

The City Without Castells?

Frans Schuurman and Ton van Naerssen eds., *Urban Social Movements in the Third World* (London: Routledge, 1989) 223pp.

A theory of urbanization and urban social movements has already seen print in the book subtitled *The City After Castells* [1]. Reference is largely made to Manuel Castells' magisterial 500-page, world-spanning epic, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements*. [2] And they are bold academics who dismiss Castells' understanding of urban social movements in relation to societal transformation as one that is alienated from "the daily practice of existing urban territorial organisations in the Third World". [3] All the more so if these authors go on to offer as an alternative understanding one that combines a rather simple positivism with an equally vague populism:

We feel that an adequate definition of an urban social movement is the following: a social organisation with a territorial based identity, which strives for emancipation by way of collective action. [4]

Co-editor Frans Schuurman grants much more space to liberal-reformist theory than to the movementist Marxism of Castells, but his dismissal is almost as cavalier, thus creating a clear impression of a distaste for theory. Ideologically, they seek to position their approach not beyond but between the social-transformatory orientation of the "Orthodox Marxists" and the liberal-reformists. But Schuurman's major problem seems to be with an Unorthodox Marxist, namely Castells, whose spectre seems to haunt this work. Schuurman wishes on Castells the unlikely thought that urban social movements must "relate themselves to the political expressions of the production process (e.g. political parties of trade unions)" [5]. He then argues that in the Third World:

There is a very small labor proletariat which, in relation to their comrades in the West, could not play a historically important role. As such, the labor movement in the Third World is of less value to urban social movements. [6]

This cavalier attitude now appears to be toward recent world history. It has witnessed a decline in classical labor insurgency in the First World and a resurgence in both capitalist and socialist peripheries. In such capitalist peripheries as Peru [7], South Africa [8], and the Philippines [9], the two types of struggle are often allied and sometimes interpenetrated.

The question now is whether the editorial options and opinions devalue the book as a whole.

The nine case studies are ranged by the editors on a rough spectrum from what they consider to be the more cautious or restricted movements (in Peru, Argentina, India, and Pakistan) to the more radical or extensive (South Africa, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, and the Philippines). The case studies, fortunately, more than justify the publication, providing us with an exciting range of very recent studies. One misses here, perhaps, only two elements: an examination of urban social protest in relation to political or social revolution [10], something the editors are explicitly disinterested in, and the relationship of women to urban social protest (it has been suggested by some feminists that women are at the core of such). [11]

We have space here to briefly examine two of the case studies.

Ton van Naerssen's study is of the urban squatters' movement in Manila. It provides us with a broader and more balanced overview than has so far been available, most previous accounts being those of engaged activists primarily concerned with competing organisations and strategies. This study reveals in

some detail both the national and international contexts of the movement. It shows the physical relocation and political incorporation/repression strategies followed successively by Marcos and Aquino. It also exposes the World Bank's "low cost" housing as one that is way above the reach of slum-dwellers. Van Naerssen argues that the movement has developed from a "territorial" to a "functional" one -- i.e., taking up the problems of urban squatters first and then the broader political problems of the country. He further shows us how the movement transcended local awareness and action and became involved in the national and international arenas (for instance, by protesting World Bank strategies at the Habitat Conference in Vancouver, 1976). He finally shows us a movement currently divided between moderate and radical tendencies - or between one stressing autonomy from a wider political movement and another tendency advocating articulation thereto. [12] There are important issues here but we are prevented from understanding them by shortcomings in information, analysis, and theory.

Like most other available accounts, van Naerssen's tells us nothing about actual squatters -- the nature of their base-level organizations, the leaders of these, the urban strategy and activity of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the National

Democratic Front (NDF). The CPP is a major actor here, currently leading the Third World's major socialist insurrections. This is Hamlet without at least the king. At the level of strategy analysis, van Naerssen is rather less sophisticated than the activists/advisors who, since 1985, have been trying to develop a positive relationship between autonomy from and articulation into wider political movements (there are more political actors in this play). [13] At the theoretical level, the analysis is hamstrung by its binary oppositions -- moderate/radical and autonomous/articulated. These reduce all possibilities to positions within the given axes, without any argument for these and any explanation of the relationship between them. Castells argues that urban social movements have three distinct areas of activity: collective consumption, cultural identity and political self-management. He further argues that success requires a number of inter-related organizational practices, one of these being organizational and ideological autonomy from any political party. [14] These perceptions allow for and demand more complex analysis. Being without Castells since Castells is evidently self-limiting in the extreme.

One important point that van Naerssen misses is the involvement of the urban squatters in the trade-union struggle in the La Tondena Brewery in 1975 and the "parliament of the streets" that helped bring Marcos down in 1986. Nemenzo [15] offers good reasons for their activity in both cases: workers often live in squatter settlements; non-wage squatters have more time, and possibly have less to lose, in demonstrating than do wage-earners; squatter settlements preserve a pre-industrial sense of community and solidarity that the wage-earners had lost or were only just re-learning. Nemenzo extends his argument to the point of including the squatters within the labor movement. Whilst one might not wish to follow this conclusion, the evidence provokes numerous questions that the editorial introduction prevents us from asking.

Geert Banck and Ana Maria Doimo analyze a movement in the squatter settlements of Sao Pedro, Brazil. This began with a land occupation in 1977 and ended, at least for the time being, in 1985 when Brazilian political tradition reasserted itself and a clientelist faction won control of the organization. This takeover, the authors say, did "fail to be...an urban social movement" [16], despite an impressive array of activity types, democratic features and political achievements over a considerable

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period of time. The failure, however, is definitional, being determined by Castells' insistence on the socially transformatory nature of urban social movements. Banck and Doimo are not satisfied with this but they are not concerned simply with the burial of Castells. They first praise him, finding his sophisticated specification of the nature of urban social movements useful for research agenda. Thus, they use his theory to open up their case and then use their case, plus other theories (e.g., Lowe's), plus their experience with and commitment to the movement to challenge his optimistic "millenarian enchantment" and pessimistic "theoretical predestination". [17] They demonstrate the value of relevantly-chosen theory, a systematic case study, and

of an analysis that returns to bite the theory that fed it. That their case and analysis shine through some murky English and eccentric punctuation demonstrates a fortunate truism: the power of mind (and movement?) over matter.

Despite the earlier criticism -- and the scandalous price for a medium-sized book that has not been language-edited -- the collection should be purchased by libraries and read by those who want to know what has been happening in the city since *The City After Castells*.

Notes

1. Stuart Lowe, *Urban Social Movements: The City After Castells* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

2. Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (London: Arnold, 1983).

3. Frans Schuurman and Ton van Naerssen eds., *Urban Social Movements in the Third World* (London: Routledge, 1989).

4. *Ibid*, pp. 2-3.

5. *Ibid*, p. 13.

6. *Ibid*, p. 14.

7. Denis Sulmont and Carmel Vildoso, *El Trabajo en El Peru: Balance y Perspectivas*. (Lima: Asociacion Laboral de Desarrollo ADEC/ATC, forthcoming).

8. William Cobbett and Robin Cohen eds., *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London: James Currey, 1988).

9. Francisco Nemenzo, "The Philippine Labor Movement and the Continuing Struggle for Democracy", a paper delivered in the Conference on Labor Movements in Transitions to Democracy, Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, April 26-29. 69pp.

10. Josef Gugler, "The Urban Character of Contemporary Revolutions", in Josef Gugler ed., *The Urbanization of the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) pp. 399-410.

11. Rosario Cardich, "Struggles over Reproduction, Communal Projects and the Response of Women: The Case of Urban Settlements in Lima", A Research Paper for MA Degree (The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 1988) 55pp.

12. Schuurman, p.215.

13. Naglilyab, "Tagisan Synthesis Report", in Organizing People for Power: Some Perspectives to Community Organization (Quezon City: Claretian Publication, 1987), pp. 5-14.

14. Castells; pp. 319-323.

15. Nemenzo, pp. 25-29.

16. Schuurman, p. 143.

17. Schuurman, p. 146.