The Cultural Dimensions of Urban Fragmentation: Segregation, Sociability, and Inequality in Mexico City

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by
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In the past few decades, Mexico City has experienced the continuity of traditional patterns of urbanization and the emergence of new urban processes after globalization and neoliberal reforms. The result of this confluence of persistent and emerging trends is not wholly transparent, and the social and urban fragmentation of the city is under debate. Structural trends are not enough to understand these processes; sociocultural dimensions should also be addressed. The experience of the city and the patterns of sociability in the privileged and disadvantaged classes are characterized by contrasting urban lifestyles, as well as social homogeneity, reciprocal isolation and closure, mutual indifference, stigmatization, and fear. The scale of urban segregation is decreasing; the rich and the poor may live physically closer, but the spaces for interaction and encounter are becoming increasingly homogeneous and distant in social terms. These sociocultural dimensions shed light on a new Latin American geography of urban inequality that undermines social cohesion and the experience of citizenship.

En las ultimas décadas la Ciudad de México ha experimentado tanto la continuación de su patrón tradicional de urbanización como la aparición de nuevos procesos urbanos como consecuencia de la globalización y las reformas neoliberales. El resultado de esta confluencia de corrientes persistentes y emergentes no es del todo transparente, y se debate la fragmentación social y urbana de la ciudad. No basta con examinar tendencias estructurales, también se tiene que dirigir atención a las dimensiones socioculturales. La experiencia de la ciudad y el patrón de sociabilidad dentro de las clases privilegiadas y desventajadas se contrastan por sus formas de vida urbana, como por su respectiva homogeneidad social, su aislamiento reciproco y cierre, su indiferencia mutua, su estigmatización, y sus temores. Se va disminuyendo la escala de la segregación; los ricos y pobres pueden vivir mas cercanos físicamente, pero los espacios para la interacción y encuentro se tornan cada vez mas homogéneos y distantes en términos sociales. Estas dimensiones socioculturales iluminan una nueva geografía latinoamericana de desigualdad urbana que mina la cohesión social y la experiencia de la ciudadanía.

Keywords: *Urban fragmentation, Inequality, Mexico City, Sociability, Culture*

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During the past few decades, Latin American societies have experienced profound social, economic, political, and cultural changes that differ from the model based on import-substitution industrialization. Large urban centers have become the locus par excellence of these changes. The process of social commodification that inspired the neoliberal experiment—currently questioned by many governments in the region, with the notable and persistent exception of Mexico—has left its imprint on urban space. One of the main debates in contemporary urban studies is whether these transformations are leading to the fragmentation of Latin American cities (Low, 2005). New modalities for the development and management of public space (with a strong drive toward privatization), the persistence and in some cases the deepening of inequality, the expansion of a consumer society even among the most disadvantaged, and a redefinition of the relationship between the individual and the collective (e.g., more erratic and low-intensity forms of membership) support the idea of growing urban fragmentation (Prévôt-Schapira and Cattaneo, 2008). Some scholars emphasize the continuity in the structure of the social division of urban space and segregation patterns, rooting the current tendency toward fragmentation in the previous model (Duhau and Giglia, 2008). This posits three key questions: Is a "new" city emerging? Is fragmentation one of its defining features? What are the implications of that fragmentation for social coexistence?

We argue that the apparent contradiction between those who emphasize the continuities and those who focus on the "novel" character of fragmentation in Latin American cities can be resolved by taking into account not only the objective dimensions of processes of urban segregation but also those related to urban sociability. Numerous studies on segregation are basically descriptive, with complex statistical analyses that ignore the sociocultural dimensions that govern urban interaction and experience.

We believe that the hypothesis of fragmentation is strengthened when the analysis is not limited to the urban structure but incorporates the sociocultural patterns that govern the interaction with the "other" and the experience of place in urban space—what we call urban sociability. This article focuses on the sociocultural dimensions of fragmentation in Mexico City. This large city has a population of nearly 20 million people, and although deep socioeconomic inequalities among classes have been an enduring feature of Mexican history, the social gaps have worsened and become increasingly evident (Bayón, 2009). This has led to new patterns of urbanization expressed in a city of profound contrasts: along with the gentrification of central areas and the emergence of new, highly exclusive residential areas, shopping malls, restaurants, and luxury shops, the urban periphery has expanded, areas of concentrated poverty have grown in size and density, and large social housing complexes—now in the hands of private developers—are located farther and farther away.

At the same time, other, less visible processes have contributed to urban fragmentation. Social interaction between the privileged and the lower classes is unusual, weak, and controlled, avoiding—and even rejecting—any encounter with the "other" in public spaces. Contemporary urban sociability is governed by mistrust, stigmatization, and fear, urban crime and "securitization," the differentiated use and signification of urban space, and the growing closure

of the privileged sectors, parallel to the isolation of the poorest. As is pointed out by Harvey (2006), there is separation between social classes both in spatial contexts and in vertical segregations; every model of space is tied to a moral order, and streets, neighborhoods, and homes are shaped by social meanings.

The analysis presented here is based on secondary sources as well as our own research findings. On the one hand, we examine contemporary theoretical debates on urban fragmentation with special reference to Latin America and characterize current trends of spatial segregation in Mexico on the basis of recent empirical studies. On the other hand, we provide and analyze new ethnographic evidence about urban sociability in Mexico City based on our own research in two contrasting areas, one in the lower-class periphery and the other in an exclusive, privileged zone. For the former, fieldwork was carried out in the east area of the city, a wide periphery that contains the poorest households and 40 percent of the metropolitan population—around 8 million people. Thirty-six interviews were carried out with residents of Chimalhuacán, one of the most disadvantaged municipalities on the periphery. With regard to the privileged zone, we conducted interviews with 20 students at two private universities attended by members of wealthy families in the city and from around the country, both located in the northwest (Santa Fe and Huixquilucan). The interviewees did not live in the same residential area (although most resided in the Miguel Hidalgo and Cuajimalpa delegations in the Distrito Federal and in the municipality of Naucalpan, in the State of Mexico), since the richest groups are not concentrated in a single place but dispersed in small, exclusive islands scattered around the central and northwestern areas of the city.[1] The areas where the fieldwork was performed are shown in black circles in Figure 1. Our own research and an extensive urban-studies literature suggest that these two areas are representative of the prototypical and contrasting spaces occupied by privileged and underprivileged sectors in Mexico City.

INEQUALITY AND URBANIZATION IN MEXICO CITY

During the 1980s, Latin America experienced a transition to a new development model based on free trade, a residual role for the state in the provision of social services, and, in general, full integration into the global economy. In Mexico, this was marked by three events in the course of a single year: the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the incorporation into the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in January and May 1994, respectively, and the incorporation into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in January 1995. This formal acknowledgment of Mexico's entrance into globalization required a series of far-reaching structural reforms inspired by the Washington Consensus that changed the physiognomy of the country (Bayón, 2009). Some of these reforms, such as those related to social housing policy, investment in urban infrastructure, and the flow of foreign capital in real estate, banking, and the services industry in general, directly affected large urban centers, particularly Mexico City (Pradilla, 2005).

After more than two decades of reforms, it is clear that these have not had a positive impact on the living conditions of the majority of the population.

Along with the reduction of the fiscal deficit and inflation, the combination of limited and erratic growth (an annual average of less than 2 percent between 2000 and 2010) and the absence of redistributive policies in a context of neoliberal reforms have left poverty and inequality levels practically unchanged in the past two decades: in 1992, the poverty rate was 53.1 percent and extreme poverty 21.4 percent; by 2010, these figures were 51.3 percent and 18.8 percent respectively. The inequality in income distribution narrowed slightly; the Gini index decreased from 0.543 in 1992 to 0.530 in 2008 (CONEVAL, 2010a and 2011). While Mexico has some of the richest millionaires in the world, according to *Forbes*, more than half of its population lives in poverty.

The transformations that accompanied globalization and the development of a new model have also affected urban space. Mexico City has developed some traits of the global city (Parnreiter, 2002; Sassen, 2000) while, at the same time, retaining traditional Latin American patterns of urbanization.

The process of urbanization in large Latin American cities throughout much of the past century was characterized by a model of concentric rings that spread from the center toward the periphery. In Mexico City, the distribution of social classes followed this same pattern: the privileged sectors inhabited the central areas, while the lower classes and successive waves of internal migrants were displaced to the periphery. This process led to the gradual consolidation of the more immediate peripheries and the continued expansion of new peripheries, as well as the displacement of the most exclusive residential areas into a cone-shaped zone stretching from the city center to the northwest (Aguilar and Mateos, 2011). This pattern of spatial segregation has not undergone much change and is still in many ways present.

An overview of Mexico City metropolitan area (Figure 1) shows a large space to the east composed of delegations and municipalities housing the poorest sectors of the population; in this area most living conditions indicators lag behind those in the rest of the city. In contrast, the city northwest and center (along with some areas in the south) house the upper-class sectors with the highest average income, education, and urban infrastructure levels in this urban conglomerate (and the country). However, this does not translate into a polarized urban structure (Rubalcava and Schteingart, 2000). Various studies show that there are a number of relevant nuances within this large-scale scenario. Beyond the extensive areas of concentrated poverty (the east), the poor are distributed across various parts of the city, and while the privileged classes are mostly grouped in certain residential areas (mainly in the northwest) they show some dispersion throughout a succession of small islands (Parnreiter, 2005). During the 1990s, changes began to take place in the traditional pattern of urban, class-based occupation of space. Many scholars argue that these new aspects are directly linked to urban fragmentation. Some trace a direct relationship between the latter and the globalization processes that have affected various regions of the world, including Latin American cities (Janoschka, 2002; Low, 2005). Others highlight more specific aspects of Latin American cities, which may be undergoing an urban transition (Aguilar and Mateos, 2011; Caldeira, 2007; Prévôt-Schapira and Cattaneo, 2008). In Mexico City, we can highlight at least four features of the process of urbanization and segregation, especially since the 1990s.

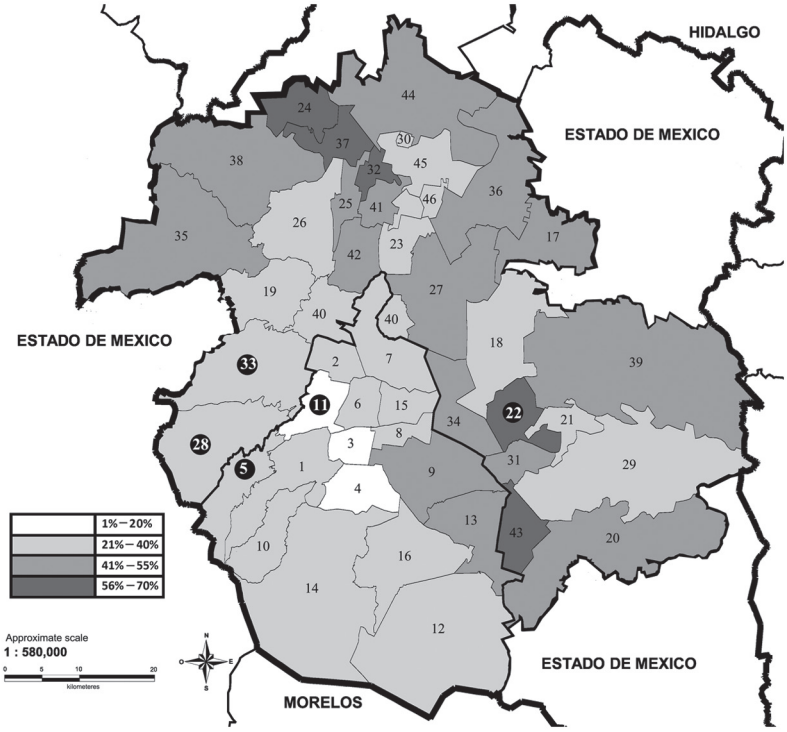

Figure 1. ***Income-based poverty by municipality (percent) in the Mexico City metropolitan area, 2005 (CONEVAL, 2010a).*** **Numbers circled correspond to the municipalities where fieldwork was carried out. The municipalities are as follows:** ***Distrito Federal*****, 1, Álvaro Obregón; 2, Azcapotzalco; 3, Benito Juárez; 4, Coyoacán; 5, Cuajimalpa; 6, Cuauhtémoc, 7, Gustavo A. Madero; 8, Iztacalco; 9, Iztapalapa; 10, Magdalena Contreras; 11, Miguel Hidalgo; 12, Milpa Alta; 13, Tláhuac; 14, Tlalpan; 15, Venustiano Carranza; 16, Xochimilco;** ***Estado de México*****, 17, Acolman; 18, Atenco; 19, Atizapán de Zaragoza; 20, Chalco; 21, Chicoloapan; 22, Chimalhuacán; 23, Coacalco Berriozábal; 24, Coyotepec; 25, Cuautitlán; 26, Cuautitlán Izcalli; 27, Ecatepec de Morelos; 28, Huixquilucan; 29, Ixtapaluca; 30, Jaltenco; 31, La Paz; 32, Melchor Ocampo; 33, Naucalpan de Juárez; 34, Nezahualcóyotl; 35, Nicolás Romero; 36, Tecámac; 37, Teoloyucán; 38,Tepotztlán, 39, Texcoco; 40, Tlalnepantla de Baz; 41, Tultepec; 42, Tultitlán; 43, Valle de Chalco Solaridad; 44, Zumpango; 45, Nextlalpan; 46, Tonanitla.**

1. The expansion and consolidation of gated and exclusive residential areas (physically or symbolically closed). This new form of urbanization, dominant among the upper and upper-middle classes, is accompanied by the more recent gentrification of some central areas. These modalities have become the predominant form of housing among the privileged classes of Latin American cities (Caldeira, 2007; Low, 2005). These fortified and self-referential spaces are autonomous from the surrounding urban space given that they are directly linked to the car as a primary means of connection. This in turn requires expressways (without any consideration for urbanism, quality of urban social life, and sustainability) and leads to an abandonment of and total lack of interest in public pedestrian space. These residential developments are mainly located in three areas of the western part of the city: Santa Fe, located in the Miguel Hidalgo and Cuajimalpa delegations, the Interlomas area in the

municipality of Huixquilucan, which gives continuity to the traditional residential colonies of elites (Polanco and Las Lomas) in the Miguel Hidalgo delegation, and, finally, Zona Esmeralda in the municipality of Atizapán (Duhau and Giglia, 2008). These new islands of exclusivity expand the traditional settlement pattern of the privileged classes from the city center to the northwest.

2. An increased weakening of public space, understood as a space of encounter between the "different" and of the exercise of urban sociability. Gated communities have privatized the public space within their walls and have also contributed to large investments in real estate, mainly through "tertiary megaprojects, especially corporate and commercial centers [that] have internalized, privatized, and given an elite character to streets and squares, isolating and separating them from the old urban fabric, transforming it into a space for the car that reigns over pedestrians and displaces them" (Pradilla, 2005: 96). Commercial centers not only contribute to this fragmentation by creating a new semipublic space but, through various material and symbolic devices, construct simulated, socially homogeneous and differentiated public spaces.

3. While the east still has the highest poverty concentration in the metropolitan area, but the periphery has extended, in part through informal settlements, unregulated lot acquisition, and traditional processes of self-built housing (e.g., Chimalhuacán) and in part through the new social housing complexes intensely promoted since the 1990s. Neoliberal reforms in housing policy for low-income families transformed the state into a simple individual mortgage financier, ceding control of the whole housing construction process (from location to promotion, construction, and sale) to the private sector (supported by international financial capital) (Puebla, 2002). These developers, driven exclusively by a market logic, have sought, on the one hand, to achieve economies of scale through the standarized construction of hundreds of thousands of (very) small houses and, on the other, to increase profitability by purchasing very cheap land, placing these complexes in peripheries that are increasingly distant from urban centers and even basic urban infrastructure (Moctezuma, 2012).

4. Finally, a narrowing of the scale of segregation: macrosegregation has decreased and microsegregation has increased. A recent study of the metropolitan area points out that residential segregation is becoming more intense on a micro scale throughout urban pockets isolated from each other, while on a macro scale it shows greater apparent heterogeneity (Aguilar and Mateos, 2011: 10). The most segregated group, according to Aguilar and Mateos, is that of "urban elites," which are preponderantly located in the northwest part of the city. In addition to the high internal homogeneity of the new residential developments, there is a reduction in physical distance between social groups of different socioeconomic strata. As suggested by Parnreiter (2005: 20), in the future the rich and the poor may often live together in smaller urban spaces. However, this must not be understood as greater mixing between different classes: there is an increase in social difference, and the construction of gated communities indicates growing physical barriers between different population groups. Spatial proximity of actors very distant in social space hardly translates into social rapprochement (Bourdieu, 1999).

The new processes of fragmentation are not necessarily evident in a statistical analysis of the social division of the space or urban segregation (Duhau and Giglia, 2008). Urban studies have rarely explored cultural meanings, identities,

psychosocial schemes, discourses, or the sociopolitical factors guiding the perception and experience of urban space and, in particular, urban sociability. Only in the past decade has there been a shift toward a more politically inclined perspective that links urban fragmentation with the political fragmentation of space organization and social cohesion (Deffner and Hoerning, 2011). In the sections that follow, we will focus on these sociocultural dimensions.

EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE CITY: CLASS CONTRASTS

It is not only the ecology of inequality (Massey, 1996) that has changed in recent decades; the experience of "the city" (or of living "in" the city) also evidences abysmal gaps between the privileged and the underprivileged. During the 1960s and 1970s, in a context in which poverty had a more integrated character (Bayón, 2012), research on the Latin American urban poor adopted a somewhat romanticized vision emphasizing their (almost inexhaustible) "adaptability" to precariousness through their networks of reciprocity and their creativity in "inventing" work. Industrialization supported by the state and the internal market, along with rapid urbanization and a dynamic labor market, contributed to the development of survival strategies among the urban poor and fueled expectations of social mobility. Changes in the strategy of development and the profound changes experienced in the socioeconomic landscape since the 1980s gave way to an increasingly hostile environment for the urban poor. Enclaves of urban poverty ceased to be transient places in the process of upward working-class mobility to become spaces of survival (Auyero, 2001) or islands of precariousness (Janoschka, 2002). The "resources of poverty" gave way to a "poverty of resources" (González de la Rocha, 2001); access to "opportunities" aimed at overcoming disadvantaged situations became increasingly scarce.

The growth of the population residing in highly disadvantaged areas of Mexico City seems to indicate that the dominant form of urban integration for the working classes (self-constructed residential areas) could be losing its inclusiveness (Duhau, 2008). A paradigmatic case of this situation is the municipality of Chimalhuacán, which has not only been developed via informal settlements and self-built housing but, according to a recent study (Rubalcava and Schteingart, 2012), has remained in the lowest socioeconomic stratum since it became part of the metropolitan area in the 1960s. In 2000, Chimalhuacán was the most disadvantaged municipality and had the highest marginality index in all of the metropolitan area. A decade later, in 2010, it still retained that position.

The areas of poverty concentration have not only persisted but grown and become denser. The concentration in one place of a homogeneous dispossessed population has the effect of redoubling the latter (Bourdieu, 1999). Again, Chimalhuacán is an example of these areas, which Lindón (2006) characterizes as excluded peripheries, areas where the location is experienced as remoteness in a sense of inaccessibility and exclusion, of being "outside" the city. As Silvia (38 years old, Chimalhuacán), put it,

> The neighbors, we are all poor. . . . Everybody is poor. . . . We don't have a neighbor with money . . . like, a lot of it . . . who has two, three cars, a good business, a house. . . . There's not one of those neighbors, as it usually happens

> in other places I've been in, a neighbor with money who then lends you some; not here.

The main pull factor of these areas is the possibility of having one's own home, given the availability of cheap land, usually located in informal settlements and risk areas, many of them susceptible to flooding. Access to these lots and to public services such as water, drainage, light, and roads is often linked to clientelism and local political chiefdoms that have "control" of the area. According to Francisco (33 years old, Chimalhuacán),

> This is a municipality that doesn't care about its community, services take forever. . . . In fact, we have growing insecurity, and the streets here are becoming very violent. And all services suddenly fail; running water, for example, or power, above all else . . . you have 15 days on and 15 off. They put in sewage pipes and suddenly they don't work, or they only do sidewalks in certain places.

The urban experience of many of the residents in this municipality has been developed in more consolidated low-income neighborhoods, also in the east of the city (especially in Nezahualcoyotl and Iztapalapa), which they left because they could not afford rent and were in need of cheap land. In other words, it is an urban experience that has mainly (if not exclusively) taken place in the periphery. It is precisely these residential areas that serve as their referents of urban normality, of what living in the city means (Bayón, 2012). Virginia (40 years old, Chimalhuacán) told us how she felt when she first moved to Chimalhuacán:

> At the beginning it was hard for me, it looked quite ugly, right? I said, "Oh! This is so ugly!" I complained to my husband, asking him why he brought me to live here. Thank God . . . over there in the Distrito everything is paved, there are more shops. And yes, in the beginning I said, "Why did you bring me here?" How was I supposed to take our daughter to school in the Distrito? Because I didn't want to change her to a school here. . . . It was hard.

When we asked whether she would like to move somewhere else, she said, "No, but I wish they would pave the streets here. . . . I think, eventually, everything here will be more normal, right? One should give things time. . . . I mean, it's not so bad, but it does lack many things."

This naturalization of peripheral urban experience and its generalization as the only possible experience of the city also has its counterpart among the most privileged sectors. The withdrawal of the upper middle and upper classes is not limited to their confinement in gated communities and socially homogeneous residential areas. The area of residence is one more component of a whole social experience that has been privatized in terms of these same criteria of safety and homogeneity. Mexico City has seen a boom in multifunctional architectural developments, which concentrate residential, work, and leisure quarters in the same "place," offering high levels of quality and exclusivity and the main comparative advantage of avoiding the "city experience." However, these developments only exacerbate something that has been happening for a while on a slightly larger scale and is exemplified by the area known as Santa Fe. As is pointed out by Hiernaux (1999: 13), the young inhabitants of these residential areas

> do not know the slums, they transit between their high-level schools or universities and their home, walk and shop in malls, and, should they need it, are taken care of by doctors in private hospitals; their social relations do not extend beyond these segregated spaces; they live there, get schooled there, spend their free time there, and will probably marry there to continue living in the same area.

During our fieldwork at two elite universities located in Santa Fe and Huixquilucan, the naturalization and standardization of this very peculiar and atypical social and urban experience lived by many of these young people was evident. The universities replicate the design of residential spaces and/or shopping malls: they are surrounded by walls, cut from their surroundings by gardens or large parking lots, and protected by various security controls; pedestrian and public transport access is extremely difficult, and it is common to see vans with private chauffeurs waiting for students in the vicinity.[2] The universities house educational facilities along with restaurants, cafes, libraries, computer and music shops, box offices, ATMs and bank branches, etc. When asked whether the students spent a lot of time at the university, Esteban (19 years old, Cuajimalpa) answered, "Yes, yes. In fact, we don't need to leave because we have everything here: the library . . . if I need to buy a book, there's the bookshop; if I'm out of money, there's a thousand ATMs across campus; there are four restaurants and . . . no, nothing's lacking."

This concentration of daily activities in microspaces takes place on a wider scale in particular areas of the city that are safe and socially homogeneous, which leads to a very limited urban experience. While the urban experience of the disadvantaged is generally limited to the precarious periphery, the upper-middle and upper classes remain in controlled pockets of privilege, exclusivity, and high quality. Esteban explained:

> Leaving school on Friday, the rule was to go out—we didn't know where, but out. . . . We always went to parties in private homes in Interlomas, La Condesa, and around here: Santa Fe, Cuajimalpa, El Contadero—particularly El Contadero. It's an area in Cuajimalpa where . . . well, there's the village of Cuajimalpa, and El Contadero is as an edge where it is no longer a village but you have condos and everything. . . . The environment was pretty closed because, on top of it, school was close to all our houses. . . . The Franco Inglés school is this way, the Vista Hermosa too, and so on.

Asked what areas of the city she knew and moved in, Andrea (23 years old, Cuatitlán Izcalli) said, "Those we go to are Polanco, though not so much lately, Santa Fe—we move a lot in Santa Fe, almost everything is there, we go there for almost everything—and my friends really like La Condesa; me not so much, but we still go." When we asked why, she answered, "Well, I think that, mainly, they're not interested in seeing what's beyond, their life is here. . . . I see it with my friends: they don't leave Santa Fe, Interlomas, Bosques, Polanco, Palmas, because it's as if there they have everything."

These new residential patterns and, generally speaking, the experience of the city for the upper-middle and upper classes are linked to an absolute dependence on the automobile, which favors isolation and decreases the possibility of meeting "others" in the city. Andrea continued:

> Here we have a car, and if you have a car you can move around; you don't know to ride the bus. I, for one, have ridden the subway with my dad because he's taught me, but I don't know how to move around here if it's not in a car, and I think it's the same for all of us. When we go abroad we use the subway, bus, and such, but here we don't.

When we asked why not in Mexico City, she said,

> Well, I think partially because of insecurity; you think, "If I take the subway I'll get mugged." But that can also happen in a car, right? I don't know, but what I do know is that, for example, I'll never see some classmate of mine who has money riding the subway here, as I could see him in . . . say, New York. I don't know, is weird, but yes, this is the way we are.

The social and physical homogeneity of these spaces and the urban experience lived by both sectors reinforce the idea of "different cities within the same one," cities unknown to each other and whose inhabitants see them as the only urban experience possibility.

For the lower classes, having one's own home is often the main source of satisfaction with the place, and this can justify many shortcomings (Moctezuma, 2012). However, this "satisfaction" is accompanied by a tacit acceptance of disadvantage and precariousness as a "fate" about which little can be done. Territorial stigmas play a key role in this attitude of resignation to their poor urban living conditions by establishing associations between types of places and types of people that are internalized by those who are victims of these stigmas. These stigmas can lead to the space's being experienced as one of "suffering" (Deffner and Hoerning, 2011). As Esther (40 years old, Chimalhuacán) put it,

> Well, right now this area is very ugly because there is plenty of dust, there are no sidewalks, the power supply is really bad, there are no recreational parks, there is no supermarket nearby . . . what else can I say? Unsafe . . . yes, it can perhaps be a bit unsafe . . . but . . . given what there is, what can we expect?

The fact that segregation has declined does not mean that the microcosms of the various social sectors have become more permeable to shared urban experiences. The privileged sectors find it difficult to believe that this "other" city actually exists. According to Andrés (26 years old, Miguel Hidalgo),

> A very common comment among many professors at the university is, "Guys, you really have to go beyond La Herradura" or "Guys, you have to go beyond Interlomas to see the real Mexico," and I think they don't. Many people at the university have this vision of "I've never seen that Mexico" and even that it doesn't exist. I've heard a number of times, "Oh no, no way, it's not true." I remember some girls from the university saying, "I don't understand why everyone can't have a house in Mexico."

Withdrawal into particular areas and spaces generates a progressive ignorance in relation to the city itself and even a loss of urbanity. These privileged young people not only live in a microcosm but lack the urban experience needed to use public transportation, walk around, stroll through a park, or go shopping in a market. Many of these spaces are stigmatized as aggressive or

dangerous, and these stigmas are also applied to the "others," strangers, they might meet there.

The construction of otherness is a key dimension of urban sociability that helps to understand social fragmentation of the city and in urban life. The coexistence of different and profoundly unequal cities in the same urban space in a context in which, in addition, the degree of segregation seems to be decreasing cannot be understood without an analysis of the sociocultural factors that govern interaction with the "other."

URBAN SOCIABILITY: CLASS CONTRASTS IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF OTHERNESS

Urban fragmentation refers not only to situations of disconnection but also to various forms of connectivity and bonding that account for a relational dimension of social interaction in urban space. These relationships are based on differentiated and unequal integrations, which, although they often contribute to the strengthening of these hierarchies, can also lead to opposition and resistance.

The construction of otherness as an aspect of urban sociability depends not primarily on the characteristics of residential spaces but on the public spaces potentially open to encounters between people of different classes. As Barry (2002) points out, the experience of common institutions and, more generally, the presence of shared experiences are determinants of social solidarity and, consequently, motives for mutual recognition and empathy. These experiences have weakened and diminished in Latin American cities in recent years. In general, and with particular relevance to Mexico City, we observe the constitution of differentiated and homogeneous areas of sociability in which the places of encounter between different social sectors are increasingly scarce. Andrea, an upper-middle-class student, made reference to this process, comparing social interaction in México with her experiences abroad:

> I lived for a time in Canada, and it wasn't the same. Something very funny happened to me once: I was studying English at a school, and one day a bunch of us were chatting outside the building and there was a guy sweeping the street . . . you know, a normal guy. . . . That night we met him at the bar we went to and talked to him and everything! These things just don't happen here. I've never seen in this in Mexico—meeting the guy who sweeps the street in a bar, the same bar I go to with my friends—never.

Low-income sectors are also aware of this reciprocal social isolation and lack of interaction between social classes; Miriam (21 years old), also a student but from a poor neighborhood of Chimalhuacán, commented about this:

> I think people hardly interact; a wealthy person does not interact with a poor one. I feel that Mexican society cares a lot about social class; for example, those who have money get together with those who have money, those who are poor with the poor, maybe just because poor people can't afford the things rich people can or because they don't have things in common, or maybe it's class—it's very divided.

The testimonies of Andrea and Miriam highlight two relevant aspects of the problem. The first is the fracture of socialization spaces between different social sectors. Public spaces are not places of encounter and interaction between different classes or, in general terms, with the "other," which demand the practice of what we might call civility (Elías, 2000). Encounters with the other are avoided, and, instead, socially homogeneous spaces are sought, from residential areas, public spaces, and recreational places to schools, hospitals, and doctor's offices, among others. Consistent with our research findings, Duhau and Giglia (2008: 36) assert that "the possibility of an unexpected encounter is reduced, while the possibility of meeting similar people or people engaged in similar activities is increased. . . . The people with whom one socializes increasingly resemble each other, and encounter situations become stereotyped."

Secondly, the stories of these young women subtly hint at the construction of "otherness" and its symbolic dimensions. According to García Canclini, "we must consider otherness as an imagined construct rooted in intercultural, empirically observable divergences" (2005: 213). In this context, the notion of symbolic boundaries proves useful; it refers to the conceptual distinctions made by actors to categorize objects, people, and practices by defining hierarchies and similarities and differences between groups and drawing boundaries between *them* and *us* (Lamont and Molnár, 2002; Small, Harding, and Lamont, 2010). Symbolic boundaries reveal how individuals explicitly and implicitly characterize the members of different social classes, particularly what they see as their characteristics and defects, and may represent both a product and a source of social inequality.

In her account, Andrea points out that the person who swept the street was "normal"—he did not look "different" and one could "even talk to him"—while Miriam notes that the rich and poor do not have "common interests." By denying the other and searching for socially homogeneous spaces, inequality is reinterpreted as differences in lifestyles or ways of being, laying down boundaries between them and us. Mercedes (21 years old, Atizapán) said,

> Yes, these are very different worlds, and there are people who don't want to share in others' reality. For example, I have a friend who goes to UNAM, and he likes the classes because they are academically good, but his classmates . . . they don't try to get along with him or he with them because they live in very different worlds. I don't mean to sound like a snob or anything, but it is the truth. . . . I looked for a place where I could be at ease . . . with my lifestyle.

These classification schemes involve both cultural patterns and psychological elements that play a key role in the processes of urban social fragmentation (Barbosa, 2001). Often, social and spatial attributes become linked, giving rise to territorial stigmas (Paugam, 2007; Wacquant, 2001) on which the relationship with the "other" in the city is shaped. Spatial disqualification emerges as the territorialized expression of social disqualification—images of place made up of types of places inhabited by types of people (Sibley, 1995; Watt, 2006). Ana (45 years old, Chimaluacán) said, "I think that [those in the wealthier areas] have the worst image of this place, right? Because they say that the worst kind of people lives here, people who have no money, have low incomes, no chance of getting ahead." Raúl (25 years old, Miguel Hidalgo), who lives in an affluent neighborhood, confirmed Ana's perception:

> You say to people, "Let's go there," and they think that just going there means they'll get mugged, rapped, kidnapped, all of that; that's very true, people here are very scared. Fortunately, nothing has ever happened to me. One can't deny that there's a serious crime problem in Mexico, but not so much that just going there will be dangerous. . . . The guys here spend all their time in Tecamachalco, Huixquilucan, La Condesa, but don't go beyond.

The symbolic violence exercised through these stigmas does not go unnoticed by the residents of those places. This recognition, even naturalization, of the territorial stigmas deepens the gap between first- and second-class citizenship, leading the poor, who are victims of these discriminatory and exclusionary practices, to blame themselves for their situation. Among privileged sectors, these same stigmas impose limitations on the use of the city by assigning meaning to certain places that become "forbidden spaces" (dangerous, violent, etc.).

A key aspect of these stigmas is fear of crime and the "other." As several studies point out, levels of violence and crime have dramatically increased in Latin American cities (Portes, Roberts, and Grimson, 2005). One of the most significant and obvious transformations in the region since the early 1990s has been public insecurity (mainly that linked to crime and drug trafficking) in its major urban centers and the spread of fear among its inhabitants (Kessler, 2009). Insecurity and fear run across the different social classes. Territorial stigmas have fed on these elements to link violence, crime, or insecurity to certain areas of the city and their residents, pathologizing peripheral areas inhabited by the most disadvantaged sectors. This leads to a growing and widespread criminalization of poverty, mainly urban poverty, as evidenced in many of the narratives of the interviewees during our fieldwork. The poor are viewed as "violent," "drug-addicted," "resentful," and are blamed for their situation. Their places are represented as "low-life," inhabited by the worst people, and even dumps. A primary-school head-teacher in Chimalhuacán expressed this as follows:

> They think Chimalhuacán is a mess, don't they? They think it's a conflict zone, one of drug addiction. They see it as the worst. . . . [Where I live,] if I say "Let's go to Chimalhuacán," they tell me, "No, no, those places . . . around there where you go, they kill people." "No, just imagine, I don't know why you work there, it's a violent area."

Gerardo (19 years old, Naucalpan) explained:

> When there is an abyss between rich and poor, when there is no middle class, the poor will look for ways . . . if they don't have money, they'll kidnap or mug or be really envious of those who have money, and they don't see that those who have money were not born into it. Maybe they worked really hard and with that job and their earnings they bought things. But there is a lot of resentment between poor and rich, as in "Why is he rich and I'm not?" "Resentment," that's the word. It's resentment.

Luis (26 years old, Miguel Hidalgo) continued in the same vein:

> Every month or every week you learn that someone's friend, cousin, was kidnapped, and when they get them it turns out it was one of those who worked with them, did the cleaning, or a driver, a guard, or something of the sort. Well?

> How is this one's fault? You leave your house and find the car has been scratched because some jerk went by and was jealous, so he scratches your car because "how come he has a car?"

The sense of insecurity and fear become fear and insecurity with regard to the other. As Low (2005) points out, fear of crime is a rationalization of the fear of the "other" as a stranger who does not share our values or who behaves in what, for us, is an unpredictable and unacceptable manner. In the case of Mexico City, the criminalization of poverty permeates urban sociability, and, contrary to classical principles of urbanity, the city becomes a dreaded space that one tries to avoid precisely for fear of encountering strangers.

The weakening of public space is not entirely the result of an urban policy that has deliberately ceded (or has been subjected) to the market. It is also the product of a withdrawal of the middle and upper classes, who have abandoned public spaces not only because of new urban patterns but because of a combination of sociocultural factors that involve stigmas, fears, and differentiations. In parallel to the private creation of new public spaces, the traditional public space becomes homogeneously lower-class: squares and parks, public transport and sidewalks, markets and public events are "left" to the lower classes and lower-middle classes, while the privileged sectors remain practically absent.

The accounts of Mariana (23 years old, Cuajimalpa) and Miriam (21 years old, Chimalhuacán) below seem to recreate some scenes from the film *La Zona*, in which Rodrigo Plá masterfully captures the spatial confinement of the privileged sectors of Mexico City in gated and heavily guarded residential spaces, as well as their fear of and contempt for the most disadvantaged:

> Another example: the building where I live is five minutes from here [Santa Fe], in an area of young families with small children, and it's a bubble: the building alone shows the existing violence and inequality. Why? Look, employees may not enter by the main gate, they have to use a special building; it's horrible. If they use the main elevator people get angry, but what is derogatory is that there is a side entrance for employees, like a secondary category of people. And yes, of course, they [my neighbors] are very humane . . . and that is also something very characteristic of this population, being very humane. . . . So employees get special self-esteem workshops, against family violence, etc. And how is their self-esteem not supposed to be low if that's where it's being created!

> The rich people and the poor people . . . I don't know, I've seen on TV these people who are always like that . . . how can I put it? They want to see poor people as their servants, as people who have to work for them, as if they're there to give orders and we the poor are here to obey them.

Fear of the "other" results in avoidance of or strictly controlled interaction between different classes, which are embedded in structures of subordination where the "other" is the domestic employee, the chauffeur, the gardener, the car cleaner, the person in charge of valet parking, or the secretary. A careful observer of everyday life in Mexico City will see that these "controlled" situations have multiplied, while different social classes hardly ever share schools, parks, squares, public transport, or shopping centers. In this sense, urban sociability does not necessarily coincide with statistical segregation levels; rich and poor

may be closer in physical terms, but symbolic boundaries make these meetings unusual or strictly controlled, with no citizenship experience.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has addressed the issue of urban fragmentation from two main perspectives: the relationship between urban space and social space and the linking of urban social fragmentation to inequality and social cohesion. The analysis suggests that social space is retranslated in the urban space in a blurred way (Bourdieu, 1999), permeating the experience of the city, the ways in which the *other* is socially constructed, the interactions between different classes in the public space, and, in general terms, urban sociability. Sociability shapes the meaning and implications of urban segregation and urbanization.

In the case of Mexico City, we can see the continuity of certain general and traditional patterns of urbanization, altered and reformulated with the emergence of the urban phenomena that have accompanied globalization and neoliberal reforms since the 1990s. The result of this confluence of persistent and emerging trends is not wholly transparent. In a macro sense, the social division of space has not changed substantially, but the level of segregation has decreased, public space and housing policies have been commodified, gated and exclusive developments have proliferated, and the peripheries have expanded, sometimes becoming consolidated as "excluded peripheries" or "islands of precariousness." Interpretations of this new urban configuration are diverse and, in our opinion, incomplete when the sociocultural dimensions that accompany these processes are not considered. What are the implications of class and place inequalities for urban social life?

The experience of the city is characterized by deep class contrasts that lead to the proliferation of cities that are both foreign to each other and naturalized, becoming urban microcosms. Territorial stigmas operate as symbolic boundaries that permeate and guide both the experience and the perception of the city. Disadvantaged areas such as Chimalhuacán are stigmatized and demonized, symbolically degrading those who live in them. "Empty (senseless) spaces" and "forbidden (dangerous) areas" contain and restrict the experience of the city for the upper-middle and upper classes.

The construction of otherness is also dominated by mutual ignorance and stigmatization. Growing criminality and violence in the city have deeply influenced interaction between classes. On the one hand, the privileged classes have abandoned public spaces, reducing their possibilities of meeting with strangers to a minimum. Added to this is their defection from public schools and health services, along with their almost exclusive use of the car as a means of transport. All this has rendered multiclass institutions and interactions virtually nonexistent. On the other hand, fear of crime and the feeling of insecurity have been transferred to both the city and urbanity. The city itself is seen as a dangerous space, where chaos and danger are predominant; a potential encounter with someone unknown and, moreover, different is not an opportunity to engage in civility but a risk to be avoided. Finally, when these encounters are

inevitable, interaction between classes is embedded in a rigid subordination scheme that gives the wealthy control of the relationship and the situation. These interaction frameworks help naturalize inequality and even dilute the deep socioeconomic contrasts in terms of roles and lifestyles. Urban fragmentation is a consequence of both a particular urban structure and the sociocultural dimensions that govern sociability.

The analysis of sociocultural dimensions is crucial to an understanding of the way urban inequality is experienced, represented, legitimized, and reproduced. In societies such as the Mexican, where poverty, privilege, and the distances between classes are deep and long-standing, social fragmentation of urban space appears to contribute to the naturalization of inequality and the dilution of conflict. At the same time, it undermines social cohesion and the possibility of coexistence based on principles of full and democratic citizenship.

NOTES

1. All interviews were carried out between 2008 and 2010, recorded and transcribed, then analyzed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software. These were all in-depth semistructured interviews with a thematic guide. Names have been replaced with fictional ones to preserve the anonymity of respondents.

2. Of the 20 students interviewed in these two universities, 16 owned a car. Fourteen had "never" used public transport during the past month, and only three had used it "three or more times."

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