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Creative Activism and Art Against Urban Renaissance and Social Exclusion – Space Sensitive Approaches to the Study of Collective Action and Belonging

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Abstract

Creative activism and urban art are increasingly being used as an instrument to collectively re-appropriate the urban space and thus articulate urban belonging and citizenship from below. In cities worldwide, where different politics of place stimulate capitalist appropriation, individuals and groups use the public space as a laboratory for resistance, creative act, and as a medium for communication. As such, creative activism is a strategy for those who are widely excluded from social, political, cultural, and economic participation. Collectives are built through joint actions and experiences that are translated into the production situated forms of urban belonging. By drawing on space sensitive and situationist approaches and the power of creativity as an important moment in the analysis of action, the paper provides examples of how collective action and belonging is produced under conditions of contentious politics and exclusion that go beyond social norms, the social containment of institutions,¹ and imposed collective identities.

Introduction

Cities are undergoing significant transformation processes that have an important impact on spatial practices and social production. European global cities such as Madrid, Amsterdam, and London are cases in point where different politics of place stimulate capitalist appropriation and privatization (see Youkhana and Sebaly 2013; Schmidt 2005). In consequence, the replacement of traditional structures and conventions provokes resistant spatial practices and makes urban neighborhoods highly contested spaces (Janoschka and Sequera 2011; Gebhardt and Holm 2011; Martínez López 2007). New collectivities and alliances emerge with various degrees of formality in order to advance social change and alternative urban imaginaries (Leitner et al. 2008: 157ff) beyond the all-embracing market propaganda. New forms of urban belonging are produced under conditions of contentious politics and social exclusion (Jüssien and Youkhana 2011).

Being linked to processes of collectivization, the concept of belonging has been discussed at various analytical scales and societal levels (Savage et al. 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006; Anthias 2006, 2009; SIRC 2007; Christensen 2009; Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011; Albiez et al. 2011).² Still, the concept of belonging is rarely theorized and often describes the construction of socio-cultural and/or political groups, their strategic use as well as processes of naturalizing them and regarding them as given (Bulter and Spivak 2007; Yuval-Davis 2006). Notions of belonging are often based on an inside/outside dichotomy taking rational choice principles as the starting point for the analysis of collective action. In studies on collective action and the production of social belonging, the role of material and spatial aspects (and thus the manifold bio-physical and technological processes (Leitner et al. 2008: 158) that regulate and mediate social relations (Pierce et al. 2011: 57) are often ignored. By integrating the

concept of space and a materialist perspective to the analysis of collective action and belonging, the article explores creative activism from Lefebvre's triadic dialectic, describing the social as a contradiction between the physical material, the discursive, and the imaginative (Lefebvre 2006/1974). The creative poetic act, the third driving force of Lefebvre's triadic dialectic to explain social processes, is the strategy of urban dwellers, those who withdraw from dominant bureaucratic arrangements, religions, or other social orders and norms. Thus, the creative poetic act is interacting with the social thought and the social practice (both central to the Hegelian dialectic) and is understood as a constituting power in social processes. According to Lefebvre, the creativity of social action, often disregarded in social science analysis, transcends the dialectic distinction between the lived and the thought and gains equivalent value in the production of social reality (Lefebvre 2006/1974: 336).

Considering urban art and graffiti as expressions of creative resistance show how collective action emerges between urban shapes (architectures, infrastructures), urban dwellers, and their complex interactions. Creative Activism is used to produce urban belonging beyond notions of social containers or imposed collective identities. After defining creative activism and art exercised by social movements and in contentious politics, the paper shows how urban art responds to political struggles to belong to the urban collective giving the example of Madrid and the neighborhood of Lavapiés, respectively.

Creative activism and urban art as situational power negotiations

Creative activism and urban art are increasingly being used as an instrument to collectively re-appropriate the urban space and thus articulate themselves as being part of the urban collective, being an urban citizen. Since the 1960s, the debate about graffiti and different forms of street or urban art shifted from mere aesthetic views to approaches that interpret these (sub)cultural expressions as social and political protests and as an important instrument for communication for those who are widely excluded from hegemonic social, political, and cultural participation. The symbolic re-appropriation of North American cities documents how cultural expressions are nowadays synonyms for the countervailing power of the subalterns who express their belonging to a place of social exclusion. Graffiti has been used mainly by young men from lower classes to gain public esteem through quantity, willingness to take risks, and dispersion of their pieces (Reinicke 2007: 46ff.). The underlying messages are reflected in the iconographies and in the selection and use of the urban furniture. To place a piece of art on a moving object such as a train or tram enhances the reputation of a graffiti writer. By appropriating a moving object, belonging of the writer is produced, documented, and propagated through an automated process (Abarca 2012).³ Gang graffiti adds a specific component to the idea of belonging by the practice of occupying and defending certain territories. Belonging is then the practice of conquering and claiming spaces rather than the wish to and participate in the urban fabric.

Urban art as both a manifestation of the self and a practice of resistance had its origins in a group of artists between 1957 and 1974. The outspoken aim of the "Situationist International"⁴ was "the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passionnal quality" (Debord 1957: 9). There are two methods on which today's urban artists relate to situationist approaches. The first is the *dérive*: "the practice of a passionnal journey out of the ordinary through a rapid changing of ambiences", (Debord 1957: 10). Like the situationists, urban art activists drift through the city to discover and experience new public spaces for their creative performances. By that means, the artists are able to use empty and porous spaces for poetic spatial productions. The second method, the *détournement*, was used to set up subversive political pranks in order to unmask expressions

of the capitalist system and the progressive privatization (Shepard and Smithsimon 2011: 3, see McKenzie Wark 2011). The strategy of misappropriation of, for example, the textual or pictographic transformation and alienation of advertisement and/or political slogans is today known as culture jamming. Against the increasing commercialization of life, culture jamming disputes with hegemonic communication systems and the dissemination of economic messages. *Détournement* breaks the rules of normality by changing the way we read well-known structures, images, and signs (Gabbert 2007: 47, Schmidt 2009: 196). The direct intervention into the existing code and symbol system of the urban imagery on advertisements, road signs, appears as a manifest and as a political positioning against hegemonic discourses and the privatization of public urban places that turn into spaces of play and improvisation (Shepard and Smithsimon 2011: 153ff).⁵

Creative activism and social movements

Urban art and graffiti are expressions of more general ideas, beliefs, and convictions and are thus subject to conflicts about power over signification and interpretation as well as about access to common resources. In the revanchist city⁶ of today, dominant tenure and property rights and the related institutional practices necessarily exclude those who are not part of the new entrepreneurialism (Windzio 2010: 93f). The urban landscape plays an important role as they serve as instruments for exercising power by symbolic staging (Heinrich 2013: 7 after Alber 1997: 274). Through the reservation of the urban arenas by the economic and political establishment and by the creation of a well-structured symbol system, neoliberal ideologies are carried through the public space. With the interventions of graffiti and urban art that demonstrate and expose this structuring, the artists challenge the represented power relations (Gabbert 2007: 46). New urban meanings are created by turning the poetical into the political.

The politically motivated stencils and art performances sensitize for problems related to socio-spatial transformation in the city and the impact on social and political life. With the manifestation and reification of personal messages, actors link the self to a certain location (Hetzner 2011: 4) and demonstrate their belonging to a place.⁷ The individuals need the urban infrastructure and street furniture (benches, bus stops, traffic lights, see Waldner and Dobratz 2013: 377ff) to interact with others, to give themselves a face and empowerment. The practice of appropriation is what makes urban art a vital experience. "... it is not merely the possession of objects that determines well-being but the capacity for self-creation by a society or individual that is created through their appropriation" (Miller 2005: 20). The urban shapes serve as media, urban art as the act to associate the individual artists with others by the use of walls, barriers, and roofs – objects that become important agents in the collective act of communication. By creative activism and urban art, more or less intended, spontaneous, or planned, objects carry political messages and agency by telling individual narratives also in a time delayed dimension (Müller and Uhlig 2011). The street becomes a laboratory and playground for creative acts and enables associations of heterogeneous actors, artists, buildings, and dwellers, who act collectively (Abarca Sanchís 2010: 100). Thereby, the artists reframe a public debate and sensitize for social drawbacks and political conflicts in order to challenge the hegemonic discourses and to mobilize a broader public. Besides the political positioning against domination, the symbols and iconographies of this "subversive art" (Kastner 2011: 58) also serve as identity markers and describe resistant collectivities at different spatial scales from local ethnic to global urban networked communities (Kastner 2011: 59, Douglas 2005). The symbolic dimension of collective action is stressed by Della Porta and Diani (2011: 64ff). They look at the role certain values

play for collective identifications and how social actors assign meaning to the experience of the act itself. According to the authors, the movements' cultural production, their values and identifications can be both an impediment and a resource for action (Della Porta and Diani 2011: 88).

The political and social nature of the creative acts are often ignored in debates about the function of graffiti and urban art beyond its recognition as a product of youth culture (Remmert 2010: 34). Furthermore, little attention has been paid to the role of these performances in contentious politics (Waldner and Dobratz 2013: 377) and as a representation mechanism for social movements. The latest social protest movements worldwide have shown that art performances help the producers to escape from voicelessness, to denounce social exclusion and the lack of rights and access to common resources (Abaza 2013; Waldner and Dobratz 2013: 381f after Hanauer 2011). Graffiti and urban art are indeed instruments that allow the production of new forms of (urban) belongings and the enactment of citizenship Isin (2009) by those who are ignored by the polity (López 1998).

Urban art in recent social protest movements

Contentious politics are responses to changes in political opportunity and threats as well as the use of well-known repertoires of direct and situated action (Tarrow 2011: 16). The subversive, mobile, and situated aspects qualify urban art as media of communication in favor of political protest movements. By taking over the physical space through direct action and short-term arrangements, the lack of alternative media and power to engage in more institutionalized means can be overcome (Waldner and Dobratz 2013: 383). Social movements worldwide use the instrument of urban art attendant to public events and political acts to propagate political messages, to oppose authority, and to attract public attention (Oliver and Myers, 1999: 40). The creative fight of Palestinians against occupation, the Arab or "Spanish revolution" for more democracy, are examples where spontaneous wall paintings translated into a political activism and are the tip of a worldwide creative political movement. In the documentary "The noise of Cairo" by Heiko Lange (2012), a musician says that all these individual artistic practices in the urban space "gave the people in Egypt for the first time the impression that they own the country" (Figure 1) (picture by Amador Fernández Savater, Tahrir 2011).

In the Latin American context, different forms of urban art serve as demonstrations of ethnic identities and of collective belonging. The creative activism is pointing at social inequalities and exclusion from the "majority society" while claiming citizenship rights and political participation. The Latin American mural paintings are often closely interrelated to social protest movements of today. In Buenos Aires, Argentina, artists use the urban furniture to bring back primitive art of the neglected indigenous population of the country to the urban scenery (Figure 2).

Well-known cases are also the mural paintings that were produced during the protests of the APPO⁸ starting in 2006 (Kastner 2011). In their cooperative struggle for better conditions of living in one of the most impoverished state of Mexico, the development of urban art was a powerful instrument to represent the political opposition. The murals and works drew on traditional aesthetics of various localities while mixing them with forms, styles, and techniques of the global urban art scene. This practice again attracted more attention for the messages of the producers and thus served as a communication channel to express and sensitize for political oppression or social exclusion.

The assumption that urban art is inherently transformative and express civil disobedience has been criticized since the ad industry has taken possession of the guerrilla tactics of the



Figure 1 Political stencil in the Arab revolution with clear relation to the internationally used Guy Fawkes mask.



Figure 2 Buenos Aires in August 2012.

urban art scene. By using the same instruments subversion of the creative activists and urban artists stands in close relationship to affirmation, the acceptance of conditions set by the establishment (Schmidt 2009: 197). According to the critics, urban art in its commissioned

appearance becomes an affirmative instrument for the dominant class, serves as city branding and for the interests of a society that leans on consumption and passive citizenship rather than participation and protest. The pictographic and textual messages may initially hint at a significant criticism of society, but the aesthetics are allocated in a context of neoliberal restructuring and are seen as visual markers of gentrification and commercialization processes (Abarca Sanchís 2013). Subject to this criticism is the performance in neighborhoods where urban art, controlled and commissioned, is becoming one component of the new urban creativity Florida (2002). Also, the communal initiatives before international sports or cultural events, for example, the cleanup measures in Brazilian cities, integrate the urban art scene to meet the visitors expectations of a colorful and creative society. What comes along as a global protest scene integrates the touristic consumer just as the political activist. Not the contents but the colors and forms serve as identity markers without distinguishing in terms of originators, socio-political messages or degree of institutionalization and control.⁹ The appropriation of the public urban space does not result from different interest groups but from the logic of a framework provided by investors and communal planners (Janoschka and Sequera 2011: 154, Delgado and Malet 2011: 57ff).

Collective action and the concept belonging in a space sensitive perspective

To explain the role creative activism plays in processes of collectivization in the urban context, I draw on two schools of thought that are closely interrelated. The first approach is based on the theory of the production of space by Lefebvre (2006/1974) who conceptualized space as a social category and understood the city as a spatial configuration. While making the role of the inhabitants and their everyday practices central to urbanization processes (Schmid 2005: 11, 32, see Purcell 2002), he showed how people interact dialectically to the resulting urban structures. The idea of 'Right to the city' initiated by him has been used by critical geographers, sociologists, and social movements to stress the potential of human creation for urbanization and socialization processes. By drawing on French phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty) and German dialectics (Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche) and by integrating the concept of space and a meta-philosophy of the everyday to the analysis of social relations, Lefebvre makes a distinctive claim for the analysis of human beings and their social productions. Space is understood as neither an absolute entity or measurable objective container nor abstract and subjective but as a differential unit that connects the material and non-material elements and moments of socio-spatial productions (Schmid 2005: 271f). He describes a triadic dialectic of social reality by connecting three correspondent moments of social formation, social thought, social practice, and the poetic and creative act (Schmid 2005: 111, 192). The social is lived, perceived, and conceived in space while creating it socially (Lefebvre 2006: 335f). In comparison to the traditional occidental and binary thinking that focuses on the dialectic between social thought and social practice, he argues that creativity, the reflective action on a specific situation, is especially important for the study of urban processes and cities where transformation through contradicting social practices are most visible (Lefebvre 2006).

With the theory of the production of space, the concise and sensitized analysis of socio-spatial production processes, the incorporation of material conditions, knowledge, meaning, and their entanglement in everyday practices, Lefebvre (2006: 330ff, see Schmid 2005¹⁰) opens up new perspectives for the study of social belonging. The concept includes social rationality in practice and cultural implicitness in thought, two poles on which dominant notions of belonging and group identities such as family ties and national belonging are based. Coming from Lefebvre's triadic epistemology, we challenge what is

accepted as a ‘given’ and ‘real’ social belonging. The study of the creative acts shows how belonging is realized and is coming into being (see Schmid 2008: 31). It also shows belonging as a dynamic rather than fixed social fact that is based on choices and experiences rather than imposed identities and refers to synchronized, progressive actions rather than self-contained decisions.

The second school of thought works with an amplified notion of actor and stresses the importance of things to human relations. By systematically considering non-humans in the analysis of social relations and by allocating agency to objects and artifacts (Miller 2005: 11, Latour 2005: 63ff, Gell 1998: 17ff), chains of interactions are unfold and actors that are not immediately involved in the social phenomenon can be included into the analysis. Like space, the concept of an actors’ network described here adopts a materialistic perspective and thus stresses the corporeality and creativity of human action in studies of collective action and belonging. Collective action then includes not only social actors, their behavioral aspects, and the symbolic cognitive dimension (Hamel et al. 2012: 174) but also expands communicative resources and adds an experiential and multi-sensory dimension to collective action and belonging (Finnegan 2002, Sheppard 2011). Introducing space as a social category and returning to objects as part of an actors’ network show how society is held together in a collective (Latour 2005: 13).

Creative activism and urban art in the global city

Politics of place and spatial practices in the global city

Throughout the past three decades, urban renaissance and the recapitalization of the social and material landscapes to create an economic competitive location within the international arena led to processes of social exclusion in many global cities (Lefebvre 2006/1977, Harvey 1978, Castells 1981). The neo-liberal and entrepreneurial strategies (MacLeod 2002: 602) have transformed the city into a space that produces mechanisms of control and social exclusion (Begg 2002, Seisdedos and Vaggione 2005, Holm and Kuhn 2011, Janoschka and Sequera 2011, Shepard and Smithsimon 2011: 23ff, Youkhana and Sebaly 2013). The neoliberal advance created by the Chicago School of Economics (Peck and Tickel 2002: 380, Klein 2007) has reached most North and South American as well as European cities. Neoliberal urban governance strategies, the de-industrialization of cities, the settlement of non-productive industries, and the revaluation of urban districts transform historic city centers into an arena for consumption, urban spectacle, and tourism (Rosenthal 2000: 32ff, Lee et al. 2007: 130, Feinberg 2011). City marketing and branding to attract international companies and service sectors transform the cities into competitive hubs for business and commerce (Begg 2002, Seisdedos and Vaggione 2005).

Madrid is a case in point; a global city that exemplifies the new urban geography and politics of the modern metropolis. Characterized as one of the 20 most important global cities, Madrid is an important hub for the finance and logistics sectors and the third largest city in the EU, following London and Berlin, with over 3.3 million inhabitants in the city (and over 6.5 million in the metropolitan region) (INE 2012). A key factor in the reconfiguration of the city is the transformation of the historic city center, which plays a significant role in the urban dynamics of Madrid. The urban renaissance includes rehabilitation projects, redesign and control of communal places and leads to changes in social tenancy, as well as gentrification and displacement of less endowed people such as immigrant groups in so-called distressed neighborhoods (Blasius and Friedrichs 2008). Lavapiés, a working class and immigrant neighborhood in Madrid, is one example for

revanchist urban governance, urban renaissance and gentrification leading to displacement of the less endowed under the new residential relations (Youkhana and Sebaly 2013). Various demonstrations of political urban art are questioning the codes of property rights and belonging by sensitizing for the exclusionary character of society (Abarca Sanchís 2010: 42ff). The following examples are just a selection of countless art performances in the neighborhood of Lavapiés that are representative for the practice of urban art as political protest. It is shown that the art performances are attached to dark niches, places where the countless surveillance cameras to control the public space cannot reach, but where passengers got irritated by initially inconspicuous images.

The figures show selected images of urban art in Lavapiés that were taken in 2011 and 2012 during and immediately after the 15 M movement or 'Spanish revolution'. Figure 3 shows an armed Spanish police men as the shadow of the street post, indicating the state surveillance that has increased significantly in the neighborhood. The image is provocative because it has been fixed in front of a police training center. In Figure 4, the image of an African mother carrying her baby is integrated into the street furniture demonstrating her belonging to the neighborhood. The political stencil in Figure 5 was placed on a building under renovation to demonstrate the ubiquitous and personified repression leaning arrogantly against the wall. The Spanish Guardia Civil, represented here was an important pillar of the dictatorship of Franco. The stencil indicates that the contested function of this paramilitary unit is still an instrument for repression and a contentious issue in urban politics. Sensitizing for camera surveillance with a racist motivation, Figure 6 shows a sticker of the Three Magi being pursued by a helicopter – a strong image to sensitize for Islamo-phobia in the Spanish society, which has significant numbers of Arabs and Muslims.



Figure 3 Doctor Fouquet Street in Lavapiés.



Figure 4 Embajadores Street in Lavapiés.



Figure 5 Political stencil in Sombrerete Street.



Figure 6 Political stencil in Argumosa Street.

All examples show interventions in public spaces to sensitize for and resist against social exclusion in the revanchist city where belonging is reserved for the economic wealthy, the politically adapted, and the socially accepted. The images tell stories about how public space is purged through stigmatization, surveillance, and humiliation of the excluded. The visualization of these drawbacks intends to acknowledge their belonging to the Spanish society. The transience of the acts (most of them disappear after a couple of month) is projected in order to constitute a sense of belonging that is circulating rather than static. Object appropriation is effected while property seems to be given back to the public – a sharing principle very much opposed to the neoliberal logic of ownership. In addition, the use of the urban structure dissolves social boundaries and forms a situated togetherness that intersperse with the restricted notions of collective ethnic or national belongings. This was also demonstrated during the *acts of citizenship* (Janoschka and Sequera 2011: 152) of the 15 M movement in Spain that has gained international attention through direct and creative interventions, such as the occupation of public places, squatting, and the use of urban art to propagate the claims for more democracy and public participation in decision making processes. Thereby, the social struggles could be carried back to the middle of society.

“Reassembling” creative activism

The analysis of the competing tactics and maneuvers, strategies, and poetics (de Certeau 1980), described here for the example of urban art reveals spatial production as a material social practice that links individually perceived realities with each other, their distinct thoughts and conceptions that gain signification in certain spaces of representation. These spaces include heterogeneous actors that are associated to act collectively. This leads again to the second school of thought and extends the concept of actor in the study of collective action. Latour (2005: 10) sensitizes the precise role granted to non-humans, which need to be seen as actors and not simply the “hapless bearers of symbolic projection”. The study of actors’ networks and the relations and dynamics between heterogeneous actors or human beings

and non-humans provides an instrument to follow the actors themselves. Following the actors is to try to catch up “with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what collective existence has become in their hands, which method they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish.” (Latour 2005: 12). What Latour offers as an actor–network theory directs towards a new approach to analyzing the social by looking at processes of group formations rather than the assumption of the existence of groups, by looking at matters of concern rather than matters of fact, by shifting from the analysis of society to the analysis of collectives where objects also have agency. This materialist perspective allows for the analysis of actions that emerge as responses to spatiotemporal interconnections that confront and challenge us every day and to which we need to face up and act reflectively by situations (Joas 1994: 160). The creativity of action in the study of urban art and graffiti is the matter of concern against the backdrop of situational contexts where reflexivity is added to the intentionality of social action and the ability to actuate self-reflectively or, as Joas describes it: “Human action is therefore characterized not simply by the interplay of values and impulses, but the creative concretization of values as well as the constructive satisfaction of impulses... Thus corporality shows itself to be the constitutive precondition for creativity not only in perception but also in action itself.” (Joas 1994: 163). The focus expands from the dialectic between intellectual thoughts (and underlying intentionalities) and implicit interactions of human subjects (that are rationally chosen) towards an understanding of action that emerges from sensuously perceived and bodily experienced situations. To speak again with Lefebvre, we open up social analysis from what accounts for the lived activity, the trinity of the corporal, the mental and social (2006/1974: 337). This rather non-teleological interpretation of human action enables the analysis of different phenomena of direct collective action and resistance against a world that is increasingly finding porosity and permeability replaced by social demarcations, the commodification of common resources and bio-political control, which became everyday occurrences in the urban core. Creative activism and urban art understood as a strategy to re-appropriate of the public urban space describe collective and situated actions that convene from the association of urban dwellers and the urban shapes. Both are significant agents in contentious politics and the construction of new urban relations and structures. The study of an actors’ network allows for the analysis of contingent/unexpected resistance through graffiti, uncommissioned urban art, and other forms of creative and direct political acts that as of late are even labeled as “escrache”, which is the Spanish translation for scratching or synonym to the Latin word *graffiare*.¹¹

Conclusion

The paper showed graffiti and urban art as creative strategies to escape from invisibility and sensitize for problems that people face against the backdrop of so-called rehabilitation strategies and displacement in the ‘modern’ metropolis. Space sensitive approaches to collective action and belonging show how materiality, artifacts, and urban shapes can be included into the analysis of social production processes. The examples of urban art in Madrid show that the city is serving as the organism, the holistic system within which the new urbanism of the everyday is emerging through transitivity, daily rhythms, and situated footprint effects (see Armin and Thrift 2002: 7). Creative political acts, urban art and strategies to inscribe the city through the creative tactics and poetics, are questioning dominant tenure and property rights and are producing new forms of urban belonging by associating spatial shapes and spatial practices. They arise from a political landscape that built on the potential of those who need to install their home in a situation of transitivity, knowing

that the status of un-belonging is constitutive to their lives. However, creative activism in the face of neoliberal politics and revanchist urban governments is also under increasing pressure of legitimization that make self-reflecting mechanisms more necessary than ever.

In order to better understand how materiality adds to the creativity in collective action, additional interdisciplinary research is needed that emanates at the same time from the social interaction, peoples imagination, and their creative poetic acts that describe the experiential dimension of social life (Jacucci and Wagner 2007: 75). By looking at creative acts in certain spaces of representation and how they are used or refused to be used by social movements (McCurdy 2012) may open social analysis for alternative communication channels in urban settings. For the analysis of belonging and how it is produced and re-produced under established power asymmetries but everyday changing situations, it is necessary for scholars to avoid the empirical replication of concepts and perspectives that act on the assumption that social communities are closed and primordial by nature (Brubaker 2009, Wimmer 2009).¹² We need to be aware that the replication of ‘groupist’ perspectives imposed collective identities, and notions of belonging in social studies reproduce the oppressive but invisible social and political structures and often hamper emancipatory powers.

Short Biography

Eva Youkhana is a Social Anthropologist and Sociologist with a special interest on interdisciplinary research, studies on migration and urbanization focusing on Latin America, Africa, and Europe. After working as a Senior Researcher at the Center for Development Research (Political and Cultural Change) at the University of Bonn, Germany, she joined the Research Network on Latin America: *Ethnicity, Citizenship, Belonging* and the Interdisciplinary Latina America Center (ILZ) as a PostDoc in 2010. Her current research interests are connected to space sensitive approaches to the study of social mobilization, belonging, and place making processes for the reproduction of ethnicities and the articulation of citizenship. In 2013, she realized an International Conference on “GraffiCity: materialized visual practices in the public urban space” in Cologne being followed by an anthology to be edited by the end of 2013.

Notes

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¹ The container function of institutions is discussed by Lustiger-Thaler et al. (1998: 162ff) to criticize widespread notions that collective action needs to be incorporated into normatively regulated institutions. The authors discuss the inside/outside dichotomy when social movements are embedded in institutional arrangements. In turn, they theorize collective action as a self-reflexive process and institutions as an experimental/relational field.

² For example at the micro level of family ties, local associations, and neighborhoods, as well as at macro level of national and supra national institutions (state, religious institutions).

³ In a personal communication in February 2012 in Madrid.

⁴ Observing and analyzing the world from the perspective of the practices and everyday life of people and their degradation in the capitalist production process, the tactics used by the situationists (or the group Situationist International) can be seen as the precursors of performance art, graffiti, and culture jamming. (Gabbert 2007; Reinicke 2007: 163).

⁵ Good examples for this tactic are for example the iRaq – iPod parody, such as the examples of E\$O and Murder King.

⁶ Urban revanchism describes the outcomes of neoliberal politics on urban structures and administration in favor of downtown renaissance, gentrification, and public surveillance.

- ⁷ In contrast, gang graffiti is often manifestations and demarcations of a place belonging to a certain group and, thus, territorial boundary formations.
- ⁸ Asamblea Popular de los pueblos de Oaxaca – Assemblage of the peoples of Oaxaca.
- ⁹ At the International Conference on GraffiCity – materialized visual practices in the public urban space (Cologne, April 17–19, 2013); this criticism was brought forward by art historians and by sprayers.
- ¹⁰ With his book on city, space, and society (*Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft*) Schmid (2005) has presented a comprehensive analysis of and new insights into the theoretical fundamentals of the production of space offering new potentials for the debate and empirical studies of today's cities.
- ¹¹ *Escrache* is an Argentinean social movement term created for spontaneous and short lived assemblies of people for political protest. In the context of Madrid, direct political interventions to avoid evictions of people affected by the mortgages crisis are labeled as *escrache*.
- ¹² Wimmer (2009) gives an interesting guideline how to avoid boundary making approaches in migration studies.

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