

## CHAPTER 14

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# SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN URBAN POLITICS: TRENDS IN RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Mobilization around urban conflicts and their efforts to influence urban politics have a long history. As urbanization advanced, cities became increasingly viewed as sites where social struggles and emancipatory politics were concentrated. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, First World cities were sites of politically mobilized working classes and harbored vibrant proletarian public spheres. Since the post-World War II period, they have become sites of struggles around collective consumption, particularly in the 1960s when contestations over public infrastructures and public space were perceived by ruling classes across the advanced Western countries as unrest threatening broader catalytic effects. While cities in the global North seem to have lost this potential of radiating transformative change into society at large, social movements of various kinds still mobilize and intervene in local politics, and cities in the global South have become sites of new forms of resistance which, however, in many ways defy the explanatory frameworks provided by prevalent movement theories. Globalization and global urbanization have deeply affected the transnational division of labor, and thus the class composition of cities worldwide, spawning significant reconfigurations within both practice and theories of social movements in urban settings.

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This chapter traces first, the genealogy of urban movements and second, of the theories and methodologies developed to explain their dynamics primarily in European and North American settings, where different legacies have generated different “schools” of analysis. Their respective strengths and weaknesses are then evaluated against the emergence and increasingly salient role of “glocal” movements influenced by transnational antiglobalization activism, as well as against the novel forms of urban micro- and infra-politics<sup>1</sup> (which may be read as manifesting an impact of urbanity on forms of political action) with the potential of reaching a global scale because of the scope and interdependencies of the current historical period. Finally, and on the basis of our reading of the deficits and lacunae of current urban research and action, we suggest some lines for a future research agenda.

## 2. TRACING THE GENEALOGY OF “URBAN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS”

Even though urban social movements have a long history, they have not explicitly been identified in social science literatures until the 1960s. The term “urban social movement” was first introduced in studies by Manuel Castells and other French researchers in order to challenge a view then prevalent in urban sociology, which saw social problems and spatial structures primarily from the perspective of social integration. In contrast to this sociological view, and inspired by the widespread struggles over housing policies, urban renewal, and squatting, which these researchers were observing at the time, they developed a concept of urban conflicts as structured by struggles over (political) power. They saw urban movements as not only articulating the structural contradictions of late-capitalist societies, but also as capable of bringing about, together with labor unions and political parties, fundamental change in politics and society (Castells 1977, 432). This definition, though later abandoned by Castells (1983), has spread not only across Western metropolises, but also across Latin America and the newly industrializing countries of Asia, and has become influential in guiding the research of the “new urban sociology” (cf. Lebas 1982; Pickvance 1976).

This early concept of urban social movements was more interested in the (potential) function and effects of the movements than in their concrete origins, their specific forms of organizing and mobilizing, and the various ways in which they pursued their interests. Analysis focused on the structural contradictions articulated by the movements, less on their frames and ideologies, action repertoires, and organizational patterns. As a consequence, what was studied were primarily

1. The term was coined by Scott (1990) to designate a “hidden transcript of power,” actions taken in uncoordinated manner in everyday settings and difficult to detect from the perspective of those in power.

those movements that seemed or promised to bring about social and political change—less promising, localist, or small-scale mobilizations that did not reflect the large structural contradictions of class society remained outside the radar screen of these scholars.

By the mid-1980s, as urban conflicts intensified and cities experienced more and more varied forms of protest and political mobilization, this narrow definition of social movements was displaced by less normative views of urban activism. Castells as well, in his central study of the topic (1983), redefines urban movements in a less charged way as “urban-oriented mobilizations that influence structural social change and transform the urban meanings” (305). These movements combine activism around collective consumption with struggles for community culture as well as for political self-management; “transforming urban meanings” thus implies the undermining of the social hierarchies that structure urban life and producing, instead, a city organized on the basis of use values, autonomous local cultures, and decentralized participatory democracy (319–20).

Another neo-Marxist, yet less structuralist strand of analysis of urban movements developed on the basis of Lefebvre’s writings on the critique of everyday life and on cities. Lefebvre’s concept of the Everyday Life connotes, as that of the Situationists, both a space of resistance against alienation and the permanent colonization of the lifeworld through the commodity form. While commodification of all realms of life is accelerated by the global process of “urbanization” of society, it is also urban space which becomes a new productive force. Lefebvre wrote *La révolution urbaine* (1970) under the impression of the 1968 events in Paris, viewing “revolution” both as technocratic, neoliberal conquest of the world, as well as urban praxis as utopian critique, thus laying the basis for a more ambiguous yet emancipatory concept for interpreting movements for the right to the city.

David Harvey, concerned with the diversity and fragmentation of place-based resistance movements which he viewed as incoherent and fraught with internal contradictions (Harvey 1996; 2000), suggested identifying the underlying class content in the broad range of issues of “militant particularism,” thereby providing the foundation for a more universal socialist resistance politics. Borrowing the notion from Raymond Williams (1989), Harvey argued that militant particularisms are often profoundly conservative, resting upon the perpetuation of patterns of social relations and community solidarities. Left to themselves, he sees such place-based movements easily dominated by the power of capital, unable to transcend the narrow solidarities and particular affinities shaped in particular places. He concludes that movements need to develop a politics of solidarity reaching across space, without abandoning their militant particularist base(s) (1996, 400).

Distinct from such (neo-)Marxist perspectives on the reality and possibilities of the city, which shaped urban movement research particularly across the European countries (cf. Mayer et al. 1978), North America saw primarily another, more pragmatic, perspective take hold. Most scholars here initially focused on empirical studies of protest movements of urban minorities in the context of local political



structures (e.g. Fainstein and Fainstein 1974) and on the long established tradition of community organizing (cf. Fisher 1994), which saw a massive renaissance in the context of struggles against renewal and displacement, but also on homeowner movements (cf. Fainstein and Hirst 1995, 190).

Latin American authors had also started to devote themselves to empirical investigations of local political actions exploding onto the scenes of newly democratized countries (cf. Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Wignaraja 1993). Both in North and South America, where structuralist traditions have been less influential than in Europe, questions of mobilization, organization, and empowerment of discriminated and marginalized urban groups gained attention and were moved into the foreground of research far sooner than in Europe. This led to a more open and broader definition of urban social movements, including a wide variety of forms of mobilization taking place within and oriented toward the city.

Identity-based movements have also made their mark in urban politics and have been studied from within a variety of perspectives. In Western cities, struggles for recognition of marginalized identities were particularly intense in the 1980s and 1990s, accompanied by academic debates on the relationship between identity and redistributive politics. Iris Young's chapter on city life in her 1990 book nicely summarizes the tensions in the North American context. While movements based on ethnic and racial identities were soon dealt with in the context of urban politics literatures, as well as increasingly in studies of urban social movements, the role of gay and lesbian movements in urban life was viewed in more ambiguous terms. Castells (1983) devoted a chapter to analyzing the gay community in San Francisco, highlighting its success in transforming the local political system and in upgrading property values and built environment (similarly Lauria and Knopp 1985), but bemoaning its failure to align with the women's movement and thus to build a new hegemonic culture. Bailey's (1999) study of gay and lesbian activism in four U.S. cities combined political-economic with identity-related approaches, thus allowing for a fuller understanding of gay residential concentration and electoral prowess. While North American authors have emphasized how sexual minorities have claimed territory in the city from which to build inclusion and representation, in the European debates, gay and lesbian space has been considered more in terms of resistance and transgression. In eastern European cities, gay and lesbian activism still mainly revolves around the contestation of the criminalization and marginalization of homosexuality, whereas in the West since the 1990s, gay pride marches, CSD demonstrations, and gay scenes more generally have increasingly become commercialized, which has reoriented research into exploring the normalizing effects of a "lesbian and gay equality" rhetoric (Richardson 2005) and the impetus of sexual politics commodified as "cosmopolitan and incorporated spatiality" (Binnie and Skeggs 2004), but also its new radical potential when the capitalization of cultural difference is tactically harnessed (e.g. Bassi 2006).

Generally, the international debate now speaks of *social* movements to the extent that collective actors intervene, through mobilization, in processes of social and/or political change, and of *urban* movements to the extent that their goals and activities



concern the city and its decision-making structures and processes. However, new research currently goes beyond this definition of “urban movement” by exploring how urbanity affects wider types of political acts as well (see section 4 below).

Urban movements have not only appeared in different shapes and sizes, but they have also undergone significant changes. To this day, urban movements in the so-called transformation societies follow different patterns from those challenging the urbanism of Western democracies. And within the former, the different eastern European countries’ movements, though sharing characteristics and concerns, particularly over housing and environmental degradations, exhibit significant differences depending on the strength of their respective civil societies (cf. Pickvance 2000). Unlike their postsocialist counterparts, the urban movements that emerged in (post-military dictatorship) Latin American countries were part of broad popular struggles not only around issues of consumption and workforce reproduction, but also civil liberties, democratization of daily life, and the organization of cooperatives. Though the World Bank and IMF thrust most Latin American countries into severe economic crisis, and homegrown repressive regimes forced social movements onto the defensive, these precarious decades were survived thanks to self-organizing *barrios*, where neighborhood women played important roles nourishing the need for warm food and basic services as well as for dignity. Country after country has seen new (workers) parties or indigenous movements gain strength and oust repressive regimes, creating space for more participatory democracy and empowering the local movements against neoliberalism and imperialism. Also, struggles were won by the gay and lesbian movements in cities such as Mexico City, where gay marriage was recently recognized in the wake of numerous other progressive policies implemented by the leftist government since the 1990s, with the impressive result of having challenged the authoritarian regime of the PRI nationwide.

Our knowledge of urban movements in the new growth regions of Asia appears to be more scattered if we look exclusively under the familiar labels, that is, look for literatures applying the social movement theories elaborated within Western contexts (e.g. Ho Kwok-laung 2000). But if we cast the net more widely, we find that, as with Latin American urbanism, there is sustained research on the marginalities of the South Asian city, but also work on the possibilities of urban citizenship. South Asian scholarship is shaped by traditions of postcolonial theory and studies of the South Asian city are concerned with the hegemonic production of urban subjects, specifically with how subaltern subjects consent to and participate in projects of urban redevelopment and inequality (Roy 2003a). This as well as scholarship on urban movements in South Asia, Africa, or the Middle East open windows to forms of agency that go beyond the hegemonic theoretical frameworks, and future research will be well served to incorporate it more systematically if we want to understand the trajectory of urban social movements.

The prevailing theoretical approaches, even though they have been developed mostly on the basis of urban conflict in Western democracies, fall short in accounting for the significant changes First World urban activism has undergone since globalization and neoliberalism have fundamentally reconfigured cityscapes here—as

well as, of course, in the Second and Third Worlds. As First World cities have transformed into something like “global suburbs,” having outsourced much of their manufacturing to platforms in the global South, they now constitute privileged spaces for more and less gentrified “creative classes,” and breeding grounds for a mix of alternative, critical, and “bohemian” milieus.

This generates a new antagonism (and hence new types of conflict) between top-end users of the city versus growing advanced marginality, creating fundamentally restructured movement terrains and new relationships between municipalities and civil society actors. Privatization, security measures, the proliferation of zones of segregation, and the retrenchment of municipal services and infrastructures are all contributing to the disappearance of spaces for collectivization, and to the disintegration of the role public space might play in the formation and politicization of (class) subjects and for building alliances. Yet, at the same time, as (low) waged work has expanded to include more women and more immigrants, First World cities increasingly become important sites of anticolonial struggles as well as struggles against racism and sexism, and the trends to pit “creative urban lifestyles” against suburban dwellers are also being contested, as for example by the Creative Class Struggle group in Toronto.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORIES AND URBANITY

This genealogy of the concept of urban social movements demonstrates that it developed as a fairly autonomous self-standing body of literature, separated from social movement theories. Social movement theories, whether of the “American” or the “European” traditions,<sup>3</sup> have some trouble with the urban specificity of movements

2. When Richard Florida moved to Toronto in 2007 (with public subsidies to pay for his salary and support his research at the University of Toronto), local residents began to mobilize against the dominance of creative class policies. According to the group, “‘Creative class’ policies are designed to build money-making cities rather than secure livelihoods for real people. These policies celebrate a society based on inequality, in which a select group of glorified professionals is supported by an invisible army of low-wage service workers. Seduced by the promise of prosperity and growth, governments around the world are reorienting their economies along these ‘creative’ class lines without consulting immigrants, women, people of colour, low-wage workers, and others directly affected by their decisions. Divisive ‘creative class’ policies, implemented in the midst of the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, serve only to increase the vulnerability of the vulnerable and further empower the powerful” (<http://creativeclassstruggle.wordpress.com/mission/>, retrieved August 4, 2010).

3. By now, the division between “American” and “European” social movement theories (cf. Mayer 1991, 1995) has been broken down by many contributions (see for instance della Porta and Diani 1999). Yet its legacies are still palpable—as illustrated even

as it runs counter to the categorization logic of environmental, women's, LGBT, peace, antinuclear, or other new social movements. The "American" perspective, led among others by Tarrow, Zald, McAdams, and Tilly, is primarily preoccupied with understanding the conditions enabling political mobilization, with the concept of political opportunity structure at the center of their analytical framework (see Tarrow, 1998; McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, 1996; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, 2001). In addition to identifying the conditions for mobilization, this approach seeks to unveil the mechanisms through which various forms of political contention (from social movements to revolution) unfold in relation to the state. Resources, organizational form, framing processes, repertoires of action serve as foci of analysis for understanding the mechanics of political contention. This literature does not consider urbanity as a factor worthy of analysis. More recent work suggests instead (as we will show in the last section) that urbanity, understood as a historically-situated and unevenly distributed condition, also has an impact on the logic of political contention. The idea that contention works in cycles (the concept of a cycle of protest), with the 1960s and 1970s as the epitome of such cycles in the "American" theoretical perspective, does not consider the urban quality of such cycles as a relevant explanatory factor.

The "European" perspective, known as new social movement theory, has been more sensitive to the role of urbanity, but without explicitly reflecting on its influence on mobilization. The interrogation here centers on uncovering the structural socioeconomic and cultural transformations that led to the emergence of newly politicized issues (such as sexual orientation, environmentalism, ecology, etc.) outside of the labor-capital nexus (see for instance Melucci 1989; Touraine 1992; Mayer and Roth 1995). These movements, to quote Ruggiero, are "not preoccupied with struggles over the production and distribution of material goods, but rais[e] cultural challenges to the dominant language and to official codes" (Ruggiero, 2001, 43–44). More influenced by Marxism than rational choice theory (as are the American scholars), this "European" approach is concerned with defining what counts as "social movement" (rather narrowly as opposed to the concept of political contention generally used by American scholars). Inspired by Marx's idea of labor as the motor of history, they define a social movement as a force that has social transformative power. This, of course, eliminates many urban struggles, where the connection between their practice and a potentially society-wide transformative effect is less clear. Yet, the fact that new social movement theory is interested in newly politicized issues that are particularly visible in cities might have initiated a reflection on the impact of urbanity on social mobilization. Lefebvre (1968; 1970),

by recent publications such as an 'urban social movements' entry published in the U.S. (Rabrenovic 2009). It describes urban social movement theory exclusively in terms of American approaches "including most prominently resource mobilization theory, political opportunity structure theory and framing theory" (241), mentioning neither the influence of Lefebvre or Harvey, nor the European new social movement perspective.

though not a social movement theorist per se but widely perceived as writing within this context, is the only author who explicitly raised this question. For this, he was criticized by Castells (1972) and Harvey (1973). In *The Urban Question* (1972, 1977), Castells emphasized that there is nothing specifically urban about the way history progresses. According to this young Castells, the prevailing motor of action was still class struggle. He rejected the idea that an urban mode of production was displacing the industrial capital-labor nexus. His analysis interpreted political claims arising in cities as the contemporary manifestation of the capital-labor conflict, shifted from the workplace to the collective consumption spaces of the city. In *Social Justice and the City* (1973), Harvey made a similar argument, suggesting that the urban was still heavily dependent on industrial capital and thus cannot be analyzed as a new mode of production. His evidence was that industrial capital was still far stronger than land capital.

As the global political economic context drastically changed in the following decades, both Castells and Harvey later nuanced these arguments from the 1970s and offered important reflections on the urbanity of social movements. While Castells (1996–98) turns more toward the networked organizational form of social and political claims, Harvey (1989; 2008) revisits Lefebvre's early claims to the right to the city and highlights the shifts in the political economic context that have enabled the rise of urban movements around the globe. As urbanization globalizes through the integration of financial markets and through the dictates of international organizations pushing for urbanizing policies in the South in order to foster economic development, more and more movements rally under the banner of the "Right to the City" (Mayer 2009).

Especially as the fallout of the financial and economic crisis has been making itself felt, and as growing numbers of urban residents see long-accustomed rights erode, the slogan "Right to the City" has come to merge and concentrate a set of highly charged issues: it has the potential to bring together deprived and excluded groups with culturally alienated, discontented groups, and also to forge connections between struggles in First World metropolises and those in cities of the global South, where the fight against privatization, speculation, eviction, and displacement is even far more existential.

But the claim is being invoked in rather different, not always reconcilable ways. On the one side, movements are building on the Lefebvrian conception, where urbanization stands for a transformation of society and everyday life through capital. Against this transformation Lefebvre sought to *create* rights through social and political action: the street, and claims to it, are establishing these rights. In this sense, the right to the city is not a juridical right, but rather an oppositional demand. It is a right to redistribution, not for all people, but for those deprived of it and in need of it. And it is a right that exists only as people appropriate it (and the city). In this sense, many local struggles in European and American cities have recently invoked the claim and used it to form alliances across town and across issues, between housing activists and artists, leftist groups and cultural workers, small business owners and the new precarious groups—as all of them feel threatened by contemporary

forms of development entailing gentrification, mega projects, and displacement. In the U.S. it is even used as an organizational principle as with the Right to the City Alliance (cf. Leavitt et al. 2009).

At the same time the slogan has also gained traction in another context, where international NGOs and advocacy organizations have adopted it with somewhat different connotations. Beginning in the mid-1990s, a variety of inter- and transnational policy networks and international NGOs have developed “Urban Agendas” and in 2001, now in the framework of the World Social Forum (WSF), a process was opened to formulate a *World Charter on the Right to the City*. A couple events in particular stood out in the revision, negotiation, and dissemination process: at the Social Forum of the Americas in Quito, Ecuador, in 2004 the Habitat International Coalition together with other transnational organizations promoted instruments through which to broaden and activate social mobilization around this new right; during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005 a “World Charter of the Right to the City” was adopted. The UN-Habitat decision to organize the fifth World Urban Forum in 2010 around the theme of the right to the city further contributed to propel the topic to the worldwide arena. Parallel to these initiatives, some governments, at various levels, have been generating charters in order to legislate human rights in the urban context.

The objective of such charters is to establish effective legal monitoring mechanisms and instruments to ensure the enforcement of recognized human, social, and citizenship rights. In their effort to put “our most vulnerable urban residents” rather than investors and developers at the center of public policy, these charters enumerate specific rights which a progressive urban politics should particularly protect. All of these listed rights (such as: to housing, social security, work, leisure, information, organization, free association, food and water, freedom from dispossession, etc.) are supposed to hold for all “urban inhabitants,” but some groups are highlighted as deserving particular protection (poor, ill, handicapped, and migrants get mentioned). (These and further details to be found on the website UNESCO.ORG; cf. also Sugranyes and Mathivet 2010; on how the Right to the City has become materialized in legal terms in Brazil, see Fernandes 2007.)

Fully realized, such rights might spell improvements for disadvantaged groups. However, such institutionalized sets of rights invariably boil down to claims for inclusion in the contemporary city as it exists; they do not aim at transforming the existing system—and in that process ourselves. They target particular aspects of neoliberal policy, but not the underlying structures which systematically produce exploitation, poverty, and marginalization. Perhaps one promising movement potentially able to merge the city-based transformative struggles with transnational urban agendas might develop out of claims by urban indigenous peoples. Tapping into transnational postcolonial theories and practices, urban indigenous people in North America are increasingly claiming the right to the city, with transformative potential.

Both “European” and “American” theoretical perspectives on social movements, and particularly the depoliticized version of “the right to the city,” which echoes

many assumptions of the latter, lack attention to urbanity as a condition that transforms the practice of political contestation. In many ways, this can be explained by disciplinary divisions, with political scientists and sociologists on one side, and geographers and urbanists on the other. The latter have been at the forefront of discussions on the emancipatory city, linking urban movements with the broader political economic context, while political scientists and sociologists have been more concerned with conflicts between social movements and state institutions. While political scientists and sociologists have had their respective contingent of scholars working on urban politics and urban sociology, these subfields have largely been narrowly defined around municipal politics and apolitical social interactions.

Hence it seems to us an urgent task of the contemporary period, as we argue below, to bring these various disciplinary, theoretical, and methodological strands together. In a study of how the urban poor movements of Mexico have contributed to major institutional and political-economic changes in this country, Haber (2006) develops an interesting methodological framework combining tools from “American” social movement theories (political opportunity structure, cycles of protest, as well as influences from Piven and Cloward 1979) with a phenomenological approach to understand the construction of activist subjectivity, something closer to the heart of the “European” approach to social movements. He focuses on relationships between activists because understanding what difference it makes “to a middle-aged, low income woman living in a shantytown [for instance] if she refers to her neighbour as *señora* or *compañera*” “deepens our appreciation for the experience of movements; it also contributes to our analytical understanding of how this resource is generated and its power implications” (Haber 2006, 19). Along with this, he offers an interesting reflection on changing intergovernmental relations and the rise of cities as political actors in the global neoliberal context of the 1980s and 1990s.

#### 4. GLOBAL URBANITY AND POLITICAL MOBILIZATION

At the height and yet beginning crisis of neoliberalism (with the dot.com crash of 2001), urban movements entered a new phase, where urbanization has gone global through the integration of financial markets that have used their flexibility to debt-finance urban development around the world (Harvey 2008, 30). Economic growth rates began to stagnate in the “old” industrial nations, and sharper social divides became expressed in intensifying socio-spatial polarization, while reforms of social security systems replaced welfare with workfare that seeks to “activate” the urban underclass into downgraded and informal labor markets. But still, the benefits of the growth of the last 30 years have overwhelmingly gone to those living in the West/North under immeasurably higher living standards than the greater part of

the world, even higher than for most but the very rich in the dynamic economies which have been keeping the world economy going. The emerging economies in formerly “underdeveloped” regions have seen unprecedented growth rates in industrialization and urbanization driven by neoliberal market rule. Whether in Africa, Latin America, South or East Asia, this intense development usually privileges upper- and middle-class propertied interests, while shack-dweller communities, pavement dwellers, and slum and favela regions have sprawled at the outskirts or within exploding mega cities, marginalizing and discriminating their inhabitants in multiple ways. However, their daily struggles for survival, usually at the grassroots level and most often hidden from view, have been challenging and reframing the association of civilization and urbanization characteristic of the neoliberal notion of development. For them, development “has become synonymous with a combination of crises (food, environmental, energy, financial, and climate)” (McMichael and Morarji 2010, 238). The emergence of such new collective actors—out of the lower, indigenous, feminist, and other (post)colonial cultures—is gradually being acknowledged, but still constitutes a significant break both within the world of social movements and that of academic research.

One of the reasons for the invisibility of these struggles in research and in the world of social movements arguably lies in the definition of the “political” underlying activist and research circles. The idea of social movement implies that the state-citizen relationship is inherently “political” in the sense that it is based on competitive and often confrontational claim-making. Yet, politicization is only one way to interact with the state; negotiation is another (for instance, bribing a corrupted official). Hiding from the state is yet another way (e.g. squatting). In an interesting text on informal settlements, Roy and AlSayyad (2004) show how the dominance of studies on Latin American urban informality has led to the general assumption that squatters and people active in the informal economy tend to mobilize collectively against the state. However, studies on urban informality in the Middle East show that many individuals prefer to hide, or keep a low profile, rather than confronting authorities. Bayat (2004, 81 and 94) suggests that political subjectivity comes more in the form of a “quiet encroachment of the ordinary,” which he defines as “noncollective, but prolonged, direct action by individuals and families to acquire the basic necessities of life (land for shelter, urban collective consumption, informal work, business opportunities, and public space) in a quiet and unassuming, yet illegal fashion.... the struggle of the actors against the authorities is not about winning a gain, but primarily about defending and furthering what has already been won.” In other words, it is not necessarily socially and politically transformative or revolutionary. In many ways, as Bayat writes speaking of street vendors and squatters, “*theirs* is not a politics of protest, but of redress, the struggle for an immediate outcome through individual direct action” (Bayat 2004, 93, emphasis original). This is not to say that collective action is absent. But, as with the mobilization of migrant domestic workers in Los Angeles in the marches against the right-wing proposals to reform immigration in the U.S. in 2006, it is mostly through continuities between everyday life and protest action that one can understand political mobilization (Boudreau et al. 2009).

Within the Euro-American core, neoliberal globalization and the rise of global urbanity can be said to have narrowed the space for social contestation in many ways, but nevertheless collective mobilization does continue, especially around three urban fault lines: challenges to corporate urban development, claims for social and environmental justice, and antiglobalization (see Mayer 2007). Also, urban riots have reemerged on the scene, a type of militancy that seems to refuse to be linked to articulated political demands. French suburbs have become sites of what many described as “prepolitical” protest by young people, mostly of migrant background. Similarly, Athens and other European cities have erupted in protests against police violence and have seen disturbances triggered by the financial meltdown of 2008. If many continue to see urban riots as prepolitical, others insist that for some groups riots can be the only way to enter the political space and find a way to negotiate (Rea 2006; Balibar 2007).

Reflecting these novel developments, various theoretical debates have emerged around the world, not all of which we can possibly reflect on here. Our limitation to only parts of English, French and German speaking academia will hopefully not be read as reproduction of Eurocentric forms of colonialism, but as merely a first step toward understanding the diversity of practices and theories of today’s global-local movements.

With the rise of antiglobalization movements at the end of the 1990s, the relation between urban movements and resistance to neoliberal globalization inspired much research on the dialectic between global and local as new sites of resistance (e.g. Hamel, Lustiger-Thaler, and Mayer 2000; Merrifield 2002; INURA 2003; Köhler and Wissen 2003; Conway 2004). A special issue of *Space and Polity* was dedicated to uncover the urban orientation of justice movements (Nicholls and Beaumont 2004). The *International Journal of Urban Regional Research* published a special issue exploring the changes urban social movements have undergone since the 1970s (Pickvance 2003), and a recent issue of *CITY* is dedicated to questions these recent changes have thrown up for critical urban theory (Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer 2009).

As transnational antiglobalization movements, after coming together in the World Social Forum and other global gatherings, began to discover “the local,” their city, as places where globalization “touches down” and materializes, where global issues become localized, they sparked off not only new alliances and new action repertoires within urban movement scenes, but also new research exploring the role of scale and global-local connections for and within urban contestation. Organizations such as the Social Fora or Attac have expanded their demands to include not only the democratization of international institutions, but have taken the message of “global justice” to the city (Portaliou 2007). Here they defend public services and institutions, campaign against welfare cuts, and for rights for migrants as well as workfare workers. In the course of their countersummits or Social Forum meetings, they have discovered that issues such as privatization and infringement of social rights are connecting them with movements across the globe. Conversely, preexisting urban movements that have long been struggling for a better city are

now articulating the “global” in contestations that take place “locally,” and are importing action repertoires gleaned from antiglobalization protests. Together with the antiglobalization movements, they now seek to build alliances with local unions, social service organizations, churches, and newly emerging labor/community centers.

Ongoing research seeks to detect patterns and causal relationships in this multiscalar jumble (cf. Ashman 2004; Glassman 2001; Routledge 2003; Sites 2007; Tarrow and McAdam 2005; Wissen et al. 2008). The interplay of these different clusters of “glocal” movements seems to create a novel multi-scalar architecture of urban protest, in which impetus from supranational scales may boost and strengthen local grassroots movements, or specific urban initiatives may turn into beacons of the global social justice movement. While there is, to our knowledge, little research as yet exploring the tensions and conflicts that have emerged between mobile transnational activism and the locally based groups, it is increasingly clear that the new dialectic between global and local sites of resistance emerges as an important focus of theorizing the significance of today’s urban movements. Also, work done in Latin American, African, and Asian cities on the respective urban movements, squatters’ and shack- or pavement-dwellers’ struggles, and their respective forms of self-organization and resistance to the everyday violence needs to be brought into the debates going on in social movement circles far more than has been the case so far, if we are to understand the possibilities and trajectories of an emancipatory urban politics (for instance, Roy and AlSayyad 2004).

Beyond the urban social movement literature but also inspired by Lefebvre’s work on the right to the city (1968), the dynamic literature on urban citizenship stresses the importance of recognizing the legitimacy of political action for people without legal citizenship (Holston 1995; Holston and Appadurai 1996; Sassen 1996; Dikeç and Gilbert 2002; Mitchell 2003). The right to be politically active brings to the fore the issue of the possibility to act. These studies locate political mobilization in everyday life, because people *inhabit* a world on which they wish to act. However, by focusing on the legitimacy to act without legal citizenship, this literature does not explain why people decide to act. In the “American” social movement approach discussed above, these two questions (the possibility to act and the motive for taking action) could not be separated. Indeed, the concept of a political opportunity structure (Tarrow 1998) posits that action can be initiated only if a window of opportunity enables people to seize it and take action. The opportunity provides the motive. On the other hand, this framework neglects a fundamental aspect of urban daily life: politics in daily rhythms, which is invisible if we only focus on more or less organized mass mobilization.

These small acts of reappropriation of urban space are at the core of another body of literature, which is also claiming much influence from Lefebvre, but also from Hardt and Negri’s notion of the multitude (see for instance a special issue of the French journal *Multitudes* on the *agir urbain*, urban acts [Petrescu et al. 2008]). The “multitude” for Hardt and Negri (2004) is the mass of self-organizing people whose cumulative actions lead to a revolutionary contestation of contemporary

imperialism. In their conversation with Negri, the authors of this special issue on urban actions explore what acting in the city looks like. They emphasize the researcher's duty to look for political acts in unexpected liminal places, such as the street corner, the artist collective, or the vacant space between buildings. They never define why they call this type of politics "urban." Nevertheless, one can infer that the small gestures investigated can be found mostly in dense city settings and because the type of political subjectivity they see is largely a function of intense interactions among diverse people in close contact. Indeed, a recent exhibition at the Canadian Center for Architecture was dedicated to numerous examples of such urban acts of resistance, mostly conceived by architects, artists, and radical urban planners (Borasi and Zardini 2009). Such forms of urban resistance range from guerrilla gardening to skateboarding, from the occupation of public parks to the creation of sandboxes and soccer fields on freeways. These micro- and infra-practices, according to Negri (2008), cumulate into "irreversible thresholds" which gradually constitute collective revolutionary actors.

While indeed, political action in the city is deeply entrenched into everyday life, which means that it is defined by interdependencies, unpredictability, and nonstrategic actions, this challenges some of the underlying assumptions of classical social movement theories. Studies of social movements have mostly been constructed on an antagonistic ontology aiming to uncover the workings of domination in order to foster resistance. There is an identified enemy and the focus of the studies is on analyzing strategies of resistance. Yet, if resistance can also be conceived as unorganized, diffuse, and nonstrategic, and if we emphasize the construction of individual political subjectivity more than the organization of collective movements, what would be a future critical research agenda?

## 5. AN AGENDA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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One of the characteristics of contemporary urban movements, whether those influenced by the open space concept typical of the Social Forum process or those involved in micro-actions in the city, is that they do not have a consensual and defined idea of the ideal society for which they are struggling. When the organizers of the Montreal Citizen Summit, for instance, call for the *City We Want*, they know very well that the various claims and activities that will stem out of the event (just like in any other social forum) will not necessarily converge. At the core of this logic of action is the idea that conflicts are beneficial for keeping democracy alive (a clear position against the consensual bent of neoliberalism; see Mertes 2004) and that the results of conflicts are always unpredictable. Unpredictability is integrated into political strategies. Unpredictability, as well as intensified interdependencies and mobilities, accelerating paces of change and intensified affects, are also central characteristics of urbanity. We define urbanity as a historically-situated and

geographically unevenly distributed condition that affects the way we act politically. One important question for future research could be: What is it in urbanity that would energize political action? Is there a specifically urban way of acting politically (Boudreau 2010)? What is the emancipatory potential of the city today?

As First World cities have transformed into privileged “global suburbs” inhabited by, on the one hand, upscale top-end users and “creative classes,” on the other by low-wage and precarious groups of excluded and marginalized “urban outcasts” (Wacquant 2007), they become sites of different types of urban movements: they are sites of anticolonial and antiracist struggles, which are only occasionally visible; more visibly, they are sites of antigentrification and other defensive struggles, in which heterogeneous actors seek to save a piece of urbanity or protect their alternative lifestyles. For some of these, the risk of co-optation and (partial) integration into an urban model in the image of corporate and financial interests is immense. Especially among former squatters and the newly engaged cultural activists, many have become more interested in projecting a city where their own—self-determined, autonomous, and politically-correct—liberated space is guaranteed (and less concerned with the exclusion and repression of less fortunate ones). Such activists increasingly succeed today in securing their own survival by buying into the new, entrepreneurial “creative city” policies that exploit their vibrant cultural scenes for branding, as a locational asset in the intensifying interurban competition.

Under such conditions, where dissent is often limited to defending “alternative biotopes” and/or easily incorporated into creative city policies, we need to ask whether First World cities, whose class composition has been structurally transformed as global production chains asserted themselves, are still capable of bringing forth the social forces with an interest in transforming them into more equitable and attractive living environments for all. In whose interest would it be to form alliances that would challenge the structures of *global* inequality? Do the comparatively privileged urban activists in the global North have the motivation for *global* justice?

Given the increasingly tight global interconnections that define urban social movements, comparative urban politics would seem to be another crucial area for future research. Precisely because of these interdependencies, comparative methodologies ought not to be conceived as the comparison of fixed and mutually-exclusive units (e.g., two or several cities in different regions of the world), but rather the comparison of processes and the use of interconnections for blurring the limit between the compared elements. The objective of comparing should not be simply to highlight contrasts and similarities, but rather to use a different lens to shed light on a local process. For instance, in comparing homeless activism in the U.S. to slum dwelling in India, Roy does not hesitate to “use one site to pose questions of another” because she sees transnationalism as an “interrogative technique” (Roy 2003b, 466).

Thus, looking ahead it seems that more interpenetration between various research traditions (sociology, political science, urban studies, geography, etc.) and worlds of political action (North, South, East, and West) is urgently needed. We

need to beware of zero-sum games between local action and transnational struggles, “creative” inner city politics and outcasts of global suburbs. The very definition of the political, long understood in social movement worlds as a strategically-organized confrontation between the dominant and the dominated, may need to be enlarged if we are to recognize forms of action increasingly important in our urban world. From spontaneous riots to the “quiet encroachment” and negotiated practices of informality, these struggles are part of the politics of our cities, yet still analytically unconnected to the (urban) social movement literature.

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