



# Social movements in the face of criminal power

## The socio-political fragmentation of space and 'micro-level warlords' as challenges for emancipative urban struggles

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*In the context of contemporary capitalism, emancipative social movements must resist intimidation not only through official repression by the state apparatus (through police's brutality and sometimes through military interventions); the illegal, criminal side of capitalism also threatens emancipative struggle. Within this framework, the real and potential role of the 'hyperprecariat' (i.e., the workers who depend on—and often were expelled to—the informal sector in semi-peripheral countries, and who work and live under very vulnerable conditions) is a key one. Criminal attempts to co-opt, to silence, to neutralize the social force of emancipative social movements have been already a daily experience in several cities and countries. The main trouble for emancipative urban movements is that the 'enemies' they have to face inside segregated spaces, and who belong to the 'hyperprecariat', do not seem to be—strictly in terms of social class—'enemies' at all. 'Micro-level warlords' such as drug traffickers operating in the sphere of retail sales recruit their 'soldiers' (and are themselves recruited) among poor, young people in the shanty towns. Nevertheless, these armed young people frequently intimidate and repress urban activists. Considering this problem, emancipative social movements have to learn to be a countervailing power not only regarding the state apparatus and the legal side of capitalist economy, but also in relation to ordinary criminal forces—which are usually totally adapted to capitalist values, 'logic' and patterns of behaviour. The aim of this paper is to discuss the 'new' challenges for social movements in the context of what I termed a 'phobopolis' – a city whose inhabitants experience a very complex situation of diffuse violence and widespread fear – and considering the role of the 'hyperprecariat in guns'. The present paper analyses examples primarily from Brazil (Sections 1 and 2), but also from Argentina and South Africa (first part of Section 3), before elaborating the theoretical contributions (in the last part of Section 3).*

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Introduction: 'hyperprecariat' and 'molecular civil war'—from Rio de Janeiro to Mexico-City to Johannesburg to...

**T**he word 'hyperprecariat' will certainly sound strange to the reader, so my first task is to clarify the concept behind this term.

In Brazil, I have proposed the neologism *hiperpreariado* in order to avoid the term *lumpemproletariado* (from the German word *Lumpenproletariat*). *Lumpenproletariat* became a traditional term in Marxist jargon after it was used by Marx and Engels (1982) in the *Manifesto of the Communist*

*Party* and then in various later works. However, the suppositions of this term render it deeply problematic. According to Marx and Engels, the *Lumpenproletariat* ('lumpenproletarians') are to be considered as an amorphous group of different kinds of people that, together, are always potentially dangerous and reactionary. Marx and Engels employed several discriminatory (partly even moralistic) expressions to designate the *Lumpenproletariat*,<sup>1</sup> in contrast to a virtuous 'Proletariat' or 'Arbeiterklasse' (= working class), that was supposed to be the real protagonist of social change towards socialism.

In Europe and North America, the debate regarding 'precarity' is about the effects of the erosion of the welfare state in the context of neo-liberalism, globalization and 'flexible accumulation'. Authors such as French sociologist Bresson (2007, p. 73) believe that this debate is pertinent only to the so-called 'industrialized world', being irrelevant to deal with the problems of the countries usually known as 'developing countries'. This oversimplifies the capitalist world-system. According to this point of view, the highly heterogeneous set of countries located outside the world economy's core can be reduced implicitly to formulas such as 'non-industrialized countries'—that is, to peripheral or agrarian economies in a proper sense. The trouble with this schema lies in the fact that there is a whole set of countries—for instance, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa—which are at the same time *significantly industrialized* (although this industrialization is usually very concentrated in some regions) and *socially highly problematic* (the degree of inequity and social injustice is often even higher than in many typical peripheral countries). They are *semi-peripheral* countries, whose economies can be by no means described as 'agrarian' (despite the importance of the primary sector) or 'non-industrialized'.

Of course, in contrast to Western Europe and the USA, at the semi-periphery of the capitalist world-system, precarity or even

extreme precarity was always a chronic problem, due to the intensity of exploitation and oppression and the absence of a welfare state. As a consequence the concept of 'hyperprecariat', which intends to describe the workers who depend on (and often were expelled to) the informal sector in semi-peripheral countries, and who work and live under very vulnerable conditions, does not have very much to do with the European (above all French and German) discussion about *précarization/Prekarisierung*. However, it is useful to consider some links at the global level, in order to avoid some kind of (Eurocentric) 'theoretical provinciality'.<sup>2</sup>

The links between a country like Brazil and the core-countries have been sometimes recognized in interesting and, for many people, disturbing ways. For instance, German sociologist Ulrich Beck speaks about a 'Brazilianization of the West' (Beck, 2000, pp. 1–9) or a 'Brazilianization' of Europe (Beck, 2000, pp. 92–109)—which is for him an 'unintended consequence of the neoliberal free-market utopia' (Beck, 2000, p. 1). After observing that '[i]n a semi-industrialized country such as Brazil, those who depend upon a wage or salary in full-time work represent only a minority of the economically active population; the majority earn their living in more precarious conditions' (as he explains: '[p]eople are travelling vendors, small retailers or craftworkers, offer all kinds of personal service, or shuttle back and forth between different fields of activity, forms of employment and training' [pp. 1–2]), Beck advances the essence of his 'Brazilianization thesis':

'As new developments show in the so-called highly developed economies, this nomadic 'multi-activity'—until now mainly a feature of female labour in the West—is not a premodern relic but a rapidly spreading variant in the late work-societies, where attractive, highly skilled and well-paid full-time employment in on way out.' (Beck, 2000, p. 2)<sup>3</sup>

As we can see, the European debate does raise issues that can usefully extend to a

discussion of some problems of semi-peripheral countries at a very general level—namely at the scale of the global processes that push the labour force into a precarious (Europe) or an even more precarious (semi-peripheral countries) situation in the labour market and with regards to general living conditions (as, for instance, in relation to the housing question). So, as Beck's 'Brazilianization thesis' implicitly suggests the theoretical debates undertaken in semi-peripheral countries can somehow be interesting for US-American and European social scientists too.

Another concept which is mentioned in the title of this introductory section and which needs clarification is that of 'molecular civil war'. A 'molecular civil war' is in fact not a 'war' in a proper sense—not even a conventional 'civil war'.<sup>4</sup> German writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger had already coined the suggestive expression 'molecular civil war' (*molekularer Bürgerkrieg*) in an essay published originally in 1992. Although his reflections do not contain a 'precise' or complete conceptualization, his intentions were nevertheless quite clear: the description of situations characterized by diffuse and growing violence, violent criminality and social conflict which are increasingly typical for big cities and metropolises—not only at the periphery and semi-periphery, but also in Los Angeles, in the *banlieue* of Paris, and so on (see Enzensberger, 1993).

A 'molecular civil war' is a very complex situation of diffuse violence and widespread fear, in whose context repression goes beyond the usual limits of police repression—to the point of including interventions of the army itself to assure 'public safety' and 'law and order'. Within this framework violence turns into a very common and almost daily experience for most social groups and for many individuals, including various different conflicts among poor people themselves, as I am going to show later in this paper.

The expression 'molecular civil war' is an attempt to describe a fuzzy situation, where terms such as 'criminality' and 'social conflict' seem to be insufficient to describe

the reality in all its complexity. However, it is extremely important to underline the absolutely non-conventional nature of this 'war'. Since it is *not* a war in conventional terms, *not even a conventional civil war*, it cannot be 'won' on the basis of military means and strategies. More and more repression, including the employment of the army itself (as, for instance, in Brazil and Mexico)<sup>5</sup> in order to establish 'law and order' just serves to 'contain' protest and delay social explosion. This 'militarization of the urban question'<sup>6</sup> intensifies oppression and is a desperate attempt to stabilize an unjust *status quo*. A 'molecular civil war' is much more a *social challenge* than a mere task for the police—and by no means is it a *military* problem.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the 'new' challenges for social movements in the framework of what I termed a *phobopolis*, that is a 'city of fear' (see especially Souza, 2008). A 'phobopolis' is a city whose inhabitants experience a quasi-'Hobbesian' situation, as 'molecular civil war' and its socio-spatial consequences have become a daily experience for many people. In other words, it is a city in which violence has become a very widespread concern, and in which fear has become an almost omnipresent feeling.

I have proposed the word 'phobopolis' as a new technical term in order to emphasize the degree of intensity regarding violence and fear in many cities nowadays. Of course, there is nothing new about 'criminality and violence in cities' as such; from ancient Rome to medieval European cities to 18th-century London, New York and Rio de Janeiro, history offers many examples of criminality and of public concerns about violence in the urban spaces of the past. It is quite clear that every comparison must take into consideration the historical and geographical relativity of 'intersubjective' feelings. People always tend to compare the gravity of their present-day situation to their own situation and subjectivity in the past, or to the situation in other places, which is *supposed* to have been or be better. Considering this, the point here is obviously not a

matter of *presence* or *absence* of violent criminality and fear, but a matter of the *intensity* of these phenomena. To be more precise, the question of their particular intensity in a certain historical and geographical context, *in which the (socio-)political consequences of violence and fear are important to the point of influencing various different kinds of decision on the part of governments, capitalists and families.* These decisions range from the decision to move to a gated community, to the decision to send in the army to fight drug traffickers, to the decision to avoid new investments in certain cities, to the decision to migrate in order to escape notorious ‘risk places’. The picture which emerges from certain descriptions of the public concern about crime in some cities of the past may seem familiar to the inhabitants of today’s Rio de Janeiro, Mexico-City and Johannesburg (and Los Angeles...). But a closer inspection reveals some significant differences. In spite of all horror and fear of crime and violence, they did not seem to dominate public discourse and collective concern as intensely in the past, as it is the case in contemporary Rio de Janeiro, Johannesburg or Mexico-City. As violent as ancient Rome or 18th-century London were, people did not routinely compare their feelings and problems related to ordinary criminality with some kind of ‘civil war’.

In the context of contemporary capitalism, a social model which is becoming increasingly ‘criminogenous’ for a number of reasons,<sup>7</sup> the interests of its ‘legal side’ along with official repression on the part of the state apparatus (through police’s brutality and sometimes through military interventions as I mentioned above) are no longer the sole intimidating factors against which emancipative social movements must resist; the illegal, criminal side of capitalism also threatens emancipative struggle—by means of the corruptive and alienating forces of ‘easy money’, and by means of pure force and violence. *Within this framework, the real and potential role of the ‘hyperpreariat’ is a key one.*

The main trouble for emancipatory urban movements lies in the fact that the ‘enemies’ who they have often to face, and who belong to the ‘hyperpreariat’ do not seem to be—*strictly in terms of social class*—‘enemies’ at all. ‘Micro-level warlords’ such as drug traffickers operating in the sphere of retail sales recruit their ‘soldiers’ (and are themselves recruited) among poor, young men (and sometimes women) and teenagers in the shanty towns. Nevertheless, these armed young people frequently intimidate and repress urban activists, sometimes in a brutal manner. In fact, from a progressive, politico-philosophical point of view, this is more than just a challenge. It is a profound tragedy.

In the remainder of this paper, I will consider examples primarily from Brazil (Sections 1 and 2, respectively on the *favela* activism and the *sem-teto* movement). I will also provide some empirical evidence from Argentina and South Africa (Subsection 3.1.), before elaborating some theoretical contributions (Subsection 3.2.).

### 1. A first example from Brazil: the ‘territorialization’ of *favelas* by drug-trafficking groups and its consequences for *favela* activists

*Favela* activism has a rich history in Brazil, including some almost epic moments of heroic resistance, such as the resistance against evictions in Rio de Janeiro during the 1960s, in the context of the military regime (see Santos, 1981; Pfeiffer, 1987). However, this social activism has been in crisis in Rio de Janeiro as well as in other Brazilian cities since the 1980s due, among other factors, to the increasing influence of drug traffickers over residents’ associations (*associações de moradores*).

Since the beginning of the 1980s drug-trafficking ‘micro-level warlords’ have started to exercise territorial control over shanty towns in several Brazilian cities. Rio de Janeiro was the first case and remains the worst instance. *Favelas*, which were up until the 1980s more or less ‘open’, became increasingly

‘closed’, in the sense that the spatial mobility of people between two *favelas* controlled by rival drug-trafficking organizations had become more and more difficult. For the *favela* inhabitant, other *favelas* increasingly became territories controlled by drug-traffickers who are rivals and enemies of those that control his or her own community. Rivalry between criminal groups began to influence the spatial mobility of *favela* inhabitants, in as far as they had to risk facing hostility and aggression when visiting people in other *favelas*. Since the 1980s, people who live in *favelas* under the control of different, rival criminal crews can no longer visit each other without restrictions or even risking their physical integrity and life.

Rio de Janeiro’s and São Paulo’s drug trafficking *comandos* (Comando Vermelho, Terceiro Comando, Primeiro Comando da Capital, among others) are not single ‘gangs’. They are, instead, loose organizations (comparable to ‘criminal mutual help networks’) which comprise many specific criminal crews (Portuguese: *quadrilhas*). As far as the crews which belong to a *comando* are concerned, they are more organized and better armed than the word ‘gang’ could suggest. That is the reason why this term is not very appropriate in this case (see about this Souza, 1996, 2000, 2005, 2008).

*Favela*-based retail drug trafficking combines a strong hierarchy at the scale of the *favela*<sup>8</sup> with a decentralized mode of organization at a larger scale—namely at the level of the *comandos*. Each drug trafficking crew has its own territory (i.e., one or more *favelas*), and while dealers who belong to the same *comando* usually respect each others territories, bandits belonging to rival *comandos* often try to take possession of ‘enemy territories’—the result is a ‘war’ between crews (*guerra de quadrilhas*) which can take several days or even weeks. In the context of such a conflict several drug trafficking crews belonging to the same *comando* can help to oppose the invasion of their territory.

This ‘territorialization’ of segregated spaces by criminal groups is, along with the

proliferation of elite and upper-middle-class ‘gated communities’, one of the most pervasive features of the process termed by me as a *socio-political fragmentation of the urban space* (Souza, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2008). This fragmentation, the perception of diffuse social conflict as a ‘molecular civil war’ and the transformation of a city into a ‘phobopolis’ are phenomena which are closely related to each other. In fact, we should say that they are different aspects of the same socio-spatial process.

Those drug dealers who are based in segregated spaces such as *favelas* are nothing other than the poorest part of a long chain of agents. They are not ‘drug barons’ at all; the wholesalers who operate at a regional, national and even international level, and who are the real ‘drug barons’, are found elsewhere. Dealers who distribute drugs on the basis of retail sale in various parts of the formal city (from restaurants to universities to middle-class flats) do not live in *favelas*.

Be that as it may, one cannot deny that *favelas* have a major economic significance for those drug dealers who operate within the retail circuit of drug trading in many Brazilian cities. There are three main reasons for this importance: (1) The typical *internal spatial structure of favelas* (namely small streets and a very irregular spatial pattern) makes the task of invading and taking them under control difficult both for the police and for rival drug-trafficking crews (additionally, in many concrete situations, as it is the case especially in Rio de Janeiro, topography itself – i.e., *favelas* located on hills – performs the same function and helps to defend the territory against potential invaders (see Figure 1). (2) The *location* of many *favelas* makes them very attractive because of their logistical relevance and/or because of the easy access for the main drug consumers (many *favelas* are located very close to middle-class neighbourhoods). (3) *Favelas’ socio-economic characteristics* (i.e., abundant poor, unemployed or underemployed young people) make them a place where a labour force can be easily recruited for different



**Figure 1** Morro da Providência, Rio de Janeiro's oldest *favela* (grounded in 1898). Photograph © M. Lopes de Souza, 2006.

activities, as well as easily replaced.<sup>9</sup> As a consequence of this attractiveness, *favelas* have suffered more directly and intensely than other types of residential space with the problem of 'territorialization' by drug trafficking crews and *comandos* (see Souza, 1995a, 1995b, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2008).<sup>10</sup>

In reality, the whole situation is rather confusing, not only because drug trafficking represents at the same time a source of different problems (stigmatization, violence and so on) and an important income source for the poor, but especially because the behaviour of criminals towards ordinary *favela* inhabitants is often contradictory.

*On the one hand* a *favela* leader I interviewed in Rio de Janeiro in the mid-1990s suggested, only in his or her own community can a *favela* inhabitant enjoy some safety. This situation seems to be paradoxical, but in fact it is easy to explain: drug dealers usually do not allow ordinary crimes (say, rape or robbery) within their territories, for the sake of their 'business' (as too much violence would lead both to unnecessary tension and to an excessive public exposure of the community at hand) as well as a demonstration of rival power.

*On the other hand*, the protection of business, as well as other symbolic demonstrations of power and virility (see Zaluar, 1994, 2002a) has contributed not only to an increasing use of violence by criminal groups, but also to an increasing 'tyranny' on the part of drug dealers towards ordinary *favela* inhabitants.

Drug traffickers' 'tyranny' is multifaceted. It seems—at the first glance—that in their own community *favela* residents enjoy safety from certain types of violent crime. However, there are also clear limits to role of *favela*-based drug dealers as 'safety guarantors'. As I have observed for many years, rapists, thieves and robbers who practice crimes against other *favela* residents are usually punished by drug dealers in a severe manner. However, the dealers themselves often behave in a brutal and arbitrary way towards other *favelados*. While drug traffickers usually condemn theft or rape if it is committed by other people, it is not unusual that drug traffickers themselves take houses and women by force, as I have registered in earlier works (Souza, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2008). In this context, a particularly shocking example of drug traffickers' 'tyranny' was reported by the press in 2003, when a teenager was forced by local drug traffickers to walk naked in the streets of the *favela* she lived, then raped and finally tortured and murdered—all because it was discovered that her boyfriend lived in another *favela* which belonged to the network of a rival *comando*. Public humiliations like this and different forms of violent 'exemplary punishment' of transgressors (such as torture, castration and murder) are by no means unusual, and are often implemented by 'micro-level warlords', who act as omnipotent legislators, judges and 'law' enforcers.

'Micro-level warlords' increasingly go beyond their criminal business not only to control individual behaviour, but also in order to regulate and influence many aspects of *favela* life, including spatial organization and collective spatial practices. Let me give a few examples.

*Favela*-based drug bosses can influence and disturb *favela*-upgrading projects, as illustrated by Rio de Janeiro's community-upgrading programme *Favela-Bairro*. Since the implementation of this programme by Rio de Janeiro's administration in 1994, drug traffickers have prohibited the implementation of specific aspects of certain *favela*-upgrading projects in the framework of this programme

several times. In other cases, local bosses ordered the modification of aspects of the project after its implementation. This kind of interference is imposed by ‘micro-level warlords’ because they are not interested in some types of physical improvements which could represent a risk to their security (such as better integration between the small streets of the *favela* and those of the surrounding neighbourhoods of the formal part of the city). This situation is often ‘tolerated’ by a demoralized state apparatus. Problems like these (along with plain arbitrary behaviour on the part of armed dealers wishing to demonstrate power or extort money from *Favela-Bairro* teams) are often reported by the press, and several people who were interviewed by me and my assistants reported similar experiences (see Note 8 in this paper, and above all Souza, 2005).

Another example relates directly to the residents’ associations. From as early as the 1980s and 1990s drug traffickers started to influence elections for dwellers’ associations in many shanty towns, advancing candidates linked to them and committed to their interests. The other side of the same coin is that leaders of dwellers’ associations who refuse to obey orders (such as requests to permit the use of the association’s infrastructure by drug traffickers) are usually not only threatened and banished, but often even murdered (Souza, 2000, 2005, 2008; Zaluar, 2002b; see also Leeds, 1996). According to an estimate made by the Human Rights Commission of the Legislative Assembly of the State of Rio de Janeiro, 300 leaders of residents’ associations were evicted from their *favelas* by criminals between 1992 and 2001, and at least 100 people linked to these associations were murdered (*O Globo*, 20 June 2002).<sup>11</sup>

It is not only community leaders who are subject to violence and banishment. When a crew invades and takes possession over a *favela* which was previously controlled by another crew, not only are surviving crew members evicted, but often their relatives and even friends are cast out too. By virtue of this practice, or simply as a consequence of

increased insecurity, around 20% of dwellers have already left their respective *favelas*, according to a rough estimation made by the Federation of Residents’ Associations of the State of Rio de Janeiro a couple of years ago (Zaluar, 2002a, p. 149).

*Favela* activism has suffered in many different ways as a consequence of the restricted spatial mobility of *favela* residents. One among many examples was given by a community leader of a *favela* of Rio de Janeiro whom I interviewed along with some research assistants in July 1995. She informed us that it was virtually impossible for her and community leaders of neighbouring communities to develop co-operation, since their *favelas* were turned into territories under the influence of rival *comandos*. According to her, even the possibility of them gathering together and promoting meetings to discuss themes of general interest became very difficult because of the effects of the rivalry between drug trafficking groups.

As we have seen, drug traffickers’ brutality and their interference in residents’ associations mean that both state projects (exemplified here by the community-upgrading programme *Favela-Bairro*) and bottom-up initiatives (*favela* activism as such) face serious obstacles. This has been particularly true in relation to Rio de Janeiro—where approximately one third of the population live in *favelas*, most of which are controlled by a *comando*.<sup>12</sup>

One thing is certain: *favela*-based drug dealers are neither a kind of tropical ‘Robin Hoods’ (a myth which has been cultivated by some wannabe progressive observers since the 1980s) nor ‘beasts’ (an image which is usually disseminated by the police and the mass media). As I have tried to demonstrate, the most accurate definition of their role seems to be that *they are themselves oppressed people who quite often oppress other oppressed people* (Souza, 2005, p. 7; 2006a, p. 510; 2008, p. 61).

Considering all of this, it is not accidental that *favela* activism in Rio de Janeiro (as well as in other Brazilian metropolises and big cities) became weaker and weaker in terms of



mobilization capacity, political influence, emancipative élan, and perhaps even creativity.

## 2. A second example from Brazil: *Sem-teto* settlements as ‘contested territories’

*A brief presentation of the sem-teto and their strategies*

While *favela* activism has declined in relevance, and to some extent in legitimacy since the 1980s, another social movement has gained visibility and has become politically relevant in recent years in urban Brazil: the *sem-teto* movement.

*Sem-teto* means literally ‘roofless’. Despite the appearances, this expression has been often used to describe not homeless people or beggars (euphemistically known in Brazil as *população de rua*, that is ‘street population’), but a *specific kind* of squatter. Although *favela* residents are also squatters in a broader sense, *favelados* do not see themselves as a part of the *sem-teto* movement. Historically, *favelas* have emerged either ‘spontaneously’ or sometimes under guidance and protection of populist politicians looking for future electoral support, while the *sem-teto* movement is usually highly ‘politicized’ from a critical standpoint. Nevertheless, many *sem-teto* are former *favela* residents and sometimes even former homeless people in a strict sense, and—as I could observe with the help of interviews—they show a strong solidarity with *favela* inhabitants, whose problems are so familiar to them and whose identity as squatters in a broader sense they surely share. In the remainder of this text, I will use the Portuguese expression *sem-teto* instead of ‘squatters’, in order to avoid misunderstandings.

The *sem-teto* movements’ praxis has shown an increasing ability to combine different strategies, tactics and methods, from ‘direct action’ to ‘institutional struggle’; that is, from squatting as such (along with creative attempts to develop new social relations, in terms of more solidarity and alternative

culture, as well as alternative economic circuits), to campaigns and creative public protests against evictions to dialogue and negotiation with state officials. In fact, while squatting is a direct challenge to the capitalist ‘order’ of private ownership of land and to the inefficiency of the state apparatus (as many squatted buildings are old public buildings which remained vacant for years or even decades), a smart use of the possibilities offered by the existing legal framework with the purpose of avoiding short-term evictions and attaining a ‘stabilization’ of the possession of vacant land and buildings by *sem-teto* is not discharged *a priori* by the activists, even if those possibilities do not justify any ‘legalistic’ over-optimism. Obviously, one cannot expect the formal legal framework in a capitalist country to challenge private property. However, contemporary Brazilian urban law is relatively progressive,<sup>13</sup> providing a framework for punishment of explicit land speculation and to the protection of the rights of *favela* residents under some special circumstances.<sup>14</sup> Be that as it may, we can observe that the *sem-teto* movement has already obtained some modest victories on the basis of an intelligent use of the existent legal and institutional room for manoeuvre.

For decades the use and the improvement of the legal and institutional room for manoeuvre in order to attain more socio-spatial justice in the Brazilian cities has been the quintessence of the *reforma urbana* strategy, which was developed first in early 1960s and improved after the end of the military regime (1964–85)—that is, long before the *sem-teto* movement became important. Although *reforma urbana* usually means simply ‘urban reform’ in a very general sense, this expression has also meant something more specific since the 1960s and especially since the 1980s. Put briefly, it means a kind of *structural social reform* which encompasses a *strong and direct spatial dimension*. In contrast to what can be called in Portuguese a *reforma urbanística* (i.e., an intervention oriented mainly or exclusively towards urban design—in other words, a

mere reshaping of the space for purposes of more economic efficiency or beauty), the aim of a *reforma urbana* is a much broader one, namely *the transformation of the institutions regulating the production of urban space to attain more social justice*.

From the perspective of those so-called ‘progressive’ planners who sometimes work for the state apparatus, or who believe that the state apparatus is the sole relevant planning agent and the sole force which can promote changes towards more socio-spatial justice (‘state-centrism’), the essence of the *reforma urbana* strategy lies in the combination of progressive fiscal instruments (such as the progressive property tax) with tools designed to assure the legal rights of *favela* dwellers (*usucapião* and *concessão de uso*), ‘compulsory construction and land division’, expropriation, alternative zoning tools and community-upgrading, as well as some other measures.<sup>15</sup> Theoretically, this is based on participatory planning, but always under the strict guidance of the state apparatus and in the context of the legal framework. From this perspective, the approval of the Federal Law of Urban Development (called the ‘City Statute’) in 2001, which is to a large extent compatible with the spirit of the *reforma urbana*, has been regarded as a crucial milestone for progressive urban politics, capable of influencing local level situation positively in the long run.

Unfortunately, the limits of ‘progressive’ laws like the ‘City Statute’ have been neglected in the academic debate. The most relevant problem is the ‘legalistic’ over-optimism which is typical of ‘left-wing technocratism’ (Souza, 2002, p. 163; 2006a, p. 224; 2006b, p. 337). In spite of the *potential* importance of some laws, planning instruments and institutionalized participative channels, expecting too much from state initiatives on the basis of the existing legal and institutional framework surely corresponds to the cultivation of an illusion. Although this ‘state-centred’ approach to ‘urban reform’ as a strategy of socio-spatial transformation goes far beyond the usual ‘good governance’ discourse and opposes the spirit of the neo-

liberal agenda (‘deregulation + privatization’), and though the ‘City Statute’ seems to be undoubtedly a considerable legal advance for a capitalist country—but which may in the long-run lead to socio-political ‘appeasement’ and ‘stabilization’ instead of contributing to radical, deep socio-spatial change...—, both the ‘state-centred’ approach to ‘urban reform’ and the legal framework also have severe political limits.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to the aforementioned ‘state-centred’ mainstream approach, *reforma urbana* has also been a key idea for a large part of the *sem-teto* movement,<sup>17</sup> but its activists have tried to capture this idea from a distinct, radically bottom-up perspective. While the ‘urban reform’ mainstream shows a ‘legalistic’, and to some extent even technocratic approach to socio-spatial change, some organizations of the *sem-teto* movement represent a real grassroots alternative in terms of ‘urban reform’. This social movement tries to overcome the limits not only of the legal framework itself (which, as it was pointed out, merely restricts some privileges of private property owners, especially regarding massive land speculation), but also the limits of ‘left-wing technocratism’ which characterizes contemporary ‘urban reform’ mainstream by means of a pressure from below (i.e., independent initiatives and direct action in the form of squatting, street blockades, grounding of co-operatives and other forms of income generation, and so on).

A good example for how much some organizations of the *sem-teto* act as ‘critical urban planning agents’ (or even more precisely as ‘insurgent urban planning agents’)<sup>18</sup> is the fact that they sometimes try to participate in broader discussions about the housing question or to ‘urban reform’ in general, mainly supported and influenced by more or less established NGOs. Furthermore, as I have already pointed out (Souza, 2006a, p. 174; 2006b, pp. 332–333, 340 [Note 8]), organizations of the *sem-teto* movement also take into consideration existing planning documents produced by the state apparatus such as master plans, zoning ordinances and various

kinds of maps—not always to just criticize them, but sometimes in order to *consider certain legal and environmental limits to their own action* (i.e., areas of environmental protection) or with the purpose of *obtaining several types of useful information* (like those on land ownership).

Another example for a socio-spatial strategy towards ‘urban development from below’ is the *assentamentos rururbanos* (‘rurban settlements’), a proposal supported and to some extent developed by MTST at the beginning of the present decade, clearly under influence of its ‘source of inspiration’—MST (see Note 17 for a description of MTST). This strategy corresponds to an attempt to build settlements for urban workers at the periphery of cities, in which the families could breed small animals and cultivate vegetables. According to MTST’s strategists, workers could thus become less dependent of the capitalist market to satisfy their alimentary basic needs. In fact, there was even the expectation that this kind of ‘rurban settlement’ could be attractive not just for future migrants, but also to poor people who presently live in *favelas* dispersed throughout the big cities. However, this strategy did not prove itself very promising, since it would be unrealistic to expect that those residents of *favelas* located close to the Central Business District or subcentres where they can find most jobs would have a big interest in changing their homes for locations far away at the periphery of the cities—so that it was eventually criticized and abandoned by MTST itself.<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly, the idea of ‘rurban settlements’ is at least partly an interesting one; however, it was poorly articulated in MTST’s discourse. It carries an ‘original sin’ that compromises its consistency: As has been usual in the case of MTST, this strategy also corresponds to an attempt to adapt the approaches and strategies of the MST to the urban space—which in fact deals with problems concerning a kind of environment that is very different of that of a big city or metropolis.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it remains as an

interesting and noticeable example of the proactive role of a *sem-teto* organization.

Anyway, ‘rurban settlements’ are certainly not the only contribution of the *sem-teto* movement in general, and of MTST in particular, to the development of insurgent spatial practices and bottom-up socio-spatial strategies. Along with other organizations of the *sem-teto* movement, MTST has made various contributions to the building of an alternative, socially less unjust spatiality. For instance, in São Paulo, MTST has tried to stimulate critical forms of popular culture, through the grounding of the *Brigadas de Guerrilha Cultural* (= ‘Cultural Guerrilla Brigades’). More or less similar attempts can be observed in Rio de Janeiro, such as the grounding of a *bloco carnavalesco* by residents of the *ocupação Zumbi dos Palmares* in 2008. Although it was apparently modelled on the *blocos carnavalescos* from Rio de Janeiro (which are groups of people who, dressed in costumes and singing and playing percussion and several music instruments, parade in specific places to celebrate carnival, being a kind of small *escolas de samba*/‘samba schools’), this *bloco* has a critical, political purpose, and not just an entertainment-centred one.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Sem-teto settlements as ‘contested territories’*

Another contribution of MTST to the development of insurgent spatial practices is its search for political support in *favelas*. This search is evident in the organization’s more recent proposals and strategies. MTST has tried using the *Associação de Comunidades Periferia Ativa* to organize groups of discussion and forms of co-operation since 2005, in order to contribute to ‘political capacity-building’ in *favelas*. However, MTST militants have learned that the problems of a *favela* are quite different from those of a *ocupação* (= *sem-teto* settlement). As a MTST leader told me in September 2005, they know very well that *favelas* are contested spaces: already existing (and often clientelistic) residents’ associations, Pentecostal churches ...

and drug traffickers. All these groups and stakeholders co-exist at the same place in a situation of constant tension.

As it became clear in the previous section, drug trafficking has been an important challenge for *favela* activism in Brazil. And it is increasingly a challenge also for the *sem-teto* movement too. As far as this specific social movement is concerned, the problem is not only related to the attempt on the part of a particular organization such as MTST to develop actions in *favelas*, but also related to the fact that drug dealers have tried to ‘territorialize’ *ocupações* on several occasions, as has been reported from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In this sense, *sem-teto* settlements are becoming themselves ‘contested territories’.

A few examples illustrate the point. At the periphery of Guarulhos (a municipality which belongs to the metropolitan region of São Paulo), MTST militants were already threatened and ‘de-territorialized’ by criminals in 2004, as one of the biggest settlements grounded by the organization, *ocupação* Anita Garibaldi, was taken under control of

drug traffickers. The activists tried first to ‘negotiate’ with the dealers, in order to attain some kind of ‘peaceful co-existence’; however, they were expelled by force after tension escalated.<sup>22</sup> A similar episode was reported to me by a *sem-teto* militant in Rio de Janeiro, concerning the threat of ‘terrorialization’ by a drug-trafficking crew which was suffered by an *ocupação* located in a building close to Rio’s Central Business District. In this case, the traffickers did not succeed, as they were persuaded by *sem-teto* activists that they would be too exposed in such a location (relatively close to important public buildings), and that the *sem-teto* could be evicted by the police at any moment...

This interest on the part of drug traffickers is not difficult to understand, as many *ocupações* have the same (or at least similar) characteristics which make *favelas* attractive as a trade point and as a refuge for criminals. The internal spatial structure of the *ocupações* is often not different from that of the *favelas* (with the obvious exception of squatted buildings; compare Figures 2–4); the location



**Figure 2** *Ocupação* João Cândido, in Itapeperica da Serra (periphery of São Paulo). Photograph © M. Lopes de Souza, 2008.



**Figure 3** *Ocupação* Chiquinha Gonzaga, a squatted building in Rio de Janeiro's inner city. Photograph © Lopes de Souza, 2008.

of many *ocupações* also makes them as attractive as many *favelas* because of their logistical relevance and/or because of the easy access for the middle-class drug consumers; finally, the majority of the population of *ocupações* are not militants of any *sem-teto* organization, but unemployed or underemployed (young) people who can be recruited for

different activities in the context of drug trafficking.

MTST leaders told me in 2006 they were still trying to find a way to 'co-exist' peacefully with drug traffickers. However, as the case of *ocupação* Anita Garibaldi demonstrates 'peaceful co-existence' does not seem to be a particularly realistic strategy ... Since both retail drug dealers and the *sem-teto* movement operate in segregated spaces and recruit their bases among the same stratum of the population—namely the 'hyperprecariat'—it seems that the movements organizations and their militants are living under a Damocles' sword. On the one side, it is of course very difficult for a social movement organization to cope with this kind of situation by mean of fighting against criminals who armed not only with pistols, but also with assault rifles (AK-47, AR-15, FN-FAL), machine guns and even hand grenades (often stolen from army barracks). On the other side, every form of 'co-operation' with criminals would bring the obvious risk of demoralization and also of corruption for social movements activists.



**Figure 4** Apartment in the *ocupação* Chiquinha Gonzaga. Photograph © M. Lopes de Souza, 2008.

### 3. Theoretical (and political) implications: the new role of the urban ‘hyperprecariat’ in (semi)peripheral countries

#### *Some evidences from other countries*

At this juncture, it is convenient to make explicit an objective which is only implicit in the Introduction of this text: This work’s purpose is not circumscribed to empirical analysis; it also has the ambition of making some contribution to theory-building. However, it is quite obvious that within the limits of a relatively short paper it is scarcely possible to furnish empirical details about several case studies and to explore theoretical insights at the same time. Sure, some theoretical ideas can be outlined in a very synthetic way, but then the empirical basis cannot be limited to just the Brazilian case studies which were briefly examined in Sections 1 and 2 of this paper. That is to say, I can mention some other interesting cases, in order to avoid ‘theoretical provinciality’ in its crudest form, but generalization can only be made in a cautious manner.

One interesting example comes from *Argentina*. It is also a semi-peripheral country, but in contrast to Brazil, the level of social inequality in Argentina was relatively low during most of the 20th century. ‘Hyperprecarity’ is nothing new in typical semi-peripheral countries such as Brazil, South Africa or Mexico, but ‘street children’ (Spanish = *niños de la calle*), massive under-employment, shanty towns (in Argentina called *villas miseria*) and begging are relatively new phenomena in Argentina. Following several processes and problems—such as de-industrialization, which was ‘collateral damage’ from the neo-liberal economic policies implemented by the military regime after 1976, not to mention a series of successive corrupt and/or incompetent governments—‘hyperprecarization’ finally also became a part of Argentinian socio-economic landscape in the 1990s.

Although police brutality is well-known in Argentina, an ostensive presence of organized

and semi-organized criminality as is typical for Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Mexico City is still not a big issue there. However, as the *guerras* (wars) between *bandas* (criminal crews) of drug traffickers in the ‘unofficial district’ of Bajo Flores in Buenos Aires show the same phenomena which are well-known in Brazilian or Mexican cities can also be observed in Argentina, even if with a lower degree of intensity and complexity. In fact, there is apparently some evidence of connections between Buenos Aires’ drug traffickers and Brazilian criminals, as reported in 8 June 2007 by the newspaper *Clarín*, which also stresses that ‘[L]a trama que comenzó con una guerra entre bandas de traficantes peruanos por el control de distintos barrios de la Capital Federal se hace cada vez más compleja’ (‘the story which began as a war between criminal crews formed by Peruvian traffickers for the control of several districts of the Federal Capital is becoming more and more complex’).

In this framework, an emblematic case of ‘de-territorialization’ of urban activists by criminals was reported to me by an activist of *Libres del Sur—Colectivo de Cultura y Acción Popular* (a politico-cultural organization which works closely with the *piquetero* movement and which is based in Avellaneda, in the metropolitan region of Buenos Aires) in February 2007. According to this activist, a cultural centre managed by social movements activists had been taken by force by drug traffickers a couple of months before in the district of Bajo Flores, where one of the oldest *villas* of the Argentinian capital is located. In the light of the experience of the Brazilian (and to a lesser degree Mexican) cities, one can easily foresee a trend towards a proliferation of cases of ‘(de)territorialization’ like this also in Buenos Aires.

Examples from *South Africa*, which is a semi-peripheral country like Brazil and Argentina, are also instructive. As in other semi-peripheral countries, social inequality is very high in South Africa. The *apartheid* regime is gone, but its socio-spatial legacy remains, and what Beall *et al.* (2002) write

about Johannesburg is true for South Africa as a whole—from *racial apartheid to social polarization*:

‘The transition from apartheid in Johannesburg has meant that power in this divided city is more contested than ever before. Notwithstanding the acceptance of promising redistributive frameworks of reconstruction, poverty and inequality in Johannesburg are far from being reduced.’ (p. 7)

Criminality and urban violence are also high in South Africa, and like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, in Johannesburg white, middle-class families increasingly live in ‘high-security habitats’ such as gated communities or houses which resemble bunkers. Indeed, the spatial (re)location patterns of industrial companies and service-sector businesses have been co-determined by factors such as safety and protection from crime (Beall *et al.*, 2002, pp. 54–56). However, the situation in South Africa is quite different from that of Rio de Janeiro’s or São Paulo’s, as Richard Pithouse (who is an urban activist in Durban and at the same time a brilliant scholar) told me:

‘[W]e generally don’t have [in South Africa] the situation where settlements are controlled by criminal gangs. The gang culture does exist here but not in the shacks. It exists in the peripheral relocation sites to which people were removed out of the shacks in the cities in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, especially the Cape Flats in Cape Town and some townships in Durban. These are places that look like the City of God in the film of that same name (although they are certainly not as bad in terms of crime as the situation represented in that film).’<sup>23</sup>

Compared with Brazilian *comandos*, crime in South Africa seems to be much less organized. As another South African activist (Jared Sacks, from Cape Town) told me: ‘[t]he gangs in the Cape Flats (the suburban, mostly “coloured” townships) more resemble the kinds of gangs you’d find in the US

[rather than those “organizations” which operate at the level of retail drug trafficking in several Brazilian cities]’; and ‘in the rest of the areas, it’s small groups or individuals’, so that the situation in South Africa ‘is definitely very different’ (in comparison with Brazil).<sup>24</sup> Notwithstanding this difference, there are ‘micro-level warlords’ in the poor settlements of South African cities too. As Richard Pithouse pointed out in the same email:

‘(...) there is a huge problem with authoritarianism in the settlements here. The state, referring to the UN, always talks about shack lords as the problem. But the problem is not usually people extracting rent. That does happen but it is not typical. The typical mode of authoritarianism is political—a local elite that delivers the settlement as a vote bank (and as a space that does not mobilise against the state) in exchange for small favours and, when housing developments happen, considerable access to patronage. In most settlements it is a question of party control. The middle classes have liberal democracy but in the settlements there is no political freedom—if you challenge the party you must leave or have your home burnt. Many of the local party leaders have armed support, sometimes this comes from local criminals that they shelter in exchange for security (but there is still not a gang culture—these are individuals who operate in small groups).’

As Jared Sacks pointed out: ‘[c]riminality in South Africa is, I think, the biggest block on democratically organizing the townships in a progressive manner’. The fact that ‘it’s small groups or individuals’, as it was already mentioned, ‘does not make it any less debilitating’.

‘It means, for instance, many people are scared to go out at night in certain circumstances. This has an impact on possible cooperative ways of interacting within settlements and communities. People can work together but they’re scared to really work cooperatively in full trust with one another.’

Also, fear of crime allows politicians and political parties to capitalise through “anti-crime” marches (especially Cape Town’s mayor). This undermines the autonomous organising of the social movements which seek to organise structures outside a hierarchical political party format. The more right wing parties always have anti-crime or anti-drug marches seeking to co-opt poor people who are sick of crime. So this makes it extremely important to find progressive ways to being “anti-crime”. (...)

Finally, fear of crime justifies the increased militarization of the country through building a huge prison industrial complex, putting more and more cops on the street, and co-opting more and more residents into wanting the intervention of police officers in order to protect them from “criminals”.

As one can see, the kind of ‘approach’ to criminality disseminated by the Brazilian movie (now internationally known) *Tropa de Elite* (‘Elite Squad’) (2007) – brutal repression as the only appropriate response to criminality, and in fact the kind of response that good citizens/tax payers expect from the government – is by no means a Brazilian ‘privilege’. (In fact, the ‘spirit’ of *Tropa de Elite* and its positive reception among many middle-class people can be summarized and partly explained by means of a phrase said by a voiceover during the opening credits of another movie, the science fiction movie *The Chronicles of Riddick* [2004]: ‘In normal times, evil should be fought by good, but in times like this, well, it should be fought by another kind of evil’.)

Although political parties and *favela* inhabitants have established clientelistic relationship in many Brazilian cities for decades, this kind of dependency has been above all a matter of co-optation, and not (partly in contrast to South Africa) of employment of violence on the part of the leaders of dwellers’ associations against *favelados*. In fact, as it was shown in Section 1, this clientelism has been strongly modified by the interference of drug traffickers since the 1980s and 1990s, who manipulate dwellers’

associations and ‘negotiate’ with politicians for the right for a candidate to make political propaganda in a certain *favela* (dwellers’ associations are often used by drug dealers as an intermediary instance between them and the politicians). In South Africa, ‘micro-level warlords’ are primarily settlements’ rulers who use violence to support traditional party politics, establishing several connections with criminals. The existence of true social movements is also very difficult under these circumstances. As Richard Pithouse told me regarding *Abahlali baseMjondolo* (a shack dwellers’ organization in South Africa which is supported and co-organized by him).

‘Abahlali politics only becomes possible when the settlements were democratized. This was the first struggle on which all others, especially the struggle against the state, was dependent. It has often been very hard and in some settlements this question is still not resolved.’

### *Theoretical and political implications*

As far as the theoretical and political implications are concerned, we can both summarize the most important positive outcomes of some contemporary urban movement and, in contrast to this, advance some hypothesis regarding the obstacles they face in relation to the increasing magnitude of drug trafficking and violence and violent criminality in general.

In short, no social movement is going to implement radical changes in space and society *alone* (i.e., working without connections with other movements), but we can recognize that social movements like the Brazilian *sem-teto*, the Argentinian *piqueteros* (along with the *asambleas barriales*), and shack dwellers such as those organized around the South African organization *Abahlali baseMjondolo* in Durban perform very relevant tasks in terms of social justice and democratization by means of ‘supervizing’ and putting the state apparatus under pressure, and by making contributions concerning the ‘right



to the city' on the part of the oppressed directly (by means of squatting, development of alternative economic circuits, and so on). Of course, we should not forget that all these movements have their own problems, and one of them is the challenge represented by long-term mobilization of people who often do not correspond to 'working class' in the old, strict Marxist sense, but rather to 'hyper-precariat'. Nevertheless, important achievements have been made by urban social movements in different countries, and the cases mentioned here can illustrate the point very well.

A word which has been used to define and describe the anti-authoritarian values and practices which characterize some contemporary social movements at various levels is *autonomy*. Many present-day social movements worldwide share a common a commitment to this idea, which presupposes a criticism both of capitalism (and, due to its limits, also of representative 'democracy') and of authoritarian 'socialism' (totalitarianism, Leninist 'democratic centralism', and so on) *at the same time*.

The development of an alternative to both capitalism and Marxism on the basis of self-management and a radical criticism towards the state apparatus has been a characteristic of anarchism from its classic period (19th century and the beginning of the 20th century: Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, among other relevant thinkers and activists) to the neo-anarchism of the second half of the 20th century (represented by thinkers like Murray Bookchin). Unfortunately, many contributions made by the anarchists (from the criticisms they have addressed to the solutions they have conceived) remain insufficiently developed, or even entail contradictions and shortcomings. Many questions the classic libertarians raised as early as in the 19th century remained theoretically and philosophically underdeveloped until the 1950s and 1960s and especially the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, when the Greco-French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis, co-founder of the famous French left-wing

group and journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, made the most important contribution to date to the 're-establishment' of the democratic project—which he call the *autonomy project* (*projet d'autonomie*).

Exploring insights already offered by anarchists like Bakunin and Kropotkin in the past, but moving at an intellectual level in terms of coherence, richness and density that was never reached by most anarchist authors, Castoriadis showed that many problems of the Marxist alternative to capitalism and the capitalist state are symptoms of the presence of capitalist 'social imaginary significations'<sup>25</sup> in Marxist thought. A problem that, as he demonstrated, did not begin with Stalinism, not even with Leninism, but instead can be found in Marx himself, although they became more explicit and worse later (Castoriadis, 1975, 1978, 1983b, 1985a, 1985b). For Castoriadis, Marxism was not able to propose a real alternative to capitalism and representative 'democracies' (or, in Castoriadis' parlance, 'liberal oligarchies' [Castoriadis, 1999]) precisely because of these weaknesses. In the context of historical materialism, resistance against the structural inequality of the distribution of the wealth generated by society provoked criticism of *capitalist production relations*, but not a deep criticism of the *productive forces* brought about by the capitalist mode of production. (As Marx underlined, the development of mankind would necessarily include the utilization of the technological contributions made by capitalism; these contributions should be regarded in themselves as a positive legacy, on which basis a free, classless society could be built after overcoming bourgeois class exploitation.) From a specifically political point of view, Marx's view of a revolutionary working class led by the communist party was 'completed' by Lenin at the beginning of the 20th century, when the strategy of 'democratic centralism' as the form of organization of the communist party and the idea of a 'socialist state' established through a 'dictatorship of the proletariat' finally revealed the authoritarian germ contained in

Marx's heritage (as had been already noted by Bakunin in the 19th century) in such a way that only an extraordinary ideological blindness could fail to recognize.

In his 're-establishment' of the democratic project, Castoriadis was deeply inspired by the classical Greek heritage of *direct democracy*. He admitted, of course, that ancient democracy lacked *universalism*; he did not ignore slavery and the inferior status of women as the Greek *polis*' weaknesses. Notwithstanding this basic restriction, ancient Greece experienced the 'co-birth' of *philosophy* (i.e., of the explicit questioning of tradition) and *politics* (i.e., of the explicit deliberation about, as well as the lucid attempt to change, laws and institutions). Ancient Greece was also the historic and spatial framework in which the idea of *autonomy* was born (Castoriadis, 1986b, 1996a).

According to Castoriadis, the idea of autonomy embraces two essential and inter-related senses: *collective* autonomy, which is *the conscious and explicitly free self-rule of a particular society*, as based on politico-institutional guaranties as well as the effective material possibility (including access to reliable information) of equal chances of participation in relevant decision-making processes; and *individual* autonomy, which means *the capacity of particular individuals to make choices in freedom* (a capacity which of course depends both on strictly individual and psychological circumstances and on political and material factors). For him, an autonomous society is one which 'institutes' itself on the basis of freedom both from metaphysical constraints (e.g., religious foundations of laws and norms) and from oppression (Castoriadis, 1975, 1983a, 1986c, 1990b, 1996b). That is the reason why both 'liberal oligarchies' (which embody a structural gap between a minority of powerful groups and the majority of ordinary citizens: decision-making spheres are largely closed off from public and democratic accountability, information which is brought to the public is not seldom masked and the state

guarantees the reproduction of the existing social and economic order through its legal monopoly of violence) and 'real socialism' represented both heteronomy, even if in different ways and degrees of intensity.

Although Castoriadis shared many anarchistic basic insights and values, the Greco-French philosopher also criticized anarchistic oversimplifications—for instance, regarding the question of the concept of *power*. (While 'power' seems to be an anathema *as such* for most anarchists, Castoriadis stressed the incoherence of the idea of a society in which power would be completely absent [Castoriadis, 1983a]. At the same time, he differentiated clearly between power in general, which is a part of social relations in every society, and *state* power in particular, which is the most emblematic symbol of *heteronomous* power.) Apart from restrictions like this, the 'autonomy project' outlined by Castoriadis in several works deserves to be regarded as the most profound and solid foundation of the radical-libertarian alternative.

The idea of autonomy was born in Europe, but its praxis, as well as the reflection about it, did not remain a privilege of European activists and thinkers. One of the most remarkable aspects of many of today's social movements outside Europe has been indeed, precisely, the attempt to develop 'horizontal', non-hierarchical, *autonomous* socio-political relations—in contrast to the 'vertical', more or less hierarchical ones which are typical of many social movements embedded in highly authoritarian political cultures (and, of course, also typical of left-wing political parties). *Autonomía* and 'horizontality' have been characteristic for the socio-spatial practices of a large part of the *piqueteros* movement in Argentina, although this social movement comprises many organizations with different political and ideological profiles (about the *piqueteros* and related social movements in Argentina, see Zibechi, 1999, 2003, 2007), as well as for the Zapatistas in Mexico (see Zibechi, 1999, 2007). 'Horizontality' as a value and as a practice also seems to be very important for a part of the

shack dwellers' movement in South Africa (for instance, the aforementioned organization *Abahlali baseMjondolo* which emerged in Durban and is now represented in other South African cities as well—see Pithouse, 2008), and the idea of *autonomia* has been cultivated by a part of the *sem-teto* movement in Brazil, especially in Rio de Janeiro (see Souza, 2006a, 2006b).<sup>26</sup> Indeed, as far as the Brazilian *sem-teto* are concerned, there are some organizations and *ocupações* clearly inspired by a 'horizontal', self-management approach to socio-political relations in Rio de Janeiro, such as *ocupações* Chiquinha Gonzaga, Zumbi dos Palmares and Quilombo das Guerreiras, which are closely linked to the organization *Frente de Luta Popular/FLP* (= Front for Popular Struggle), although the real extent to which the *sem-teto* movement is and will be able to develop a new 'political culture' in terms of non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical, 'horizontal' socio-spatial practices is still an open question.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to this, the European situation is rather characterized by pessimism than by hope, and by no means by any large-scale mobilization. After the events of 1968 in France (which were partly influenced by the group *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) and some relevant political activity of the Italian workers in the 1970s (in which framework organizations such as *Autonomia Operaia* were grounded), social movements dramatically declined in Europe (see, for instance, Gronemeyer, 2005), despite the creativity shown by recent movements such as, for instance, the social centres movement, Reclaim the Streets or the anti-globalization movement. As far as the European anti-globalization movement is concerned (which is the most relevant social movement in contemporary Europe), a part of it is undoubtedly committed to radical-libertarian, autonomous ideas; but on the other side its strength and consistency have also been sometimes regarded with deep scepticism (see Wetzel, 2005).

In countries such as Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and South Africa, Castoriadis' diagnosis

of an 'époque du conformisme généralisé', that is of an 'age of widespread conformism' (Castoriadis, 1990a), seems to be much less true than in relation to his own European context. However, precisely *autonomy* is in danger in our present-day 'age of fear', especially in cities like those of semi-peripheral countries. Besides police repression and brutality, another problem which several social movements in different countries have to face nowadays are the threats and the disruptive and corruptive force represented by more or less organized crime and its effects. Criminal attempts to co-opt, to silence, to neutralize the social force of emancipative social movements have been a daily experience in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* for many years, and these days they have to face also the increasing relevance of police's degeneration and corruption at its peak (which also represents the climax of the promiscuity between the 'legal' and the 'illegal' regarding state institutions): paramilitary groups, that is 'death squads' and the like... With the 'militarization of the urban question' (i.e., as I argued in the Introduction, more and more repression to the point of the engagement of the army itself in a desperate attempt to impose 'law and order'), autonomy is under threat—by all sides.

Emancipative social movements have to learn to be a countervailing power not only regarding the state apparatus and the legal side of capitalist economy, *but also in relation to the ordinary criminal forces*, which are usually totally adapted to capitalist values (for instance, consumerism), capitalist 'logic' (orientation towards maximization of profit) and capitalist patterns of behaviour, despite some illusionary 'wannabe-left-wing' discourses and isolated acts of 'solidarity with the poor' on the part of some drug traffickers (see Souza, 2008). Whatever their limitations, they have to do so in order to avoid destruction (or demoralization) by criminal crews and organizations. Emancipative social movements cannot rely only or primarily on the state apparatus to protect their militants—it would be contradictory to their spirit, and in the long run even dangerous to their goals.

On the other side, emancipative social movements cannot cultivate illusions about the ‘progressiveness’ of some criminals and criminal forces, although the people who constitute the mass of ‘informal workers’ recruited to serve activities such as retail drug trafficking are commonly poor young people who live in shanty towns. Sure, capitalism is itself ‘criminogenous’ as it induces or generates crime in several different ways, and those poor young people who kill each other regularly in the course of ‘wars’ between criminal crews usually lack any ‘class consciousness’. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to imagine that the ‘hyperprecariat in guns’ can be massively converted to consistent anti-systemic beliefs and goals (i.e., to a *Klasse für sich*) simply because of their ‘objective condition’ in terms of exploited social class (*Klasse an sich*)—as if my enemy’s enemy would be always and necessarily (or automatically) my friend or ally... (Souza, 2008, pp. 136–137)

Emancipative urban social movements must learn to combine their persuasion and mobilization skills. However, it is not easy to neutralize criminal crews (sometimes heavily armed, as in the case of Brazil) and organizations, even on the battlefield of symbolism, since the culture of violence, consumerism and individualism is much more disseminated than emancipative, solidarity-oriented values (see, in this regard, also more or less specific problems such as xenophobia in South Africa, where violent attacks on foreigners have been registered in 2008—which is a big problem indeed, as in South African poor settlements and townships there are usually many foreign born people). Nevertheless, I would submit that they also must develop their own ‘self-defence socio-spatial strategies and tactics’, because they cannot expect much ‘protection’ from the same state which very often criminalizes and represses them. To explore the concrete features of these ‘self-defence strategies and tactics’, however, we need much more than just the efforts of a single scholar in the context of a short academic paper. Indeed,

we need, and urgently, a broad *collective debate*—among social movements’ activists as well as between these and progressive scholars.

## Conclusion

As I have argued, one of the major challenges some contemporary social movements are facing is increasingly the problem represented by criminal crews and organizations. This problem has not been taken seriously enough by most researchers or by many activists. Although empirical evidence from several cities eloquently shows the disruptive force of the ‘criminal-informal capitalism’ and its negative effects on emancipative social movements.

One of the reasons why this problem has been underestimated or even neglected is the fact that, especially in countries which experienced military dictatorships and where police is very easily associated to brutal behaviour and crude defence of elite’s privileges, ‘public safety’ tends to be reduced by left-wing intellectuals to a ‘conservative subject’ *in itself*—and, at the same time, to an exclusive responsibility of the state apparatus.

It is not my intention to deny what has been persuasively demonstrated by critical observers since the 19th century: as a fundamental part of the coercive side of the state apparatus, the ultimate task of the police is less the protection of the citizens ‘in general’ than the protection of status quo—beginning with private ownership. Nevertheless, this recognition does not justify the simplistic interpretation according to which *every* concern with questions regarding ‘public safety’, criminality, and the like is conservative *as such*. The existence of a whole set of interesting works committed to a ‘radical criminology’ (see, for instance, Lynch *et al.*, 2000) is good empirical evidence of the fact that a generalization such as ‘every public-safety concern is right-wing’ or ‘concerns for public safety only contributes to the rise of the conservatives’ are fallacious. But there is

an even more relevant point that deserves to be underlined here: assuring ‘public safety’—understood as assuring the safety of the citizens—should by no means be seen as exclusively the task of the state apparatus. Precisely, those activists and movements which engage themselves for deep socio-spatial change have to be aware of the fact that they need to develop a kind of radical, alternative approach to ‘public safety’—one which is *both* embedded in a general framework regarding the question of the autonomous establishment of the *nómos* (the laws and rules on which basis society can institute itself explicitly and lucidly) in a future society *and* is pragmatically able to provide a path to the development of self-defence/self-protection tools, strategies and tactics here and now—be it against police’s brutality, be it against paramilitary groups, be it against ordinary criminals operating, for instance, in the context of retail drug trafficking.

This recognition leads us to another question. A complementary and naïve prejudice is that ordinary, poor criminals and even retail drug traffickers are potentially allies in the course of class struggle, as they are objectively also exploited and oppressed. As I have argued (both in this paper and above all in Souza, 2005, 2008), this belief is over optimistic and based on a mechanistic and schematic interpretation of social conflict under contemporary capitalism. It is not necessary to share Marx’s prejudices against the *Lumpenproletariat* to admit that a large part of the contemporary ‘hyperprecariat’ which are directly involved with violent, criminal activities is perhaps irremediably lost for any anti-systemic struggle or constructive purpose regarding the goal of overthrowing capitalism and heteronomy. Many of these people have been already been captured and deformed by capitalist and heteronomous values (from consumerism to patriarchy to adoration of violence and even torture) to such an extent that their ‘conversion’ to altruistic, radical-democratic, autonomous values is probably unrealistic. That is *not* to say that it is not worthwhile developing approaches

committed to an attempt at ‘rehabilitating’ at least a part of these people (especially the mass of very young criminals, quite often teenagers) for emancipative purposes—by means of an intelligent combination of political discussion and ‘capacity-building’ (‘consciousness-raising’) and the offering of economic options on the basis of alternative, non-criminal economic circuits. That is only to say that there is no automatic connection between belonging to the hyperprecariat and being a potential ally of emancipative social movements. In fact, a part of the hyperprecariat concretely constitutes an increasing danger and challenge for freedom-and-justice-oriented urban activists in several countries.

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### Notes

- 1 Just a few examples: ‘(...) the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society (...)’ (Marx and Engels, 1982, p. 116); ‘(...) the venality and depravity of the present “civilized” lumpenproletariat’ (Engels, 2006, p. 9); ‘The *lumpenproletariat*, this scum of depraved elements from all classes (...)’ (Engels, 2006, p. XII); ‘[t]his rabble is absolutely venal and absolutely brazen’ (Engels’, 2006, p. XII); ‘[a]longside decayed *roués* with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, *lazzaroni*, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, *maquereaux*, brothel keepers, porters, *literati*, organ grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars—in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and

- thither, which the French call *la bohème* (...) (Marx, 1978, pp. 70–71); '(...) this scum, offal, refuse of all classes (...)' (Marx, 1978, p. 71).
- 2 Another peculiarity which we should take into account in order to avoid any 'theoretical provinciality' is the fact that in many peripheral, predominantly agrarian and scarcely industrialized countries where ethnicity, traditional values, communitarian ties and non-western cosmologies (still) play a strong role, informal work outside the sphere of typical capitalist work relations cannot be simply interpreted as (hyper)precarious for the following reason as well: In such a context, informality can also be (above all) a strategy to preserve culture and a communitarian way of life, and not a sign of deterioration of life standards (see Zibechi [2006] about the example of El Alto, in Bolivia).
  - 3 From Beck's point of view: '(...) quite different histories as well as contemporary causes and dynamics underlie the surprisingly similar precariousness of work in the so-called first and third worlds. What appears the same means in Europe the erosion of labour rights, living standards and social security. (...) This paradoxical alikeness of heterogeneous cultural developments and ideas of modernity is addressed in the thesis of a Brazilianization of the United States and Europe. (...) Crucial to the Brazilianization thesis is the fact that, for all the cultural oppositions and incomparabilities, the future of informality now dawning in the West has a long tradition in South America and can be observed there in all its ambivalence' (Beck, 2000, pp. 96–97).
  - 4 A civil war has been defined as an armed conflict inside a country, in the context of which two or more national groups fight against each other; the fights may simultaneously occur as a conflict between rival rebel groups themselves and the government. The causes may be of an ethnic, economic, political or social nature, and are often ascribed to a mixture of different factors. However, various authors have contributed to a 'flexibilization' of the understanding of what a 'civil war' is. For instance, the German political scientist Peter Waldmann (1997) paid attention to phenomena which do not fit the traditional concept of a civil war; for example, he identifies 'low-intensity wars', which can last almost indefinitely and where the goals of the 'warlords' are less orientated around the control of the state than the continuous economic and even sexual exploitation of the civil population. Hardt and Negri (2005), as well as the philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2004) have gone even further and proposed the expression 'global civil war'. (In fact, not only the understanding of what a 'civil war' is, but also the more general conceptual and theoretical debate about the nature of 'war' itself has changed in recent years. Recent changes in the phenomenon of 'war' are attested to by a growing literature and several discussions around the so-called 'new wars' (see Azzellini and Kanzleiter, 2003; Münkler, 2004; Kaldor, 2007). This debate has many aspects, including very different political and ideological perspectives. Among those who accept that contemporary warfare presents some new features in the context of globalization, we can find both conservative and left-wing approaches. According to Kaldor (2007, p. 2): '[...] the new wars involve a blurring of the distinctions between war [usually defined as violence between states or organized political groups for political motives], organized crime [violence undertaken by privately organized groups for private purposes, usually financial gain] and large-scale violations of human rights [violence undertaken by states or politically organized groups against individuals]'. For authors such as those represented in the book edited by Azzellini and Kanzleiter (2003), the main trouble with observers like Kaldor [who goes so far as to defend a 'benign imperialism' as an alternative to 'local nationalists' but is not among the most conservative authors...] is that they neglect or underestimate the fact that neo-liberalism and imperialism very often generated the so-called 'new wars'. Another, particularly interesting refinement in this discussion about 'new wars' is the explicit dealing with the socio-psychological dimension by Ulrich Beck [2007], who spoke about a *gefühlter Krieg* – that is, a situation in which 'it feels like a war', although there is formally 'peace'.)
  - 5 As far as Brazil is concerned, army interventions to assure 'law and order' and in the name of 'public safety' occurred many times in Rio de Janeiro since the beginning of the 1990s, especially with the purpose of fighting drug trafficking. In Mexico, the army has been employed by president Calderón in several cities in order to fight drug dealers and organized crime (in fact, the Mexican army has also been used since many years to repress social movements and social protests in general).
  - 6 I have used the expression and discussed the problem of the 'militarization of the urban question' since the 1990s (see Souza, 1993, pp. 330–340; 1996, p. 449; 2000, p. 98; 2004, pp. 26–27; and especially 2008). Recently, Loïc Wacquant examined in an interesting paper the transition from a ('mere') 'penalization of poverty' to a 'militarization of urban marginality' in Brazil, but the militarization *stricto sensu* is only briefly mentioned without being explored in any detail (see Wacquant, 2008).
  - 7 The capitalist social 'model' shows itself as 'criminogenous', especially these days, as it (1) wakes in many people a desperate desire to

- consume, while it simultaneously gives to only few people the opportunity to satisfy (even) their (basic) needs in a legal way; (2) generates and disseminates competitive, individualistic and hedonistic values, so placing 'me' clearly above 'us', 'to have' above 'to be', and property above life; (3) generates a 'cultural industry' for which violent criminality is a major types of 'food'—and which reinforces values such as individualism and the primacy of force through the powerful influence of several ways (newspapers, movies, television, videogames) and through superficial and a-critical narratives on violence and crime; (4) facilitates, by means of deregulation of the financial system, money laundering and corruption worldwide; and (5) disseminates the belief according to which everything can be transformed into a commodity and everybody has a price—and the feeling that the difference between being sent or not being sent to overcrowded and inhuman prison depends (more or less according to the country) on whether or not one can spend the necessary sum of money.
- 8 This hierarchy comprises—regarding each criminal crew—the  *dono* (literally 'owner') over the *gerentes* ('managers', that is those who control the selling places) and *soldados* ('soldiers' = security staff) to *vapores* ('vapours' = street sellers) and *aviões* ('aeroplanes' = go-between sellers). These terms became popular in Rio de Janeiro in the 1980s, and begun to be used in other cities later.
  - 9 Rio's and São Paulo's *favelas* can be mentioned as good examples of what Georg Elwert (2001) termed 'economies of violence' (*Gewaltökonomien*). Although he was himself interested in other types of socio-spatial reality ('economies of violence' serving the purposes of warlords and *guerrilla* fighters at regional level in typical peripheral countries), the relevance of his concept also to the urban context was *en passant* recognized by Mair (2002, p. 34), and I paid tribute to this idea later in several works (Souza, 2006, 2008). In contrast to those 'economies of violence' which are best known for Africa, Latin-American, urban 'economies of violence' are not characterized by the use of violence as a primary means to extract revenue; however, since drug trafficking is an illegal activity, the interests of rival 'micro-level warlords' can only be protected with the help of guns and fear.
  - 10 A research project about the socio-spatial impacts of drug trafficking on Brazilian cities (funded by the Brazilian research council [CNPq]) was co-ordinated by me between 1994 and 1997. In the context of this project, many people in four Brazilian cities (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Curitiba and Recife) were interviewed. In Rio de Janeiro in particular, where most people were interviewed, both formal and informal leaders of *favelas* were contacted. Fieldwork included in Rio de Janeiro observation and interviews in 17 *favelas*, and my research team and myself talked to 20 leaders of residents' associations. Details regarding the most important results of this project can be found in Souza (1996, 2000). A much more specific research project about how drug trafficking and related violence, fear and territorialization processes affect urban planning and management (specially the possibilities for participatory urban planning) has been co-ordinated by me between 2003 and 2007, in the framework of which fieldwork has been done as well; the most important case study was again Rio de Janeiro. Many key persons were interviewed in that city (*favela*-leaders, local government officials, landscape architects who work or worked for Rio's community-upgrading programme *Programa Favela-Bairro*, policemen). See details regarding the main results of this research project in Souza (2008).
  - 11 These data are probably not very accurate; information was given to the press, but a final version of the report was never submitted to public examination. Anyway, the mentioned figures are symptomatic of the magnitude of the problem. Furthermore, I can say on the basis of my own research experience that they are at least not unrealistic.
  - 12 In recent years, paramilitary 'militias' constituted by policemen and former policemen (a kind of further development of the 'death squadrons' of the 1970s and 1980s) have expelled or killed and replaced drug traffickers as 'informal rulers' in many *favelas* of the city. As far as the freedom of self-organization of the poor population is concerned, this replacement is by no means a positive phenomenon; considered in terms of the long run effects, this trend represents in fact probably a worsening of the whole socio-political situation (Souza, 2008, p. 138).
  - 13 The two fundamental legal texts concerning urban law at a national level are, besides the Constitution itself (Articles 182 and 183), the Federal Law of Urban Development (Law 10.257/2001) and the *Medida Provisória* 2.220 (which deals mainly with land regularization).
  - 14 *Usucapião* and *concessão de (direito real de) uso*, which are both forms of adverse possession that can be employed to assure the rights of *favela* inhabitants respectively on private and public land, are the two most relevant instruments existing in the context of Brazilian urban law aiming at the protection of dwellers who lack any formal tenure or property title. However, neither *usucapião* nor *concessão de uso* are applicable to all kinds of squatting of land, even less to squatting of buildings: They can benefit only those people who

- occupy private (*usucapião*) or state-owned (*concessão de uso*) areas less than 250 m<sup>2</sup> for five consecutive years.
- 15 Complementary to the typical *reforma urbana* agenda (whose essence is the use of land policy instruments), there are also strategies of income generation and of democratic budgetary decision-making (known in Brazil as *orçamento participativo*, that is 'participatory budgeting').
  - 16 Besides this, not many Brazilian municipalities have approved and implemented master plans which had the *reforma urbana* agenda consistently and clearly as a source of inspiration, despite the efforts of the federal Ministry of Cities to stimulate municipalities to adopt 'participative master plans' in recent years. Be that as it may, these efforts and the approach to 'participation' behind them are themselves not particularly persuading anyway, as I argued elsewhere (Souza, 2006a, pp. 231–232). Another point is that there is often a big distance in peripheral and semi-peripheral countries between the law and its enforcement, which can be paradigmatically illustrated by the South African case: while South Africa's Constitution and the Prevention of Illegal Eviction and Unlawful Occupation of Land act establish 'clear rights for shack dwellers protecting them from forceful and undignified eviction' (Pitsoche, 2008, p. 71), the country's reality is plenty of injustice and illegality on the part of the state itself (see Pitsoche, 2008).
  - 17 For instance, for the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto/MTST (literally, Movement of Roofless Workers), which is the strongest organization of the *sem-teto* movement, and which presents as one of its main slogans the phrase *Na luta pela reforma urbana* (= 'Fighting for an urban reform').
  - 18 Critical urban planning can be understood as the development of strategies, tactics, methods and instruments to overcome socio-spatial injustice in the city, on the basis of a critical approach to existing capitalist, heteronomous, social and spatial 'order'. It can be developed and supported by left-wing governments in specific (and rare) circumstances, and under a favourable conjuncture; moreover, it can be carried on (of course in a different way) also by emancipative social movements, which are in fact the only (potentially) anti-systemic agency, due to the structural contradiction between a government which is supportive of an urban regime oriented towards more socio-spatial justice and truly committed to popular participation (such as that of Porto Alegre's from 1989 to 2004), on the one side, and the state apparatus as a structurally heteronomous power instance, on the other. For this reason, state-led urban planning can sometimes be quite progressive or (rarely) even very progressive (i.e., critical, or relatively 'subversive' in the face of the existing socio-spatial 'order'), but it can never be properly understood as *insurgent*. Emancipative social movements, however, often deserve to be recognized as something more specific than a critical urban planning source—in fact, they often act as an *insurgent* planning agent, while developing *counter power measures* by means of *alternative socio-spatial strategies, tactics and projects*.
  - 19 According to oral information given to the author by a MTST leader; personal talk in September 2005.
  - 20 The strategy of 'rurban settlements' mirrors a certain 'intellectual dependency' of MTST in the face of its rural, older and much bigger counterpart MST. The connection between MTST and MST has been an interesting but partly very problematic one. It is true that MTST has tried to become intellectually more independent since 2004, but there still are several inconsistencies. As a leading MTST activist told me in March 2008, even the 'urban reform', which they tried to 're-invent' as an alternative to the 'urban reform' mainstream, was until then much more a loose proposal (employed in analogy with the *land reform* which MST fight for) than a set of well-defined principles, steps and instruments.
  - 21 This *bloco* is surely very similar to some politicized *murgas* which appeared in Argentina's carnival in recent years, more or less in the context of the rise of social movements such as *piqueteros* and *asambleas barriales*, as I could observe personally in Buenos Aires in February 2007 during fieldwork.
  - 22 According to oral information given to the author by a MTST leader in 2005.
  - 23 From an email sent to the author on 17 July 2008.
  - 24 From an email sent to the author on 17 September 2008.
  - 25 The concept of 'social imaginary significations' plays a key role in Castoriadis' work. 'Social imaginary significations' cannot be reduced to the Marxist concept of *ideology* (i.e., in orthodox terms, 'false consciousness'), but they cannot be used as a perfect synonym with the broad anthropological concept of *culture* either. Last but not least, they do not represent just 'imagination' (in the sense of non-reality), since they are very real in their effectiveness: 'social imaginary significations' correspond to the central societal values (such as religious beliefs, ethical values, *Weltanschauungen*, myths...) which furnish a 'meaning' to the world of each particular society—and which shape the psyche of the individuals (see Castoriadis, 1975, 1986a).
  - 26 The relevance of the idea of 'autonomy' outside Europe is probably less a symptom of the potentiality of such idea outside the 'West' than a



symptom of the cultural influence of the 'West' beyond Europe and North America, as it is particularly evident in relation to Latin America. However, this 'European invention' has been not only more or less 'adapted' in Latin America, but sometimes even interestingly combined with old local/regional traditions, as in the case of Mexican Zapatistas. It is surely necessary to examine the tensions and limits (and sometimes contradictions and mistakes) of these socio-spatial practices (and of their evaluation by some authors) in order to avoid any naïve glorification, but neither with 'Eurocentric eyes' nor in the name of 'politico-philosophical pureness'—otherwise many of them are *a priori* condemned to appear as mere 'imperfect copies' of a supposed European 'original' (which surely was never 'perfect' itself). It is convenient to admit that the idea of autonomy can be 'reinvented' in contemporary cultural contexts other than Europe, in a way which can be sometimes irritating or confusing for European autonomists, but sometimes in such a fascinating way that these non-European experiences can be sources of inspiration for Europe (and North America) itself.

- 27 Precisely in this regard MTST shows some ambiguities, largely due to its 'genetic' links to MST—which is to some extent a contradictory organization, which combines some clear hierarchical elements with grassroots discourse and praxis. However, these hierarchical elements are not as evident in the case of MTST as they are in the case of MST itself.

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# CITY

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