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## The Urban Peripheries: Counter-Powers from Below?

*When the proletariat was rebellious and self-active,  
it was described as a monster, a many-headed hydra.*

Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker  
*The Many-Headed Hydra*

If a specter is haunting the Latin American elites at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is for sure living in the peripheries of large cities. The main challenges to the dominant system in the last two decades have emerged from the heart of the poor urban peripheries. In between the Caracazo of 1989 and the Oaxaca Commune of 2006, there have been popular uprisings in Asunción in March 1999, Quito in February 1997 and January 2000, Lima and Cochabamba in April 2000, Buenos Aires in December 2001, Arequipa in June 2002, Caracas in April 2002, La Paz in February 2003, and El Alto in October 2003, to mention just the most relevant.

In the following pages, I will briefly and selectively tour some of the past half century's urban movements in an effort to grasp the long-term itineraries and hidden agendas of the urban poor. The poor of the cities do not usually formulate explicit agendas, with key strategies and tactics laid out, nor political programs or demands, but, as is often the case in the history of the oppressed, they make the road by walking. One can only *a posteriori* reconstruct the coherence of a journey that always seems to pass by or amend the initial intentions of the subjects. Before reviewing the new strategies being developed by the imperial right to address the challenges posed by the peripheries of large cities, I will offer a set of theses

that challenge those who doubt that the marginalized can be considered political subjects.

### Militarization and the State of Exception

Control of the urban poor is the most important goal for governments, global financial institutions, and the armed forces of the most powerful countries. Estimates indicate that one billion people live in the suburbs of third-world cities and that the number of poor in cities around the world has risen to two billion, one third of humanity. These numbers will double in the next fifteen to twenty years, and 95 percent of this growth will occur on the peripheries of southern cities (Davis 2006b). The situation is even more serious than the numbers suggest: Urbanization, as Davis explains, has become disconnected and autonomous from industrialization as well as from economic development, which implies the "structural and permanent disconnection of many city dwellers from the formal world economy" (2006b), while the current modes of accumulation continue to force people out of the countryside.

Many large Latin American cities seem to be on the edge of social explosion and several have been exploding in the last two decades. Fearful, the powerful embrace a two-fold strategy for dealing with the crisis: try to stall or block the explosion and also prevent the consolidation of those "black holes" outside of state control, the spaces where those from below, as noted by James Scott (2000), "rehearse" their challenges to the state before they become full rebellions.

Therefore, throughout the continent governments have been directing economic subsidies (known as "social plans") and other material benefits toward the populations of urban peripheries, seeking to implement new forms of social control and discipline and, through research, to develop a better understanding of those areas. Meanwhile, military and financial publications have addressed the challenges presented by Mara Salvatrucha and street gangs in recent years, discussing the problems created by the urban war.<sup>1</sup> The concepts of

<sup>1</sup> See, for example Boraz and Bruneau 2006; Brevé 2007; Chiarelli 2005; Brown

“asymmetrical war” and “fourth generation war” are responses to problems identical to those created by Third World urban peripheries: the birth of a new type of warfare against non-state enemies, in which military superiority does not play a decisive role. From this point of view, social plans and the militarization of the urban peripheries are two sides of the same attempt to control populations outside the reach of the state.<sup>2</sup>

William S. Lind, director of the Center for Cultural Conservatism of the Free Congress Foundation, asserts that the state has lost its monopoly on war and elites feel that “dangers” are multiplying. “Almost everywhere, the state is losing” (Lind 2005). Despite supporting a quick pullout from Iraq, Lind defends “total war,” which engages enemies on all fronts: the economic, cultural, social, political, and also military. He believes that dangers for United States hegemony lie in all aspects of daily life or, if you prefer, in life itself. He asserts that “in Fourth Generation War, invasion by immigrants can be just as dangerous as invasion by a state army.” New problems rooted in the “universal crisis of the legitimacy of the state” place “non-state enemies” at the center. This leads him to warn military leaders that no state military has succeeded against a non-state enemy, and that the underlying problem is that the armed forces of a state were designed to fight against the armed forces of another state. This paradox is at the heart of new military paradigms, which must be completely reformulated to face challenges emerging from areas that used to be designated as “civilian.”

Military commanders deployed in Iraq seem to be aware of the problems they face. Based on his recent experience on the outskirts of Baghdad in Sadr City, Cavalry Division Commander General Peter W. Chiarelli, writes,

The conduct of war in the way we are used to has changed. The demographic progression of in large urban areas, together with the local government’s inability

2007; Blanco 2005; Diaz 2007; Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo 2006.

<sup>2</sup> I have addressed social plans as a way to control and discipline the poor in Zibechi 2006a.

to keep pace with basic services, creates ideal conditions for fundamentalist ideologues to take advantage of the marginalized elements of the population. To use our economic strength with an instrument of national power balances the process of achieving sustainable success in the long term.” (Chiarelli 2005, 15).

“Executing traditionally focused combat operations... works, but only for the short term. In the long term, doing so hinders true progress and, in reality, promotes the growth of insurgent forces working against campaign objectives” (ibid., 14). This implies that the two traditional goals of armed forces of operation—combat and the training of local security forces—are insufficient.

Therefore, three “non-traditional” lines of operation should be undertaken: Essential services must be provided to the population, a legitimate government must be built, and a market economy instituted. Infrastructure improves circumstances for the poorest sector of the population, creates employment opportunities, and sends visible signs of progress. In the second place, creating a “democratic” regime is an essential point for legitimizing the whole process. For United States commanders in Iraq, the “point of penetration” of their troops occurred with the January 30, 2005 elections. This reduced democracy to producing a vote, which is not contradictory and is actually functional in a state of siege (Agamben 2003). Finally, insurgents’ recruitment capacity can be reduced through the expansion of the market and “by ‘gentrifying’ city centers and creating business parks” that dynamically stimulate the rest of society (*Military Review* 2005, 12). This is how “democracy”—the expansion of services and the market economy—becomes a mechanism that strengthens power and domination. Today’s armed forces of the chief global power see it as a way to get “long-term security.” In the future, the poor urban peripheries will be, in military jargon, “the center of strategic and operational gravity.” In countries with weak states and high concentrations of urban poor, biopolitical mechanisms are enrolled as part of the militarization of society. Meanwhile, the armed

forces occupy the place of the sovereign for a time, rebuilding the state and implementing—in a vertical and authoritarian manner—biopolitical mechanisms that ensure the continuity of domination. Disciplinary control mechanisms and the biopolitical are intertwined and in extreme cases such as in Iraq, the favelas of Rio Janeiro, and the slums of Port au Prince in Haiti form an essential part of the military plan.

Since the September 11, 2001, attacks, U.S. policy has been consistent with the concept of “permanent state of exception” as defined by Agamben, while consolidating a trend that had already been in place. It is applied to very different situations and for very different reasons, from internal problems to external political threats, from economic emergency to natural disaster. The state of exception was used in response to financial and economic crisis in Argentina, December 2001 (which gave rise to a broad social movement); to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans; and to the rebellion of the poor immigrant suburbs of French cities, and so on. The common factor is that in all cases it was a means to contain the urban poor: blacks, immigrants, and the unemployed, etc. For Agamben, totalitarianism can be defined as “the establishment of, through the state of exception, a *legal civil war*, which allows not only the *physical elimination* of political adversaries, but of entire categories of citizens who for whatever reason are not integrated into the political system” (Agamben 2003, 25). These citizens are mainly residents of poor neighborhoods who are structurally disconnected from the formal economy.

In the eighth thesis of his “On the Concept of History,” Walter Benjamin states that “the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of exception in which we live is the rule.” Acknowledging that the statement is based on the reality of everyday life of those from below means addressing the second part of the same thesis, which holds that “we must arrive at a concept of history that corresponds to this situation.” It does not seem sufficient to challenge the Western idea of progress; the crux of the problem lies in the so-called rule of law. Violence (“mythical violence,” according to Benjamin) is

the foundation of law and guarantees its conservation. If indeed “the law is the submission of a part of life to power” (Mate 2006, 147), then that portion of life is that which corresponds to a part of society existing in a lawless space.

This domination of life by violence is what Agamben registers in the concentration camp, the space where the state of exception becomes the dominant mode of governance (Agamben 1998). But the *bare life* to which human existence has been reduced in the camp (or on the urban periphery) implies a challenge to how politics have been done in the West since the French Revolution. In Agamben’s terms, “from the concentration camps there is no possible return to classic politics,” to the extent that there is now no possible distinction between “city and house,” between “our biological body and our body politic” (Agamben 1998, 238).

Is there no way out? Is the totalitarian state here to stay and we have no choice but to become inhabitants of camps like Guantanamo? Agamben claims that exodus is not a practicable option largely because, at least in the First World, there is no outside to migrate to, since capital and the state have colonized the very pores of life. What is certain is that there is no alternative outside of or away from spaces where the state of exception prevails, in the camps/peripheries where people live on a dollar a day, because that is where the true “original structure of statehood” is manifested in all its harshness (Agamben 1998, 22).

### The Return of the Dangerous Classes

The crisis of liberalism and the crisis of the nation-state is the foundation of this situation. The world revolution of 1968 was the turning point that showed the ruling classes that it could not maintain the welfare state—or extend it to the entire world—without affecting the process of capital accumulation. The formula of the liberal state—universal suffrage plus welfare state—“worked marvelously well” as a means “to counter democratic aspirations” and “contain the dangerous classes” (Wallerstein 2004, 424).<sup>3</sup> In the core countries, this system

<sup>3</sup> A more detailed analysis can be found in Wallerstein 1996.

could be maintained on the basis of the exploitation of the South grounded in racism. But the revolution of 1968 convinced the dominant classes of the need for a change of direction. This was the beginning of a long-term systemic change. Hereinafter “the southern countries could not expect substantial economic development,” but nevertheless the pressure to democratize—that is, “an egalitarian and anti-authoritarian attitude”—continues to grow. The welfare state ceased to function, those from below again fought for a better world, and the result was that “the dangerous classes became that once more” (Wallerstein 2004, 424).

A many-faceted chaos replaced the welfare state and industrial society. Wallerstein outlines five factors that gave rise to this: the weakness of the U.S., escalating wars and violent conflicts due to the ineffectiveness of the interstate system, the rise of a multitude of defensive groups, the increase in local, national and regional crises, and the spread of new diseases (Wallerstein 2004, 425–427). Urban peripheries are one of the important fractures in a system that tends toward chaos. States have only a minimal presence within them, and conflict and violence—resulting from the disintegration of society—are part of everyday life, where youth gangs are so strong that they sometimes take control of neighborhoods and, ultimately, these are zones where disease spreads exponentially. Put in Wallerstein’s terms, some of the most important fractures in capitalism occur in the suburbs: race, class, ethnicity, and gender. These are territories of almost complete dispossession—and conversely, hope, as Mike Davis points out.

But there is another important dimension. Wallerstein has detected eight major differences between the previous phase of capitalist expansion—which he situates from 1945 to 1967–73—and the current phase expected to last until 2025 or so. Briefly, these differences include the existence of a bipolar world (understanding that the *entente* between the USA and USSR formed an unipolar world); that there will be no investments in the South; strong migratory pressure toward the north; a crisis of the middle strata of the north; ecological limits on economic growth, deruralization, and urbanization;

middle classes and poor people tending to unite in the South; and the rise of democratization and the decline of liberalism (Wallerstein 2004, 418–424). The crisis of the middle strata and their possible unity with the poor would make the system unsustainable and, according to this analysis, would eventually rupture its legitimacy.

During the years of prosperity, “the middle tier became an important pillar for the stability of political systems and constituted in fact a very strong pillar” (Wallerstein 2004, 420). Today, even in the North, new forms of accumulation are based on production processes that significantly reduce the size of the middle classes as well as state budgets. Damaged by the wave of labor militancy during the sixties, capital took these decisions as a way to relaunch the process of accumulation. Now there are other factors to be included, such as the existence of multiple poles of growth confronting each other. Fierce competition within different capitalist centers leads to an intense struggle to cut costs, thus weakening the middle class.

Meanwhile, the weakening of the middle class intensifies the crisis of the legitimacy of states. The appropriation of surplus value “takes place so that there are not two, but three participants in the process of exploitation,” as there is a “mid-level which participates in exploiting the lower tier but is also exploited by the higher” (Wallerstein 2004, 293). In the factory—the core of capitalist production—there are many mid-level operatives: foremen and their assistants, controllers, supervisors, administrators, and so on. Even in Third World countries, this layer represents between 15 and 20 percent of the total factory workforce.<sup>4</sup> This is a crucial political issue:

Such a three-tiered format is essentially stabilizing in effect, whereas a two-tiered format is essentially disintegrating. We are not saying that three tiers exist at all moments. We are saying that those on top always seek

<sup>4</sup> I have shown that the defeat of the Uruguayan working class was linked, among other causes, to capitalists’ ability to isolate them and cede power to the middle classes (Zibechi 2006c).

to ensure the existence of three tiers in order the better to preserve their privilege, whereas those on the bottom conversely seek to reduce the three to two, the better to destroy this same privilege. This fight over the existence of a middle tier goes on continually, both in political terms and in terms of basic ideological constructs (those that are pluralist versus those that are manicheist.) This is the core issue around which the class struggle is centered. (Wallerstein 1975, 368.)

We can apply this trimodal (center, semi-periphery, periphery) model to the planet and also to cities (districts for the rich, the middle strata, and the poor). The problem facing the rulers in many Latin American countries is that the middle class is in decline, like the industrial working class, while the poor in the slums—the so-called marginalized or excluded—are growing. This is why they generate so much fear and why there are so many attempts to control them.



The urban peripheries are disconnected from the formal economy and territories beyond the control of the powerful. Through the increased militarization of these spaces, elites try to solve this “anomaly,” and simultaneously, in order to obtain long-term security, implement biopolitical methods of governance.

The Latin American peculiarity is that progressive governments implement biopolitical techniques by means of their “social plans,” but also through military forces. In Brazil, to give just one example, the state applies different forms of control simultaneously: The “Zero Hunger” government plan goes hand in hand with the militarization of the *favelas*. The Latin American left regard the poor peripheries as pockets of crime, drug trafficking, and violence; spaces where chaos and the law of the jungle reign. Distrust takes the place of understanding. There is not the slightest difference in perspective between left and right on this issue.

Mike Davis has a different view of the urban peripheries and summarizes the difficulties in one insightful sentence: “The suburbs of the cities of the Third World have become the new decisive geopolitical scenario” (2007). Davis’s work focuses on the how and why these peripheries have become such “decisive scenarios” in Latin America. His work also explores how and why these spaces have become something akin to a popular counter-power and from which the lower classes have launched formidable challenges to the capitalist system.

### Can the Marginalized Be Subjects?

Few social scientists or academics understand the reality of urban peripheries in Latin America. Class categories, a blind faith in progress, and the application of concepts coined for different contexts distort readings of those places where the popular sectors oscillate between rebellion, dependence on local bosses, and the search for state patronage. Such thinking insists on seeing the slums as an anomaly, almost always a problem, and rarely a place of emancipatory potential. We will briefly explore some of these ideas here.

During a polemic against Proudhon in *The Housing Question*, Frederick Engels emphasizes that property—land or housing—is an obstacle from the past that prevents the proletarian struggle for a new world. Marx and Engels believed that complete dispossession would allow workers to fight for a new world and thus, as property owners, the peasantry would never be a revolutionary class. By contrast, Proudhon argued that Paleolithic man, who has his cave, and the Indian, who owns his own home, were in a better condition than modern workers who remained “virtually in the air.” Engels’s answer lays bare the difficulties of Marxism, linked as it is to a linear conception of history, so it is worth citing it despite its length:

In order to create the modern revolutionary class of the proletariat it was absolutely necessary to cut the umbilical cord which still bound the worker of the past to the land. The hand weaver who had his little house, garden and field along with his loom, was a quiet, contented

man—in all godliness and respectability—despite all misery and despite all political pressure; he doffed his cap to the rich, to the priests and to the officials of the state; and inwardly was altogether a slave. It is precisely modern large-scale industry, which has turned the worker, formerly chained to the land, into a completely property-less proletarian, liberated from all traditional fetters and free as a bird.... The driving of the workers from every hearth and home...was the very first condition of his spiritual emancipation.

The English proletariat of 1872 is on an infinitely higher level than the rural weaver of 1772, who had his “house and hearth.” And will the troglodyte with his cave and the Indian with his own home ever accomplish a Paris Commune? (Engels 1976, 30–31)

Proudhon argues that workers improve their status in society by owning property, which Engels rightly criticizes, but it is not true that property is, abstractly, a brake on the constitution of a subject. Latin American social struggles reveal the opposite. Popular sectors have been able to resist the system by maintaining or re-creating spaces under their own control and possession. Seizing the land, housing, and factories strengthens their struggles. Likewise, the poor have launched formidable challenges to the states and elites from their conquered territories. Engels and other Marxists have not recognized that capitalism, far from being an improvement, was a significant setback for the poor of the land. They did not value, particularly, the loss of autonomy represented by the loss of their plots, homes, and means of production, which stopped them from being stripped totally bare by capitalism.

The peasant and indigenous movements gained strength as they fought to defend their land and recover territories stolen by landowners. The landless movement in Brazil has taken over 22 million hectares in twenty-seven years, an area the size of several European countries. And using this land as a base, they continue to struggle for agrarian reform without any expectation of winning state power. In Latin America, the

poor are making land reform from below. The indigenous are recovering their ancestral territories, from which they resist the multinationals; within these territories they are teaching alternative ways. As we shall see later, the urban poor are following similar paths.

In the field of Marxism, the French urbanist Henri Lefebvre moves away from the economic and deals with urban issues with an open mind, starting from the assumption that capital accumulation has a geographic footprint that survives by occupying and producing space. He recognizes that the “production of space” clashes with private ownership of urban land. He relates the European experience, in which the ruling classes use space to “disperse the working class, to distribute them in places allocated for them—to organize the various flows, subordinated to the institutional rules—consequently, to subordinate space to power,” with the objective of preserving capitalist relations of production (1976, 140).

He asks whether it is possible to take the instrument of space from the ruling classes. He is skeptical, because the experience of the European working class has not led to the creation of spaces beyond the control of dominant classes. He adds that the possibility of doing so should be in a function of “new realities and not as a function of the problems of industrial production for more than a century” (1976, 141). He clearly perceives the limits of the classical theory to which he subscribes. He has a vision of reality that leads to the conclusion that the working class is constrained in space and capital flows and the division of labor. He is aware that “industrial production and capitalism have taken over the cities.” He goes one step further: He shows convincingly that business enterprise is no longer the center of capital accumulation but the whole of society, including “the interstitial urban tissue” involved in production. But the limits of his thinking are closely connected to social struggles. His conclusion is clear: “In 1968, the French working class was almost at the extreme of its objective and subjective possibilities” (1976, 157).

Here is the point where even as fine a sensibility as Lefebvre’s could not get past: that space is a product of social

struggles. He was unable to see how those from below are capable of creating their own spaces and converting them into territories, which they can do, at least in Latin America. In his polemic against the dismissal of space in the *Communist Manifesto*, the geographer David Harvey says that the bourgeoisie has won by mobilizing domination over space as a producing force peculiar in itself. From this, he concludes that the working class must learn to neutralize the bourgeoisie's capability to dominate and produce space. And so long as the working class "does not learn to deal with the bourgeois capacity to master space and produce it, to shape a new geography of production and social relations, it will always be in a position of weakness rather than strength" (Harvey 2003, 65).

However, this is not occurring in the First World today. Agamben's pessimism about finding alternatives to the expansion of totalitarianism could be correct. He believes that the main difficulty is that "a truly heterogeneous way of life does not exist, at least in the advanced capitalist countries" (Agamben 1998, 20). Lefebvre asserts that the remnants of the old society disappeared after the Second World War in Europe, alongside the remains of artisan and peasant production. In its place, the "consumption-led bureaucratic society" has been able to impose a distinct division and composition of everyday life, and even a "programmed everyday life in an urban setting suited for that purpose" (1972, 85). The consumption-led bureaucratic society produces a homogenous life that is subordinate to capital; it occupies all the interstices of life, and thus prevents the creation of territories of flows beyond its control.

The sociologist Loïc Wacquant is one of the leading scholars of urban poverty in the central countries. His sympathies lie with the "urban outcasts." He denounces the criminalization of poverty, the stigmatization of the ghetto, and the "criminal state," arguing that the only way to respond to the "challenge posed to democratic society by advanced marginality" is to rebuild the welfare state (2007a, 186). He recognizes that a portion of workers have become redundant in the current period of capitalism and will not return to work, which complements the growing precariousness of

employment in general. He notes with concern the changes in the urban context: He says that we have gone beyond a situation in which poverty (although he uses the term "marginality") was "residual" and could be absorbed by the periods of market expansion to one in which the poor "seems to have been decoupled from the cyclical fluctuations of the national economy" (2007a, 173). Many analysts share this conclusion.

He finds six differences between the "new regime of marginality" and the Fordist period that ended in the sixties and seventies. The two most important, from our Latin American perspective, are related to how wage labor has become a source of fragmentation and social precarity rather than homogeneity, solidarity, and security, as happened under the welfare state (2007b, 271). I commented on the second difference above: the disconnection of poverty from the cyclical fluctuations of the economy. However, he recognizes an additional difference based on his empirical studies. In the city of Chicago, where he lived for several years, "the financial situation of 80 percent of the inhabitants of the ghetto showed signs of deterioration after four years of economic growth sustained under the presidency of Ronald Reagan" (2007b, 274). Economic growth and job creation not only did not solve the problem of urban poverty but exacerbated it. In a similar manner, the economic "development" we can expect in Latin America in this period of capitalism concentrates wealth and poverty at opposite poles, and cannot stop doing so.

Throughout his work, Wacquant, like other scholars, emphasizes the problems of violence and drug trafficking in the periphery. For many academics, the ghettos are "a menacing urban hydra personified in the defiant and aggressive youth gang" (2007b, 36). In my opinion, it is important to recognize that the ghettos of the First World, particularly in the United States no longer have the race riots of the sixties but rather the "silent or slow upheavals" of today. Grasping this allows us make a serious attempt to understand the logic that leads the young, black, and poor ghetto inhabitants into violence and drug trafficking. In part, this is because urban black poverty today is more intense and concentrated than during the sixties

and because the gap between rich and poor is widening. As Wacquant notes:

The openly racial uprisings in African-American communities of the northern cities in defiant rebellion against white authority gave way to the “slow upheaval” of black on black crime, massive rejection of school, drug trafficking and internal social decay. During the evening news broadcast, scenes of white police officers unleashing state violence against peaceful black protesters demanding the mere recognition of their basic constitutional rights have been replaced by reports of drive-by shootings, homelessness and teenage pregnancy. (2007b, 35–36)

Wacquant’s account is interesting in so much as it fails to capture a defiant attitude to the established order in these images of self-destruction—a defiance that is very different than that of the sixties but no less important. Nevertheless, even analysts committed to the First World poor are unable to see the peripheries as anything but a problem, defined always in negative terms such as “suburbs of despair” or as “museum of horrors” (Eckstein in Wacquant 2007b, 282; Durán 1996, 148). When inhabitants are not stigmatized, they are seen as “survivors of a huge collective disaster” (Bourdieu 1999, 11). The inhabitants are never regarded as subjects, but just objects for study by researchers who are responsible, as Bourdieu says, for shaping a discourse that they themselves, the “precarious,” could never produce because they “have not yet acceded to the status of a ‘class object’” and are required to “form their subjectivity from their objectification by others” (Wacquant 2007b, 285).

Like Bourdieu and Wacquant, Castells emphasizes the state’s role as a generator of urban marginality. “The world of marginality is, in fact, built by the state in a process of social integration and political mobilization, in exchange for goods and services that only it can procure” (1986, 266). In his extensive survey of the slums of Latin American cities, to

which we will return later, he argues that the relationship between the state and the settlers is organized around the delivery of services as a means of political control, and thus a populist relationship. He dismisses the idea that inhabitants of the neighborhoods can act as subjects and insists that the most common trend in Latin America is for squatter settlement movements to become “an instrument of social integration and subordination to the existing political order rather than an agent of social change” (1986, 274). According to Castells, their material and social status prevents them from overcoming dependence on the political system.

Coming from another theoretical position, Antonio Negri agrees that the rebellious youth of the peripheries are not subjects to the extent that “they know what they do not want but they do not know what they want” (2006, 2). He asserts that urban youth of the peripheries have a “completely negative” identity and that the concentration camp in which they live is their only commonality. He agrees with the analysis outlined above: The inhabitants of the peripheries cannot escape their situation. Hope is only to be found in the new models of governance embodied by Lula in Brazil and Kirchner in Argentina, who, engaged with social movements, are negotiating the “radicalization of democracy” (2006, 2). However, I would argue that young people from the Brazilian favelas do not feel like they are reconstructing their country under Lula so much as suffering the rigors of everyday state repression.



Had proponents of the (erroneously named) “theory of marginality” constructed in the sixties in Latin America witnessed the socio-political activism of the urban settlers in the eighties, largely caused by the effects of globalization, they might have been more likely to see the urban poor as social and political subjects. However, I think these theorists have established one significant point: Dependent capitalism creates a “marginal pole” in society, which means breaking with the Eurocentric analysis emphasizing the differences and particularities

present within South America (Quijano 1977). This systemic approach to “marginality” helps us place imperialism and the political and social problems it represents in the center of the analysis, which many European and North American intellectuals fail to do. On the other hand, it is useful to return to these theorists’ reflections on the differences between the concepts of “marginality” and the “reserve industrial army.” Three decades later, these differences have become extenuated to such an extent that some traditional concepts seem to have outlived their usefulness.<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion, I would like to mention two further analyses published during the same period as the aforementioned. Larissa Lomnitz discusses the bonds shared by the poor inhabitants of a Mexico City slum in a work that seeks to understand the reality “from below” and therefore “from within” (1975). The second study, by Peruvian José Matos Mar, concerns the capability of the people who have settled in the slums of Lima to “overflow from below” and, in the process, change the face of Peru (1989–2004).

Lomnitz’s work marks a turning point in studies about urban poverty and marginality (Svampa 2004). Social networks of reciprocal exchange, according to the author, are “the most significant element of the social structure in the *barrio*” (Lomnitz 1975, 219) and are what enable the marginalized to migrate from the countryside, settle in the city, organize in movements, get a roof over their heads, and survive. Lomnitz’s emphasis on networks, familial relations, solidarity, and reciprocity paints a picture of a world where trust and reciprocal exchange are the key elements in social relationships. This meticulous work had the insight to place the emphasis on the internal resources of the “marginal” world. In other words, the analysis focused on the internal potentialities nesting within the population of the peripheries, which are the secret of their survival, their existence, and their daily lives.

Matos Mar goes a step further and places this “marginal” sector at the center of his research, at a time when its capacity to “overflow” the established order is undisputed. He argues

5 See the introduction to Quijano 1977 and Nun 1969, and Jose Nun,

that there are in reality “two Perus,” two parallel societies: the official and the marginal. The first consists of the state, political parties, businesses, the armed forces, and trade unions, and it has adopted a foreign culture. The second is plural and multiform, has its own economy (which he calls an “oppositional economy” rather than an informal one), system of justice and authorities, religion, culture, and community; and it possesses a communitarian Andean heart (2004, 47). A process that began with the invasion of urban plots of land in the fifties resulted in an overflow and expansion consistent with Matos Mar’s idea of the “other” Peru—a submerged Andean Peru reemerging to be reinvented in the cities, especially Lima.

According to Matos Mar, confrontation is inevitable, but it will not be a traditional clash between opposites, but a circumstance in which “millions of participants from the ‘other society,’” attempt to “impose their own terms by means of mass force” (2004, 101). Sometimes he seems to present a situation in which the other society asserts itself in a capillary manner, while at other moments he describes a process in which “the masses generate semi-autonomous pockets of power, based on asymmetric patterns of rural reciprocity adapted to the urban situation. They oppose the state and the state ignores them” (2004, 105). When evaluating the path followed by the “overflow” in the last two decades, Matos Mar argues that “the oppositional style of overflow used by these masses since the early fifties keeps advancing their conquest and possession of new physical, cultural, social, economic and political territories, once reserved for the wealthy, upper and middle class urbanites” (2004, 130). He employs the concept of “overflow” to describe a social change that challenges the concepts of integration, reform, and revolution; it operates as a sort of Andean stain that spreads in physical as well as cultural, economic, social, and political space. Meanwhile, as this occurs, the institutional world grows increasingly isolated, broken, and incapable of governing this “other” world.

More urban rebellions have occurred since the publication of this work. In analyzing them, it is important to take a long-term perspective, because otherwise it is difficult to

understand their ebbs and flows and to decipher the trajectories and processes that form their backdrop. These rebellions do not follow programs or established objectives—there is no well-beaten path—but we can attempt to identify the broader tendencies where they exist.

### **Social Movements, or Societies in Movement**

The concept of social movements is an additional obstacle in understanding the reality of the urban peripheries. When analyzing social movements, analysts often emphasize the more formal aspects, like organizational forms, cycles of mobilization, the movement's identity and cultural contexts, and so on. And they usually classify them according to goals, membership, and the timing and reasons for their emergence. There are entire libraries written on the subject, although very little fieldwork on the quite distinct, Latin American terrain and its unique bases. In the arduous task of decolonizing critical thinking, a discussion of theories of social movements is of primary importance.

One of the most complete and comprehensive analyses of the Bolivian movements, coordinated by Alvaro García Linera, relies uncritically on European and American paradigms. The various Bolivian movements are defined as “a kind of collective action intentionally seeking to change established social systems or defend some material interest, for which they organize and cooperate with the purpose of initiating public actions based on these goals or demands” (2004, 21). All social movements share three features: a structure for mobilizing or a decision-making system, a collective identity or cultural characteristics, and codes of mobilization or methods of struggle. However, this kind of analytical framework is applicable to only a few movements: the institutionalized, those with a visible structure that is separate from everyday life, and those who elect leaders and have a definite program and set of goals.

But the bulk of social movements do not work in this way. For example, poor women in urban peripheries generally do not participate in social movements in the way described by the theory above, even though they play a very important

role as a force of social change. Women's movements generally have, beyond a small nucleus of women organized in a stable manner, a capillary form. This kind of organization, although not institutionalized or stable, can still be huge and capable of changing the world from the ground up. García Linera's study touches upon some of these themes while addressing the Unique Confederation of Rural Laborers of Bolivia (CSTUB), a peasant organization of the Altiplano Aymara:

Strictly speaking, the CSUTCB is a kind of social movement that sets in movement not just a part of society, but a different society: a set of social relations with non-capitalist forms of labor and modes of organization, meaning, representation, and political authority that are different from the dominant society. Hence, Luis Tapia's notion of a societal movement is relevant in this case. (2004, 130)

The concept of a “societal movement” helps us understand the different social relations that exist in Latin America. They are not “remnants” from the past, but social relations that grow alongside and are distinct from the dominant forms. This theory attempts to conceptualize the movement “as a society in itself, or a complete system of social relations” and identify the movement as “a part of society that is within the other” (Tapia 2002, 60–61). Tapia observes the existence of “several societies” within the one society, or at least the articulation of two distinct sets of social relations. In a similar vein, I have argued for conceiving of these movements as “societies in movement” (Zibechi 2003a). What is compelling is how these ideas can grasp that social relations existing in rural areas among the indigenous and landless are now appearing in urban areas. In cities like Caracas, Buenos Aires, and Oaxaca these territorialized social relations have become visible in social struggles during the last fifteen to twenty years, with El Alto in Bolivia being the best example of the trend.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See my analysis of the urban “communities” of El Alto in Zibechi 2010.

The central aspect of this debate is whether a system of social relations can exist in a given territory. In the analysis of movements, this implies focusing less on forms of organization and codes of mobilization and more on social relations and territories—to look at the flow and circulation, not the structures. This brings new concepts like autonomy, culture, and community into focus. Carlos Walter Porto Gonçalves argued this point: He analyzed the rubber tappers working with Chico Mendes in Brazil for many years. “In the battle for the decolonization of thought, the recuperation of the concept of territory would perhaps be a contribution” (2006, 161).

In effect, the indigenous, landless, and—increasingly—urban dweller movements in Latin America are territorialized. The social relations within them and the subjects who form them are what make up the territories (Porto 2001). This means returning to Lefebvre’s assertion that the production of space is the production of differentiated space: Those who produce space embody differentiated social relations rooted in territories. This is not limited to the possession (or ownership) of land, but is rather about the organization of a territory that has different social relations and that embodies the subject. It is the subject’s need to give shape to counter-hegemonic social relations that create the new territorialities.

Place and space have been privileged concepts in the theoretical analysis of social movements and should be applied to territories in Latin America, including its cities. In an excellent work, Porto Gonçalves says that the “new subjects suggest the introduction of new territorialities” (2001, 208). He reaches this conclusion after studying the rubber tappers, who had constantly moved around before building a movement, leading Porto Gonçalves to the conclusion that their force “had emanated from their domestic-and-productive-space” (2001, 203). It was this disengagement, the moving away from their original and inherited place (in society), that allowed them to form anew as a movement.

Classes are not things but rather human relations, as indicated by E.P. Thompson (1989). These relations are not given, but rather are constructed in the midst of struggle and

confrontation. This construction of class as a relation includes the notion of space. Thompson postulates that social classes are constituted in and by the struggles of the protagonists locked in concrete situations. In this way, the protagonists not only occupy the space, but also constitute it. Thus, “social movement is, rigorously, a changing of social place,” a point that intersects at the crossroads of sociology and geography (Porto 2001, 197–198). Based on this, we come to a different definition of social movements than that found in sociology, which always focuses on organizational aspects, structures, and political goals:

Every social movement begins from the starting point of people breaking the inertia and moving, i.e. changing place, rejecting the place historically assigned for them within a given social organization, and their desire to increase opportunities for expression, an action that, as Michel Foucault warned, has strong implications for the political order. (2001, 81)

This potent image emphasizes the character of a social movement as a moving-of-itself, as a capacity to flow and shift, or to circulate. A movement is always shifting spaces and moving away from inherited identities (Espinosa 1999). When that movement/shift takes root in a territory or when the subjects who undertake this moving-of-themselves are rooted in a physical space, they constitute territories defined by their difference from territories of capital or the state. This implies that land/space is no longer understood as a means of production and becomes, instead, a political and cultural creation. Territory becomes the place where counter-hegemonic social relations are deployed and where groups and collectives can practice different ways of living. This is one of the major contributions made by the indigenous movements of our continent to the fight for emancipation.

By introducing concepts such as territory, autonomy, self-determination, and self-government—all of which belong to the same problematic—indigenous movements are

producing a theoretical and political revolution, as noted by Díaz Polanco (1997). At some point in their centuries-long struggle for land, indigenous communities started to expand local and communal self-government into wider spaces as part of their construction as national subjects and peoples. During the First Continental Gathering of Indigenous Peoples in 1990, this very process was deliberated upon, leading to the Declaration of Quito.

Until then, all existing territory was a property of the state, both materially and symbolically. The idea of territory could not be separated from that of the nation-state. For Weber, “the state is that human community within a particular territory—the concept of ‘territory’ is essential in this definition—that claims for itself (successfully) the monopoly of legitimate physical coercion” (2002, 1056). With the emergence of the Indian movement during the last two decades, since the mid- to late eighties, the concept of territory changed due to the impact of indigenous struggles. The Declaration of Quito says that “the right to territory is a fundamental demand of indigenous peoples” and concludes that “without Indian self-government and without control of our territories, there can be no autonomy” (Declaration of Quito 1990, 107).

This theoretical and political revolution suggests a new distribution of power. Important questions arise, like how did the indigenous movements move from the struggle for land to constructing territories, from demanding rights to demanding autonomy and self-government? That is, how did the transition from resistance against domination to the affirmation of difference occur? How this was achieved is of particular importance to the formation of urban communities taking root in self-constructed urban spaces.

### **The Formation of Popular Neighborhoods**

The night of October 29, 1957, a group from Zanjón de la Aguada—a 5-kilometer by 100-meter belt of poverty in the center of Santiago with a population of 35,000—prepared to carry out the first organized mass seizure of urban land. At 8:00 p.m., they began to dismantle their shacks, tied strips of

cloth over their horses’ hooves to prevent them making noise, and gathered “the three sticks and the flag” with which to create the new settlement. Around 2:30 a.m., they arrived at the chosen site: a state-owned property in the southern part of the city.<sup>7</sup> It is worth dwelling on this story, in the form of an account given by a participant, which may have been the first organized mass land seizure in Latin America:

At eight o’clock in the evening, the most determined ones began to gather at the agreed spot: with the three poles and a flag, and some utensils and blankets, the convoy took shape.... The column kept advancing and people joined it...quietly we were reaching our goal. Under the lights of Los Cerrillos airport during this dark, moonless night, we felt like Jews escaping from the Nazis: the darkness meant we could only advance step by step. With the first lights of dawn, everyone began to clear a piece of brush, build a hut, and raise the flag,” (Garcés 2002a, 130)

Some twelve hundred families from various rural towns converged on the chosen site of about fifty-five hectares. The “encampment” withstood police eviction actions, and families began to build the settlement. They defined the terms of the experience from the outset: The construction of the settlement, which they called “La Victoria” [victory], was “an enormous exercise in self-organization by the settlers,” who had to “work together and innovate, drawing on every bit of knowledge and all of their skills.” The government did not throw them out, but did not assist in the construction of the settlement either (Garcés 2002a, 138).

The premise of self-organization distinguished the action from previous struggles. On the first night, the settlers convened a large meeting and created committees to attend to security, food, and health care, among other necessities. From then on, all important decisions were made through collective

<sup>7</sup> The first land occupation in Chile is documented by Mario Garcés (2002a) and the Grupo Identidad de Memoria Popular (2007).

debate. The second distinguishing aspect was its self-construction. They constructed the first public buildings, the school, and the health clinic collectively. Each settler had to contribute fifteen adobe bricks for the school; women brought the straw, young people made the bricks, and teachers stacked them one on top of another. Within a few months of the camp's establishment, the school began to function, although the teachers worked without a salary. The health clinic began attending to residents under a tent while its building was constructed collectively, like the school. Within two years, La Victoria had 18,000 inhabitants and more than 3,000 dwellings. It was a city built and governed by the poorest, based on a "rich and extensive community network" (Garcés 2002a, 142).

The "seizure" of La Victoria followed a pattern of social action to be repeated throughout the following decades up to today, not only in Chile but also throughout Latin America. There is collective organization prior to the occupation, careful selection of a suitable space, and then a sudden action—preferably at night—accompanied by outreach to churches or political parties, attempting to legitimize the illegal action. If the occupiers withstand the initial eviction efforts by security forces, it is very likely that the occupants will be able to remain.

Interestingly, this pattern of social action began in Santiago and Lima during the fifties but only spread to Buenos Aires and Montevideo, the most "European" of Latin American cities due to their homogeneity, in the eighties. This pattern is very different from individual families joining shantytowns—"favelas," "callampas," or "villas miseria." The fact that they occurred decades apart is not significant; what is really important here is the adoption of a similar pattern of collective action.

Let us look at La Victoria in more detail, which will shed light on the new processes at work. Land seizure "entails a radical break with institutional logic and with the fundamental principle of liberal democracies: property" (Grupo Identidad 2007, 14). Legitimacy takes the place of legality, and the land's use value prevails over its exchange value. With a seizure, an invisible group becomes a socio-political subject. In La Victoria, something more happens: Residents appropriate

space by constructing homes and a neighborhood, and, when they subsequently inhabit them, the "we" becomes the basis of the area's self-government.

Thus, the pattern of direct action modifies the relation between people and the state embedded in the dominant culture and also a relation that the Left and the labor movement have adopted—the logic of class/union/party rooted in representing the interests of a sector within the state apparatus. In this new kind of movement, self-construction and self-determination take the place of demands and representation. This change is still very much in its infancy, but a different course is now slowly being charted by the popular sectors. It parallels what we have seen in indigenous movements since the eighties. They place the question of territory at the center of their activities, in addition to a series of theoretical and political concepts that belong to this genealogy: autonomy, self-government (Díaz Polanco 1997, 14).

Accounts from the people involved go even further. They reveal a number of issues that we will see repeatedly in struggles the length and breadth of the urban peripheries in Latin America.

- The capacity to *self-organize* and, on that basis, self-construction and self-determination of life. Not only did the inhabitants of La Victoria construct their own homes, streets, water system, and electricity system, they also erected a health clinic and a school, the latter reflecting participatory values, in that it is a circular building. They governed their own lives throughout area, establishing forms of popular power or counterpower.
- Women played a prominent role, to the extent that many left their husbands to participate in the land seizure or did not inform them of the crucial step they were about to take in their lives. "I went alone with my seven-month-old daughter, since my husband didn't go with me," recounts Luisa, who was eighteen at the time of the seizure (Grupo Identidad 2007, 58). Zulema, age forty-two,

remembers, “Several women secretly came with their children, hiding from their husbands, like I did” (Grupo Identidad 2007, 58). Even in the mid-fifties, popular sector women—strictly speaking, we would have to say mothers, or the women and their children—had a surprising level of autonomy. The women took the lead during the occupation and in resistance to evictions, facing down security forces with their children:

One time the soldiers threatened to shoot us all, so all the women went to leave the children with our mothers and then we returned to fight. All day long we were waiting for the soldiers to arrive and they didn’t arrive but the police came in kicking down flags and tents and threatened to kill us. And there we were, fighting against eviction and shouting “You will only get us out of here dead!” (Grupo Identidad 2007, 60)

Chilean historian Gabriel Salazar states that prior to 1950, poor women had learned by necessity to organize tenement house assemblies, tenant strikes, land seizures, health care groups, resistance to police evictions, and other forms of opposition. In order to become “home owners,” they had to become activists and promote land seizures. As a result, female settlers began to develop “a certain type of popular, local power” that amounted to the ability to create free territories in which they “directly exercised sovereignty” in truly autonomous communes (Salazar y Pinto 2002a, 251). Further on, we shall see that women have always played a prominent role in Latin American movements, imbuing the movements with a cosmivision that is different from the dominant worldview of the nation-state and organizations like political parties and unions. It was the women who led the wave of land seizures that swept the continent in the years ahead.

- La Victoria was built as a *community* of sentiments and feelings, where pain and death played a role in bringing

the people together. It is important to emphasize how identity is not anchored in the physical place, but in affections and shared life experiences. As the comments from participants affirm, in the early days everyone called each other “compañero,” partly because everyone shared responsibilities. However, it was not so much an ideological comradeship but something far more sobering: The November rains caused the death of twenty-one infants one year. “These things unite us. With a neighbor by our side, we did these things together. When one lacked something, the other would help. She had three girls and one died...” (Grupo Identidad 2007, 36). The death of a child is something profound for the whole community. In Brazil, when the landless occupy a property, they raise a large wooden cross. Each time a child from the camp dies, they drape a piece of white cloth on the cross and leave it there: It is a sacred thing. In La Victoria, when a child died, or sometimes an adult, a long caravan walked through the streets of the neighborhood before heading to the cemetery.

Women play such a decisive role in organizing the barrio/community because they are the most affected. Angela Roman, who was twenty-seven when the occupation took place, says,

We came together in group meetings organized by block. I still participate to this day. If a neighbor dies, I’m the first one out with a basket to collect money, at whatever hour, because this is what we learned to do when the children died and there was no money for burial. In block meetings, we discuss things we need to take care of, like when were we going to have water, etc. We discussed what we needed; this is how we organized. (Grupo Identidad 2007, 37)

Thus the community form becomes a form of struggle. For instance, during resistance to evictions, a pattern emerged

that will be repeated again and again across the continent: “The children in front, the women behind, and the men last; this is why they could never kick us out, because people were very united” (Grupo Identidad 2007, 53).

- The seized land, the housing, and the self-constructed neighborhood are experienced and felt as a *use value* in a society that prioritizes exchange value. Many neighbors insist they will not sell their house at “any price.” On October 30 of each year, the whole community celebrates the anniversary of the land seizure and decorates the entire barrio. “Every year I participate in the remembrance celebration.... We decorate floats, with the children riding on them, and recall how important the land seizure was in our life,” says Rosa Lagos, who was sixteen in 1957 (Grupo Identidad 2007, 74).

The prevalence of use value, or rather, the deconstruction of exchange value in exchange for use value is closely linked to the “self,” as in self-determination and also the role of women. A domestic logic began to expand—the production of use value was confined to the domestic space for a long time—into the public space and, from there, throughout the whole social fabric, particularly at critical times for communities.

- They established relationships with the state, political parties, and the church, but due to the community’s reliance on self-organization and self-government, these were instrumental in nature. Communist and Christian organizations predominated in La Victoria but, despite their presence, the population made its own decisions in its own decision-making bodies. The same autonomy was evident in relation to the state. Such instrumental relationships indicate that the people do not wish to be represented by such institutions and desire to be autonomous. While this type of relationship can be construed as “clientelist,” they are in reality instrumental relations, since they represent the way two different and opposing worlds relate.

Over the years, the occupation and construction of La Victoria represented a watershed. The state attempted to organize and contain the settlers, but the inhabitants circumvented the state’s policies and implemented “their own housing policy: the extended occupation of the city through ‘land seizures’” (Garcés 2002a, 337). Up until to 1973, popular sectors were the main creators of urban space in the city. In late 1972, during the government of Salvador Allende, there were 400,000 people living in settlements in Santiago alone (Castells 1986, 281). Analysts from various traditions agree that the movement was very important. Castells argues that “the movement of settlers in Chile was potentially a decisive element in the revolutionary transformation of society” (Castells 1986, 291). Garcés points out that by September 1970, the capital was in full transformation due to the encampments, which were “the most influential social force in the urban community of greater Santiago” (Garcés 2002a, 416).

This pressure from below transformed the course of social struggles and the cities. In the Chilean case, Garcés notes that “in the revolutionary discourse emerging in 1970, even more important than the struggle for state power, radical leaders had to prioritize forms of sociability within the ‘camps’” (Garcés 2002a, 423). The changes of “place” involved a third of the population of Santiago:

At the end of the sixties, the people who had “occupied places” in the city were also simultaneously occupying a new “place” in Chilean society. Specifically, the most radical change that we see in this was the movement of the *callampas* into the general population....<sup>8</sup> What people brought into play in the sixties was not only a new territorial position but also a new social and political positioning. (Garcés 2002a, 423–424)

Pinochet’s coup sought to reverse the almost hegemonic position attained by the popular sectors. That third of

<sup>8</sup> *Callampas* are the settlers in popular encampments, who get their name from the callampa mushroom, which grows overnight.

Santiago's population—those who had built their own barrios, houses, schools, and health clinics, and pushed for basic services—was a threat to the capital's authorities. The military regime attempted to override this by displacing the entire population to suburbs built by the state or the market.

Between 1973 and today, there has been a profound reversal in city housing, a true urban counterrevolution. Between 1980 and 2000, 202,000 “social housing units” were constructed in Santiago, in order to move a million people—one-fifth of the capital's population—from self-constructed areas to segregated housing complexes far from the city center (Rodriguez and Sugranyes 2005). It is useful to take a closer look at this process to see how the state and capital tries to halt and reverse the “taking of positions” of the popular sectors in the cities. Sixty-five percent of people in these complexes want to leave because of overcrowding in small houses, compounded by the isolation of being confined to the outskirts of the city. The dictatorship's policies, continued and intensified in the post-dictatorship era since 1990, have resulted in regressive changes embodied in “the uniformity of social housing as compared to the spatial complexity of the popular settlements”; “organization to fragmentation” and “the land seizures representing an act of integration into the city, compared to social housing as an expulsion from the city as perceived by the *villa* inhabitants” (Rodriguez and Sugranyes 2002, 17).<sup>9</sup>

The operation's objective was to destroy a popular territorial power as embodied in the settlements; the dictatorship initiated it and the democratic government post-1990 continued it. A huge mass of low-standard housing was built for the poor throughout the country; it was constructed in a manner that explicitly sought to eradicate the settlements. At the beginning of the plan, the production of subsidized housing during the eighties “was applied almost exclusively in programs for the eradication of ‘settlements,’ particularly in the regions of Santiago and Las Condes” (Rodriguez and

<sup>9</sup> In Chile, an illegal occupation of a property is called a *toma*, an irregular settlement is called a *campamento*, and all housing built by the state is called *villa*.

Sugranyes 2005, 30). First, they “cleaned up” wealthy neighborhoods. There were two goals here: to end the distortions in land value created by the settlements in wealthy districts and to consolidate the spatial segregation of social classes for the purposes of security.

Between 1979 and 1983, some 120,000 people were forcibly transferred from settlements they had occupied in the sixties and seventies into the periphery. Chilean urban analysts consider the dictatorship's eradication of the poor from the consolidated city as “a radical measure, singular on the continent” (Rodriguez and Sugranyes 2005, 31).<sup>10</sup>

Re-settlements occurred in thirteen of the twenty-four districts of Santiago. The eradicated lost their jobs, faced an increase in transportation costs, and continued to have major problems in accessing education, health care, and social benefits. Above all, the forcible transfer contributed “to uprooting the informal network of help and support among the population and a strong decrease in participation of residents in community organizations” (Rodriguez and Sugranyes 2005, 31). That was precisely the aim of the transfer. The transplanted family tends to remain confined inside their house and social bonds are broken. Over the years, a new housing pattern was established: large urban areas containing intentionally separated concentrations of rich and poor.

And from the point of view of capital and the state, one has to wonder, was the continuity of the settlements and popular neighborhoods so terrible? Apparently so. The wave of mobilizations in 1983 in these neighborhoods—after ten years of fierce repression and the social restructuring—put the dictatorship on the defensive and convinced the elites to expedite their efforts to eradicate popular settlements. Land seizures started in 1980 threatened to spread during the protests of 1983. This new generation of land seizures occurred because the residents refused to be part of the new state housing policies that “would have inevitably meant leaving their

<sup>10</sup> The dictatorships in Argentina and Uruguay tried to eliminate “slums” in Buenos Aires and Montevideo by relocating inhabitants to the periphery, but they were not as successful or aggressive as the Pinochet dictatorship.

communities and moving to the outskirts of the city” (Garcés 2002b, 30).

Elites saw the existence of settlements and barrios constructed and governed by the popular sectors as a direct threat to their privileged social position—hence, as the Corporation of Social Studies and Education has pointed out, they created a policy of forcefully resettling people on the periphery, causing the new inhabitants to be uprooted and in debt. But it also marks the change of one form of society to another:

[T]hey go from a state of relative autonomy, to a clientelist dependency, leaving behind a society that recognizes use value as its fundamental axis to one dominated by the commodification of social relations. Moreover, the daily violence endured by the inhabitants of these social housing projects subsidizes political peace in the rest of the country. (Skewes 2005, 101)

This could not be achieved without imposing spatial discipline, a careful but violent reconstruction of the panopticon deconstructed by residents. In short, social control was achieved in Chile via a reconstruction of public space and forced incorporation into the market economy. This dual strategy successfully eradicated the relatively autonomous spaces created by the population. Let’s take a close look at this world that had to be destroyed. The researcher Juan Carlos Skewes lived in a “settlement” for a year and then accompanied an uprooted family to a housing project, which allowed him to observe the changes in lifestyle between the two places.

Skewes argues that there is a “popular design” in the settlement that is different from the official, hegemonic world. Since there were no plans or preconceived ideas about how to organize the space, the design reflects the day-to-day practice of those who, in order “to live, create a livable space” (Skewes 2005, 106). He notes eight characteristics of the spatial design: labyrinthine structure, porosity of the boundaries, invisibility inside the settlement, interconnection of housing, irregularity

of internal boundaries, use of markers to rank spaces, the existence of focal points, and, finally, lookout posts.

There is a logic to the settlement’s form of internal interconnectedness, and this determines the flows, corridors, and passages. It is a structure that ensures autonomy, in part due to the internal invisibility and self-regulation that mark the limit of the settlement. This delineation of an inside and an outside represents a macro limit that cannot be reproduced inside the camp where boundaries are porous because use value determines it so. The design protects residents from the outside, but “facilitates social control through acoustic, visual, and olfactory means, contributing to the formation of a porous environment that reinforces the fusion of individual lives” (Skewes 2005, 114).

When moved to public housing, inhabitants lose their self-sufficiency. With its panoptic design and straight lines, residents are fragmented and isolated, while being stripped of a sense of community protection. A living space focused on people is converted into a space centered on objects, housing, and what Skewes describes as “the transition from a female domain into a masculine world, and from local control to external control” (Skewes 2005, 120). The networks of mutual support and sense of neighborhood community are all destroyed, and the inhabitants are left in a state of debt and dependency, coping with a high level of daily, localized crime. In sum, the state attempts to destroy a social sector through relocation because the urban settlers threaten the hegemonic order. Ultimately, it comes down to destroying or corralling popular sectors by means of criminalizing poverty.



But the events in Santiago were not unique in the continent. In 1970, 50 percent of the population of Recife and 30 percent of those of Rio de Janeiro lived in popular settlements, which was also true of 60 percent of the population in Bogotá; 49 percent of Guayaquil, 40 percent of Caracas, and 40 percent of Lima in 1969 (Castells 1986, 249–250). Another study shows the

percentages of residents living in self-constructed homes: 60 percent of the population of Mexico City in 1990, 61 percent of Caracas, and 31 percent in Bogotá of 1985 (Gilbert 1997, 104).

Millions of people have created their own spaces and means of survival beyond the market. There was talk of the existence of two societies long before the actual disengagement of a sizable portion of the population from the formal economy, of “different conceptions of the world and life, so diverse that they seemed irreconcilable” (Romero 2001, 364). If these two worlds had something in common, it was, as Romero put it, a “revolution of expectations.” But neoliberal globalization erased that point in common.

Of course, not all self-constructed neighborhoods and cities follow the same trajectory, and in some cases they seem to be very far from constituting forms of popular power or local self-government. But there is no doubt that undiscovered potentialities for social change are nesting in these spaces.

To conclude the first part of this essay, I would like to quickly address the experience of the city of Lima, where the occupation of urban space takes a slightly different form than in Santiago: Here the settlements and popular neighborhoods are “islands,” which arise in the interstices of the traditional city. The number of settlements/islands in Lima has risen from 56 to 408 between 1957 and 1981, grouped into three large cones (south, north, and east) by 2004.

These urban cones are huge “blotches” that appear to imprison the traditional city. This is a quantitatively and qualitative dual phenomenon. If in Santiago the settlements included about 30 percent of the city dwellers in 1973, in Lima the urban periphery population increased from 9.5 percent in 1957 to 59 percent in 2004 (Matos Mar 2004, 149, 153). The difference is that the settlements were established in areas adjacent to the city in the vast, empty sand flats that surround Lima and are relatively continuous and homogeneous territories, forming real “blotches” populated by urban migrants from the highlands.

From the point of view of the forms of land occupation, there are no major differences here compared to the case of La

Victoria in Santiago. These are invasions by organized groups of poor people who illegally occupy land, hoist Peruvian flags, resist the security forces, set up their residents’ associations, and start building their shacks with straw mats; the whole neighborhood then acts as one community, nestled in the hillsides and the sand. The first neighborhood formed in this manner was San Cosme, established in May 1946. The practice of seizing lands and forming shantytowns grew slowly in the fifties and reached a peak during the seventies. Villa El Salvador was a part of this process; for a time, it was considered a model of neighborhood self-management.

In the late eighties, Matos Mar estimated nine million people lived in 2,100 settlements across the country (1989, 120). He believes that because of the enormity of the process, the country faces what he calls an “overflow from below” that is changing the face of the cities and particularly the capital. He argues that urban land invasions are part of a process begun by Juan Velasco Alvarado’s military government (1968–1975); it forced peasants to move from the sierra when it advanced a program of agrarian reform, attempting to break up the traditional haciendas of the landowners. By 1984, 80 percent of the population of Lima lived in popular settlements: 37 percent in shantytowns, 23 percent in popular urban peripheries, and 20 percent in alleyways and yards (Matos Mar 2004, 69). The remaining 20 percent lived in middle-class and wealthy residential neighborhoods.

Migrants continued taking over land until the mid-eighties without the presence of state institutions, which marks a crucial difference from the occupations in Chile. The Andean migrant installed in Lima had to adjust not only to the challenging physical aspect of the city but also its patterns of sociability and everyday culture.

Some architectural features of the constructed homes—gabled roofs and fences—are derived more from the mountains than European influences; a growing common practice is to employ indigenous systems of reciprocity such as the *minka*. The new housing is christened with the Andean *tin-ka*—a cross of flowers crowning the highest point. To protect

the house from evil and thieves, talismans and amulets—especially vegetables—have become a standard part of popular urban religion (Matos Mar 2004, 80).

This migrant population has developed an oppositional economy, according to Matos Mar, which is distinct from the “informal” economy because it reflects a reality that bears an antagonistic relation to the official. To call it “informal” suggests ceding a central place to the established economy, hege- monized by the ruling classes. Instead, they have a survival economy and one organized around resistance—the economy cannot be separated from the set of social relations at work in the settlements. The popular sectors have created a different city with its own means of communication, its own religious and cultural practices (like *la chicha* music), its own means of transport (the microbus), and even its own “autonomous neighborhood surveillance systems and, for extreme cases, people’s courts and summary executions” (Matos Mar 2004, 188). The popular economy sits within this overall context, while maintaining ties with the economy of the ruling classes.

These considerable achievements rest upon the reinven- tion of the Andean community and kinship and reciprocity networks at work in the new urban space. The urban com- munity creates public spaces through cooperation between the inhabitants: streets, sidewalks, lighting, water supply, schools, and health facilities are all constructed collectively. Family networks constructed the homes: 500,000 homes in shantytowns have been built in the traditional stages method. Two out of every three homes in Lima have been built in this collective way. It’s another way of making a city, a different city, where living spaces are often places of work and shops simultaneously. This other city belongs to the *other* Peru, which has a more dynamic economy. According to data from the Peruvian Chamber of Construction, 70 percent of housing construction is done in the shantytowns by families working informally with master builders and small businesses, a form of direct self-construction (Tokeshi 2006).

Matos Mar’s work points to the existence of two countries, “the official Peru of the institutions” and “the marginalized

Peru, plural and multiform” (2004, 97). Supporting this view- point, sociologist Carlos Franco observes three distinctive characteristics in Villa El Salvador: a mode of organization and distribution of space, the organizational form of the pop- ulation, and a project of economic and social development (Tokeshi 2006). It is not a separate country that is a subsidiary or dependent on the other; there are two autonomous, self- sufficient worlds that relate to one another as such. The main difference is that one is in decline and the other ascendent.

In effect, the Peru-from-below went from seizing land and properties in the fifties to invading “the official culture in its economic, educational, legal, and religious forms through new styles introduced by the constantly overflowing and expanding masses” (Matos Mar 2004, 101). Furthermore, the masses be- came uncontrollable and established “semi-autonomous pock- ets of power” based on Andean communitarian traditions of reciprocity (Matos Mar 2004, 105). The official and the auton- omous countries relate, confront, and interpenetrate, according to Matos Mar, but the dominant sectors are slowly losing hold of their traditional physical and symbolic spaces. This kind of spontaneous social change is expressed in the Andean concept of *Pachakutik*.<sup>11</sup>

Popular sectors have been able to veto Creole politicians (for example, blocking Mario Vargas Llosa’s election attempts in the late eighties), but they have not established stable alli- ances with political parties and leaders. Instead they establish “relations in terms of costs and benefits that serve a calcu- lated processes of negotiation” (Degregori and Grompone 1991, 46). This does not indicate populism or patronage but, as Carlos Franco notes, that the “urban plebs” are moving from “delegated representation to political self-representa- tion” (Degregori and Grompone 1991, 46). What we see hap- pening here, much like what occurred later in Bolivia, is that the population does not feel the need to be represented in the hegemonic world and is creating a separate or “other” world. At this point, the traditional concepts coined to describe and

11 *Pachakutik* is a Quechua word that signifies change, rebirth, transforma- tion, and the coming of a new era.

analyze the social struggles in a society are no longer useful because here we encounter two worlds in conflict and alliance over wide range of issues. And so, from an academic point of view, it becomes necessary to write a new narrative.

So far we have looked at two groups of popular urban sectors that have followed different paths, although they share points in common. Pinochet's dictatorship (1973–1990) and the Fujimori regime (1990–2000) marked the end of one epoch for the urban, popular sector movement. It was a new movement, and, notwithstanding its heterogeneity, I think we can identify some of its common features:

- It is a movement of *rural migrants* arriving in cities that are the centers of power for the dominant classes. The mass influx of rural population into the cities changes social, economic, and cultural relations; popular sectors create multiple islands in urban spaces in the midst of traditional cities, which are sometimes interconnected. This is a form of resistance to elite power and an affirmation of the popular world.
- The spaces they construct (settlements, shantytowns, popular neighborhoods) are *different* from the traditional city of the middle and upper classes. They have been constructed differently (that is, collectively) and urban space is occupied and distributed differently within them (based on solidarity, reciprocity, and egalitarianism).
- Explicit or implicit forms of popular power are born in these self-constructed spaces, impacting the entire range of social relations—from the direct control of space (who inhabits it and how) to the regulation of relations between people. State logic appears to be subordinate to popular/community logic in these spaces.
- Economic initiatives for survival arise in the popular territories that often take the form of a *different, counter-hegemonic economy*.
- Control of these territories enables the urban popular sectors to resist, stay put, and survive even as the powers that be seek to break them, whether by disguising their

differences, through co-optation, or by neutralizing initiatives.

### Recent Experiences

Urban popular sectors began a new era during the February 1989 Caracazo. From the spaces they controlled, they launched profound challenges to the system, creating counter-powers based in their barrio/territories. The overflow from below that occurred in Lima became insurrectional in other cities and marked the beginning of a new political era of survival and resistance to the hegemonic society. This is a product of neoliberalism, which led to a re-colonization of the continent and an attack on popular sectors' lifeways. The testing ground for the implementation of the neoliberal experiment was, with particular vehemence, in Pinochet's Chile.

Beginning in 1983, settlements in Santiago created by popular sectors after the occupation of La Victoria played a decisive role in resistance to the dictatorship. The self-constructed, self-governed neighborhoods replaced factories as the epicenter of popular action. After ten years of dictatorship, popular sectors defied the regimen in the streets by staging eleven "national protests" between May 11, 1983, and October 30, 1984 (some analysts argue that there were twenty-two protests between 1983 and 1987) (Salazar and Pinto 2002b, 242). The enormity and potency of these protests put the dictatorship on the defensive. The leaders were primarily young people who used barricades and bonfires to demarcate their territory and attack the closest symbols of order such as municipal buildings, traffic lights, and so on.

From the early eighties, women and young people began to assume leadership roles in the movement via their pro-survival and socio-cultural organizations, taking action against the dictatorship's attempts to dismantle the popular sector. The appropriation of territories during protests, where street barricades physically limit the state presence, represents the rejection of an external authority within the self-controlled spaces. "They shall not pass" was a popular slogan at the barricades. This effectively "closed off the population"

and represented the “affirmation of the popular community as an alternative to state authority and rejection of the proposed totality of the dictatorship” (Revilla 1991, 63).

The state response was brutal. At least 75 were killed, more than 1,000 wounded, and 6,000 arrested within a year. In a single protest on August 11–12, 1983, 1,000 were arrested and 29 killed; 18,000 soldiers participated in the repression, in addition to civilians and national police. This underscores the intensity of the protests. Despite the repression, there was no defeat. Community identity was restored, and the ability to mount such protests and launch repeated and sustained challenges to the system for a year and a half following a decade of repression, torture, and disappearances, was in itself a tremendous success.

The protests show new social actors in action, at a time when the working class could no longer play a central role. The new actors—basically women and young settlers—are different from the working class in important ways. The first, discussed previously, consists of the territorial roots of the protest and therefore of the subjects who carry them out. This change is a long-term shift that modifies the character, form, and trajectory of the movements of those from below (Zibechi 2003b). The historian Gabriel Salazar notes that “autonomy, agency, and identity creation is synthesized as the country’s poor gradually rose up” (1999, 127).

However, it is not the territorialization of popular power that gives the struggle its potency, but the social relations nesting in these “other” territories. In contrast to the first epoch of the movement, popular sectors, particularly lower-class women, developed new capabilities—principally, the capacity to produce and re-produce their lives without relying on the market. Salazar and Pinto captured the depth of this difference:

If women’s experience in the 60s had been profound, that of the 80s and 90s was deeper still, causing an even more vigorous and comprehensive social response. After 1973, the people’s movement did not decline. On the contrary: it reached its peak.

The settlers of the 80s organized not only to seize a site, build a camp, and await a state legitimation, or to “associate” with the populist state according to the terms they proposed. They organized among themselves (and with other settlers) to produce (bread-making collectives, laundries, weaving centers, etc.), to subsist (community kitchens, family gardens, joint purchases), to educate themselves (women’s collectives, cultural groups), and also to resist (militancy, health groups). All this was carried out not only without the state, but also against the state. (Salazar and Pinto 2002a, 261)

It was this movement that forced the dictatorship to withdraw. It was also, as Salazar observed, the longest and most vigorous resistance movement in Chilean history, one that even brutal repression could not defeat. Poor women in the most difficult conditions drew from the memory of the struggles of the fifties and earlier. Women’s strength—and this is a characteristic of current movements across the continent—rests on something as simple as coming together, supporting one another, and resolving problems “their” way, using the infallible logic of doing things as they do them at home. They transferred the style of a private space to a collective space and utilized the spontaneous community attitude seen in movements like Argentina’s Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (Zibechi 2003a).

These women have modified our understanding of the term “social movement.” They did not create bureaucratic structures or ceremonies with the usual pomp and circumstance inherent in those institutions, which are necessarily separated from their base. But they acted, and did they ever! Under the dictatorship, Chilean women settlers became

little ants that crisscrossed between and among area houses, meeting and chatting with all the neighbors, dealing with professionals from the NGOs or social vicarages (and later with professionals and politicians

from the municipalities), attending workshops and training courses and regional and national coordinator meetings. Their mobility allowed them to weave “neighborhood nets” and even community networks that made formal neighborhood board meetings unnecessary, such as the neighborhood councils and mothers’ centers. (Salazar and Pinto 2002a, 267)

This is a social movement that prioritizes the movement as a moving-of-itself, displacing organizational structures, as we have seen before. The description of poor women moving about in the neighborhoods as they weave local networks—that are, as Salazar points out, “community cells”—is the best image of a non-institutionalized movement and the creation of non-state powers, which are not hierarchical or separated from the rest. Thus was born a new way of doing politics in the hands of new subjects, with whom state institutions do not know how to interact.

For these women, the transition from dictatorship to democracy was a disaster. After the restoration of constitutional democracy in 1990, they suffered an unimaginable defeat. In other words, “The dictatorship did not vanquish the settler movement on the battlefield the settlers chose, but on the field of compromise chosen by their supposed allies: middle class professionals and left-of-center politicians” (Salazar and Pinto 2002a, 263). It is difficult to describe the transition from dictatorship to democracy in better terms. The population had created the Commando of United Residents and the Settler Women’s Movement (CUP and MOMUPO). They were invited to participate in multi-sectoral bodies such as the Civility Assembly, where professional and middle-class militants advocated for a transition “from within the popular movement,” which led firstly to the marginalization and later the disintegration of popular organizations (Salazar and Pinto 2002a, 262–263).

From this experience, we can deduct several relevant lessons. The first is that the movements—which I will call “communitarian” for lack of anything better (that is, they act as a coherent, territorially bound social actor)—cannot be defeated

by repression, however brutal it may be, excepting the mass slaughter of its members. The second is that emancipatory forces can suffer defeat when at the mercy of what is generally called “the left”—that set of professionals, NGOs, and political parties who are responsible for overseeing the softening and fragmenting of the movement. To do this—and this is the third lesson—it is necessary to co-opt or break key individuals or collectives within the movement. This is what happened in Chile in the crucial year of 1986, when the rules of the transition were defined, and later in much of the continent.

Young people, the other key players in protests from 1983 onward, followed a similar course. During the early years of the dictatorship, thousands of “cultural” groups were created, operating as shelters from an exterminating regime. Under the protection of Catholic parishes, theater groups, youth clubs, discussion groups, and workshops, various forms of popular education were set up, “forging a youth culture quite different from the ‘68 generation: this one more rooted in the present than in the past, the collective more than the individual, more artisan than professional, and more participatory than scenic” (Salazar and Pinto 2002b, 237). The various youth groups comprised a large, diverse, and spontaneous network. At the same time, but uniting with the activities of women settlers, the youth began to organize outdoor “cultural” events that eventually attracted thousands of people.

In those safe spaces beyond the control of the dictatorship (Scott 2000), young people tested out their rejection of the regime and then, around 1983, moved onto the streets. The period of retreat, from 1976 to 1982, Salazar defined as “a communitarian cycle centered in cultural construction” with a rotating and informal leadership. In this period and in these spaces, a powerful youth culture was born that continues to have a presence even today:

Perhaps the most striking legacy of this cycle was to demonstrate that the articulation of open groups with free participation could be a militant and democratic force, socially more transparent than the functional

and hierarchical structure of political parties. (Salazar and Pinto 2002b, 241)

This new horizontal youth culture had to not only confront the military dictatorship but also sections of the militant left who sought to instrumentalize the youth initially for the insurgency and later for electoral participation. Broadly speaking, it can be described like a clamp on the new youth cultures: the dictatorship on one side and the old left on the other. Later on, when the electoral system was restored, the clamp on the youth was represented by neoliberal policies or the market on one side, and the institutions, governed by the right or left, on the other. NGOs are very often part of the second side of the clamp.

The rejection of political parties and electoral abstentionism is common among oppositional young people in Latin America. Across the continent, where there were dictatorships and also constitutional democracies, a clear separation existed between base activists and the leadership, the latter always willing to negotiate “solutions” with the military, elites, and/or traditional parties. In the eighties and early nineties, popular sectors (again, basically women and youth) suffered serious reverses that were not inflicted by authoritarian regimes or the right in power. Just as left-wing professionals and trade unions played a role in reinstalling constitutional democracies with restricted freedoms in the southern Cone, some armed leftist groups contributed to weakening popular forces, particularly the urban poor.<sup>12</sup>

Chilean youth, like most youth in Latin America, withdrew from the militant stage and from formal politics in order to temporarily retreat to spaces where they felt more secure, away from the control of the system. The “re-grouping of youth ‘from below’ occurs in various forms, in the subcutaneous tissue of institutions, on the edges of the regulatory system, or in the intersubjective intricacies and burrows of private space” (Salazar and Pinto 2002b, 265). And something happened in those spaces during the nineties: After that

<sup>12</sup> I am thinking of the Shining Path in Peru.

period of retreat, the youth reappeared as a force in the streets. Hundreds of thousands of high-school students—the “Penguins”—protested the neoliberal educational policies in 2006, and fiercely challenging the government of Michelle Bachelet and the Chilean elite.

The mobilization of the youth came as a big surprise. The Chilean ruling coalition had brought the popular sectors off the streets and into the political arena, not as actors but as objects of targeted government policies seeking to control and neutralize movements. And this begs the question—how long will they be able to neutralize movements through directed policies?

We do not know, but past experience has left its mark. The young people, according to Salazar, now “know” that things have gone wrong with both the right and the left and that they have to do things for themselves after the huge disappointment with formal politics and electoral democracy. Perhaps that’s why organizations that survived the transition to democracy are different from those of previous periods. The new community organizations are more autonomous and focus on various campaigns: to recuperate the memory of struggle and neighborhood identity, to solve community health problems, and to try to “access economic alternatives for themselves and their families” (ECO 2001). In other words, they seek to produce and reproduce their lives beyond the control of any institution, state, or party.

The land seizure in Peñalolén, Santiago, in March 1997 greatly resembled the taking of La Victoria forty years earlier. And, as with other popular organizations during this period, the relationship between the settlers with the state remains strictly instrumental and rigorously external. For this reason, no political party has a significant influence in Peñalolén. At the Pedro Mariqueo Cultural Center in La Victoria, during preparations for the twelfth anniversary celebration of the founding of the Primero de Mayo radio station, I personally witnessed the high degree of autonomy among the new local organizations. One slogan made an impression on me: “Our problem began with the return to democracy.” This was not an ideological affirmation, just a common sense sentiment

shared by the approximately thirty people, mostly youth and women, present.

In fact, governments throughout Latin America employed the same “model” of transition, which was very similar to the Spanish transition after the death of Franco. But popular sectors are boiling over, to such an extent that the Chilean state has to intervene in urban spaces under the pretext of drugs and crime through the Safe Neighborhoods Program. The Interior Ministry launched this program in 2001 with funds from the Inter-American Development Bank, leading to police and social intervention in “marginal” and “conflicted” neighborhoods. The first area affected was La Legua and the second was La Victoria, followed by up to nine more neighborhoods during the first four years. The plan’s objectives are not clear and all that authorities will say is that its purpose is “to combat illegal street vendors and delinquency in downtown Santiago.”<sup>13</sup>

The state tries to involve local social organizations in its program, particularly the neighborhood councils, which divides the neighborhood and its organizational nuclei. Members of the Esteban Gumucio de Yungay Cultural Center, one of the communities taken over by the Ministry of the Interior, claim that the “government bulldozer” is an attempt to dismantle “self-governing territorial organizations” (Perro Muerto 2006, 12). In this neighborhood, autonomous collectives seized a public space and constructed a cultural center and a community kitchen in which residents make bread and pies. Police, with the support of the local neighborhood council, have subjected the community to a virtual state of siege.

The blatant manipulation of the community resulted in the installation of street lights, paving, and speed bumps, all with the approval of neighborhood councils—one of which consists almost entirely of municipal officials and represents, in practice, the eyes, ears, and voice of the municipality—even though the steps of the housing blocks are falling apart and the application to build a social headquarters for popular

13 See [www.gobiernodechile.cl](http://www.gobiernodechile.cl).

organizations was dismissed with an abrupt “the municipality opposes the headquarters” (Perro Muerto 2006, 13).

The state continually tries to stifle any autonomous activity among the poor, whether political, economic, or cultural. Therefore, in order to isolate the autonomous collectives it is necessary to co-opt local organizations or social leaders, since repression produced the opposite effects of those sought. “Democratic” legislation is also part of this low intensity war against the popular sectors. In December 2003, a bill entered Parliament to “modernize” the free outdoor flea markets that are “residual spaces of popular sovereignty” for the people (Páez 2004). The flea markets are areas where popular producers and buyers form horizontal links, and this kind of trade is often an “economic and political weapon with which the popular classes can exercise their rights as citizens” (Páez 2004). Both the rulers and the ruled know that it is from these micro-spaces of everyday life that the beginnings of insurrections can take hold and occasionally pour out onto the great avenues of social control.



Collective social action by poor women is particularly inspiring in the city of Lima. In 1994, there were 15,000 popular organizations in the city: 7,630 Glass of Milk Committees, 2,575 mothers clubs, 2,273 popular soup kitchens, and 1,871 neighborhood councils, according to official sources.<sup>14</sup> Many of the organizations have links to political parties; for example, some mothers clubs have had connections to the Peru’s American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) since 1985 or were co-opted by them. Designed to provide breakfast to children under the age of six and to pregnant and nursing mothers, the Glass of Milk Committee originated under leftist mayor Alfonso Barrantes in 1984, when pressure from poor women convinced the city to implement the Glass of Milk Program.

By the mid-nineties, mothers clubs, Glass of Milk Committees, and popular soup kitchens benefited four million

14 See [www.inei.gob.pe](http://www.inei.gob.pe).

people throughout the country and were run almost exclusively by women. But the female role is not fully appreciated. Often this kind of activity is seen as a type of charitable activity or a substitute for the state's role, but I would argue that these initiatives have little to do with charity or clientelism. Below, I will look closely at Lima's soup kitchens, a network of organizations born "from below" that have been functioning for almost forty years.

A nun/nurse named Maria Van der Linde created the first collective popular kitchen in the late seventies in Comas, north Lima (Blondet and Trivelli 2004, 39). The goal was to collectively prepare food rations for families and individuals, using donated or subsidized food. The idea of neighborhood collective kitchens spread quickly during the economic crisis: In 1982 there were 200 peoples' kitchens in Lima; in 1988, at the time of the stabilization program under APRA President Alan Garcia, the number had risen to 2,000; and during Fujimori's structural adjustment programs in the nineties, there were 7,000 kitchens. A survey in 2003 counted 5,000 soup kitchens in Lima alone, with more than 100,000 active (female) members (Blondet and Trivelli 2004, 20).

The kitchens, supported by pastoral communities influenced by liberation theology,

promoted self-help and the self-provision of services, seeking to emphasize the autonomy of the poor vis-à-vis the state and charitable institutions, in contrast the dependency too easily engendered by other programs. This is why personal effort and popular initiative were so important in the emergence of these kitchens, and why there was resistance to coordinating with government programs and articulating their demands in relation to the state. (Blondet and Trivelli 2004, 39)

These kitchens are considered "self-managed" or "self-sustaining," while those of the state are called "administered" or "subsidized." The latter are more sympathetic to the state and political parties, but over time the differences seem

minor. The evolution of the kitchens had various stages: In 1988, the First Meeting of Self-Managed Kitchens was held and the National Commission of Kitchens was created, during a period when women activists came into prominence and the government was prepared to offer a lot of help. After the economic crisis in 1988, the kitchens multiplied in number and people had to learn new ways to survive (through small "businesses" and the expansion of food loans), leading to significant popular mobilizations for government support. During the nineties, many kitchens had to close due to Shining Path harassment, while others worked from behind closed doors (Blondet and Trivelli 2004, 42–43).

Each kitchen has an average of twenty-two active women members in each neighborhood organization, according to the 2003 survey. Ninety percent of the members have received some training and has had some management responsibility. Only 20 percent of the kitchen's presidents have finished high school. In 2003, 2,775 kitchens in Lima were self-managed and 1,930 were subsidized; the latter formed in the second half of the eighties and the former in the nineties.

Each kitchen produces an average of a hundred meals daily, almost half a million each day in Lima. It is interesting to note who receives the meals: 60 percent go to members and their families; 12 percent to the members who cook as payment for their labor (there is no other pay); and 8 percent is donated to poor people in the neighborhood ("social cases"). Only 18 percent of the meals are sold, half to people in the community—usually the same individuals everyday—and the other half to people who happen to be in the area, such as service people and others. Members can buy at a lower price than non-members.

Clearly the kitchens were set up to attend to the needs of members and their families, not to make profits. The kitchens do not have savings or distribute benefits to members, and "it is most likely that the members themselves are subsidizing the kitchen directly (donating ingredients, providing labor, etc.) beyond the normal cooking duties" (Blondet and Trivelli 2004, 32). Although I will return to this later, women who work in the kitchens operate with the logic of economic

solidarity, not the logic of the market, and are not guided by commercial criteria. Only 9 percent of their work is dedicated to producing goods for sale. In fact, what they receive from the state goes almost entirely to rations given to the poorest.

Most of the kitchens organize parties and raffles to generate further income, since state-provided rations barely cover 20 percent of the cost of a meal. A 2006 study by the Federation of Women Organized in Committees of Self-Sustaining Kitchens (FEMOCCPAAL), representing some 1,800 kitchens, states that “kitchens are no longer a supplement to a salary, because that salary no longer exists, and for many families, they are the only means to access food.”<sup>15</sup> This is happening in a period of strong economic growth. A detailed study by that organization quantified the cost of each meal as follows: The state contributes 19 percent, kitchen organizations provide 81 percent; members buy food that accounts for 33 percent, free labor is another 32 percent, and the remaining 16 percent is administrative costs, transportation to pick up state-donated food, and other services compensated by work or meals.

The magnitude of the efforts of Lima’s poor women shows their capacity to intervene in the political life from their own place. In the popular kitchens, the women have moved what they do in their homes into the public sphere. The same is true of other social organizations. It is the logic of family care extended and multiplied in times of crisis. However, in November 1988, during one of the most critical moments in the history of Peru, women participated not only in local organizations such as the popular kitchens, but also directly on the national political scene. During that month, a rumor spread in the barrios claiming that strangers (gringo doctors accompanied by thugs) had been abducting children to extract their eyes. Between November 29 and 30, thousands of mothers, almost all from the poor barrios, panicked and went en masse to the schools to collect their children because they believed they were in jeopardy from the *sacaojos* [eye-snatchers]. Residents set up patrols in many neighborhoods and were on the verge of lynching several people suspected of being *sacaojos*.

<sup>15</sup> See [www.femoccpaal.org](http://www.femoccpaal.org).

A detailed investigation shed light on the reasons for such strange collective behavior (Portocarrero and Soraya 1991). While at first it was seen as an unusual rumor associated with myths of the colonial period, the investigation shows how the *sacaojos* rumor flourished around the same time as a worsening of economic conditions, government paralysis, a wave of strikes, the collapse of public services, and an increase in the attacks by the Shining Path guerrilla group. The city of Lima was semi-paralyzed and people were very afraid. In September of that year there had been a *paquetazo* [a readjustment of prices to reduce inflation] that posed a serious reduction in workers’ purchasing power. Markets were empty and housewives had to wait in long queues to buy the few goods available.

President Alan Garcia’s popularity had plummeted. The Prime Minister made dramatic statements in early November (he said “rivers of blood will flow,” if the right returns). Around November 7, there were so many workers on strike that it looked like public services might completely collapse, especially the urban transport system, due to a bus drivers’ strike. Lima was a city in chaos, with crowded bus stops, thousands of people on foot, and passengers perched on top of trucks and vans. On November 22, Sendero Luminoso blew up thirty-two electrical towers, causing a massive power outage and three weeks of power constraints. Traffic lights were not working, there was no bread in the bakeries, and the same day, the Minister of Economy announced commodity price increases from 100 to 200 percent. Many businesses shut down, but in the urban peripheries, people worked with the police to force them to open.

The level of tension was very high. Many imagined that there would be looting and a huge social explosion, followed by the inevitable repression leading to thousands of deaths. Fear and despair gripped popular sectors. The workers’ syndicate called a twenty-four-hour strike that was a complete failure. And then things took a different turn:

In the days following the *paquetazo*, there was no strike in Lima or looting. However, the *sacaojos* episode

occurred. The hypothesis we propose is that the rumor and panic increased the general level of stress. The *sacaajos* episode was a functional equivalent of riots or strikes. It allowed people to release tension, to collectively express the fear and despair generated by the situation, and even try to defend themselves from it. The sensation was that something had to happen in order for the fear to be dissipated. (Portocarrero and Soraya 1991, 29)

The hypothesis is that the classic popular “response” (looting, strikes, and insurrection) to crisis was not worth it in the eyes of the main protagonists because of the inevitable human costs involved. But the poor, and particularly the women and mothers, were neither demobilized nor disorganized. At various points throughout the city, crowds of up to one thousand mothers demanded answers and the intervention of authorities to solve the problem of the eye-snatchers. They formed neighborhood patrols and committees to capture the culprits and, although a guilty party was never found, in several cases the people arrested “suspects” who were always doctors or foreigners.

The truth is that women and mothers were the protagonists in all of this and “not the popular leaders (which is the case in a strike) or young people (which is the case in riots and looting),” and through the eye-snatchers rumor and panic, a greater evil was prevented: “So the fear and anxiety was converted into a feeling of panic and violence within young people, especially in the private world of the poor family. These feelings were not politicized, as intended by the proposed strike. It also did not lead to looting and anomic behavior; something else occurred” (Portocarrero and Soraya 1991, 33).

At that time, the main protagonists were not trade unions or the rural farmers’ groups but rather the women and mothers organized in their districts to ensure the maintenance of everyday life. When the “formal” economy of the country became paralyzed, thousands of popular kitchens, Glass of Milk Committees, and mothers’ clubs held together the daily

life for families. Secondly, women and mothers intervened in the country’s political life at the height of its troubles, but not as expected. Why? Clearly they did not trust the trade union movement or the political parties, in which their husbands or male relatives were active. But there is even more to the story.

I lived in Lima at that time and saw for myself the impossibility of changing the course of policies of those “from above” during those months. The popular movement did not have the force or legitimacy to compel the government or elites to change their policies. It was also unable to stop Shining Path terror. The women and mothers sensed it or knew it. What was the point of a strike or rioting in this situation? The first was a gesture without consequence and the second involved running too high a risk. And therefore the women and mothers intervened decisively at this critical juncture, to protect their children, their neighborhoods, and their families just as they had been doing in the thousands of locally run organizations.

If we maintain an enlightened gaze from above—male, white, and intellectual—we will continue to underestimate actions arising and carried out by those from below, such as the massive intervention of poor women in 1988. The poor women were engaging in a different form of doing politics, neither better nor worse than men in their formal and masculine organizations, but coming from another place. We should be open to other interpretations of the political conjuncture coming “from below”—in this case, poor women—for it can help strengthen the positive features that already exist in the movement and put a stop to those that merely reproduce hegemonic modes. As we know, the popular sectors played a decisive role in the electoral tsunami that prevented the election of rightist Mario Vargas Llosa and defeated the Shining Path. And has the huge role played by women and mothers in both cases been fully recognized?



In Venezuela, there are more than six thousand urban land committees and two thousand technical water boards

through which millions of people are taking control of their own lives. Although they really took shape during the government of Hugo Chávez, both organizations are part of the popular urban struggle over the last two decades. In Caracas, 50 percent of the population lives in settlements without legal rights to the land and with poor drinking water facilities (Antillano 2005). Like other parts of the continent, these barrios emerged in the fifties and sixties as a result of inequalities in oil revenue distribution.

In 1991, the Assembly of Barrios of Caracas was formed from the residents' board during the First International Gathering for the Rehabilitation of the Barrios. The assembly brought together people from over two hundred barrios in the capital and formulated a series of key demands that were later taken up by the Venezuelan government: These included co-management of the drinking water facilities, regulation of the land occupied by the settlers, and local self-government. This was the result of three decades of popular organization and mobilization in the urban peripheries.

The emergence of these barrios was the result of intense struggles to resist evictions and win basic services. In the seventies and early eighties, barrio inhabitants gained a stronger sense of common identity through cultural activities and the construction of new subjectivities. There were church groups, theater groups, literacy campaigns, children's projects, and local newspapers. "There was an invisible but powerful accumulation of forces" (Antillano 2006). Local campaigns around this time, the first stage in the development of the barrio, often focused on rising transportation costs or demands for improvements in street infrastructure. Neoliberal reforms precipitated the second stage of development due to the divestiture of state housing, allowing neighborhoods to fall into disrepair, the impoverishment of the population, the dismantling and privatization of public services, and "the weakening and collapse of intermediary agencies that had worked through a mechanism of cooptation and redistribution via political parties and neighborhood councils" (Antilles 2005, 208).

The citizens' uprising of 1989 in Caracas—known as the Caracazo—was a product of this process. Urban popular sectors took the initiative from the very beginning of this insurrection and have retained it up to this day. The intense popular mobilizations in the early nineties caused the collapse of the corrupt traditional parties, leading to a crisis in the model of domination, thus facilitating the conquest of government power by a new breed of leaders including Hugo Chávez. These same popular sectors were instrumental in halting and reversing the coup d'état against Chávez in April 2002 and in the defeat of the oil strike launched by elites shortly afterward. The urban poor in the slums of Caracas neutralized the various rightwing offenses as large sections of the middle class rallied to support the ruling class. As with other popular mobilizations around the continent, these were decisive actions undertaken without a unified coordination or centralized leadership.

The fourth stage—the present—began in 2002 with the decree for the regularization of land tenure and the rehabilitation of barrios, promoting the formation of Urban Land Committees (CTU). This process is intimately related to the nature and spirit of the Bolivarian process under the Venezuelan government, which is distinctly different from other governments on the continent. The approximately one thousand CTUs in the city of Caracas consist of about two hundred families each and are informally interconnected.

The most relevant part of the decree is this recognition and inclusion of the barrios, in so much as it leaves participation, mobilization, and organization to the neighborhood residents themselves, so the communities themselves become agents of transformation. Thus, the urban land committees, a new form of social organization legalized by the decree, execute technical, political, and even "judicial" tasks. Thus, a precedent is set for the implementation of social policies for this government: social inclusion through the mobilization of the excluded. (Antillano 2005, 210)

The technical water boards are similar. They form part of a “territorial revolution,” according to Antillano (a social leader from a popular neighborhood). These are autonomous organizations, elected by barrio residents, and are flexible; they also do not require the presence of intermediaries and respond to people’s immediate needs. These committees tend to become local powers; local ownership of the land is not family-based but rather “an association consisting of all the families in the neighborhood, which among other things, is responsible for regulating the use of space (common and familiar), authorizing sales or leases, and ensuring standards of living, mediating disputes and actions of collective responsibility, etc.” (Antillano 2005, 214). This passage describes the distance between the organizations and the state, reflecting what I have designated as “non-state powers” (Zibechi 2006b), although in this case these organizations have been created at the behest of the Venezuelan government.

The territories of the urban poor tend to become multifaceted community spaces; thus, popular organizations dealing with health, water, land, cooperatives, culture, and now community councils have sprung up in the hills of Caracas. In terms of production, the neighborhood becomes like one large factory or *maquila*. As in other poor parts of the continent, the people do not invent something new here without first fixing or improving what already exists, and this includes the always complicated relationship with the market or state. The productive forces—like recuperated factories in other parts of Latin America—are already located in the barrios of Caracas, thereby avoiding dependencies on external exploiters.

Antimano is a neighborhood of 150,000 residents with a lot of *maquilas*. It operates like a very efficient factory: a ball of cotton goes in on one side and out of the other comes a shirt. There are ladies who knit, some cut, others sew, etc. The same thing happens throughout Latin America and the third world.... Here the middlemen who keep the profits are cut out, and people produce cooperatively, much as they do everything else in the

territory. One has to think of the issue from this perspective—the contribution the territory can make to production. (Antillano 2006)



In Bolivia, there have been remarkable experiences in urban peripheries that reveal the capacity of the indigenous grassroots to construct a genuine “other” society. One is the city of El Alto, which has been analyzed in several works (Gomez 2004; Mamani 2005; Zibechi 2006b). Here I examine a notable experience of regional and community water management based on a non-state model. There are over one hundred water committees in the city of Cochabamba responsible for overseeing the provision of water, which the state is unable to provide.

With the implementation of the neoliberal model in Bolivia in 1985, mine closures and migration to the cities changed the map of the country. The city of Cochabamba’s population grew to over one million inhabitants by 2001, filled with people uprooted from rural communities and workplaces. The state water company, Semapa, served only 50 percent of the city’s population, neglecting vast areas such as the southern peripheries. In the early nineties, neighborhood groups organized to bring the water to their homes. They formed associations and cooperatives and without state assistance dug wells, repaired water mains, constructed elevated tanks or bought water in cisterns, and even built drainage and sewers.

The Association for the Management and Production of Water and Sanitation (ASICA) was formed in March 1990 in Villa Sebastián Pagador and was probably the first local initiative for organizing drinking water (ASICA-Sur 2003). Some 140 water committees were formed in the south of the city in 1990, comprising an average of 300 to 1000 families in each one. They had to overcome many difficulties, including the struggle for reductions in the price of electricity, which is necessary for extracting water from wells. Some wells dried up and in others the water quality was too poor for domestic use.

If a well could not be found, the committee would have to buy water commercially and transport it to the affected neighborhood. Some committees have bought their own water tankers, which made several delivery trips daily (Granddyer 2005).

Urban water committees played a key role in the Water War of April 2000. The state handed control of Sempa to a multinational company, which began threatening to expropriate the water obtained by residents through so much sacrifice. Ultimately, residents' resistance reversed the water privatization and opened a cycle of protests that undermined the neoliberal model and led to the election of Evo Morales. The expulsion of the multinational allowed people to elect their own representatives to control the state-owned water company, and so began a new era in which installing water services in the peripheries became a priority.

In August 2004, the water committees created the Association of Community Water Systems in the South and elected its first board. At this stage they were discussing how to deal with the state company, as it was clear that there was no guarantee that they would provide quality water. Clearly there was a need to co-manage water services with the state company, but the question arose as how to do so without losing autonomy, which was the only guarantee of their ability to continue monitoring the supply:

Today we are at another crossroads. What will become of our water committees when Semapa receives the right to serve our districts? Will our organization be terminated? Will we be able to influence Semapa's decisions? Will we become individual and anonymous users for the municipal company? Or can we keep our organizations, our decision-making capacity, and the self-managed forms that we used for years? (ASIC-South 2003, 1)

The Water War and a long decade of autonomous struggle were not in vain. The residents fought and won their autonomy and did not want to lose it. For this reason, they decided to

allow Semapa to provide water "wholesale" to the committees, who would distribute it to residents, thereby retaining control of service management. While the model of using water wells proved to be an alternative to centralized and hierarchical state control, the large number of wells drilled damaged the water table around the valley, causing wells to dry up or to lose water quality. So the committees opted for the state-owned service, but without losing their autonomy. The experience of the Cochabamba water committees is an important example of alternative ways to manage the commons.

The question of "ownership" reveals the water committee's fundamental difference from the state company. When defining the notion of ownership of water, the committees rejected both the concept of "individual private ownership" as well as "state public ownership."

What we are trying to defend in our neighborhoods is a type of ownership that is private in a sense (because it does not depend on the state but on the people directly), but at the same time is public (it does not belong to one individual, but to the entire community). That is why it is called collective or communal property. The main reason for the existence of such ownership is not economic, but to satisfy a social need, the administration of a public good such as water, which should never be considered a private good or an object to trade. Both Semapa and the water committees in our neighborhoods must understand it from the perspective of "communal public ownership." (ASIC-South 2003, 5)

This is very similar to the "private/social" concept formulated by Anibal Quijano to describe the predominant forms of ownership in Latin America's popular urban world. He argued that these anti-capitalist types of organization—collective, democratic, and based on solidarity—are "one of the most widespread forms of organization of everyday life and represent the experience of a large swathe of the population of Latin America" (Quijano 1988, 26). These forms of social

experience rooted in the private/social are not, according to Quijano, cyclical or transitory but established practices in the urban peripheries in particular. These social organizations operating on the basis of reciprocity, equality, and solidarity “are not islands in the sea of the urban world dominated by capital. They are part of the sea that, in turn, modulates and controls the logic of capital.” It is not “state power, but a power within society” that constitute these private/social islands; they are part of another society (Quijano 1988, 27–28).



Many consider Uruguay to be the most integrated country, in which the welfare state has achieved greater development and is therefore less troubled than other countries. The syndicalist movement and the left party Frente Amplio [Broad Front] have consolidated their grip on urban society since the nineties, with the result that Uruguay is not the best scenario for the formation of autonomous social practices.

However, at the peak of the economic and social crisis of 2001, thousands of unemployed residents of the Montevideo peripheries organized dozens of family and collective gardens. About 200,000 lived in informal settlements in the capital and its metropolitan area (of 1.5 million people), premised on collective labor with self-constructed family houses. Unemployment reached 20 percent at the peak of the crisis (July to December 2001), but 80 percent of the popular sectors had no stable employment and were shipwrecked among unemployment, self-employment, and various forms of informal work. The community gardens were a response to the food crisis hitting the poorest. Even though there has been economic growth since 2004, many of these plots continue to flourish.

During the crisis, more than two hundred collective family and communitarian gardens functioned in the urban zone. Families set up the first on privately owned land and cultivated them with the support of locals, while others set up the community gardens in public spaces. In both cases, garden activists established stable forms of organization, which became a

unifying axis for neighborhood groups struggling for autonomy from political parties, trade unions, and the municipality. Although the first two years were difficult, groups began to grow, leading to a strengthening of ties that they themselves defined as “community.” Women from the Amanecer Community Garden in the Sayago barrio reflected on the progress:

At first we had a card upon which each person recorded hours worked. At harvest time, each received a certain quantity, according to the amount of time worked. And then during one meeting it was proposed, to our surprise, that we not note hours worked. This pleased us greatly, as it meant that the group was beginning to have a sense of communitarian consciousness. We operate on this basis to this day. Having worked in the garden, the member simply takes enough to feed their family. (Oholeguy 2004, 49)

The group of *huerteros* [gardeners]—about forty of them, mostly women and youth—ultimately became self-sufficient and decided to stop accepting food from the municipality, indicating that they would rather the food go to soup kitchens or other groups that needed it.

Meanwhile in the Villa Garcia neighborhood on the periphery of Montevideo, some twenty collective family gardens began to network. After a shaky start, they formed a stable collective that met weekly, rotating the location among the gardens in the network. Without creating an organizational structure, the *huerteros* created a sort of “mobile network coordination” to support each other by exchanging seeds, knowledge, and cultivation techniques, and then looked into ways of marketing the produce. The weekly gatherings were divided into three stages: collective learning through work in the garden, sharing a common pot of the products harvested, and an evaluation and planning meeting. They were remarkably successful: Working groups were consolidated, the collective pot based on the production of the gardens was maintained, they depended less and less on food donated by the state, and

a greenhouse and seed bank was created to supply all the gardens in the zone. The collective began publishing a monthly newsletter and coordinating with similar groups around Montevideo, which led to the First Gathering of Urban Agricultural Producers in October 2003, with the support of the Department of Agriculture and the municipality (Contreras 2004).

Huerteros in other zones also began to coordinate, organize workshops (in pruning, beekeeping, and poultry farming) and occasional fairs to market their harvest as well as canned goods and delicacies produced by families. In some zones, barter clubs participated in the markets. About seventy residents occupied a 19-hectare area owned by a private bank and began planting. The huerteros' ability—the term huertero became part of their collective identity—to reject urban solitude and anxiety about survival and act collectively shows popular sectors' capacity to overcome dependency on the state and the party system. Their gatherings stressed the need “to organize themselves into a network, as horizontally and openly as possible, without scheming leaders or becoming trapped in a bubble” (Contreras 2004).

Many community gardens were dissolved after the Frente Amplio occupied the government in March 2005 and implemented anti-poverty policies, but an Urban Agricultural Producers group still exists and brings together a large group of urban huerteros, including new groups testing out innovative production strategies. Despite the overall decline in the gardening movement, this experience demonstrates that, even in a “modern” and “complex” city like Montevideo, it is possible to produce autonomously and build non-market networks.



Finally, the peripheries of Argentinian cities have given birth to one of the most formidable and multifaceted social movements. The financial and social crisis that precipitated the uprising of December 19–20, 2001, brought many popular initiatives to the forefront, particularly economic alternatives. Expressions of the people's capacity to put this society in crisis

back in movement came in the form of about two hundred recuperated factories, hundreds of local enterprises set up by neighborhood assemblies, and piquetero groups.

Each of these sectors has developed their own forms of action. The recuperated factories demonstrate that the workers are capable of the running factories and that there is no need for bosses, supervisors, or specialists. In some instances, the recuperated factories have formed strong relationships with one another, the local community, and with social and cultural organizations. Recuperated factories have opened their spaces to host cultural activities—workshops, community radio stations, and fora for discussion and exchanges, and so on—and in some cases they are building distribution networks that operate outside of the market.

The piquetero movement has secured major achievements, despite the uneven development and disorganization of much of it. Piquetero groups operating in neighborhoods forsaken by the state have built health clinics, popular kitchens, and food programs for local children. They have organized community gardens and bakeries to feed the communal pots, and others have set up carpentry and metallurgy workshops as well as training spaces organized around the principles of popular education.

The neighborhood assemblies have become centers for cultural and social activities, including the production of packaged foods, the cleaning and repair of computers, and so on. Across the big city of Buenos Aires, piquetero groups are organizing writing workshops, film screenings, cultural or political debates, popular markets where they sell their products, and their own distribution networks for their products. The three groups that we have identified—the recuperated factory movement, the piqueteros, and the neighborhood assemblies—are all taking the re-production of their lives into their own hands.

The popular movement offensive between 1997 and 2002 not only created thousands of alternative productive spaces but also generated a “new economy” around them, in the form of non-capitalist social relations between producers and

consumers. Furthermore, in many of these enterprises, alienated or estranged labor is no longer the dominant form, and in others, the production of goods for the market—that is, the production of exchange value—is subordinate to the production of use value. Labor is de-alienated in different ways: either by rotating tasks or because producers control the entire work process. In these cases, we can speak of “free producers” rather than workers as appendages of machines who are alienated in a labor process that they do not control.

On the other hand, sometimes production occurs outside of the market and therefore non-commodities are produced, although this is more difficult to sustain over time. What difficulties and constraints do these enterprises face? How to make autonomous processes sustainable and should they take such processes even further?

I would like to enter this debate by taking a close look at one such alternative enterprise in Buenos Aires. There are many such projects, but I will focus on the self-run bakery in the Barracas barrio; it has been functioning for over three years, although the group of people running it have been working together collectively for almost a decade. These are youths who formed a cultural group in the late nineties and then, in the midst of the great turmoil that followed the uprising of December 2001, occupied the premises of a bank and were subsequently evicted. Today they have two illegally occupied spaces: a publishing house is run out of one, as well as a cinema for local children and adults, and in the other space they operate a popular library that serves two hundred members and a bakery employing twelve people, about half male and half female.

The story of the bakery is a remarkable one. For a couple of years, it operated with teams of two people who did the baking in an electric oven and sold the products in the neighborhood. They eventually secured the right to sell at the School of Fine Arts. The group decided to change from what they call “individual management”—deemed “unfair” because, for example, the group working Monday sold much less than the Friday group—to form a cooperative.

Now they have basically two “teams,” one in the kitchen and one out selling. The money is divided equally among them and they earn almost double the salary that they would receive on welfare. Although some prefer some types of work, tasks are still rotated. One of the main discussions they have is how to evaluate the different tasks. I should point out that the twelve bakers participated in struggles together for years and lived in the same squatted house, but most have never had formal “jobs.” But how does one establish a correlation between work done and remuneration?

What is the equivalence? The answer is that there is no equivalence, because there is no abstract labor and, as we shall see, because the category of commodity does not exist. Let’s look at some of the debates brought up by this experience.

Although they sell what they produce, *they do not produce commodities*. In fact, they do not go out to sell on the “market,” as they have established a network of fixed buyers (80 percent of buyers are return customers). They have established a relationship of trust with their buyers, to such an extent that the Fine Arts school where they “sell” their goods also helps defend their squat and participates in local activities. That gives us a second clue: The “duality” of the commodity, as carrier of use value and exchange value has been—or rather, is being—deconstructed in favor of use value, or, *products that are non-commodities*. One cannot, in fact, speak of abstract labor but of useful or concrete labor. So there can be no equivalent between the labor of baking and the labor of selling, because an equal and abstract labor that is measurable by the socially necessary labor time does not exist. Although money is a means of exchange, I do not think it is a decisive factor.

There is no hierarchy between producers and distributors or between productive and unproductive labor, although those who sell the product have some advantage over those who produce it. Selling requires building social relations within the neighborhood, which, in fact, ensures the survival of the enterprise. Political economy is not applicable to these kinds of enterprises, and it is necessary to invent a new theoretical perspective.

What do we call this non-alienated labor, which produces non-commodities and in which the production is as “productive” as distribution? And what is produced? In this case, what is produced are non-capitalist social relations, or non-capitalism. And this very specific small experience, very micro if you will, is not unusual in Buenos Aires or other cities on the continent.

The appropriation of the means of production and the de-alienation of the production process are two steps taken by some recuperated factories and productive enterprises. They are certainly very valuable steps, but still insufficient. The next step is to produce, like the youth of the Barracas bakery, non-commodities. And with this concept we enter into the realm of exchange.

Marx notes that “the labor of the individual asserts itself as a part of the labor of society, only by means of the relations that the act of exchange establishes directly between the products, and indirectly, through them, between the producers. It is only by being exchanged that the products of labor acquire, as values, one uniform social status, distinct from their varied forms of existence as objects of utility” (Marx 1975, 89). In short, producers relate to each other in the market, but not directly, only as owners and sellers of commodities, they face each other through things.

This is why I have explored the case of the Barracas social bakery, though I could also add the example of the popular kitchens in Lima and a host of similar initiatives running across the length and breadth of the continent. Production is not for a market or through the market relationship of producers and buyers. However, it was not always so for the Barracas bakery, and it took three years to deconstruct the products—from commodities to non-commodities. At first, the bakery products were brought to the market “to see what happened.” Some were sold and others were not. The relationship with buyers was a relationship mediated by the price of bread (i.e., if it was cheaper and better quality, more was sold). Buyers were not always the same but more likely to be those who happened to appear at a time and were able to buy. In

short, it was a typical market relationship, impersonal and random. Over time, the producers/sellers and buyers began to get to know one another and established relations of trust. In other words, the relationship between things (bread and buyers with money) was becoming a relationship between people, or social relationships not mediated by things. Now the producers know the buyers, and now they produce the things the buyers need or want.

Many buyers have established direct links with the bakery, even visiting it in the social center that houses it. They are no longer bread sellers and buyers, but Peter and Jane who sell, and Eloisa and Felipe who buy. Thus they decode the “social hieroglyphic” that for Marx is “any product of labor” (Marx 1975, 91). Deciphering the hieroglyphic through social practice implies that something essential to capitalism has stopped functioning. The socially necessary labor time required for the production of bread is no longer the master key, and the sales price is not adjusted to that, simply because no similar “measure” exists, or it has ceased to operate as such. “Because, in the midst of all the accidental and ever fluctuating exchange relations between the products, the labor time socially necessary for their production forcibly asserts itself like an over-riding *law of Nature*” (Marx 1975, 92). The terms of trade are no longer random and fluctuating because the market is not impersonal. And the socially necessary labor time varies and depends on who is doing the work, if there are more boys or more girls, if they are very tired or if they are playing about while they work or listening to music or discussing things. And often they give the bread away, because that is how they are. Sellers and buyers no longer relate as “possessors of commodities” but in another context, in which solidarity between the “castaways” plays a central role.

This is not derived mechanically from the ownership of the means of production or even the de-alienation from the process of labor, but from something more profound: They are not focused on accumulating wealth and do not feel like possessors of commodities. The social function is above the possession of commodities, which is what allows them to produce use values for consumption by real people. In

When Marx discusses these arid topics in *Capital*, he uses the Daniel Defoe's famous Robinson Crusoe as an example. On the lonely island, Crusoe makes things and works to survive but, being a lone castaway, "the objects that form this wealth of his own creation are here so simple and clear," so that there is no fetishism in his life. Marx thought that in an association of free men, of free producers, "all the determinations of Robinson's labor are repeated here, only in a social manner, rather than individual" (Marx 1975, 94–96).

Those who try to establish non-capitalist relations are castaways in this system that marginalizes them. I would go further: Only the castaways, those who have a weak relationship with capital, and therefore with abstract labor, can undertake tasks like this. But unlike Robinson Crusoe, our *compañeros* are not passive victims of a shipwreck but are actually behind it—they are part of the wave that has been causing it since the sixties, in struggles like the Cordobazo in Argentina (1969), that began to call alienated labor into question, using sabotage, underground resistance, and sometimes open revolt. It was the generation of the sixties and the seventies that began to sink the ship of the capital-labor relation, and their children, the castaways of today, are building a new world around non-capitalist relations and upon the remains of this shipwreck.



I want to emphasize six aspects of the urban social movements I have reviewed, the second stage of these movements, which began during protests in Chile against Pinochet:

- The actors are not only rural migrants but also people born in the city with extensive experience in urban life. The barrios that they constructed in the first stage are now insufficient to house them and they tend to occupy new spaces, while it is becoming increasingly clear that there are no longer many "free" spaces left.
- The barrios/islands tend to become archipelagos or large

urban blotches (such as the peripheries of Lima). They are consolidated territories; the state enters only with great difficulty and must use armed force to do so, as happens in Santiago or Rio de Janeiro, since popular sectors have undermined the possibilities of state control.

- The production and reproduction of life *by* and *between* popular sectors grows and becomes the dominant form in those territories. Although non-capitalist relations are not yet hegemonic, they are growing. Territorial control facilitates the creation and maintenance of these relations, and the disconnection from capitalist cycles requires that popular sectors intensify them to survive.
- Popular sectors are in the midst of an offense, which began in 1989 with the Caracazo. Urban insurrections are the most visible form of this offensive, but there is also the invisible and subterranean sociability that is beginning to have an impact, from health and education to material production. Drug trafficking, which has expanded in the poor territories during this period, should be included in this long-term trend of popular counter-offensive.
- We are dealing with *two worlds*. Even the Venezuelan government must negotiate as an equal with the urban poor. They can provide stability or not to ongoing processes and are thus indispensable for the continuity of the capitalist model of accumulation. For this reason, those from below grouped into urban peripheries are "modulated and controlled" on a daily basis, as noted by Quijano. This other world cannot be represented in the formal world; it is not only different but also one outside the state-capitalist world.
- One issue that divides the popular world is *what kind of relations to maintain with the state* (the government and municipalities) and the party system. Two positions predominate. Those who support maintaining some kind of relation with the state because one must take advantage of every available space to strengthen the project of those from below, and those who are inclined to work

autonomously without any relation whatsoever with the state, or with those from above, or capital.

Many collectives have divided as a result of these conflicting positions. Unlike the first period of the movement, this debate is no longer the prerogative of leaders or intellectuals outside of the movements but instead involves many activists within it. Another difference is that it is not an ideological debate but a strategic question. I think that working with state institutions weakens the movements, diverting strength from the main task, which is to strengthen what is “ours.” I share the Zapatista position here. But there are many combative and consistent movements that fight for real social change that relate to the state and remain autonomous. The MST of Brazil is a case in point. These differences within the movements will not be resolved in the short term, and we will have to see what is the best way to process them with the least possible damage to organizations from below.

### **What Powers Are Found in the Peripheries?**

I look at popular urban movements from a long-term perspective, one that can pick up on underground and invisible processes missed in other studies—to reconstruct the trajectory of the popular sectors during the last fifty to one hundred years, and to track their “historic project.” This temporal distinction is important, too, because it can reveal the agenda that lies *below and behind* the visible actions, the major struggles and mass mobilizations, and can link several cycles of struggle that would otherwise have no apparent relationship. Comparing the situation of the urban poor in 1900 or 1950 with that of 2000 allows us to comprehend the path upon which they are traveling. Slow changes can be more readily understood over the long term.

The dominated do not act symmetrically in relation to those dominating them and, for that reason, do not formulate a rational program that they set out to implement. The popular sectors of our continent are creating their own project and history as they follow their trajectory but, just like Chilean

settlers we have studied, they do not draw up plans as they construct their squatters’ camps. There is no pre-planning, and those who do not understand this cannot understand the reality of our peoples. I advance, then, not a complete theory but rather a proposal for discussion and a set of conclusions about the experiences that I have studied in this overview.

1) A century ago, cities were the space of the dominant and middle classes, who maintained an uneasy relationship. Today they have been displaced or are surrounded by popular sectors. In other words, those from below are enclosing the physical and symbolic spaces from which the ruling classes historically established their power. Poverty is a question of power. From this point of view, the poor of our continent have settled in the cities without losing their connections to rural areas and are better able to corner the ruling classes. The ruling classes have had to emigrate to other areas, literally digging themselves in for fear of the poor. They are surrounded.

My hypothesis is that in the last half century, the urban peripheries of the large cities have formed their own world, traversing a long distance from the appropriation of land and space to the construction of territories; from the creation of new subjectivities to the constitution of new political subjects, quite different from the old industrial, unionized working class; from unemployment to the creation of new roles and thus opening up the way for oppositional economies. In my view, this long process has not been recognized in all its complexity, and we have yet to discover its full potential.

2) The foundation of popular sectors’ activity is the expansion of a family/community logic focused on the role of the woman/mother. A new world of relations have been formed around this family/community logic, based on affection, mutual care, containment, and inclusiveness. These forms of living and doing have departed from the “private” realm in which they had sought refuge and, since the systemic crisis after the world revolution of 1968, have expanded into the public and collective sphere.

We can observe the expansion of the role of women/mother in every current movement for social change. In some cases, such as among Argentina's piqueteros, women and their children make up 70 percent of the activists, although the implications go far beyond the quantitative. Women's presence breaks a relational episteme, says Alejandro Moreno (Moreno 2006), and introduces another rationality, another culture. This ties in with understanding the idea of movement and life differently. It is a cosmovision in which relationships (and not things) play a central role, and is premised upon another way to knowing, of living, and of feeling. The main driving force of this other world is born in the affections: love, friendship, fellowship, and so on. They are creating a parallel system of economic relations on those foundations, one that is outside the market economy.

3) Another world exists in the spaces and times of this different society: feminine, based on use value, communitarian, centered on autonomy, spontaneous in the deepest sense of the term, natural, and self-determined. This world did not grow in opposition to the state/masculine world, one based in exchange values, polarization, institutions (political parties and associations) that are regulated by binary relations of order and obedience, cause and effect (planning). Its own internal dynamics prompted its birth and growth, and if it is unable to survive, by expanding and displacing the state/masculine world, the survival of humanity will be in danger.

When I speak of feminine and masculine (or patriarchal) modes, I am referring to two opposing and complementary ways, two worldviews, or civilizations. With the advent of capitalism, a patriarchal, logocentric, Newtonian-Cartesian culture became hegemonic, grounded on the principle of the excluded third, a rationale of exclusion that implies an unspeakable violence against people and life. It is a culture of death, colonial and predatory, where the subject submits to the object. Among the Indian peoples of America, among the peoples of the East, and among the popular sectors, there is another cosmovision that we can call feminine or matriarchal:

it is holistic, relational, grounded in the complementarity of opposites and in reciprocity (Medina 2006). It is a culture of life and emancipation, where there is no subject-object relation, but rather a plurality of subjects. And this is not simply a matter of gender. Perhaps the best image for this would be the yin and yang of Taoism or the concept of *chacha* and *warmi* among the Aymaras. In this cosmovision, change does not consist of the annihilation of an enemy (revolution and dictatorship of the proletariat) but rather of the *pachakutik*, a cosmic shift, the world turned upside down.

4) And what of people's power? Of counter-powers from below? This remains an open question. The issue of power has been at the center of many ongoing discussions between social and political movements since the emergence of the Zapatistas. I believe that the very concept of power should be revised. I often speak of "non-state powers," but this still seems insufficient. The Good Government councils in the Zapatista autonomous municipalities exercise power on a rotating basis, so that all the inhabitants of a zone will eventually learn how to govern. But can we speak of power when the community exercises it?

The truth is that we live between the two worlds. One is out of control, having made domination and destruction its main source of nourishment. The other world offers the only chance that we have to remain human and preserve nature and the commons for the benefit of all. But the logic of life in this other world is not symmetrical to the hegemonic world. In that sense, it cannot grow by destroying and annihilating the world of oppression, but rather in its own way: by expanding, dilating, disseminating, transmitting, dissipating, radiating, and resonating. In other words, naturally. And this is how non-capitalism has grown in the urban peripheries for at least half a century.

It is not possible to impose this other world, as capital was imposed, but we can breathe life into it, nurture it, and help it expand and rise. The movement exists, and we cannot invent

it or direct it. At best, we can be part of it, moving ourselves as well, improving the art of putting ourselves in movement. This is no small thing, because our capacity to move ourselves is our best hope for saving ourselves.