisis, the revaluation of public squares has been a central strategy of the coup's aftermath. While Erdogan already called for the people to go to the streets to protect their elected government while the military coup was ongoing, thousands of citizens followed the president's call for so called "democracy watches" once the coup had been averted. Over the course of the following nights thousands gathered to show their solidarity with the elected government. These protests were in contrast to the "Gezi Utopia" characterized by their national symbolism, with a blaze of Turkish flags and Erdogan and religious banners (Akyol, 2016). Taksim square was one of the biggest gathering places night after night, where citizens stated their belonging to the state and their support of democracy across party lines and ethnic groups. If "the crisis of democracy strolls in public spaces of the world, seeking an effective redefinition, an update of the concept, a way to bring the public back into the concept of democracy" (Örs, 2014, p. 490-491), Erdogan and his supporters have been successful at bringing the public back into a different concept of democracy. Thus it represents an effective redefinition of not democracy but autocratic state power, seeking legitimation in the streets by calling the people to show their solidarity with the nation and not with pluralistic, bottom-up democracy, as it was lived in the Gezi camp. The democracy watch on Taksim square revaluated the place that once stood for the Gezi protests against the government's radical urban redevelopment and speculation strategy, and then for the disproportionate police violence through which the protest was ended. After the repeated night watches, and images of red flags plastering the square, Taksim stands now for the unity and national identification of the Turkish people (at least those present at the demonstrations) while the purge of all difference is ongoing.

4.2 THE CELEBRATION OF AUSTRIA'S NATIONAL HOLIDAY IN VIENNA

Since 1965 Austria's National Holiday is celebrated on the 26th of October to commemorates Austria's declaration of unceasing neutrality and independence to foster peace in the world:

"Eingedenk der Tatsache, daß Österreich am 26.Oktober 1955 mit dem Bundesverfassungsgesetz BGBI. Nr. 211/1955 über die Neutralität Österreichs seinen Willen erklärt hat, für alle Zukunft und unter allen Umständen seine Unabhängigkeit zu wahren und sie mit allen zu Gebote stehenden Mitteln zu verteidigen, und in eben demselben Bundesverfassungsgesetz seine immerwährende Neutralität festgelegt hat, und in der Einsicht des damit bekundeten Willens, als dauernd neutraler Staat einen wertvollen Beitrag zum Frieden in der Welt leisten zu können, hat der Nationalrat beschlossen:

1. Der 26. Oktober ist der österreichische Nationalfeiertag.
2. Der österreichische Nationalfeiertag wird im ganzen Bundesgebiet festlich begangen." (Rechtisformationssystem Bundeskanzleramt ris.bka.gv.at)

Both the independence contract and the declaration of neutrality have been denominated at the heart of a positive Austrian national conscience, detached from nostalgic ideas about the former super power or a Pan German empire (Spann, N.D.). Besides a speech by the president, the national holiday is celebrated with an open house day in Vienna where people are invited to visit the central democratic institutions such as the seat of the chancellor or the parliament building, where the different elected parties present themselves. In 2016 the celebrations took place along the Ringstraße boulevard and Heldenplatz, where important historical state buildings, and political and cultural institutions are located, such as the parliament, the City Hall of Vienna, the historic building complex of the Hofburg (the seat of the Federal President), the Chancellor's office, Burgtheater and State Opera, the Museums of Natural and Art History, and the University of Vienna. Two prominent organisations shape the festivities in public space: The Österreichische Bundesheer (BH, the Austrian Armed Forces) and the K-Kreis (Katastrophenschutzorganisation, civil protection organisations), an association of 39 professional and voluntary organisations and divisions of the municipal authorities catering for what they call "security", e.g. wastewater and sewage, electricity and gas, public transportation, police and military police, but also social services. In what they called a "Informations- und Leistungsschau" (informational and performance show) the BH, the institution most prominent in the public spaces of the fair, present military vehicles and innovations, such as tanks, helicopters and trucks, special weapons, gear and even military dogs and the different divisions of the armed forces. Besides displaying the military force of the BH, another stated aim of the show is to recruit new soldiers in the face of illegal migration and the threat of terrorism. The banners of the BH underpin the message of a threat to security and the important role of the Armed Forces to increasingly protect it:

Mit Sicherheit. Auf unser Heer kommt's an. Gerade jetzt. (See fig.1)

Figure 1 - Banners of the BH at the celebrations of the Austrian National Day, October 26, 2017 (© Author)

The square in front of the town hall was used as a fair ground for the "Wiener Sicherheitsfest" (Vienna Festival of Security). As part of the show of the various organizations of the K-Kreis also the police and the military police presented themselves and their special operations vehicles with tear cannons. Again, the security aspect informed the naming of the event and the display of (para-)military machinery and personnel were the main aspects occupying public space. The violent character of these high-tech weapons and soldiers as actual protagonists of war and defense and the paramilitary armament of police seem unfit to be presented in a popular fair. And yet, the people coming to the show apparently enjoyed the day atmosphere, had food and drinks, bought balloons for their kids and took photos together with soldiers in gear holding their pump guns and posing on tanks. The BH and the police presented themselves as approachable and popular while stressing their importance as strong defenders of the country's and its citizens' safety in times of crisis. (see fig.2)

In light of the declaration of neutrality and independence that is celebrated on Austria's national holiday, such a strong presence of the military and the police and their performance show during the festivities seem a bit odd. Opening up the democratic institutions to interested visitors on the other hand celebrate what Agnew (2013) has termed civic nationalism (p.136) as it is dedicated to the democratic institutions (but not yet principles) of Austria. Still, the BH show and the "security festival" in central public spaces in Vienna address principles of populist and popular nationalism. They bring up threats of terrorism and illegal migration as topical issues they tackle and thus affirm the protection of a state-organized territory. Exactly the tying of communities of interest and identity to territory and the protection of that territory against enemy figures are described as appealing to popular nationalism (Agnew, 2013; Bulut, 2006). They, if very subtly, play in the hands of conservative and right-wing discourses on refuge, migration and terrorism, where increased border control and urban securitization are pursued. As Bulut (2006) points out for the case of nationalism in Turkey in the 1990s: "In order to understand the extension of nationalism as the social grammar, one has to consider mobilization not as an ensemble of specific actions but as a continuum which includes actions, sentiments, even silences (non-protestation). It is less a mobilization for action than a mobilization for consensus." (p. 129)

As internationally military parades are common events during national celebrations, we have not come to question them. The presentation of BH and police armament as a popular fun fair should be recognized though as normalizing discourses of urban warfare and threats of national security as part of rightist federal law as well as urban securitization.

Figure 2 - Military and police “performance show” at the Austrian National Holiday, October 26, 2017 (© Author)

5 REFLECTION – FRAMING A RESEARCH AGENDA

First explorations of nationalist appropriations of public spaces in Istanbul and in Vienna have shown the return of overt and subtle nationalist discourses and practices in cities. They have pointed out that public space is a relevant arena to establish, further and maintain nationalist politics and establish first relationships between national discourses on migration and terrorism and their effects on urban spaces. The democracy watch protests have brought citizens to the streets in national unity and in “defence of democracy” against the enemy identified as the coup plotters. We have furthermore observed the normalizing and trivializing military and para-military presence during the festivities of the national holiday, that has been shaped by the theme of security. The discourses shaping the exhibitions in public space were themed as “security” shows, where a more abstract enemy has been identified with illegal migrants and terrorists.

The urban studies discourse has engaged intensively with progressive movements and their relation to public space, furthering accounts of the cosmopolitan and inclusionary potential of cities. Radically exclusionary movements though still offer research opportunities in their relation to public space and I claim that it is crucial to understand rightist appropriations of space to mobilize people and propagate their agenda as crucial arenas we need to tackle. Though cautious not to promote rightist ideas, urban research needs to analyse rightist movements to raise awareness of the critical factor of space and body politics in establishing, continuing, and furthering ideologies that might threaten the democratic project. This research can also inform urban and spatial planning and its engagement with nationalism, localism and identity of place.

To achieve a broader understanding of the spectrum of rightist appropriations of public space, I want to develop a research project that looks at conservative and right-wing parties, movements and everyday practices in relation to urban space. The aim of such a study then is not to analyse intellectual trends, ideologies and social contexts of those groups in depth but to study their use of and relation to public space in establishing, continuing, and furthering anti-pluralist, xenophobic and nationalist ideologies.

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