

Right to the City: Homage or a New Societal Ethics?*

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1. Introduction

In January 1991, the Chief of Land-use and Planning Operations at the French Ministry of Equipment and Housing invited various researchers and academics to a seminar organized to discuss a new law in preparation.¹ The law in question was the Urban Development Act (*Loi d'orientation pour la ville*, LOV hereafter), known also as the “anti-ghetto law,” with the major concern to fight against social exclusion and spatial segregation. The ensuing seminar spawned lively debates that generated difficult questions, particularly concerning the opening article of the law, which read:

In order to realize *the right to the city*, urban districts, other territorial collectivities and their groupings, the State and its public institutions assure to all the inhabitants of cities the conditions of living and dwelling in favor of social cohesion as to avoid or abate the phenomena of segregation. This policy must provide for the insertion of each neighborhood [*quartier*] in the city and assure the coexistence of diverse social categories in each agglomeration.²

*The authors wish to thank the reviewers and editors for their insightful comments.

¹The invitation to the seminar was made by Agnès Desmarest-Parreil, Chief of Land-use and Planning Operations at the Ministry of Equipment and Housing of France. The minutes of the seminar were later published in *Recherches*, 20, “Loi d’orientation pour la ville: séminaire chercheurs décideurs” (Paris: Ministère de l’équipement, des transports et du logement, 1991).

²*Journal Officiel de la République Française*, 19 Juillet 1991. Translation by the authors.

For us, one of the most important issues raised was that the notion of invocation of “the right to the city” seemed, as one of the participants put it, merely “a homage to the work of Henri Lefebvre.”³ Indeed, the inclusion of the catch phrase, without deliberate elaboration and careful consideration of larger structural issues, appeared unable to deliver its promises. Besides, it was unclear what this “right” would mean for inhabitants of cities — especially those without citizenship or “proper” papers.

Étienne Balibar was also present in the seminar, and his comments on this specific article open the way into our discussions in this paper.⁴

The LOV, Balibar argued, failed to take into consideration the necessary implication of any notion of right, that is, “defining and instituting the balance between equality and freedom.”⁵ There was no reference to freedom; it was largely presupposed under the conditions of the free market. The allusion to equality, on the other hand, was ambiguous. It was not clear whether it implied an “egalitarian redistribution of a service or an indivisible good, situated beyond individual property, that in sum would be the urban as such, or the quality of urban life,” or a conception of equality that would “attribute each individual or group a good corresponding to its rank; that is, to its financial means, and material and cultural needs.”⁶ This ambiguity, Balibar maintained, undermined the viability of LOV, particularly with regard to the concept of “right to the city.” What he had in mind was a third notion of equality, neither distributive nor participatory, but openly *civic*. Informed by such a conception, “talking about the right to the city would be a way of indicating that the city becomes as such a *polis*, a political collectivity, a place where public interest is defined and realized.”⁷

Adopted on July 13, 1991, the LOV (with the right to the city declared in the opening article as remedy for segregation) was to encourage diversity through the provision of social housing construction: cities with at least 200,000 inhabitants were obliged to provide a minimum of 20 percent social housing.⁸ A letter was

³Comment made by Véronique de Rudder, *Recherches*, p. 36.

⁴This section draws from Mustafa Dikeç, “Justice and the Spatial Imagination,” *Environment and Planning A*, 33, 2001, pp. 1785-1805.

⁵Balibar, *Recherches*, p. 65.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁸The implementation, however, was ineffective. Moreover, the Carrez Law of January 21, 1995 would slacken the obligation to build social housing.

circulated on July 31, 1991 to clarify the articles of the law, which stated that the opening article — the right to the city — had “no normative nature.”⁹

Why did the French urban policy makers prefer to repudiate the notion rather than attempting to develop some normative content for it? Such an attempt would have raised at least two major issues: the terms of membership and the structural dynamics articulating society and its space, and the dialectical relationship between them. It would, in other words, have had to be confronted by a reconsideration of immigration policy and principles of citizenship, and the ethics and politics of the urban society, including socio-spatial dynamics that make the city.

The LOV envisions the construction of some form of community with the objective of social cohesion. But, Balibar asks, “in which space-time this community has to be constituted?”¹⁰ The ultimate horizon that the law implicitly presupposes is the nation. In a period in which the local and the global seem to be intertwined, creating new human geographies and new frameworks of action, “would it not be necessary,” Balibar asks again, “to formulate the questions of right, equality, and democracy in terms of global flows?” In other words, “Would it not be necessary that the framework in which the urban questions are approached be a space of flow of populations and not simply an administrative and financial space?”¹¹

Our aim in this paper is to argue that the notion of right to the city, if it is to go beyond a catch phrase, has to be considered within a larger framework. One way of reflecting on the implications of talking about a right to the city is to consider it in relation to the current debates about immigration and citizenship, of which absolutely no mention was made in the aforementioned law. In attempting to push the conceptual boundaries of the right to the city, we shall particularly focus on Lefebvre’s *Le Droit à la Ville* published in 1968 (and translated in English in 1996 by Kofman and Lebas), and *Du Contrat de Citoyenneté* written in 1990 in collaboration with the Navarrenx Group.¹² We contend that it is particularly relevant to revisit Lefebvre’s

⁹Ministère de l’équipement, des transports et du logement, Direction de l’architecture et de l’urbanisme, Direction de la Construction, *Circulaire no. 91-57 relative à la loi d’orientation pour la ville no. 91-662 du 13 juillet 1991* (Paris: 31 juillet 1991).

¹⁰Balibar, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Henri Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la ville — Espace et Politique* (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1968); *Writings on Cities*, translated and introduced by E.

writings, which have been consistently concerned with the structural dynamics of the urban society and space, and we contend that it is particularly relevant to revisit this work in an era where these dynamics are largely affected by increased immigration, undermining the modern principle of citizenship provided by the nation-state.

Three decades later, Lefebvre's right to the city as a practice of argument for claiming rights and appropriating social and physical spaces of the city continues to inform much of the literature concerned with the articulation of these rights. It is possible to find ramifications of this notion particularly among scholars working on globalization and the problem of new rights or claims of citizenship and globalization.¹³ Lefebvre's right to the city resonates particularly loudly in the work of those with the focus on the (global) city as the center of global interactions and migrations. "The politics of immigration is closely tied to the politics of cities."¹⁴ It might be argued that the notion of citizenship has always been (if not explicitly) implicitly part of Lefebvre's insistent call for the practice of rights to the city by city inhabitants. Lefebvre's thinking on the notion of citizenship became more explicit, in his later writings, where he argued for a new citizenship linked to a new societal ethics. It is our aim to interpret Lefebvre's writings on the right to the city and citizenship together against the backdrop of the recent debates revolving around immigration and citizenship.¹⁵

2. The Debates: Immigration and the Question of Citizenship

The growing literature on the questions of immigration and citizenship is articulated around three major currents. First, immigration and citizenship directly call into question the sovereign and unitary capabilities of the nation-state, and consequently the issues of

Kofman and E. Lebas (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); and Henri Lefebvre and Le Groupe de Navarrenx, *Du Contrat de Citoyenneté* (Paris: Syllepse and Editions Périscope, 1990). The citations are from Lefebvre 1968 unless otherwise noted.

¹³See, for example, Engin Isin, ed., *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City* (London: Routledge, 2000); James Holston and Arjun Appadurai, "Cities and Citizenship," *Public Culture*, 8, 2, 1996.

¹⁴Holston and Appadurai, *op. cit.*, p. 196. See also Saskia Sassen, "Whose City Is It? Globalization and the Formation of New Claims," *Public Culture*, 8, 2, 1996.

¹⁵Throughout the paper, we use examples from France, Canada and the United States to illustrate our points but they are not intended to be directly comparative.

membership and its borders. Second, the notion of citizenship occupies a considerable place in the current debates revolving around globalization and its unsettling impacts on the nation-state. Third, the effects of immigration, and the practices of citizenship mainly unfold at the local and urban level. This provides the link between Lefebvre's rights to the city as elaborated in the revolutionary political context of the 1960s and the current formulation of rights-claims of urban citizenship. While these three arguments will be developed separately below, it is important to recognize their interrelatedness and their influences on the everyday practices of the city.

The first point relates to state sovereignty and unity. Immigration is not only an important part of the processes of economic and cultural globalization, but, as Wihtol de Wenden states, also the "ultimate symbol of the exercise of state sovereignty," and, therefore, "the object of tension between market logic, state logic, and human rights."¹⁶ Usually regarded as a "threat to sovereignty and national identity," migratory movements, faced with the symbolic control of state sovereignty, cannot enjoy the same ease of mobility of capital, goods, information, and knowledge.¹⁷ These movements nevertheless challenge the territorial borders of the nation-state, while also probing the national boundaries of membership and its ostensible homogeneity. The immigration question, with regard to the social and political status of the immigrant, formally and informally touches on the question of citizenship, which constitutes another domain wherein the state exercises its sovereign powers by controlling who has access to membership. The challenge here, for the state, is to ensure the provision and facilitate the equal practice of citizenship rights of its members, since the provision of citizenship rights does not necessarily mean that each member will equally enjoy the fruits of these rights.¹⁸ Moreover, as the gap between provision and performance is contested, the state is confronted with reconsidering the political status of the "non-citizen residents" within its borders. Germany's recent attempts to revise its citizenship laws in order to extend citizenship status to guestworkers, and the social mobilization around the struggles of the *sans-papiers* in France both invoke new conceptions of citizenship

¹⁶Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, *Faut-il ouvrir les frontières?* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1999), pp. 9-10.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁸See S. Clarke and G. Gaile, *The Work of Cities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

conceived on the basis of residence.¹⁹ These efforts may be read as a recognition of the urban as a new spatial scale where the practice or performance of citizenship unfolds through local affiliations, in contradistinction to a notion of citizenship conceived merely at an abstract and national level.

Second, citizenship literature has recently received its share of arguments about the eradicating powers of deterritorialization, either in the form of denationalization as the transformation of the nation-state or of postnationalization as a “call for global civil society and citizenship.”²⁰ Both arguments “invoke a world without borders in which nation-states play a diminished role.”²¹ But these borderless arguments eschew the difficult questions of defining the political community to which one belongs, as well as the multiple conceptions and scales of citizenship. Post-national forms of cosmopolitan and/or transnational citizenship have accurately emphasized the emergence of practices of citizenship outside of the national realm.²² These trends, resulting from the current processes of globalization, certainly do represent a challenge to the nationally conceived notion of citizenship, but these practices of citizenship are predominantly grounded at the sub-national level of cities. Like Sassen has argued, global cities are the strategic sites for the localized practices of globalization, immigration and citizenship.²³ This localization process is not without tensions, but it is often around such tensions that mobilization occurs to generate new claims. As Sassen explains:

[Global] cities concentrate a disproportionate share of global corporate power and are one of the key sites for its over-valorization. But they also concentrate a

¹⁹See Étienne Balibar *et al.*, *Sans-papiers: l'archaïsme fatal* (Paris: La Découverte, 1999); and Johanna Simeant, *La Cause des sans-papiers* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1998). For an example of urban policy responses to immigration, see J. Friedmann and U. Lehrer, “Urban Policy Responses to Foreign In-Migration: The Case of Frankfurt-Am-Main,” in M. Douglass and J. Friedmann, *Cities for Citizens: Planning and the Rise of Civil Society in a Global Age* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998).

²⁰Lynn A. Staeheli, “Globalization, National Cultures and Cultural Citizenship,” *Geography Research Forum*, 19, 1999, p. 60.

²¹*Ibid.*

²²Brian S. Turner, *Citizenship and Social Theory* (London: Sage, 1993); Michael P. Smith and Luis E. Guarnizo, *Transnationalism from Below* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1998); Yasemin N. Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

²³S. Sassen, *op. cit.*

disproportionate share of the disadvantaged and are one of the key sites for their devalorization. This joint presence happens in a context in which (1) the globalization of the economy has grown sharply and cities have become increasingly strategic for global capital; and (2) marginalized people have found their voice and are making claims on the city as well.²⁴

Third, and finally, these claims and other aspects of substantive citizenship are shaped to a large extent at the local and urban scale. As the results of globalization, Holston contends that, “many cities have experienced political mobilization through local civic affiliation, which in turn resulted in a reformulation of principles of membership and distribution of resources.”²⁵ From this argument, Holston identifies three forms of urban citizenship based on (1) the city as the “primary political community;” (2) “urban residence as the criterion of membership and the basis for political mobilization;” and (3) the formulation of “right-claims addressing urban experiences and related civic performances.”²⁶ These conceptions of urban citizenship, emphasizing the struggles over the conditions and inequities of globalization and urban life, resonate particularly well with Lefebvre’s notions of right to the city and right to difference. The civil rights movements of the 1960s demanded equality and recognition of difference by national minority groups. The recent struggles of urban citizenship are also based on claiming a just access to resources, but this time by people who are not necessarily national citizens. Hence, revisiting Lefebvre’s notions of the urban, of rights to the city, and of new citizenship, brings urban social and political engagement to the forefront of the current debates on immigration and citizenship.

3. Rearticulation of the Urban

Writing in France in the mid-1960s, Lefebvre could not have envisioned the most recent intensification and diversification of international migrations, and the multiple claims and scales of citizenship related to globalization. Just a few decades later, the internationalization of labor has become an inherent aspect of globalization — even though mobility of capital and goods remains far

²⁴S. Sassen, “The Global City: Strategic Site/New Frontier,” in Isin, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

²⁵J. Holston, “Urban Citizenship and Globalization,” in A.J. Scott, ed., *Global City-Regions: Trends, Theory, Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 326.

²⁶*Ibid.*

greater than the mobility of people (particularly the mobility of low skilled workers who too often are resolved to disguise themselves as cargo in containers, trains and trucks in order to cross the borders).²⁷ Nevertheless, immigration has typically concentrated in cities, and as a result, cities have become increasingly heterogeneous and culturally diverse.

While cities are reemerging as more salient sites for citizenship (hence challenging the modern construct of national citizenship itself built upon the obliteration of the historical primacy of urban citizenship), claiming rights to the city does not simply translate into a relocalization of claims from the national to the urban level. Urban citizenship does not necessarily replace or negate national citizenship. The right to the city, or what Lefebvre also called the right to urban life, is a claim upon society rather than a simple territorial affiliation. For Lefebvre, the urban is not simply limited to the boundaries of a city, but also includes the social system of production. Hence the right to the city is a claim for the recognition of the urban as the (re)producer of social relations of power, and the right to participation to it. In the words of Isin, “[r]ethinking rights that arise in the age of the global city requires the articulation of rights *to* the city rather than rights *of* the city as a container of politics.”²⁸ Thus, any attempt to frame citizenship in merely formal and territorial terms rather than substantive and structural terms will fail to recognize the role of the city as a political community that reflects the urban society and its social relations of production and power.

As mentioned in the introduction, Lefebvre’s reflection on the disjuncture between economic and social development was initially guided by a practical question relating housing to the notion of *habitat* in France in the 1960s. Post-war public housing policy attempted to deal with housing shortages and the need to accommodate an unprecedented number of foreign-born workers. New suburban neighborhoods of public housing, commonly referred to as *grands ensembles*, led to the social and spatial peripheralization of immigrants/workers. The *grand ensemble* “had both objective (as a response to a completely new situation) and normative considerations

²⁷See, among others, Terry MacCarthy, “The Coyote’s Game,” *Time*, June 11, 2001, pp. 56-60; J. Van Buuren, “Quand l’Union européenne s’entoure d’un cordon sanitaire,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Janvier, 1999, pp. 6-7; G. Katz, “Migrants risk death for hop to Britain,” *The Gazette*, Montreal, April 28, 2001, pp. B1, B3; and S. Bourette, “Police Dismantle Migrant Pipeline,” *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, March 21, 2001, p. A3.

²⁸Isin, *op. cit.*

(as an ideal of collective stability).”²⁹ In spite of their inclusionary intents, these housing projects led to severe problems of social exclusion and spatial segregation of immigrant workers and their families from the center of the city and society. This, roughly, was the context in which Lefebvre first conceived the notion of right to the city as a way to legitimate “the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a discriminatory and segregated organization.”³⁰

Immigrant and workers groups were not only subject to discriminatory and segregated organization of the urban space, but of society as well. This, as Turner argues, reflects the inherent contradictory nature of citizenship.³¹

[Citizenship] can be seen as (1) an inclusionary criterion for the allocation of entitlements, and (2) an exclusionary basis for building solidarity and creating identity. In this sense, national citizenship is constructed around institutionalized racism because it excludes outsiders from access to entitlements, characteristically on the basis of a racial or national identity.³²

Marginalized from the city and its activities, immigrants and workers were therefore seen as a double challenge to integration in the city and to the integrity of the state, even though immigration has long provided the necessary labor force for economic development. Such a contradiction between the so-called imperatives of the market and the ideals of the state, of course, is not limited to France.

Despite a facade of humanism, immigration policy in Canada and the United States has long been complicit with corporate interests and was historically institutionalized with labor or employment departments, and more recently associated with citizenship and naturalization processes. Whether through guest-workers programs after WWII, or through the unenforced employers’ sanctions, and the targeting of professional qualifications, low-skilled immigrants have found themselves caught between economic and political subjugation (i.e., in low-paid jobs, and with temporary and “illegal” status). It is in fact deeply ironic that immigrant workers are consistently the scapegoats for

²⁹Rémi Baudouï, “Building the Third Millenium City” (translated by A. Babak Hedjazi and Liette Gilbert), *Critical Planning*, 7, 2000, p. 118.

³⁰Lefebvre, 1996, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

³¹B. Turner, “Cosmopolitan Virtue: Loyalty and the City,” in Isin, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 137.

worsening social conditions and economic instability, when the very exploitation of immigrant labor force has historically benefited economic growth. But the so-called immigrant problem is not necessarily one of marginalization of people; it is one of access to affordable and decent housing, to living wage jobs, to basic services, and to official papers. But work permits and passports do not automatically move someone up the economic and social ladder. Immigrants have been, and continue to be, victims of economic, political and social segregation, captive in the production system, excluded from benefits, and marginalized from or even denied full participation in the society.

Many people also find themselves in between national borders. The forces of economic and political displacement are such that some people are caught in situations where they can neither afford to stay in their countries of origin nor to migrate elsewhere. The opposite condition is sometimes also true, i.e., some people who manage to leave often find themselves in the precarious situation of struggling to stay while not necessarily being able to return. Think of the estimated 6 to 10 million undocumented workers/immigrants living in the US and imagine the whole population of a state like Massachusetts or Michigan being denied their everyday existence. Hard to imagine? An attempt was made in California not so long ago.

California's Proposition 187 was a state initiative passed in 1994 with the electoral support of 59 percent of voters. Proposition 187 attempted to deny public social services, public health care services, and attendance at public schools to "illegal aliens," and went as far as requiring that state/local agencies report suspected undocumented immigrants. The racist sentiment of the initiative led to many abuses directed not only at undocumented people, but at the general Latino population — many of them with legal papers and citizenship. The "effect and likely goal of Proposition 187," as Honig states, was "not to prevent illegal immigration but to render aliens politically invisible, to quash their potential power as democratic actors, labor organizers, and community activists."³³

³³B. Honig, "Immigrant America? How Foreignness 'Solves' Democracy's Problems," *Social Text*, 56, 3, 1998, p. 5. For more on Proposition 187, see Armbruster, R. Geron, K. and E. Bonacich, "The Assault on California's Latino Immigrants: The Politics of Proposition 187," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 19, 4, 1995, pp. 655-663; and CHIRLA (Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles), *Hate Unleashed: Los Angeles in the Aftermath of 187* (Los Angeles: CHIRLA, 1995).

Proposition 187 was eventually declared unconstitutional by the US Supreme Court on the basis that immigration is under the sole jurisdiction of the federal government. It nevertheless represents the most elaborated state pressure on the federal government in the matter of immigration. This dark episode of California politics, however, gave rise to an impressive mobilization of “illegal” and “legal” citizens defending the right of immigrants to be part of the city where they work and live. These claims, formulated on the basis of residence and participation in the economy, had a significant impact in cities like Los Angeles where the Latino population has rapidly increased. Some people opposing Proposition 187 and its xenophobic spirit took their struggles to the streets, offering a “display of public citizenship in performance,” claiming their right to live in the city where they labored, and demanding a recognition of the immigrant contribution in global economy and society.³⁴

In the US, immigrant labor activism around the issues of the legitimacy of undocumented immigrants spread to other cities. In September, 2000, the City Council of Chicago adopted a resolution “wholeheartedly support[ing] a new legalization program to allow undocumented immigrants to obtain legal residency in the United States.”³⁵ The resolution also “support[ed] the abolition of the present system of employer sanction and...join[ed] ICIRR, AFL-CIO and other leading business, religious and civic leaders and organizations in urging the US Congress to establish new legalization programs to ensure the rights of undocumented immigrants and that these rights are justly applied to all peoples of African descent.”³⁶ A first of its kind, this municipal initiative is certainly laudable for supporting the “legalization” of immigrants and the recognition of their citizenship as both a status and a practice. The mention of ensuring justice in the workplace for immigrants as well as for people of African descent, however, raises the question of practices of substantive and normative citizenship rights. The majority of the so-called minorities in the United States, as in the case of people of African descent, are national

³⁴May Joseph, *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 15.

³⁵See S. Khokha, “Paper Chase,” *Colorlines*, 4, 2, Summer, 2001, pp. 26-29; and see J. J. Laski, “City Clerk’s Office, City of Chicago,” *Chicago City Council Resolution for Legalization*. <http://www.icirr.org/newsandaction/citycouncilresolution.htm>.

³⁶Laski, *op. cit.*, p. 2. Acronyms stand respectively for Illinois Coalition of Immigrant and Refugee Rights, and American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations.

citizens. The tension between possessing rights and being able to fully practice them is exemplified by the distinction between formal status and substantive practices of citizenship. Formal citizenship is a legal category whose terms are defined by the nation-state. Each citizen, in this framework, is granted certain rights (e.g., welfare, political participation), and expected to fulfill certain obligations (e.g., taxes). The specifics and combinations of these rights and obligations vary according to the political community (the nation-state) in question. Substantive citizenship, on the other hand, refers “to the ability to act as a citizen and to be respected as one,” and is “shaped by the material and ideological conditions in a society that enable people to function with some degree of autonomy, to formulate political ideas, and to act on those ideas.”³⁷

Scholars of urban citizenship have been particularly concerned about substantive democratic practice since formal membership in a political community often does not provide an adequate condition for exercising substantive citizenship rights — especially for disadvantaged groups. As Holston and Appadurai state:

[F]ormal citizenship in the nation-state is increasingly neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for substantive citizenship. That it is not sufficient is obvious for many poor citizens who have formal membership in the state but who are excluded in fact or law from enjoying the rights to citizenship and participating effectively in its organization. This condition also applies to citizens of all classes who find that their preferences for a desirable or proper form of life...are not adequately embodied in the national-public sphere of rights even though the communities in which they live may overwhelmingly approve them.³⁸

Hence, while an amnesty program would allow undocumented immigrants to obtain legal citizenship, residence and labor rights on paper are not sufficient by themselves, if they do not translate into the exercise of rights, and participation in the society.³⁹ “Tolerating” or “legalizing” immigrant workers in the fields, factories and kitchens of restaurants, is not enough, if they cannot move freely on the streets, in the media, in universities, in government positions, and in society at

³⁷Staeheli, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

³⁸Holston and Appadurai, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

³⁹D. Bacon, “Which Side Are You On?” *Colorlines*, 2001, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

large. Substantive practices of citizenship emphasize the difference between rights and the ability to enjoy and perform such rights.

Lefebvre's reflections on the right to the city and the right to difference, as a right not inscribed on papers, but cultivated through sharing space, could make a specifically urban contribution to the debates of citizenship rights. Normative rights provide citizens a political voice (i.e., voting) but do not prevent social, cultural, economic marginalization. Yet while being officially included, this marginalization may prevent political representation; people, although legal citizens, may not have their say in decisions that affect their lives. The full and effectual participation in the society in which they live might be denied, but still can be claimed. That is why the notion of urban citizenship connotes a sense of engagement in the public and urban realm. Citizenship is acquired through public participation, and is enacted through participatory democracy. As Joseph contends "the performative nature of citizenship is simultaneously learned, cultivated, and improvised as a total work of citizenship in formation."⁴⁰

4. Right to the City and New Citizenship

For Lefebvre, the right to the city represents the right to participate in the society through a multitude of everyday practices (e.g. work, housing, education, leisure, etc.). The everyday life and the urban are inextricably connected. The realization of urban life only becomes possible through the capacity to appropriate or assert the social into the political and the economic realms in a way as to fully allow residents to participate fully in the society. As Isin puts it:

Lefebvre saw the rights to the city as an expression of urban citizenship, understood not as a membership in a polity — let alone the nation-state — but as a practice of articulating, claiming and renewing group rights in and through the appropriation and creation of spaces in the city.⁴¹

Such rights, obviously, go beyond normative rights granted "from above." Young's and Miller's interpretations of rights are particularly helpful in order to understand the social relations at stake:

Rights are not fruitfully conceived as possessions.
Rights are *relationships*, not things; they are institutionally defined rules specifying what people

⁴⁰Joseph, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴¹Isin, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

can do in relation to one another. Rights refer to doing more than having, to *social relationships that enable or constrain action*.⁴²

Once a right has been established, it gains its own *intrinsic value* because individuals come to govern their actions by reference to it, and so any interference with rights will affect the security and freedom of action of some people.⁴³

Thus, Lefebvre's right to the city is established through social relationships, and once established, it gains its own "intrinsic value" that would lead to new ways of life, new social relations, and possibilities for political struggles. In this sense, the right to the city

...becomes a claim upon society for resources necessary to meet the basic needs and interests of members rather than a kind of property some possess and other do not... [I]n terms of rights to the city and rights to political participation, right becomes conceived as an aspect of social relatedness rather than as an inherent and natural property of individuals.⁴⁴

Lefebvre's rights, then, were at once ethical and political projects. They were not rights to be distributed from above, but rather, rights to be defined and redefined through political struggle and social relations. The right to the city implied the participation of all city inhabitants in the political life of the city. The complementary right to difference implied the right to engage in opposition to "indifference" or to the status-quo. The right to be different, above all, was "the right not to be classified forcibly into categories which have been determined by the necessarily homogenizing powers."⁴⁵ The right to the city and to difference were aimed at fighting discrimination and repression through a reinvention of the political and the development of a new societal ethics.

⁴²Iris M. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 25, emphases added.

⁴³David Miller, *Social Justice* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 337, emphasis added.

⁴⁴Holston and Appadurai, *op. cit.*, p. 197.

⁴⁵H. Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, translated by F. Bryant (London: Allison and Bushy, 1976 [1973]), p. 35.

The implications of these rights would figure later in Lefebvre's writings with the Navarrenx Group.⁴⁶ There is, in the collective work of Lefebvre and the Navarrenx Group, an explicit recognition of diversity of origins and practices, as well as of multiplicity of socio-spatial experiences and relationships. Emphasizing the various levels of belongings (based on various relations between institutions, people and place), the Group argued for a new definition of citizenship. In the preface of *Du Contrat de Citoyenneté*, Ajzenberg writes:

The new citizenship can be defined, for each individual and for each social group, as a possibility (as a right) to recognize and master (individually and collectively) its own conditions of existence (material and intellectual), and simultaneously as a political actor, as a producer, as a citizen-user-consumer, and that in its place of residence, its city and its region, its professional and non-work related activities, but also in its nation and in the world.⁴⁷

Implicit in this new contract of citizenship is a new ethics and new ways of living. Such a contract implies new relationships between individuals and the state, as well as between individuals themselves. While such relations are certainly made more complex by the construction and contradiction of changing rapport between institutions and people, such a definition of new citizenship emphasizes that the citizen plays an active role in shaping this new rapport. Lefebvre calls this essential participation in the society, self-management (*autogestion*). In his words, self-management describes the condition in which "each time a social group refuses to passively accept its conditions of existence, of life or of survival, each time such a group attempts not only to learn but to master its own conditions of existence."⁴⁸ Thus the idea of new citizenship and the project of a contract of citizenship have profound practical and political implications on the ways in which individuals participate in the processes that affect their lives. "This rapport, i.e., citizenship," Lefebvre writes, "demands stipulated precisions going beyond the acquired rights of representation."⁴⁹ It is the formulation of this new social and political

⁴⁶Lefebvre et Le Groupe de Navarrenx, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷A. Ajzenberg, *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁸Lefebvre quoted in *ibid.* Lefebvre's concept of self-management draws a certain parallel to the notion of self-determination used in Canada and the United States.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

contract that holds the promises of a new societal ethics. The new rights of citizenship would be directly linked to the experiences and exigencies of everyday life.

Lefebvre's new citizen rights evidently exceed an understanding of citizenship as the nationally defined bundle of rights (e.g., voting) and obligations (e.g., paying taxes). For Lefebvre, there is a series of additional rights crucial to fully participating in the society. Such rights include the right to information, to expression of ideas, to culture, to identity in difference (and equality), to self-management, and finally to the city and to its services. The notion of the right to the city provides a terrain in the assertion and exercise of these rights:

The right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban citizen (*citadin*) and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck in ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the "marginal" and even for the "privileged").⁵⁰

5. Conclusion and Opening: Right to the City as Societal Ethics

The arguments that we have tried to advance in this paper may be summarized by alluding to the examples (LOV, Proposition 187, and the Chicago experience) that have been presented. First, as Balibar's remarks on the LOV imply, the advancement of a right to the city calls for major changes in the structural dynamics that produce urban space. Unless the forces of the free market, which dominate — and shape to a large extent — urban space, are modified, the right to the city would remain a seductive but impossible ideal for those who cannot bid for the dominated spaces of the city; those, in other words, who cannot freely exercise their rights to the city.

Second, the notion of right to the city implies not only a change of the spatial conceptions, but of the societal as well, for the ways in which the notion is conceived and justified depends very much on the very society itself. In other words, the right to the city changes drastically depending on the society in question. As Joseph reminds us:

⁵⁰Lefebvre, 1986, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

The citizen and its vehicle, citizenship, are unstable sites that mutually interact to forge local, often changing (even transitory) notions of who the citizen is, and the kinds of citizenship possible at a given historical-political moment.⁵¹

Finally, there is a continuing unbundling of “the postwar political-geographical consensus” on the principle of citizenship.⁵² California’s Proposition 187 exposed the limits of citizenship conceived merely in abstract terms, revealing the ways in which it institutionalizes racism. There, obviously, is a need to complement formal rights of citizenship with an ethics cultivated through living together and sharing space. The right to the city may be seen in this perspective, and recognized as a new societal ethics. The Chicago experience is an attempt to signal such a recognition. Let us hope for a greater societal recognition of rights to the city.

⁵¹Joseph, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁵²J. Agnew, “The Dramaturgy of Horizons: Geographical Scale in the ‘Reconstruction of Italy’ by the New Italian Political Parties, 1992-95,” *Political Geography*, 16, 2, 1997, p. 100.