



Critical Commentary: Bringing Nationalism into Global Urban Studies

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Abstract

This critical commentary investigates the resurgence of nationalist politics through a global urban studies lens, arguing that cities are critical arenas in which contemporary nationalist projects are enacted, negotiated, and contested. While scholarship on nationalism, geopolitics, and international relations remains largely state-centric, global urban studies has tended to treat cities as denationalised nodes embedded in transnational networks of global capital. Our intervention is situated within a broader global context of democratic backsliding and autocratisation, that have accelerated over the past two decades and are increasingly visible across both authoritarian regimes and constitutional democracies. These developments are closely tied to the rise of populism and ethno-religious nationalism, which have mobilised anxieties surrounding inequality, migration, ethnic and racial identity to advance exclusionary political agendas. We argue that cities function simultaneously as infrastructures of nationalist governance and as spaces of political resistance. Urban actors from municipal authorities to grassroots movements reproduce, adapt, and contest nationalist projects through everyday political practices. Attending to the situated and uneven ways these dynamics unfold reveals cities not merely as passive sites of national politics but as key arenas where the

boundaries of citizenship, migration, belonging, and state power are actively reconfigured.

Keywords: cities, nationalism, international relations, geopolitics, global urban studies

Introduction

This critical commentary interrogates the surge of nationalist political contestations worldwide through the lens of the urban. The urbanisation of nationalist conflict is not a new development and stretches back to ancient Rome, as both a City and Empire and Venice, as a 14th-Century City-State. Yet in this brief intervention we emphasise the last few decades intensified speed, scale, and visibility of these trends alongside a broader global rise in authoritarian politics. We reflect on the emergence, enactment, and endorsement of nationalist ideologies and their multiple interactions with the city scale, and consider how nationalist politics are being reshaped, adopted, negotiated, and challenged by a diverse set of local actors and institutions.

Drawing together insights from studies of nationalism, international relations, geopolitics and global urban studies, we reflect on these contestations and the broader entanglements between urban and national governing logics, situating them within the

longer history of state-city relations and their inherently ambivalent forms (Rossi 2018). We propose that these shifting tensions constitute a productive site of inquiry for scholars in global urban studies. While state-centric approaches still dominate the scholarship on nationalism, international relations and geopolitics, global urban studies has generally continued to bypass the nation state, treating the city as a denationalised node in a global network of capital flows. It is into this persistent schism that our commentary seeks to intervene, making the case that a more deliberate integration of insights from nationalism studies will help illuminate the complex intersections of local and national political projects underpinning increasingly shifting and contentious urban politics.

Democratic backsliding and autocratisation are rising global trends, reshaping the basis and character of legitimate state authority, not only in traditionally hierarchical regimes but also in constitutional democracies (V-DEM, 2025: 12). For the past few decades, different forms of populism and ethno-religious nationalisms have reemerged in a wide range of cities worldwide, recently captured in the term ‘urban populism’ (Cohen 2025). However, the implications of these developments for cities and their increasing geopolitical tensions with national politics remain underexplored (Yiftachel and Rokem, 2021).

The contemporary illiberal moment is shaped by multiple interacting forces and structural shifts rather than a single defining development. These include economic polarisation, climate uncertainty, forced migration, and widespread precarity, which intensify contestation between urban and national scales. Illiberalism is further normalised through digitally mediated disinformation, resurgent gendered power relations, exclusionary and violent forms of masculinity, and hybrid religious expressions beyond traditional institutions. Although these shifts are widespread, and taking place in diverse national and urban contexts, they share common features across different authoritarian geographical settings (Jones, 2026). This requires attending to the role of the situated context and the embedded flows of power attached to place, rather than approaching it as a planetary process (Luger, 2020: 1).

Cities have a long history of being sites of both contention and control. Urban political actors have exploited these tendencies in diverse ways, from reinforcing and deepening ethnic or racial exclusions (Agnew and Shin, 2020), to pursuing and promoting solidarity movements in search of a cosmopolitan urban citizenship (Brubaker, 2017; Weinstein, 2019, 2022). As cities remain sites of exclusion, where urban rights and resources are unevenly distributed by race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, caste, or political connections, they also serve as sites of alternative political projects where marginalised groups, including migrants and displaced populations, redefine civic belonging and citizenship within and beyond their localities (Blokland et

al., 2015). Manifesting through everyday urban practices and collective mobilisations, urban politics on both the right and the left are reinforcing and contesting nationalist state projects, juxtaposing national and urban power with implications that extend far beyond the scale of the city.

In this moment of global geopolitical rupture and displacements arising from climate crises, economic dislocation, political violence, and multiple armed conflicts, the project of drawing together insights from the scholarship on nationalism, international relations and geopolitics with global urban studies becomes increasingly urgent. In a growing number of countries, governments are waging war against their own cities and urban populations, utilising military technologies, strategies and personnel, allegedly to help stifle crime, 'restore civic order', or curb gang violence. Confronting the urgency and complexity of these challenges require a fuller set of analytical tools and a more integrated dialogue across traditionally siloed fields (Fawaz et al., 2025).

Contestations between local and national actors have spanned a continuum from powerful, autonomous metropolitan centres within democratic neoliberal states, such as London, Paris, Berlin, and New York, to major cities subordinated within hierarchical and authoritarian regimes, predominantly in the Middle East and parts of Asia and Africa (Koch, 2018). Across these varied configurations, urban space is operating simultaneously as both a site of state-imposed pressures and a locus of resistance

contesting aggressive identity politics and infusing urban geopolitical violence (Rokem and Boano, 2023).

We begin by introducing nationalism into the field of global urban studies, providing a brief overview of the conceptual and empirical contributions of each field, and diagnosing the unproductive schism that exists between them. Next, we demonstrate why urban studies needs to engage in more depth with processes on the national scale and reinsert understandings of national authority, institutions, and democratic legitimacy into analyses of cities in a global context (Gordon and Ljungkvist, 2021). We further develop this argument through a brief review of various urban mobilisations that have opposed or responded to nationalist movements. Brief examples of city-state tensions from India, Turkey, and Ukraine serve as illustrative cases and possible launching pads for further inquiries. While the disciplinary and scalar schisms discussed in this brief commentary undermine productive inquiries in a range of fields, our focus in this commentary is on the global urban studies readership of this journal, proposing a deeper integration of analyses of nationalism, international relations, and geopolitics into our study of cities.

Nationalism, International Relations, Geopolitics and Global Urban Studies

Both global urban studies and the scholarship on nationalism, international relations and

geopolitics have tended to overlook how national and urban dynamics are co-constitutive. Nationalism can be understood as a political project aimed at exercising sovereign control over a defined territory and its population (Hobsbawm, 1992), which has taken several forms, including liberal, (multi)cultural, ethnic, and civic.

Foundational scholarship that predominantly emerged from political, historical, sociological, and cultural perspectives conceptualises the nation as a historically imagined, territorially bounded, and culturally uniform entity (Anderson, 1983).

Treating the nation state as its primary unit of analysis (Waltz, 1979; Hobsbawm, 1992; Ó Tuathail 1996), has meant this extensive body of work paid limited attention to the urban scale, often neglecting the ways in which cities mediate, reinforce, or challenge nationalist ideologies (Koch and Paasi, 2016).

Conversely, in pushing back against a longstanding methodological nationalism, global urban studies, since the 1990s, has focused attention on the deterritorialisation of national power and its reterritorialisation on both supranational and subnational scales, including cities and regions (Friedmann, 1986; Sassen, 1991; Castells, 2002; Brenner 2004). Since the early 2000s, it has systematically disengaged from nation-state analysis, relegating international relations scholarship to sparse theoretical interventions offering limited accounts of the existence of cities in a national, as well as global political system (Acuto, 2013: 6).

This gap is striking, as state nationalism, which emerged in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, was itself a political strategy to strengthen territorial control, cultivate loyal citizenries, stimulate economic development, enhance military capacity, and more recently, promote political stability through the global diffusion of the nation-state model (Taylor, 1994). Since the rise of modern nationalism, cities have played a central role in nation-building projects, particularly through urban design, planning, and architectural practices (Therborn, 2015). Such interventions were integral to modern nationalism's key objective of producing cultural homogeneity through alignment of state and society (Gellner, 1983).

Cities have historically been central in shaping national and global politics and sites where national power and nationalist ideologies are negotiated, contested, transformed, and adopted. Particularly in its ethnic, racial, and religious/sectarian variants, they are similarly marked by authoritarian identity politics, populist economic discourses, and a pronounced antagonism toward pluralism, diversity, and supranational cooperation. Simultaneously, cities can act as key arenas within which inhabitants nurture a particular collective character that is simultaneously cosmopolitan and place-based (Shaham-Maymon et. al., 2025) and diverge from national identities (Brenner and Miodownik, 2025). Global cities in particular offer key sites for meaningful climate action (Castán Broto et.al., 2025), immigration governance (Thouez, 2020), and peacebuilding (Elfverson et. al., 2023).

One prominent example is Brexit and mobilisation of a wider anti-EU sentiment as a hallmark of European nationalist extreme right movements, drawing on nostalgic imaginaries of a culturally homogenous past and opposition to immigration and diversity. These reemergent forms of nationalism project right-wing populist, racialised, and often religiously inflected visions of both the city and the nation (Agnew and Shin, 2020). Such dynamics produce mounting tensions with major urban centres that embody multiculturalism and liberalism (Avni, 2025).

Recent scholarship has identified these mutual blind spots between nationalism and urban studies, highlighting how cities both shape and are shaped by nationalist ideologies (Antonsich, 2018; Brenner and Miodownik, 2025). These contributions map the shifting linkages and entanglements between nationalism, international relations and geopolitics with the shifting political geographies of cities. Others have underscored the role of cities as counter-narrative spaces and sites of resistance that challenge the state's monopoly over identity and belonging (Nyers, 2011).

An important illustration of these dynamics emerged in the early 2010s during the so-called 'Arab Spring'. Igniting in Tunisia, it rapidly evolved into a wave of anti-government, pro-democracy uprisings and armed rebellions that spread across major Middle Eastern and North African cities, including Tripoli, Cairo, Damascus, Manama, and Baghdad. Mobilisations, led primarily by disenfranchised urban youth, redefined the political potential of social media as a tool for contesting entrenched authoritarian

regimes (Allegra et al., 2013). In Tunisia and Egypt, and later Syria, mass mobilisation toppled governments and prompted regime change. The Arab Spring demonstrates how urban arenas can become focal points for contesting the nationalist project, transforming cities from instruments subjected to state power into crucibles of resistance and democratic ambition (Ross and Koch, 2022). While cities are often understood as sites of individual freedom, citizenship, and diversity, recent scholarship highlights how the contemporary nationalist turn has intensified ethno-religious and racial divisions and violence across different geopolitical scales (Rokem and Boano 2023). This dynamic is evident in the escalation of violence against immigrants and racially minoritised groups in major U.S. cities and the Trump administration's deployment of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to detain and deport migrants in urban areas, provoking clashes over legitimate authority. Such interventions produced deadly confrontations and mass protests in cities such as LA and Minneapolis, turning immigration enforcement into a testing ground for competing claims to political authority (Nicholls 2026).

Across different political regimes, urban space has likewise re-emerged as a central terrain of struggle, as seen in Iran, where mass protests in Tehran and other major cities mobilised younger, more secular and urban residents to challenge the Islamic Republic's social and political order. The regime's violent repression of these mobilisations illustrates how urban politics can rapidly shift and simultaneously

incubate dissent while serving as key sites where states deploy coercive power to reassert control (Bayat, 2013), often with wider geopolitical consequences extending far beyond the local and national context.

These insights underscore the need for scholarship on cities at a global scale to engage with questions of national authority, institutions, democratic legitimacy, citizenship and nationalist ideologies. Bridging the divide between nationalism and urban studies has never been more urgent in a rapidly changing global urban present, as it promises richer analyses of political power and contestations over state authority. More interdisciplinary, decolonial and inter-scalar analyses in global urban studies can help deepen understandings of ascendant forms of nationalist authoritarianism and incursions of national-level power into cities and against minoritised urban populations.

Global Networks of Nationalism and Urbanism

Seminal North-Western scholarship on global cities (Friedmann, 1986; Sassen, 1991) conceptualised urban centres as partially deterritorialised nodes of capital accumulation, migration flows, and cultural exchange operating within global capitalist networks (Castells, 2002), with minimal attention devoted to the national scale. Rejecting the methodological nationalism that had long dominated understandings of state power, international migration, and industrial regulation. In the early 1990s, critical geographers and urban sociologists began to reconceptualise the spatial organisation of

political and economic authority. They emphasised the growing economic influence of major metropolitan regions and the ways in which these regions were becoming politically ‘disembedded’ from their national contexts and the exclusive authority of the state (Agnew, 2017). Sassen’s conceptualisation of the global city centred its ‘de-territorialisation’ from traditional state and regional hierarchies (Sassen, 1991). These developments have generated productive analyses of complex configurations between city and state, contributing to what Brenner and Schmid (2014), drawing from Lefebvre (1991), describe as processes of ‘planetary urbanisation’. Yet such planetary perspectives can overlook the relevance of national and regional sites of power, and the political influence of deindustrialised or rural places increasingly destabilised by resurgent geopolitical competition and populist nationalism.

Meanwhile, reactionary or authoritarian politics, increasingly characterised as illiberal, are infiltrating municipal governance (Laruelle, 2022). Yet the analysis of nationalism still focuses excessively on national manifestations, such as the rise of right-wing populism and the rejection of liberal norms such as diversity and inclusion. Predominantly neglecting the urban scale, this misses the structural and often local mechanisms through which authoritarianism is operationalised and enacted, including global real estate markets and seemingly inclusive urban policies entangled in shifting illiberal and populist urban agendas (Cohen 2025).

Luger and Dürr (2025: 3-4) see illiberalism as constituting a planetary urban condition, restructuring urban life across diverse regional and national contexts. Yet they warn that these framings risk reproducing analytical blind spots if they fail to engage with nationalism and the nation-state as enduring political forces shaping illiberal geopolitics across global, national, and urban scales. This is manifested, on the one hand, in resurgent nationalism that advances the supremacy of particular racial, religious, and territorial identities, and, on the other, in a vigorous countermovement from working-class, migrant, and ethnic, religious, racially or politically minoritised groups living in cities, challenging the exclusive sovereignty of the nation state (Davis and De Duren, 2011).

Despite this analytic distance, studies organised around a few key themes have helped transcend this unproductive schism and disciplinary siloing. First, the divided/contested cities literature has centred nationalist, ethnic, religious, and regional conflicts at the urban scale (Anderson, 2019). Second, more recent urban geopolitics literature has integrated understandings of nationalism in a range of urban conflicts, from ‘ordinary urban geopolitics’ (Rokem et al., 2017) to extreme manifestations of urbicide (Mezentsev and Mezentsev, 2022). Yet both approaches have tended to position cities as either geopolitical victims of broader regional and national conflicts or as instruments through which nationalist agendas are implemented (e.g., Yardımcı, 2020, 2022).

Some cities are adopting more pluralistic approaches that directly challenge nationalist homogeneity (Magnusson, 2011). Such cities are analysed as sites of resistance, where marginalised communities access relative sanctuary through more inclusive urban governance structures (Uitermark, et al. 2012). Significantly, sanctuary cities, where officials engage in service delivery and enact protective policies without regard to residents' immigration status, have transitioned from exceptional cases to normative practice (Nicholls and de Wilde, 2023). In polarised contexts where the interests of national or regional governments oppose these policies, conflicting legal and policy trajectories have arisen, constituting fledgling or contested urban sovereignty (Davis and De Duren, 2011; Barber, 2017) or the enactment of urban foreign policy (Hobbs, 1994: 18; see also Curtis and Acuto, 2018).

At the same time, increasing challenges to the monopoly of nation states over foreign affairs and international relations have come from the rise of global city networks as emergent infrastructures of global governance (Acuto and Leffel, 2021). These networks embody forms of urban diplomacy that operate across borders and institutional hierarchies (Curtis and Acuto, 2018). Yet, when situated within contemporary debates on populism and nationalism, they also reveal deeper political tensions. As nationalist movements seek to reassert the primacy of the nation-state in defining sovereignty and belonging (Agnew, 2017; Yuval-Davis et al., 2019), city

networks represent post-national collaborations that challenge these bounded territorial imaginaries.

Additionally, cross-city networks of civil society organisations are fostering cooperation and policy exchange and are increasingly clashing with national agendas rooted in ethno-racial exclusion and anti-globalism. While these movements are facilitating pragmatic governance and may fail in establishing actionable inclusivity (Kuge, 2020), they nonetheless show that cities provide potential counterforce with competing and contrasting visions to nationalist retrenchment. In this sense, urban internationalism positions cities as active agents in the reconfiguration of global politics. However, as Brenner (2004) and Jessop (2016) have argued, these processes also risk exposing and exacerbating tensions between urban autonomy and centralised state authority. These frictions have become increasingly pronounced amid the tightening of border controls and the proliferation of advanced surveillance technologies that are intensifying the competing logics underlying local and national power and democracy.

Cities and Multiple Nationalisms

Next, we elaborate how these processes manifest in three selected cases that reflect some of the authors' own research expertise. They are not used because they are the only suitable examples, but for being part of a larger global nationalist turn and its relationship with the urban. In selecting the cases we follow Robinson's (2016: 643)

assertion that “we can theorize from anywhere”. We discuss how localised mobilisations, spanning diverse regional contexts from Turkey, where there is an intensifying sense of urban rage (Dikeç, 2018), and India, where devolved governance structures and new political movements grounded in urban protest, are posing a direct challenge to oppressive national governments, deepening economic inequalities, and anti-democratic agendas. We also focus on the case of Ukraine, where municipal governments act as mediators between nationwide nationalist discourses and local anti-nationalisms (often expressed as stark regionalisms), channelling the energy of local pride into the ‘good’ nationalism needed to fight an external aggressor. Either way, the intervention of cities moderates the adverse impacts of nationalist policies stemming from central governments.

Mobilised groups, often backed by informal governing regimes, are providing a powerful counterforce to repressive nationalist movements, with implications for power on the national scale. As they challenge the exclusive authority of nationalist governments and extreme right- and left-wing political parties, the responses they are eliciting increasingly entail spectacles of military force and technologies and weaponry designed for use against external enemies.

Turkey provides a stark example of deepening tensions between urban and national visions of the political community. Since the mid-2000s, the AKP’s governance has become increasingly authoritarian, marked by right-wing populism

(Yenigün and Eraydın, 2019: 273) that polarises society along moral, cultural, and political lines. These dynamics peaked in 2019, when the opposition captured key metropolitan municipalities, most notably Istanbul. The victory was framed as a democratic rupture: the newly elected mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, declared that “the decline of democracy ends now”, presenting Istanbul as a beacon of hope and a testament to democratic resilience in the face of rising authoritarianism (McLean et al., 2024).

Claiming to serve as ‘Mayor for everyone’, İmamoğlu adopted an inclusive discourse grounded in ‘radical love’ (Wuthrich and Ingleby, 2020). To counter centralised control and funding blockages, he expanded locally financed social assistance programmes and prioritised public support by using digital platforms, e.g., livestreamed council meetings. While doing so, he promoted a broad conception of ‘the people’ that embraces Istanbul’s ethno-sectarian diversity without explicitly foregrounding difference (Deets, 2024: 897-898). At the same time, he adopted a firm rhetoric centred on repatriating refugees, framing national immigration policies as an unfair burden on ‘Istanbulites’, and calling for municipalities to take charge (Iz Gazete, 2024). He constructed an alternative ‘community of value’ (Anderson, 2013), through diverting the nationalist sentiments toward the ‘non-citizens’ and claiming a metropolitan unity grounded in transparency.

His cosmopolitan counter-imaginary of the political community gained national traction as evident in protests across 55 of Turkey's 81 provinces after İmamoğlu's arrest on alleged corruption charges. The scale of public response underscores not only the widespread discontent with democratic backsliding but also the capacity of urban nationalisms to produce alternative 'imagined communities', pragmatically reworking the polarising logics of state-level nationalism.

More recently, the politics of so-called bulldozer justice, underway in Delhi and other parts of North India since 2020, have laid bare the intersection of urban governance and exclusionary nationalism. State governments, particularly those led by the Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), have employed extrajudicial demolitions to target informal settlements, disproportionately impacting Muslim residents accused of criminal activity or political dissent. These demolitions, framed as efforts to remove 'illegal encroachments', have functioned as collective punishment and public displays of state power, accelerating the marginalisation of minoritised groups. In response, activists have challenged these actions in the courts, with the Indian Supreme Court issuing a judgment in November 2024, condemning bulldozer justice as unconstitutional, rebuking state authorities for bypassing judicial process, and establishing guidelines designed to halt arbitrary state-led evictions. This ongoing contestation demonstrates the potency of cities as arenas of both state coercion and legal

resistance, foregrounding the critical role of urban space in contemporary nationalist politics.

Against this backdrop, Delhi's political landscape has been transformed by the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), emerging from street-level activism and mobilized by widespread frustration with government corruption. The creation of Delhi's Legislative Assembly in 1991 opened new arenas for urban contestation for national projects, as residents rallied around demands for cleaner and more accountable governance. While AAP's service- and welfare-oriented agenda has avoided confronting Hindu nationalism head-on, its experiments with service delivery, education, and neighbourhood-based public health initiatives nonetheless demonstrate how urban struggles over everyday state provision can recalibrate expectations of what the state owes its citizens, even within a national landscape dominated by the BJP's exclusionary nationalism (Hall 2021).

Ukraine is a unique example, fighting for its future national survival against the Russian full-scale invasion since 2022. Both nationalisms and anti-nationalism have an urban base, but their relative presence and importance vary across the country, going against some of the urban geopolitical trends depicted in other cities such as, Istanbul, and Mumbai, embedded in national contexts not marked by armed conflict. In Ukraine, as one moves from west to east, ethnic nationalism gradually gives place to civic nationalism, but also to weaker identification with the nation state, voire anti-

nationalism. Eastern Ukrainian cities, such as Mariupol and Donetsk, for their part, have a long history of acting as bastions of anti-nationalist (and, to a lesser extent, anti-nation-state) politics—mostly when the nationalism is specifically Ukrainian (Gentile, 2020). Thus, unlike elsewhere in Western, Central, and Eastern Europe, where liberal-minded large cities challenge nationwide politics driven by the non-metropolitan electorate, the political fault lines in Ukraine run between the elites of major cities, epitomised by the Lviv–Donetsk dichotomy, an artificially constructed mutual demonisation fanned by political technologists and Russian propaganda (Homanyuk and Ashutosh, 2024).

Cities are where most Ukrainians encounter the language of wartime nation-building, albeit spoken in different dialects. The municipal authorities across the country have mobilised local and regional symbolic resources toward the shared goal of victory, producing ubiquitous patriotic posters with messages tailored according to the socio-political traits of local communities and to the way the city has suffered during the war.

In Kyiv, the nation's capital, as well as in Lviv and Dnipro, the scale of the messages is undoubtedly national: 'Glory to Ukraine', 'We will be victorious', and so on. In Kharkiv, on the other hand, the emphasis is local: 'We are united - we are Kharkivites', 'I am proud to be a Kharkivite', 'Kharkiv lives and works', 'Kharkiv is a hero city'. Zaporizhzhia, while sharing many cultural similarities with Kharkiv,

emphasises its unique position as an important historical Cossack capital: on the city's main square, the public is reminded that Zaporizhzhia is the cradle of Ukrainian statehood. In the eastern regions of the country, it would seem, the city has become an important mediator and mitigator, rather than critic, of nationalist discourses originating further west. In this role, it uses local ideological ammunition to help reorient the hearts and minds of citizens towards a future with, rather than in opposition to, Kyiv, and against Russia, an enemy belatedly discovered.

To fully comprehend these diverse manifestations of 'ordinary urban geopolitics' (Rokem 2018), it is essential to understand how cities are being reshaped by, and are subsequently transforming, the trajectories of broader nationalist projects. As examples from Turkey, India and Ukraine demonstrate, both contestation and collaboration between national and local sites of power are altering the character of local and national citizenship and belonging, while also showcasing the role that cities play in resisting, negotiating, and sometimes supporting projects of exclusionary nationalism.

Final word: the nation in the city and the city in the nation

Increasingly fierce contestations between national authorities and local actors, exacerbated by economic polarisation, climate uncertainties, widespread precarity, digital mediation of far-right ideas, media disinformation and armed conflict, require

that we as urban scholars sharpen our analytic lenses and draw upon a wider set of theoretical and conceptual tools, including those associated with the international relations, geopolitics, and nationalism studies. Enhanced analyses of these shifting phenomena require drawing on insights that have so far remained tangential to global urban studies, including those associated with ethnic and civic nationalisms, state sovereignty and illiberalism.

Further empirical research conducted in contested urban spaces and drawn from unlikely comparative cases will deepen understandings of these politics, provided that it is underpinned by a mobilisation of cities against the nationalist drift. This means more than organising workshops and conferences devoted to the theme. Instead, it is essential that we [urban scholars] enter public debate to a far greater extent and place more emphasis on establishing a global network of academics facilitating urban peacebuilding in times of divisive national politics. This is a call to establish collaborative networks across sectors to generate political change beyond academia.

Bridging this divide will require that we move beyond typically siloed frameworks to develop interdisciplinary and inter-scalar approaches to examine how struggles over identity, authority, and belonging are unfolding within and between cities and nation states. By incorporating insights developed by scholars concerned more with national-level dynamics and international relations, global urban studies can help illuminate how cities, as sites of political change, moving between illiberal trends and

democratic possibility, are operating as arenas for negotiating non-local or not-only-local nationalist political projects. These perspectives invite us to revisit the categorisations with which we decipher cities and nationalism and examine how they relate to the challenges of the global present. Hence, scholars and students of the reemerging geographies of nationalism and urbanism may be wise not only to ask, ‘What is a nation?’ (Renan, 1882/1996), or ‘What is a city?’ (Simmel, 1903/1950) but ‘what is the nation in the city?’ and ‘what is the city in the nation?’.

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