Inclusion and Right to the City. Exercising Women’s Citizen Rights: The Women’s Agenda for Rosario, Argentina

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Urban society has become complex with the emergence of new social behavior, use of time, and means of mobility and communication. Resulting from this we see a peaking of urban violence that affects women’s lives in the city in a different way. Poverty, inequality, ongoing gender-based division of labor, domestic and public violence are all critical and important hurdles keeping women from exercising their citizen rights.

Introduction

The Right to the City (Le droit à la ville) (Henri Lefebvre, 1968) provides a political perspective that emphasizes the satisfaction of citizen’s needs, and the “rescue of man as the protagonist of the city he has built.” Given that concept, David Harvey’s question (2008) takes on new relevance: What rights are we talking about? And about whose city? Or perhaps stated in a different manner: Who defines and builds the city? Who benefits from its public goods and different services? (Falú, 2013).

Focusing on questions of inclusion and gender, feminists from various disciplines have been doing research that pays attention to these questions. These efforts have brought to light the subordinate positions and conditions in which women in cities find themselves, that are grounded in a powerful and ongoing gender-based division of labor. Women’s place is deemed to be in the private home environment, out of the public eye: “...men linked to productive work—income generators—and women seen as responsible only and exclusively with regard to domestic and reproductive tasks: caring for the children and running the household.” (Falú, 1998).

Among the studies and works that have significantly helped to draw women back into the city narrative we can point to, among others, those by Daphne Spain who, in her books Gendered Spaces and How Women Saved the City, documents initiatives carried out by women in the cities, in the period between the American Civil War and World War II. Also worthy of mention is Dolores Hayden who, in The Grand Domestic Revolution documents actions taken by materialist feminists (late 19th century) who questioned gender-based division of labor and put forth the idea of collectivizing domestic work and child care.1 With regard to more recent contributions which have consolidated the work in this field, are those by Jane Jacobs, Francoise Choay and Saskia Sassen (Vélázquez, 2012).

In Latin America2, starting in the 1980s, numerous theoretical works focused on the subject of the relationship between women and the cities, adding new arguments to the feminist voices. All of those served to contribute significantly to advances made in the 20th century regarding women’s rights, establishing treaties, agreements and commitments on an international level3 with broad social acceptance, and also promoting commitments on State levels.4 Among these were conferences organized by the United Nations towards the end of the 20th century, and the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encounters, which over the course of 30 years of building the Latin American feminist agenda, included the right of women in the city and urban environment as a subject on the agenda. These instruments serve to link the agenda of the rights of women within the urban agenda.

This is all taking place in a context of growing change within the cities and in everyday spaces, as a result of different economic, social, cultural and technological factors, influenced by globalization and the rise of neoliberal policies consequently affecting ways of living in the cities. Urban society has become complex with the emergence of new social behavior, use of time and means of mobility and communication. Resulting from this we see a peaking of urban violence that affects women’s lives in the city in a different way. Poverty, inequality, ongoing gender-based division of labor, domestic and public violence are all critical and important hurdles keeping women from exercising their citizen rights.

The information presented here is organized in three parts. The first sets forth what the right to the city, in general, represents in the 21st century and what that means for women. The second looks at the main hurdles women face in being able to enjoy their right to the city; it also specifically addresses poverty and inequality linked with gender-based division of labor, with specific reference to urban violence against women and the resulting restriction of rights. The third section addresses the experience of developing the Agenda for Women in the City. Without Fear or Violence (Agenda Mujeres por la Ciudad. Sin miedos ni violencia), created within the framework of the Regional Program of Safe Cities for All5, in Rosario, Argentina. The text closes with brief conclusions on this subject.

The Right to the City in the 21st Century. Women Citizens

Forty-five years after the publication of the first edition of Henri Lefebvre’s influential work on The Right to the City, that concept takes on new significance within the
While these cities are the driving forces behind the local, regional and also global economy, and some with a higher GDP than the national States—generating work and promoting education and leisure activity—they are, at the same time, places of systematic exclusion, resulting in segregation due to class, socio-economic level, gender, ethnicity, age or cultural and symbolic values.

The importance of the right to the city, which Cuenya (2013) points out in Borja’s and Harvey’s texts, also surfaces in almost all discussions focused on the democratization of city life; this was evident at the 7th World Urban Forum (Medellín, 2014), where there was not a single presenter who didn’t make reference to the right to the city, with most of them citing Lefebvre.

Nonetheless, the difference between the French philosopher’s concept, 45 years after the publication of “Le droit à la ville,” becomes evident in terms of the different strategies regarding: the active organization of the city’s inhabitants, the State’s responsibility, and the role played by intellectuals and academics. These are social elements that can be combined, or not, in different ways. While Borja asserts the importance of social mobilization processes and intellectual reflection, he also points out that change is not just brought about through urban movements, but also by the State. Picking up on Cuenya’s interpretation, Harvey proposes adapting the Marxist proletarian concept to the workers as a whole, where a significant part of the population has been marginalized from work or whose relationship to work is flexible and unstable due to neoliberal policies. In short, Harvey suggests focusing attention on a new category: the precarious city dwellers. Nonetheless, we must include in this reading those who participate in reproducing life, “the first-rate caretakers” of children, and of the sick and elderly; those who look after life in the extensive
poor communities of the region; those who, therefore, participate in reproducing day-to-day life: that is to say, women.

While we may consider that women have always been part of this construction, their presence in the rural or urban settlements has, for the most part, been made invisible, both in terms of planning and policies. It is through organized struggles that women are beginning to find their voices in terms of having rights, and that includes the right to the city. The inclusion of women requires a complex paradigm change in terms of the processes of design, planning and citizen education for the use and enjoyment of public goods and services. This is evident in instruments such as the World Charter for Women’s Right to the City (Barcelona, 2004), which establishes a series of conditions and challenges aimed at putting women’s right to the city into effect.

**Violated Rights, Limited Citizenship: Critical Hurdles and Women’s Right to the City**

In spite of the structural adjustment and neoliberal policies of the 1980-90s, decentralization processes have played a role in democratic culture and in strengthening local governments. So, in many cases we witness the emergence of new social standard-bearers, among them women who draw up and present their agendas, develop and organize their capabilities to pressure the authorities, aim to have a voice in decision making and, sometimes, successfully achieve policy agreements. This brings with it a symbolic and cultural change and the active presence of women who play a role in the “area of local political dispute.” These processes of dispute repeatedly run up against critical hurdles which impede the consolidation of public policies that aim to advance women’s right to the city.

Despite the apparent differences between (and within) countries, there are shared challenges regarding the subject of women’s rights. While economic, ethnic and class differences exist among them, they all deserve this right to the city and are potential driving forces in shaping public policy.

There are still many subjects to be addressed on the public level regarding women’s rights, among the most important being:

- The need to consider human and universal rights as the framework, applicable to different cultures, religions and movement of peoples around the world.
- The right to live a life without violence, which is not only a persisting challenge but has become more complex both on the private and public level. Fear is a limiting factor in personal freedom.
- The right to decide regarding sexual and reproductive issues. The need for ongoing sexual education and a contraceptive policy to reduce abortion, and also the need for legal abortion, addressing both health considerations and freedom of choice. Respect for sexual and gender choice.
- The right to equal opportunities in every area of life, including the right to live in and enjoy the city.
- The gaps between the rich and poor, suffered clearly by Latin American women, that is not only about economic poverty, but poverty of rights.
- The persistent gender-based division of labor calls for a new social pact between men and women, as well as governmental policies that include the private sector as well, and society as a whole.

Beyond the legislative gains achieved on this front, there remains a glass ceiling with regard to equal opportunities and rights for women.
(a) Poverty and Inequality Suffered by Women, and Continuing Gender-based Division of Labor.

Critical Hurdles Within the Region

Perhaps the main issue heightening and affecting the critical hurdles across the board, is that of the high rates of poverty and inequality in the region, where pockets of poverty persist and are considered to be the “urbanization of poverty.” In this regard, we could refer to a process of a “feminization of poverty.”

Added to that is the prevailing division between public and private space which is primarily rooted in gender-based division of labor. In this regard, and as reflected in Doreen Massey’s works (1991), the symbolic importance of space is connected with gender and the construction of gender relations, with strong implications in women’s everyday lives.

Although women are steadily moving forward in the public arena, in the areas of labor relations, the economy and politics, this historically established distinction is still evident in Latin American countries. Data collected from time-use surveys shows a clear overload of women’s responsibilities and tasks and a lack of economic autonomy. This has to do with unpaid work, not considered as work, done by women at home and in their communities.

We must keep in mind that women spend more time than men doing non-remunerated work, and that men earn more in paid jobs, while it is the women who are looking the hardest to find work. In addition, the responsibility for work at home, including caring for children, and elderly or ill family members, falls on the shoulders of women, and the poorer the woman’s family is, the more intense the job. In sum, women dedicate more hours to work in general (both paid and non-paid). (ECLAC 2012: 44).

Women’s work overload creates a paradox: the more they work, the poorer they are. Between 1990 and 2008 women’s participation in the work force increased by 21% (more than 100 million women in the region), while the region registered economic growth and a decrease in poverty. Nonetheless, these poverty levels do not decrease among women, but quite the contrary; there is a larger proportion of women among the poor and the poorest. So, in 2002, the correlation of numbers in the region was 109 poor women to 100 poor men, and in 2012 the number of poor women rose to 118. In keeping with this, according to 2010 data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean-ECLAC (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe-CEPAL), in 1990 the region registered 41.4% of people living in poverty, while in 2009 the number dropped to 27.8%. When we look closely and analyze what has occurred in the cases of women in comparison to men, we see that the female urban poverty rate in 1990 was 107.7 and by 2009 had risen to 114.3, just as the female urban indigence rate was 115.4 in 1990 and grew to 124.2 in 2009.

In linking questions of poverty with age, education and reproduction, the Argentine Institute for Social Development (IDES) has found that 8 out of 10 young women with children in Argentina, are poor (statistics...
from 2011). This is an issue that feminists have been addressing at various international conferences, pointing out the lack of education in general, as well as lack of specific education on sexuality and reproduction, and elevated school drop-out rates as a result of adolescent pregnancy and early motherhood in poor homes. (Source: 06/11/2011 – IDESA).

While the 20th century brought with it significant advances with regard to rights, in spite of what was accomplished, the fact remains that there are millions of Latin Americans and, in particular, a great majority of women, who are unaware of their rights. The freedom to exercise citizen’s rights is still fragile, partial and unequal, involving much exclusivity.

It is worth noting that women with a higher education level (10 years or more) earn just 70% of their male equivalents (ECLAC, 2012). We must look at the way women’s work overload ties in with the “feminization of poverty;” and also take into account their economic contribution to generating goods and services in the home, in community activities and in providing care that requires their time and talents in spite of that not being considered paid work.

In sum, the gender-based division of labor plays into the ongoing masculine dominance of productive public and domestic spaces, and influences how policies are shaped. In this sense, the question arises regarding for whom, and with what prospects, public policies are designed, which then leads us to ask what type of subjectivity plays into state programs addressed to women. The maternalistic approach continues to predominate in the region’s main programs, leaving women without a voice and recognized only as mothers, wives and neighborhood women.

A good example of this is the group of Conditional Income Transfer Programs (Programas de Transferencias Condicionadas de Ingresos) that have been implemented in the poor areas of the region. There are 18 conditional income transfer programs currently in operation in 19 Latin American countries, with 8 others already carried out. These are programs that, with varying outreach and intensity, reach approximately 25 million homes, amounting to 113 million people, or 20% of the region’s total population. They are considered to be “feminized” programs that indeed offer advantages, yet it is the women who receive the income, in keeping with the idea that they do not have their own rights, but rather rights as mothers of children and adolescents. (ECLAC, 2012).

(b) A Particularly Critical Hurdle: Women’s Rights to Safe Cities
Although with slight differences, citizen (in)security and violence in public spaces which form part of day-to-day life, is one of the main challenges currently facing Latin American and Caribbean countries. Thus, the governments have raised security costs to a level of between 8 and 10% of the GDP (UN-Habitat, 2009).

One important aspect of women’s right to the city is the right to safe cities for women. That involves the need to design public policies regarding urban security that address the issue of violence towards women and girls in public spaces, on the street and on transport services. Policies with a preventative rather than repressive focus, that include various different social sectors and, at the same time, make urban security an integral part of the physical space in city planning. It also requires educating people; promoting campaigns to heighten awareness of the issue and draw in different forces, particularly the educational community and the communications media in their roles as important opinion shapers.

Different subjective data show that a lack of a sense of security is the problem that citizens cite as most important, giving it higher priority than the income issue. The objective data reflect an increase of different types of crimes in the region, including homicide, the rate of which grew by 11% between 2000 and 2010, while in other areas of the world it dropped or stabilized. The same is true with
robberies, which have tripled in numbers over the past 25 years. (PNUD, 2013).

Within this context of violence acts, fear forms part not only of citizens' daily lives, but also plays into the rules of society (Kessler, 2008). It is about citizens of fear (Rotker, 2000) which leads to the idea of another threat, generally associated with individuals or groups who are stigmatized by social class, race, ethnicity, or other factors.

It is also about violence and fear that are not perceived equally by the population at large but rather are specifically characterized by class, territory, age, and gender, among other factors. Different studies carried out by institutions within the Latin American Women and Habitat Network,⁴ point to the particular ways in which violent acts affect women, who experience everything from verbal hostility to sexual harassment and abuse in public squares, parks, on the street and on public transport systems, which make them more fearful than men in terms of moving around the city. Fear, as a factor in women's socialization, inhibits women's access to public spaces from early childhood on (Román Rivas, 2009), imposing restrictions upon them and greater permissiveness on the part of males regarding the use of that space. It is about permissiveness that has to do with a different perception of danger, and which includes the fear of sexual aggression towards little girls.

This range of violent acts against women in public spaces can be loosely described as follows:

- Male violence—primarily occurring in public spaces—taking place among men and generally having to do with organized crime-linked groups. Violence against women in public spaces, on the other hand, tends to be random and could affect any woman, regardless of class, education, age, ethnicity or place of residence. (Kessler, 2008; Falú, 2009a)
Women are more aware of possible risks in their everyday lives than men. This is true to the extent that the risk of fear is higher than the actual growing crime rate.

With regard to the above, there are certain aggressive acts that generate extreme fear among women. These are linked with the male-female power balance, specifically affecting women: sexual aggression and couple-related aggression. On any given day in Latin America, 460 people suffer the consequences of sexual violence and most of those are women.

This fear increases at certain hours of the day when the public streets, squares, and recreational areas are quieter, with less social interaction in general.

The above-noted points all fall under the category of a continuum of violent acts (Falú, 2009), which show that, both in public and private spaces, violent acts against women share the same roots: the power of one sex over another, expressed through masculine violence that exists in our societies. In an attempt to confront this violence and the associated fears, women develop individual or group strategies that allow them to overcome the obstacles and participate in the social, work and political life of the city. The alternative would be to withdraw from the public space, seen to be threatening, even to the point of not resorting to it at all, with the consequent personal and social impoverishment that comes with that choice.

So, we are referring to fear that limits the right to enjoy the public space and take part in it, which basically has to do with women being seen and considered as objects. This violence against women, sometimes resulting in death—bodies considered as “property” just by virtue of being female—leads to the coining of the phrase “femicide.” It is a concept that aims to turn the idea of subjugated bodies into “bodies endowed with social and political value.” The statistics reflect the gravity of these situations of violence against women in the region; between 2004 and 2009, of the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world, 13 were in the region.

To enjoy the city one must be able to make it hers, and necessarily be comfortable in one’s own body to be able to operate with confidence in the home, the neighborhood, and on collective, political and economic ground. In this regard, the ongoing violence against women in the public sphere, the growing violence in cities with the associated fear works to block the rights achieved by women, creating hurdles in being able to achieve a sense of belonging to the public space. Stated differently, women’s fear towards moving around the city and freely enjoying it turns into “distancing” from the public space. In the meantime, and contrary to what statistics show, private space continues to be considered safe.

Ideas put forth supporting women’s potential for freedom (Amorós, 2005), and the need for risk taking (Pitch, 2008) are essential in overcoming the oppression which women experience and serve as ways of questioning and moving beyond that which is imposed by a male-dominated power structure. Only by breaking down the paradigms of submission, can women proscribe the femininity myth and acquire and exercise new rights.

**Agenda for Women in the City, Without Fear or Violence. City of Rosario Experience (Santa Fe Province, Argentina)**

**Women Committed to the Problems in their City. Aims and Objectives of the Experience**

The Agenda for Women in the City, Without Fear or Violence grew out of cooperation among organized managers, experts and women in the communities of the northeast, western and southern Districts of the City of Rosario, Argentina. Drawing up the Agenda brought to the fore these women’s political decision to include within it demands and proposals seen as essential to living in safer cities and with inalienable rights, thus creating an instrument with political and governmental impact.

The Agenda’s aim was to bring the issue of violence against women to light and move forward on the issue of equal opportunities for women. In this regard, the Agenda served as a learning tool within the negotiation process among various players in the political sphere, resulting in consolidating women’s neighborhood organizations, systematizing their demands, and addressing questions of citizen education and training.

The process involved participative feedback in identifying the causes of violence in the respective areas. Among the methodological tools applied were: walks through neighborhoods, focus groups, and on-the-street and home surveys.

**The Process**

Several meetings were held to establish the Agenda’s aims and intentions. Priorities were established, focusing on the need for preventive action, attention to, and control of, violence against women—including that against lesbians and within work contexts—as well as reviewing budgetary questions. In addition, actions were taken to have a voice in the electoral platforms of various political candidates.

Thus, the demands and proposals were as follows:

- Create the means and budget to give visibility to, and promote, women’s action groups.
- Demand neighborhood play centers for children that encourage women’s active involvement.
- Heighten social awareness of violence against women and encouraging media coverage of the subject.
The Agenda for Women in the City set forth the following:

1. Respect for a violence-free life in the city.
3. Strengthen the city council’s program aimed at addressing and preventing issues of gender violence in neighborhoods.
4. Implement Equal Opportunities Plan III.
5. Include gender and safety questions in urban planning.
6. Increase decentralization of social/cultural activities to make public spaces more accessible.

Brief Conclusions

For women to play a role in their cities’ story and be productive participants in that, requires a paradigm change that needs a close examination of the theoretical coordinates that place them in the position of objects and the creation of a network of actions and public policies established between the government level and society at large. Women’s right to the city is a key factor in the development of a real citizen democracy, allowing women to express their aspirations, needs and demands and simultaneously enjoy full use of the city’s public goods and services.

Addressing and removing the critical hurdles set forth here requires a symbolic and cultural transformation and involves a change regarding both formal and non-formal education: alter the ongoing gender-based division of labor, inequalities, unfair work conditions for women (particularly with regard to non-visible caretaking and childrearing) and violence against women. With regard to the last point, though the issue has been addressed on a public level, it remains the primary thorn in the side of women’s lives, both at home and outside of the home.

The Women’s Agenda experience and its associated methodology is part of this change geared towards education and training leading towards active citizenship. That is not based only upon the words and actions of experts on the subject, but also upon raising the voices of women who live this experience on a daily basis and are “expert voices to be heard.” They must become active and committed participants in improving the conditions of life in their neighborhoods, and not simply recipients of interventions and planned actions by specialized teams. While commitment to the issue and intellectual reflection are necessary (Borja, 2013), there must also be motivation and action on the part of citizens, as well as an investment on the issue by those in power who are in the position of taking action. In this regard, we have turned to the joint action taken by specialists, local authorities and women in the community, taking into consideration their knowledge of the neighborhood, the city, their spaces, and the streets and transport systems to which they need to have access. Not only is freedom of movement in the neighborhood important, but so is attention to health and education issues, and social services for the elderly.

In sum, addressing all of the tasks and experiences that women take on. This agenda is based upon all of these factors.

Bibliography

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1. In Peru in the 1980s groundbreaking work was done by SUMBI-Urban Services and Women with Limited Resources, led by Maruja Barrig and Amelia Fort.
2. Mention must be made of contributions from Latin America by: Janine Anderson, Maruja Barrig, Cecilia Blondet, Amelia Fort (Peru); Alejandra Massolo (1992), Elizabeth Jelin and María del Carmen Feijoo in the 1980s through CLACSO (Latin American Council of Social Sciences); Ana Falú (Argentina); Alejandra Valdés, Rasinski and Serrano (1992) in Chile; through the Women and Habitat Network: Josefina Huamán (Peru), Ana Falú and Liliana Rainero (Argentina) and Olga Seqovia (Chile); researchers and activists including Marisol Dalmazzo, Morena Herrera, Lucy Cardona, Maite Rodríguez Blázquez, Maite Rodigou, among others. Maria Arboleda (Ecuador) through the Women and Local Government Program (PMGL), and the PMGL Study Group with . Jeanine Anderson and Ana Falú.
3. Conferences and Summit Meetings leading to commitments on the part of States, resulting in some binding Conventions and Pacts. One example of this is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), established in 1979.
4. Examples: the IULA’s Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Governments (Harare, Zimbabwe, 1998); the Founding Declaration of United Cities and Local Governments (Paris, 2004); the World Charter for Women’s Rights to the City (Barcelona, 2004).
5. The Latin American regional program “Cities without Violence against Women, Safe Cities for All”, UNIFEM-United Nations Development Fund for Women (today, UN Women) with headquarters in Brasilia (2004), put into effect, between 2006 and 2012, specific programs in Argentina, Colombia, Chile, El Salvador and Guatemala, creating the Women and Habitat Network of Latin America, in conjunction with the governments of the cities of Rosario, Bogota, Santiago, Suchitoto and Guatemala, and the participation of Lima, Recife and other cities in the region with specific activities such as public campaigns focused on violence against women. This program received financing from the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID).
6. We must stress that this subjective data regarding the sense of insecurity, do not necessarily reflect levels of criminal activity.
7. The percentages range from 20% for Peru to 61% for Venezuela.
8. Latin American Women and Habitat Network (Red Mujer y Hábitat de América Latina): comprising institutions in countries of the region that are committed to women’s rights to the city. www.redmujer.org.ar.
10. Marcela Lagarde, Mexican anthropologist and member of Parliament, investigated the subject as a member of the Special Commission Against Femicide, finding that approximately 15,000 women were murdered over the course of ten years. Lagarde defines Femicide as: “Misogynous crimes allowed by an enormous social tolerance of gender violence in which the State is actively implicated and contributes to its impunity,” adding that “the subject of impunity is severe.” http://portalseguridad.org/articulo/0/un%20estos%20crimes/lo%20impunidad/marcela-lagarde-los-feminicidios-son-la-punta-del-iceberg-de-todas-las-formas-de-violencia
12. Within the framework of the program Cities Without Violence Against Women, Cities Safe for All carried out by UN Women, Women and Habitat Network, AECID. In cooperation with CISCAS (Southern Cone Service and Exchange Center), Women and Habitat Network, and the Women’s Section of the Department for Social Support, City of Rosario, Santa Fe Province, Argentina. (2010)