Introduction: Negotiating Urban Conflicts

If city life is understood as a complex composition of strangers among strangers, difference, conflict, and compromise are not only—and inevitably—defining features of this particular place. They are also, and have to be, carried out in spatial terms based on and tied into a specific politics of space. It is above all in cities that the spatial practices of social actors and institutions—and thus highly divergent *spatial politics*—come up against one another.

Cities have always been arenas of social and symbolic conflict. As places of gender, class, ethnicity, and the myriad variations of identity-related differences, one of the major roles they are predestined to play is that of a powerful integrator; yet on the other hand urban contexts are, as it were, the ideal setting for marginalization and violence. The struggle for control of urban spaces is an ambivalent mode of sociation, one that cuts systematically across the whole of everyday life: In and by producing themselves, groups produce exclusive spaces and then, in turn, use the boundaries they have created to define themselves. In this way border control and politics of identity represent two sides of one coin. The spatial politics subscribed to by social actors at the same time shapes the contour of the city's inner order and the symbolic universes of the groups living in it.

These manifold lines of potential conflict run up against institutional regimes designed to guarantee urban security. What is paradox here are the effects engendered by attempts to 'domesticate' violence and the promise of security they imply, for they themselves are based on spatial politics and thus encourage the creation of new boundaries and renewed marginalization. Be it addressed as location policy or logic of segregation, as ghettoization or gentrification, invariably, it would appear, the underlying issue is the definition and production, the stabilization and maintenance of spatial arrangements and the way they are hierarchized.

Class, ethnicity, and gender, indeed all categorial identities, not only mark symbolic distances. They also unfold their distinctive (local) significance more in connection with the realization of spatial divisions that refer the categorial sense of orientation to strictly delimited, territorialized entities. "That's the ghetto over there"; "back there is where the new money lives"; "this is a safe part of town," etc.

The struggle for territorial control, spatial arrangements, and order focuses some of the motives—fundamental in nature though not always borne in mind by social policy and social theory—apparent in all types of urban conflict. Building on this premise, *"Negotiating urban conflicts"* centers on various mutually disruptive and reinforcing *spatial politics* with a view to pinpointing some of the major old and very new conflict potentials, but without losing sight of the need to identify altered negotiating processes. To put the main thread of this edition in a nutshell version means conceptualizing spatial politics from the perspective of a) actors, b) institutional regimes, c) constructions of difference with the processes of compromise which they entail.

Since urban conflicts, demarcations, and claims to space are played out in local contexts, though without being restricted by them in their scope, cultural frames take on particular significance here. Given that options of collective actors, configurations of institutional regimes, and possible compromises vary in cultural terms, the central question is: How can those specific and distinctive logics be grasped on which locality as a particular frame of knowledge, meaning and practice is built? Urban-sociological research designs have always tended not only to play down the role of the local as a just context driven site but to 'Europeanize' it as well. The background assumptions that have today merged to form the ideal type of the "European city" systematically obstruct our view of other modes of urbanization, of processes involved in staking out claims to and demarcating space(s) in Asia, Africa, eastern Europe, and Latin America. It is for this reason that theoretical interventions, in any case insufficiently grasped by the keyword "postcolonialism," are of particular interest in the present context. The latter have gone some way toward de-centering the supposed center and calling to memory the powerful geographies of colonization, linking the genesis of the urban centers of the West with the violent construction of colonial space. It is precisely because the discourse on the postcolonial city systematically thwarts any attempts to construct a clear-cut geographic delineation of "the West and the rest" by providing the tools needed to narrate the (hi)story of urbanization not "from the inside out" but from "the outside in" that this shift in perspective may be seen as a necessary corrective to the Eurocentric urbanization discourse. After all, what we have experienced since the end of the Second World War and the period of decolonization—the palpable presence of people from other cultures and continents in our midst—has for centuries been the usual case in the

world that is not Europe. Given this geohistorical backdrop, the assumption that multiculturalism is neither a European invention nor deeply embedded in its past is hard to deny.

"Postcolonialism" and "spatial politics" constitute the two discursive frames of this edition. While the motives and motivations of postcolonialism ensure that the geographic trajectories and the power-political configurations of local cultures, stocks of knowledge, constructions of identity, etc. are reassessed, the issue of spatial politics provides the thematic focus needed to grasp cities, urban conflicts, etc. in terms of their own specific internal logic, but without reducing them to what might be termed local specificity. This approach makes it possible to recognize distances and specify differences that, if they do not radically alter our notion of urbanity and urbanization, at least go some way toward enlarging it, laying the groundwork for us to re-explore possibilities for social change as well as new political governance potentials.

This collection of essays is organized in four chapters. "Politics of Space" (I) assembles contributions on postcolonialism, diasporic cultures, and diverse processes of cultural homogenization with a main emphasis on theoretical efforts of how to conceptualize spatial politics. "Spatializing Identities" (II) presents case studies focusing mainly on the distinctive, territorialized significance of both the production and ascription of categorical identities. "Imageries of Cities" (III) examines various modes of institutional and everyday-life-related imagining and image engineering of the urban landscape. The final chapter, "Exclusion, Surveillance and Security" (IV), deals with the multiplicity of social effects strategies of spacing evoke and with the power in places.

Although, as the content as well as these sentences show, there is a certain arrangement of topics at work here, this is by no means meant as an organizational structure for advancing a single and all-inclusive theoretical approach. On the contrary: Situated in quite different geographical as well as theoretical landscapes, this book offers insights into the ongoing and polyphonic debate about the past, the present, and the future of the urban. Readers are invited to various border crossings. You will encounter the views of geographers, anthropologists, and urban planners, of sociologists, media theorists, and political scientists, and, of course, you are invited to make your own pathways through these politics of space, which constitute the urban condition. "Cities," Kofi Annan has noted, "are the collective future of humankind." But the future of cities depends on the people inhabiting, and thereby creating and changing, them.

Acknowledgments

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