

Social Movements and Urban Space

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Abstract: *This paper discusses the relationship between social movements and urban space. To do so, it briefly discusses the concepts of social movements and urban space to subsequently provide an analysis of the relationship between them. Starting from the view that the urban space is a place of social division that ends up creating inequalities and social problems, it is possible to understand what are commonly known as urban social movements and urban popular movements as being characterized by its constitution of underprivileged social classes and that their claims ask for improvements in a part of the urban space, which creates a certain relationship with the state. In this process, there is a class conflict where we have the underprivileged classes in one side and on the other the state apparatus, representative of the ruling class.*

Keywords: *social movements, social classes, urban space, underprivileged classes, State, Popular Urban Movements, urban social movements.*

1. INTRODUCTION

A topic that has gained great space in the human sciences in recent decades are the social movements. The social changes occurring in the world recently shows the emergence of new social conflicts and manifestation's processes, protests and struggles, with parts of the mobilization occurring in the suburbs of large cities, as well as in other locations related to those with shortage of housing and collective goods in general. In this context, the discussion about social movements and urban space becomes not only current and socially relevant, but also of theoretical perspective, since the explanatory process of this phenomenon progressed but there are still some questions to be clarified.

In this sense, it will be necessary to resume the discussion about urban space and to clarify the meaning of that term in our approach, a key element to the next step of our work. In sequence, the approach of social movements, both in a general level and more specifically which addresses its relationship with the urban space, since we will then be able to understand the dynamics of social movements in urban spaces and to explain its reasons and the processes of struggle. Finally, we will discuss the relationship between social movements and urban space in the sense of understanding how the structure of urban space is the motivating element of the emergence of social movements and how this is related to the entire capitalist society, and, also, the dynamics and character of the conflict behind this relationship, which brings us also to the state's role. This is the path we will follow here.

2. THE URBAN SPACE

The urban space can be understood in various forms. However, it must be made clear the need to avoid both the empiricist as well as the fetishist conceptions. The empiricist conception of space conceives this as something "given" and everything that happens in a place defined as urban is a spatial issue¹. On the other hand, the fetishistic conception points to a perception of urban space that makes it autonomous and considers it a relationship generator².

The first point that is necessary to highlight is that space (as well as time, right, left, up, down, cause, relationship, etc.) is a category of thought, lacking concrete reality (VIANA, 2002). This, however, is not the case of the term "urban space", which is something that exists concretely. The space category

¹The empiricist conception of urban space is quite common and is reproduced in numerous writings. An example of this conception can be seen in Lipietz (1988) and a critique in Viana (2002).

² The same occurs in this case, and an example of such approach can be seen in the geographical determinism as described by Sodr  (1987) and a critique in Viana (2002).

is an intellectual tool that delimits an infinite reality sector. The addition of “urban” means a material reference, ie something concrete, real. The delimitation of space, in this case, is what is called “urban” or “city”³.

The city is the urban environment. City and urban space are, in this sense, synonymous. What characterizes the city is the intensive human control on the environment. The rural life has a mild control over the environment, although increasingly intense, which draws it ever more urban. This intensive human control on the environment can be seen through the decrease in nature (trees, plants in general, rivers, etc., which exist only as appendages and secondary elements controlled by humans). This intensive process of control over the environment is also a form of social control, in which social relations determine the relationship of humans with the environment and among themselves.

The city is simultaneously a physical space (a place with specific location and specific characteristics) and a social space (a place where certain social relations that determine the relationship between human beings and the urban environment are settled). Thus we can define the city (or urban space) as a delimited space marked by certain social relations (classes, production and distribution relations), large social division of labor and intensive control over the environment (VIANA, 2002). In this sense, it is a space of class domination⁴. Therefore, it is interesting to highlight some of the aspects of this process of domination.

The city is marked by the social division of labor. The social division of labor, in turn, is the element that defines the social classes. The classical conception of social classes is the conception of Karl Marx. According to Marx, the dominant mode of production constitutes the two fundamental social classes, a social division of labor that marks those who produce the wealth and those who have control of it, those responsible for the work and those who own the property (MARX e ENGELS, 1991). This mode of production generates fixed activities for each class, generating a way of common life, common interests and common battle against another class⁵. The dominant mode of production also generates a set of social relations for its reproduction, what he called, metaphorically, as “superstructure” that can generate new social classes. In addition to these classes (fundamental and super structural) there are still those of previous modes of production, that can survive for some time, and the subordinate modes of production that exist within society controlled by a dominant mode of production, and the marginal class (which is the margin of the social division of labor, as commoners and lumpenproletariat, depending on the society).

In the case of capitalism, specifically, the general procedure is the same⁶. The capitalist mode of production generates the two fundamental social classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, as well as the superstructure classes (bureaucracy, intelligentsia, etc.), the transition classes (previous modes of production, which survive for a while and then disappear, as does the nobility), the classes linked to other modes of production (farmers, artisans, etc.) and lumpenproletariat (VIANA, 2012).

Thus, it is possible to understand that the social division of labor is specific in every society, generating specific social relations and social classes also peculiar and specific to each society, according to the determination of the dominant mode of production. In the case of capitalism, the social division of labor is specific and generates specific social classes. The social division of labor under capitalism is the broadest and most complex in human history. The dominant mode of

³We cannot, in the space of this article, return to extensive conceptual discussions that exist from those texts that could be considered “classics” (WIRTH, 1979; SIMMEL, 1979; WEBER, 1979 and PARK, 1979), passing by several authors until reach contemporaries. We can not even point out the nearest authors of our conception (HARVEY, 1980; LOJKINE, 1981; CASTELLS, 1988; LEFEBVRE, 1991 and LEFEBVRE, 1999), for reasons of space.

⁴Several authors under different conceptions, came to this conclusion in various human sciences, especially sociology and geography (HARVEY, 1980; LOJKINE, 1981; CASTELLS, 1988; LEFEBVRE, 1991; LEFEBVRE, 1999; GOTTDIENER, 1997).

⁵ The theory of social classes of Marx is spread in several of his works (MARX, 1988; MARX e ENGELS, 1988; MARX, 1986). A summary and detailed analysis of such theory can be seen in Viana (2012).

⁶Here we will not discuss the thesis of the existence of social classes only in capital is mand the grant of that ideato Marx because it does not correspond to the writings of this author and have been refuted (VIANA, 2012).

production in this case is characterized by the production of surplus value, the element that generates the two fundamental social classes, one of which produces surplus value (proletariat) and another that appropriates it (bourgeoisie). This process generates the accumulation of capital and a whole set of derived social relations, such as the distribution and regulation, and this accumulation, in turn, promotes the continued expansion of capitalist relations of production and its universalization, generating processes ever more intense of commodification, bureaucratization and social competition.

In this context, we can understand that the social division of labor is manifested in space as a spatial division of labor. The capitalist division of urban space is a reproduction of the social division of work summarized above. The city is marked by a social division of labor: production, distribution, consumption, housing, leisure. Increasingly specialized, which can manifest itself through centralization and spatial hierarchy or through polycentric and diffuse periphery. In the classic model, we have a center and periphery as well as affluent neighborhoods and poor neighborhoods. In the contemporary model, there are still elements of that process, but the concentration of housing can be polycentric⁷, as well as other aspects of the social division of labor⁸. This does not take away the classic hierarchical opposition between center and periphery, it only complicates it while maintaining a center (also administrative, such as a concentration of influential neighborhoods) side by side with a wide periphery as a reticular polycentrism.

In this sense, the old urban problems coexist with some new ones. Anyway, the issue of mobility in urban areas, public transport, traffic violence, urban land valuation (housing problem), spatial segregation, state intervention, environmental degradation continue to exist and generate numerous social conflicts. The capitalist division of urban space still retains its centering process, now with a main center and several peripheral centers (both in relation to the housing as the process of production and administration). A wide phenomenon is the growing slums, which, in the early 2000s, reached 6% of the urban population in the imperialist countries (considered “developed”) and 78% in subordinated capitalist countries, one third of the urban population (DAVIS, 2006). This process of slum’s expansion allows us to say that Los Angeles can now be considered a metropolis of the 3rd world and Lima, Peru's capital, has in its urban areas 70% of slums.

3. POPULAR URBAN MOVEMENTS

One of the most common problems in the discussion of social movements is the concept related to this social phenomenon. An extensive literature produced on social movements failed to advance in the creation of a concept that could generate either a consensus, or a definition that fits the various existing movements. Perhaps because of this, a set of conceptions of social movements do not even attempt to create a definition or conceptual development (GOHN, 2002). Within the limits of this article, it will not be possible to present a balance sheet of this problem and do not indicate the most known definitions. The starting point is the definition with which we agree to, from there, we move forward to the discussion on the subject of the relationship between social movements and urban space.

We mean by social movements the mobilization of social groups marked by a sense of belonging and goals generated by social dissatisfaction (demands, needs, interests, etc.) with particular social situation (VIANA, 2015). Each of these elements deserves specification, but are sufficient for a general understanding of the phenomenon. However, social movements are not homogeneous, both in its social composition as in its conceptions, goals, etc. In this sense, we can highlight three variants of social movements: the conservatives who seek to preserve or regain previous situations, the reformists, aimed at reforming or carry out claims within the present society, the revolutionaries, pointing to a radical transformation of society (VIANA, 2015; JENSEN, 2014).

It is inside the reformist social movements that are located the movements more related with urban issues. The reformist social movements, mostly, have a multi class social base and an internal bourgeois hegemony. However, there are differences therein and between these differences we can express the existence of what was called “urban social movements” or “popular movements”. What

⁷The expansion of gated communities in recent years points to an overlap of no bland poorneighbor hoods in the same region rather than concentration thereof in differentareas in thecity.

⁸ In thisregard it ispossibletoconsult a synthesis focusing more on the production process and not only in urbanareas in Carmo’sarticle (2008).

distinguishes these movements from others of the reformist variety? Their social base is different because it can also be multi class, but in this case the social classes that are at its base are the underprivileged. The term “disadvantaged social classes” expresses the social classes which together have no privileges and their social situation is exploitation, subordination or marginalization, including proletarians, subordinates, peasants, artisans, lumpenproletariat, etc. Some of these movements can be monoclassist, but the basis of social class is one of the underprivileged classes⁹. In the case of those who are poly classist, it is possible that some of its branches are monoclassists¹⁰.

In the division of urban space, the underprivileged classes, for the most part, are those who live in places with smaller urban structure, with limited access to collective goods, etc. This composition of such social movements classes, usually driven by demands and claims related to urban space (public transport, housing, urban infrastructure, traffic violence, etc.), allows them to be called “urban” or “popular”. This generates a differential of these social movements compared to other reformist variety, because claims, demands, actions, manifest antagonistic interests of social classes, even with no awareness of it and under restraint. The demand for collective goods (equipment, structure, etc.), the occupation of buildings, land, etc., the demand for better and cheaper public transport, undermine directly against the interests of the capitalist class, globally or sectorally. These actions and claims put in question the management of urban space by the state apparatus, questions the ownership of certain real estate, requires more government spending or lower profit for private capital which explores urban services like public transportation.

These social movements have been termed as “urban” (LOJKINE, 1981; CASTELLS, 1988; BORJA, 1975) as well as “popular movements” (SEOANE, TADDEI e ALGRANATI, 2006). We believe that the concept of popular social movements is broader than the concept of urban social movements. The urban social movements are popular for the reason alluded to above, since they are composed of underprivileged social classes. However, there are rural social movements that are also popular and composed of underprivileged social classes. Therefore we can distinguish between urban and rural popular social movements. Our focus here is, therefore, urban popular social movements, which now call the urban popular movements or urban social movements.

The development of urban popular movements occur in a particular historical context, after 1945, in which the capitalist division of space generated new urban problems and at the same time, workers’ struggles regressed, which led to the ideology of the proletariat’s integration in capitalism¹¹. From the new phase of capitalism, the transnational oligopolistic capitalism, which emerged after the Second World War, there is a strong growth of urban struggles, both in Europe and in Latin America as well as in other regions, usually with less intensity. This process expands and deepens with the passage to a new regime of accumulation that brought neoliberal capitalism from the 1980s¹². It is in this context that extends the slums, looming urban problems, among other processes.

4. POPULAR MOVEMENTS AND URBAN STRUGGLES

Within this context we can analyze the development of the struggles of urban social movements. Before analyzing the specific dynamics of such movements, it is interesting to recover some of the main analyzes of urban social movements.

⁹This is the case of the Piqueteiro Movement in Argentina, formed by a specific social class, the lumpenproletariat (BRAGA, 2013).

¹⁰We start from the distinction between social movements and ramifications of social movements (VIANA, 2015). In the first case, we have a basic social group that creates various mobilizations, organizations, representations, trends, etc. and in the second case, the branches that are derived from these aspects. Thus, the black movement in the United States generated a set of concepts, organizations, etc., and the Black Panthers, for example, was an offshoot of the black movement as well as the group connected to Martin Luther King, and another branch. The concept of branch allows us to understand the dynamics of social movements, its divisions and internal disagreements, the derivatives of these organizations, among other phenomena. In the case of a urban social movement like the users of public transport, it is multi class, but may have in a given neighborhood or area of town, a branch (organization, group, etc.) that is mono classist.

¹¹Several authors defended this thesis, such as Marcuse (1981), Bon and Burnier (1975) and Mallet (1969). For a critique, see Viana (2012).

¹²On the theory of accumulation regimes and their historical succession it is possible to consult Viana (2009). Other authors and concepts used, more or less differentiated, the term accumulation regime. (HARVEY, 1992; LIPIETZ, 1988).

Some of the leading researchers of urban social movements presented analysis within a historical-structuralist conception¹³, supposedly Marxist, thematizing urban issue and the social struggles in the urban space, relating with other topics of Marxist origin, such as social contradictions, state policies, collective consumption, etc. One of the most important authors in this line of research was Castells (1988; 1989). He focused his view on the issue of collective consumption, considering the urban space as a place of reproduction of the labor force. Thus, the urban struggles would be aimed at this reproductive process which refers to the collective consumption. Lojkin, another representative of historical structuralism, accomplish the criticism of this conception, by performing a cut between economic and social, among others. The central issue of Lojkin critical to Castells is the reduction of the urban problem reproduction process of the workforce. The two authors would go into a debate that would point to some derived political issues, which is not our focus here. Lojkin emphasized the political aspect, the struggle of classes, state policies and points to the idea that urban social movements have the potential to break down the dominant hegemony, generating a new hegemony, being the highest expression of class struggle but, returning to the Leninist conception, requires a class party (1981).

Castells refutes Lojkin stating that the State plays only the contradictions of the imbalance between supply and demand, with the function of providing social cohesion and integrate conflicts, and referee. Urban social movements would be the drivers of change and innovation in the city (GOHN, 2002). According to Castells, “there are no significant changes in urban structure without coordination with workers” movement and class struggle (GOHN, 2002)¹⁴. The positions of historical structuralism converge at some points and diverge in others, especially in the case of these two authors. We believe that these and other similar approaches of urban social movements (BORJA, 1975; MONTANO and DURIGUETTO, 2011) are interesting and cover important aspects of urban struggles, but are limited conceptually and its explanatory power is restricted, which is derived from its methodological and political views¹⁵.

After this brief summary of the historical-structural conception¹⁶, we can move to the dialectical analysis of social movements. The methodological basis of the analysis is the dialectical method and so the understanding of social movements is a critical and historical perspective, seeking to realize the specificity of each movement. In this case our focus from now on is the specificity of social movements called “urban”.

These movements have specific dynamics that distinguish them from other social movements. First, its social composition allows it less access to resources, necessary element for more efficient fights¹⁷. To carry out demonstrations, pressure, protests, to appear in oligopolistic media, generate a favorable current of opinions, etc., financial resources are needed. Similarly, the “cultural capital”, to use Bourdieu's expression (2001) of members is lower, which means that their intellectual and human resources are more precarious than that of other social movements.

Second, the demands are quite varied and some can be partially met, even if unsatisfactorily. Thus, the strengthening of the movement can generate as much repression (which is constant in some countries, in the case of the struggle for housing, when there is occupation) and settlements in remote

¹³We call historical – structur a list conception or historical structuralism the trend in a ugurated by Louis Althusser, in France, which sought to unite the hegemonic structur a list current (from Levi-Strauss) with Leninism.

¹⁴Gohn points to a shift in thinking of Castells, which would have approached a more culturalist conception (close to Touraine) from 1980. More recently, Castells began to conduct further discussions, and lately the matized social movements and their relationship with social networks and the internet (CASTELLS, 2013), moving a way from the earlier discussion of urban social movements.

¹⁵ The historical structuralism is an obstacle for their difficulties to refer to reality and get stuck in an interpretative model and Leninism for its avant-garde and dirigisme which analyzes the popular movements refusing their autonomy and, in some cases, assigning them theme repaper of transmission belt.

¹⁶ The analysis of urban social movements is performed to a lesser extent, by some other approaches that, for reasons of space we cannot cover here, but it's possible to see a synthesis in some works (GOHN, 2002; SANTOS, 2008).

¹⁷ The so-called “theory of resource mobilization” contributes by pointing to the importance of resources (ALONSO, 2009; GOHN, 2002). However, when many other aspects related to social movements are left out, it ends up being limited and problematic (VIANA, 2015).

areas without urban structure, which gives rise to new struggle, now by collective goods. The case of public transport is another example, because the state apparatus can freeze ticket prices or avoid increases that sooner or later end up happening. This usually causes the return of mobilization around public transport.

Third, the dynamics of urban popular movements is derived from the capital accumulation process (“economic growth”), because in periods of rise and stability of the accumulation pace, urban problems are also stabilized and some are temporarily ameliorated, but in periods of declining accumulation rate, the underprivileged classes are the hardest hit financially and thus increasing urban demands while making it more difficult to care for them, as well as expansion of urban problems due to the precariousness in periods when there is no such maintenance.

Thus it's possible to see that in every established regime of accumulation there is a dynamic of social struggles and the cycle of accumulation schemes end up interfering with the dynamics of urban popular movements. This is due to changes in state policies, on the one hand, and the deterioration of the urban structure, on the other, that occurs when a regime of accumulation enters a destabilizing cycle or crisis. The state's relationship with social movements tends to change, and, in the case of urban popular movements, confrontation and opposition tends to become more open.

Similarly, the hegemony tends to weaken, opening possibilities for new ideas, concepts and guidance for the urban popular movements, creating a possibility of radicalization. At that point, social relations point to the most intense conflict, which makes the most permeable social movement in relation to the ideas and more radical views. This, once occurring, provides another element to radicalization. A state action in this context can enlarge repression or try to join co-optation process of militants and promises that are unlikely to be fulfilled without overcoming the problem of capital accumulation. Another possibility is to change the regime of accumulation and the solution of the crisis, which marks the possibility of return to stability and retreat of popular urban movements.

Thus, there is an interlacing between class situation and space situation. The underprivileged social classes have an unfavorable space situation and so the cycles of accumulation schemes reach them more intensely than other social classes. In this context, the urban popular movements are related to this dynamic process and the space situation inserted into the entire urban space.

In this case, we have a class struggle process that apparently is only an opposition between civil society and state apparatus. This appearance reveals a process in which everyday representations and ideological productions cannot overcome. It is not about an opposition of the entire society regarding the state apparatus. It is a part of civil society, the clumping in urban popular movements. However, the urban popular movements are composed of the underprivileged classes, but not them in its entirety. Some sectors of the underprivileged classes do not have housing problems, other sectors do not have great demands in matters of urban structure, etc. Thus, the urban popular movements are made by the privileged classes, but they are not and do not encompass all of them.

However, because such classes comprising, manifest class interests, even if in most immediate cases, and thus express a form of fight of disadvantaged classes. This struggle is fundamentally directed to the state. This is due to the fact that up to this provide collective goods and therefore attend the demands of popular urban movements. In this case, we have another element to enhance the appearance that it is not class struggle. The state would be neutral, the “public good”, so the demands of urban popular movements do not mean class conflict.

However, the state apparatus is the capital of the service as it creates the conditions for the process of capitalist production relations and capitalist accumulation, as well as provide the social crackdown on protesters and popular social movements, among other actions. The State policies are in order to reproduce the conditions of reproduction of capital (VIANA, 2003) and hence also expresses class struggle.

In the case of popular manifestations in 2013 in Brazil, there was a derivative process of an urban issue (claims against the poor public transport and ticket prices) done by the student movement, which has generated comprehensive manifestations, reaching other claims, including urban areas¹⁸. This is just one recent example. Thousands of other examples, to a lesser extent, could be cited, both in Brazil and Latin America in general, but also on a broader scale in the United States and Europe.

¹⁸See the analysis in Viana (2013a), Viana (2013b), Viana (2013c), Marques (2013), Maia (2013) and Davis (2013).

This does not contradict the proletariat and the bourgeoisie but sectors of underprivileged classes, including proletarians, and the state apparatus, representative of the bourgeois class. A struggle which radically may be larger or smaller, but being held based on the class of interest and the antagonism between them. It is in this game of interests of antagonistic classes involving the two fundamental classes, but also others that are linked to either, that is possible to understand the dynamics of urban popular movements.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Our path started from theoretical and conceptual discussions on urban space and urban social movements to analyze the dynamics of the latter. The urban space as a place of segregation, inequality, conflict, unmet needs, which manifest the spatial division as reproductive form of the social division of labor is a key element to enable the explanation of urban popular movements.

Social movements are a complex and multifaceted phenomenon and limit ourselves to make some notes, whose development and deepening can be seen in other specific works on this topic (VIANA, 2015; JENSEN, 2014), since our focus was the so-called urban social movements. We dedicate a conceptual discussion and a brief reference to some approaches to subsequently analyze the dynamics of what we call urban popular movements.

Thus, the analysis of urban popular movements refers to the problem of urban space, but also the problem of the state and of state policies on the one hand, and underprivileged and urban popular movements classes, with their demands, on the other. In this analytical process we point out that the class conflicts manifest themselves through the struggles of urban social movements, in a hidden way, since only in times of radicalism is that the question goes beyond the claims and points to the proposal for social transformation.

Thus, we conclude this article with the certainty that the reflections here started pave the way for developments and at the same time, provide some tools to think about the urban struggles and especially to understand the urban popular movements.

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