Article

The Urban Politics of Human Rights Practice

Paula Fernandez-Wulff and Christopher Yap*

Abstract

Social movement organizations are increasingly developing human rights strategies at the municipal level, particularly in European urban contexts. Yet critical scholarly work on human rights has overlooked two related realities: non-state-centric, social movement use of the tools and discourses of rights, and the strategic participation of citizen groups in municipal urban policy spaces. This article builds on critical human rights theory through the experiences of three grass-roots organizations claiming and exercising social rights in urban policy spaces of Barcelona, Valladolid, and London. It engages with a number of scholarly critiques of the state and human rights, particularly focusing on those critiques that question their compatibility with autonomy, democracy, and self-government at the local level. While the value of such critical literature is undeniable, we show how urban grass-roots practices and experiences with social rights-based strategies in the context of housing, water, and participation can circumvent some of these critiques on the ground, pointing at new avenues for critical legal research when infused with other critical discourses, including urban politics.

Keywords: citizen mobilization; human rights critiques; municipal policy; social rights; urban politics

1. Introduction

Local-level changes in human rights practice have received increasing attention in the last decade (see e.g. Goodale and Merry 2007; Merry 2006), particularly as civil society actors have used opportunities in international human rights law to advance their goals (Tsutsui et al. 2012). Although social movements are traditionally defined in terms of continued, collective, extra-institutional action to challenge or defend existing authority (Snow et al. 2004: 11), recent interest in the role of social movements in institutional contexts has pointed at the city as a locus of contestation over the meanings of democracy, autonomy, and self-determination (Gilbert et al. 2018; Russell and Reyes 2017). In this context, special attention has been paid to human rights as potential vehicles for justice in the city (Oomen et al. 2016).

---

* Paula Fernandez-Wulff is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, New York University School of Law. Christopher Yap is a Research Fellow at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London. The authors were previously involved in the Hands on The Land Alliance for Food Sovereignty, the grassroots coalition that motivated this research.

Human rights can be understood as both a set of values and a system of international law (Goodale 2007), but more fundamentally as a sociopolitical construct in a particular socio-historical context (Stammers 1999); they are inherently ambivalent and subject to continuous renegotiation in urban spaces (Oomen 2016). In this sense, while human rights can help us defend ourselves and others against the tyranny of political and economic powers, they can also be used as a signifier of, for, and by structures of power and domination. This duality points towards a contradictory role for human rights, as a language and tool for human emancipation from oppression and injustice, for which urban spaces represent not simply a neutral theatre in which social movements may act, but rather 'the relational conduits where movements connect and develop' (Uitermark et al. 2012: 2549).

There exists a substantial body of scholarship that unpacks critically and systematically the limitations of human rights as an idea, a discourse, and a tool. At the same time, there exists a growing, though more limited, body of literature that examines how social movements engage strategically and discursively with the human rights framework to enhance their claims to, and demand accountability from, the state. This article seeks to contribute to these two important bodies of literature, first, by exploring how such critical legal perspectives can be complemented by appealing to grounded struggles and lived experiences, and second, by exploring the significance of municipal spatial and political contexts in informing and influencing human rights claims by mobilized citizen groups.

Specifically, we examine the ways in which three grass-roots social movement organizations, operating at the municipal level in Barcelona, Valladolid, and London, have engaged with human rights discourses and tools in various ways in urban policy processes— that is, policy processes occurring at the municipal level in urban contexts, but with potentially significant implications outside of them. We explore the extent to which rights-based claims at the municipal level, through the mobilization of urban spaces, institutions, and discourses, represent a distinct set of opportunities for social movements particularly in the context of social rights, a question that remains underexplored in contemporary critical legal scholarship. In doing so, we ask: how can the concept and contents of human rights enhance the claims of mobilized citizen groups at the municipal level? And, drawing on critical legal scholarship, in what ways can human rights claims complement or constrain local conceptions of autonomy, self-governance, and an active conception of citizenship?

This article seeks to provide answers by, first, exploring the potential of municipal-level policy processes for 'active social rights' (Section 2), outlining the challenge of mobilizing the idea of 'the local' and showcasing the growing attention paid to the local sphere in human rights. Secondly, through empirical work with three citizen groups, and drawing on the work of critical theorists from a number of disciplines including legal theory, political philosophy, and urban politics, we illustrate how urban spaces at the local level offer an opening for experimentation with new forms of state–citizen relations and of social rights themselves (Section 3). We do so, specifically, by presenting the ways in which these groups are ascertaining and expanding the limits inherent to the advancement of non-traditional (innovative) human rights through the state (Section 3.1), and use non-traditional state

avenues to advance human rights by practising alternative forms of participation and accountability from below (Section 3.2).

The empirical elements of this article were developed following an exploratory approach combined with one of 'being useful' (M. Taylor 2014). Through engagement with elements of the European Food Sovereignty Movement that began at the 2nd Nyéléni Europe Forum, held in Romania in 2016, the authors identified the European Food Sovereignty Movement's deepening engagement with urban questions. In response to this growing area of interest, this research explored how social movements struggling for social rights have navigated urban policy processes in order to draw lessons for food sovereignty activists working at the municipal level. Three organizations were identified as having been successful in leading a human rights campaign and in enacting policy change at the municipal level in three cities.

The development of the case studies began in September 2017 with three exploratory semi-structured qualitative interviews with senior figures from: Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages, PAH), working in Barcelona, Spain, on the right to housing through both legal change and repertoires of contention; Valladolid Toma la Palabra (Take the Floor, VTLP) and Plataforma por la Gestión 100% Pública del Agua (100% Public Water Management Platform, PWMP), focusing on the remunicipalization of water supply and infrastructure through a right to water approach in Valladolid, Spain; and Just Space, a community-led network of groups that works to implement a collective right to a just and inclusive planning system in London, United Kingdom.

Each interview focused on the role of human rights language and instruments within the broader strategic work of the organization. Notes from these interviews were drafted into short narrative case studies by the authors, which were shared with the interviewees and to which they were invited to contribute. In the cases of Just Space and VTLP, the interviewees contributed significantly to the development of the written narratives and each case went through multiple iterations with the second author in October–November 2017. In the case of PAH, the initial narrative drafted by the first author following the interview was discussed and developed by a wider group of individuals within PAH, facilitated by the interviewee. In this way, each case study represents a co-produced narrative between the authors and members of the organizations; the selection of events was guided entirely by the interviewees, whilst the specific wording was developed collaboratively by the interviewees (and in the case of PAH, a wider collective) and the authors. In this way, the case studies are intended to preserve the 'voices' of the interviewees. These case studies first appeared as part of a report in the 'Food for Thought' series produced by Hands on the Land for Food Sovereignty (Fernandez-Wulff and Yap 2018) and were revised for this article in the context of critical human rights theory to contribute to grounded academic debates on the use and redefinition of social rights by movements working at the municipal level.

We explore the ways in which these three groups, by developing their work around three social rights, to housing, water, and participation, have circumvented the state-centric

human rights critiques through the way they defined, claimed, and exercised these rights when engaging in urban policy processes.

2. Exploring the possibilities of the local for social rights

Historically, municipalities have been seen as important sites of political dispute where social rights could be advanced. Particularly, urban municipalities gained such importance that already by the turn of the twentieth century there was an established international municipalist movement of radical political ideals (Pont 2014). At the beginning of the twentieth century, the municipality was critically seen as 'the best place to implement profound socioeconomic changes without challenging the political or legal systems of the country involved' (Dogliani 2002: 573). It is now increasingly recognized that decentralization promotes social rights (International Council on Human Rights Policy 2005: 3) and that, under specific circumstances, it can represent an opportunity to deepen democracy (Andersson and van Laerhoven 2007). Nevertheless, the concepts of 'the local' and 'municipal', and even 'scale' itself, are deeply political, and their mobilization for analysis is fraught with challenges.

Since Peter Taylor's (1982) article first challenged empirical conceptions of scale, geographers have critically engaged with 'scale', and the associated concept of 'boundaries' (Duncan and Savage 1989), as both epistemological and ontological constructs arising from predominantly social processes (Marston 2000). Neil Brenner (2004: 9), for example, defines scale as 'a 'vertical' differentiation in which social relations are embedded within a hierarchical scaffolding of nested territorial units'. As Purcell has argued, '[s]cales are socially constructed strategies to achieve particular ends. Therefore, any scale or scalar strategy can result in any outcome' (2006: 1921). Accordingly, geographers have increasingly turned their attention to what has been termed the 'politics of scale' (e.g. Cox 1998; Smith 1992).

Whilst this critical discourse has effectively problematized scale, scholars have also questioned whether the concept still has value. Marston and others (2005) argue the concept of scale confuses size and level, and that conceptions of scale cannot be untangled from implicit asymmetrical binaries, such as global–local. This asymmetry is evident in globalization discourses where 'the global is often equated with space, capital, history and agency, and the local, conversely, is linked with place, labor, and tradition' (Escobar 2001: 155). Moreover, an uncritical use of the terms 'local' and 'global' assumes that there are only two levels in the world, presented in isolation and dialectically opposed (Goodale 2007: 11–12) and, used in this way, these concepts can become a stand-in for social class (Merry 2006: 212). Following this, 'neoliberal localization' would be directly connected to processes of privatization of the municipal public sector and collective infrastructures (Brenner and Theodore 2002: 370).

Despite this academic interest in the issue of scale, in the context of human rights literature, 'the local' remains uncritically unpacked. Problematically, this conceptual vagueness can lead to a naive romanticization of 'local' as the best, or at least better, level of action for government to address societal problems that may be loosely defined as 'inherently local'—falling into what Purcell aptly called 'the local trap' (Purcell 2006). For example,

some authors have posited that, when looked at from a human rights perspective, 'the local' can be considered the original source of all human rights claims (De Feyter 2011; van den Berg and Oomen 2014), going as far as stretching its meaning to simply equate to 'somewhere' (De Feyter 2011: 14) or suggesting that 'human rights crises emerge at the local level' (De Feyter 2006: 12). This strand of literature falls into the local trap in that it presumes that localization is desirable because it is assumed to lead to more democratic or socially just outcomes (Purcell 2006; Purcell and Brown 2005).

Yet there is currently no evidence that human rights are better protected at the local level, or that municipal governments are best placed to address human rights challenges. In fact, limiting human rights to the question of which level of government is best positioned to address issues constitutes a narrow technocratic approach to governance that deprives human rights of their political significance. Municipalities, just like any other product of the state, are subject to its problematics and contradictions, its power dynamics and ambivalences. Without becoming aware and engaging with these contradictions, there is a risk of seeing local governments as either the source of all solutions or as mere technical problem-solvers devoid of democratic political agonism.

These critiques notwithstanding, in the last two decades there has been a surge in interest in the potential of the local sphere for the development and advancement of human rights ideals. A number of these networks have been increasingly interested in committing to, and indeed expanding, the content of human rights. For example, the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City was adopted during the Second Conference of European Cities for Human Rights in 2000 (Oomen and Baumgärtel 2014) and counted 372 signatory cities as of 2014 (European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City 2014). The UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy, and Human Rights drafted and adopted the Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City in 2011 (UCLG 2011), which contains road maps and indicators for the implementation of each of the 12 human rights recognized in it.[1] Additionally, the cities of Montreal (City of Montreal 2006; Frate 2016), Mexico (Mexico City 2010; Sánchez Rodríguez 2016), and Gwangju (Gwangju City 2012) have innovatively drafted their own city human rights charters.

Research on the tensions around how these localities engage with human rights has also emerged in the last years, including the development of concepts such as 'human rights in the city', 'human rights cities', and 'the right to the city' (Oomen et al. 2016), in which the key distinction is on 'how cities are redefined through human rights and the kind of discourse about the city that human rights sustain' (Grigolo 2016: 287). Yet this increased recognition of sub-national processes in human rights has primarily concerned itself with state actors, paying attention to actors inside local governments and to the institutionalization of human

---

[1] These 12 rights are: the right to the city; the right to participatory democracy; the right to civic peace and safety in the city; the right of women and men to equality; the rights of children; the right to accessible public services; freedom of conscience and religion, opinion and information; the right to peaceful meeting, association and to form a trade union; cultural rights; the right to housing and domicile; the right to clean water and food; and the right to sustainable urban development.

rights within them (ibid: 279), rather than with the power to promote a particular vision of justice that community-based groups and social movements can exert on these processes, which may in fact be the determining factor in the success or failure of their strategies (ibid: 288).

Given the contradictions and limitations relating to the ideas of scale and local, we propose that a critical conception of 'the urban' presents a more productive theoretical foothold. By approaching municipalities not as a scalar or jurisdictional category, but as a spatial manifestation of economic, social, and political processes, we might better understand and articulate the significance of urban policy spaces for claiming and exercising socioeconomic rights.

Specifically, urban policy spaces can be understood to have innate characteristics that make them unique loci of democratic contestation. Cities play critical roles in the global economy as 'engines of growth' (Harris 1988) and absorbers of surplus wealth (Harvey 2006). These roles have been consolidated through globalization, 'causing the urban scale to be intertwined ever more directly with multiple supraurban political-economic processes' (Brenner 2000: 374). Viewed in this way as a dynamic, socioeconomic construct, urban, municipal policymaking is not only a label that denotes a particular level within the nested jurisdictional structure of the state; it represents a particular form of legal and policy space that is in continuous dialectical relation with global social, economic, and political processes.

Urban centres are also characterized by their relative density, diversity, and concentration of political power and civic institutions. These characteristics make cities particularly apt for the emergence of contestation between inhabitants and the state; cities are 'not only prime sites for contentious innovation but also the places where new ways of regulating, ordering, and controlling social life are invented' (Uitermark et al. 2012). For this reason, cities represent a spatial and political opportunity for citizens to engage with and challenge the existing order, and to 'make the case for alternative possible worlds' (Miller and Nicholls 2013: 453). As Uitermark argues (2004: 711), challenging local expressions of power in cities 'can be considered a crucial means for challenging the (global) processes that gave rise to them by making them visible and possibly even accessible'. In other words, cities generate conditions for contestation and urban social movements can be understood as an inevitable consequence of the prevailing urban paradigm. 'The urban' therefore can be understood as a distinct material, social, and political construct that represents specific opportunities in the struggle for social rights.

Renegotiating rights in urban spaces has also been recognized as one of the most promising aspects of the localization of human rights (Oomen 2016) particularly because the source of citizenship rights is de facto defined by urban agents (García Chueca 2016: 104). García Chueca identifies that these rights can be both expanded, through contestation of definitions and the creation of new rights, and eroded through processes including the privatization of the city (ibid.). Following this, we wish to focus here less on new ways of talking about human rights through a 'repackaging' of values as a discursive strategy, and more on exploring whether human rights can be effectively used to experiment with new ideas of rights beyond the state and as vehicles for justice in the city more generally.

Drawing on the work of critical human rights and urban theorists and of three citizen groups engaging with social rights in urban policy spaces, in the next section we show how this fixation on state actors has the potentially dual implication of marginalizing the voices of urban inhabitants from the policy discourse and reproducing, at the local level, elements of the contradictory relationship between the state and human rights. For this reason, it is important to consider the ways in which urban policy spaces represent an opportunity to disrupt this dynamic.

3. Reclaiming the state: urban policy spaces, municipal governments, and emancipatory social rights

The role of the modern state regarding human rights is widely recognized by contemporary human rights theorists as historically ambiguous: the state both adopts and guarantees human rights obligations, and it is also the state that is often responsible for committing the cruellest of the human rights violations. In the context of socioeconomic rights, however, this ambivalence has been less explored. In this section we focus on two specific sets of critiques inherent to the way the modern state deals with social rights: first, the clash of state roles in both defining and violating human rights (with its implications for the state itself and for human rights advocates) and the known critique of human rights as a totalizing, hegemonic language; and second, the impact of the phenomenon of state categorizations and critique of human rights as state-centric, overpromising, and depoliticizing.

In the context of urban rights-based struggles these critiques have a particular significance for at least two reasons. First, a close examination of urban struggles through the lens of critical human rights theory can reveal ways that social movements claim and exercise their social rights through a double strategy, drawing on human rights legal frameworks and on locally articulated conceptions of autonomy, democracy, and self-determination. On the other hand, a critical engagement with urban spaces in which rights are claimed, violated, and contested reveals ways in which such spaces, strategically used for claiming and exercising social rights, can influence the specific manifestation of these critiques, and the resulting set of opportunities for social movements. In looking at these important critiques in the practice of three urban social movement organizations, we hope to demonstrate the need for critical legal scholarship to engage closely with grounded struggles from which are emerging creative and collective solutions to abstracted legal problems. This is not to diminish the critical nature of these paradoxes, rather it is to search, in urban rights-based struggles, for a theoretical foothold beyond these critiques as articulated by critical legal scholars. To this end, urban policy spaces, amongst other local spaces, represent a particular set of opportunities for claiming and exercising social rights, as we discuss in this section.

3.1 Acting within or in spite of the state? Social rights beyond service provision

A common critique addressed to the ability for human rights to be used in an emancipatory way is that, if the state both defines and stands in the way of the realization of human rights, then it may be politically impossible to make human rights an emancipatory strategy, at least within the state jurisdictional avenues. We engage with this challenge by exposing two main problems that constitute an obstacle to reversing it and which are representative of the debates on the matter: the subordination of economic, social, and

cultural rights to other rights and the clash of state roles when both defining and implementing rights.

First, the fact that socioeconomic rights were subordinated to civil and political rights is, as David Kennedy has put it (2011: 11), 'central to the conditions of political possibility that make human rights an emancipatory strategy in the first place'. The alleged subordination of economic, social, and cultural rights both to civil and political rights by dissociating them in 1966, and to the broader category of fundamental rights by reducing them to state services, has been reiterated since negotiations following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 hinted at a potential classification of human rights. As a result of a lack of consensus in 1952, economic, social, and cultural rights and civil and political rights were split into two separate rounds of negotiation, two separate outcome texts (the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), and ultimately two separate paths of adjudication.

As a consequence of this split and alleged subordination, social rights have been historically equated to, and most often limited to, state services, with the related consequence of their general disassociation from the rest of fundamental rights and with great implications for human rights advocacy. Both for human rights in general and for socioeconomic rights specifically, advocacy would be inherently ambivalent towards the state—demanding an end to human rights violations committed by the state ('less state'), while concurrently claiming the delivery of more or better state service and material provision, that is, 'more state' (Claeys 2015b: 62). This ambivalence can be seen in many examples of the use of human rights language and tools by communities affected by human rights violations committed by the state (Claeys 2015a; Goodale 2006). Locked within a logic of material and service provision by the state only in extreme situations such as homelessness, starvation, or extreme disease, social rights at the municipal level would then become rights to have 'access' to services technocratically provided by local governments, with little of their subversive content left for advocates to defend.

Because human rights would be limited to issuing claims and demands for recognition by the state—claims to be further regulated by the state—it seems paradoxical that they could be used to exert one's own agency. In this context, critical human rights scholars have argued that the language of human rights itself would be totalizing and hegemonic, making other, often more valuable, emancipatory strategies less available (Kennedy 2002: 108). In the case of social rights at the municipal level, state obligations would therefore be conceived as duties to provide unidirectional, depoliticized services that citizens passively receive, only demanding better or more access to such services and with very little say in their content or approach. In this sense, social rights in the city, when conceived as access to services, can be considered postpolitical in that they would be reduced to the negotiation of interests without the mediation of radical dissent and conflict (Swyngedouw 2009). To counter the postpolitical, Swyngedouw (ibid: 614) notes: 'there is an urgent need for … foregrounding and naming different socio-environmental futures, making the new and impossible enter the realm of politics and of democracy, and recognizing conflict, difference and struggle over the naming and trajectories of these futures'.

Following this, we wish to argue here that, while the power of the state to define and violate human rights is not diminished, the definition of the future of social rights at the municipal level is contested by local citizen groups claiming policy space in the city. The cases of the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) and Valladolid Toma la Palabra with Plataforma por la Gestión 100% Pública del Agua are two examples of local citizen groups working with their municipalities to redefine the content and approach to the social rights to housing and water. Both groups operated a discursive change, moving away from technocratic service provision, to a just remunicipalization of housing and water as human rights with participatory processes at their core.

3.1.1. Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (PAH) on the right to housing

PAH is a grass-roots organization campaigning for the right to housing that was created in Barcelona in February 2009 in response to the burst of the Spanish real estate bubble in 2008 and to the resulting financial and economic crises. PAH grew out of an earlier collective, V de Vivienda, which began in 2006 and brought the incipient housing crisis to the media, emphasizing the inability for young people to afford a home (Huerga 2015). After years publicly denouncing the impact of the unaffordability of housing in Barcelona, and particularly after the 15M (Indignados) movement began in May 2011, PAH spread exponentially across Spain. The 15M movement allowed PAH to connect with groups involved in other struggles and other people interested in housing, allowing the Platform to grow from 100 nodes in 2011 to over 220 in 2017. Very quickly the platform reframed the market-related crisis as a situation of deliberately created social injustice, where those to blame could be identified and accountability could be demanded. Specifically, PAH campaigned by providing legal and emotional support to citizens affected by eviction processes, organizing demonstrations and direct actions to stop evictions, and by undertaking legislative mobilizations and strategic litigation.

According to Amnesty International (Amnistía Internacional España 2015), and based on statistics issued by the Spanish Council of the Judiciary (CGPJ) and the National Statistics Institute (INE), between 2008 and 2014 there were almost 600,000 foreclosure procedures in Spain, mainly due to the alarming growth in unemployment rates—from eight per cent in 2008 to 26 per cent in 2013; by 2015, 1.8 million families had all of their members unemployed.

PAH took on a predominantly urban issue affecting private individuals—housing—and turned it into a structural, collective struggle through the careful redefinition of concepts which until then had been unchallenged. The platform and its members not only openly rejected the use of depoliticized concepts such as 'crisis', but in fact substituted them with words implying direct responsibility, such as 'scam' and 'speculation', which could be attributed to specific individuals and corporations: 'I think our biggest success has been the transformation of people's impressions' (PAH member interview). Breaking the prevailing narrative of payment default as 'living above one's possibilities' was done by impregnating a sense of urgency into housing issues through a focus on providing 'explanations' regarding three key issues: policies at all government levels affecting housing; the idea that the housing emergency ('emergencia habitacional') is a collective, not an individual problem; and a

historical perspective on why home ownership had become the social norm in Spain. This discursive transformation, undertaken by strategically using public appearances of key figures of the movement to denounce the situation, was one of the ways media attention gradually shifted from portraying the movement as simple violent offenders—some elements of the media had gone so far as to equate PAH's actions with terrorism—towards a more complex view of the social movement, particularly as more tragic, personal stories were shared, reaching a wider audience and leading to increased public support.

PAH fought widespread feelings of powerlessness regarding foreclosures and evictions through a discourse of dignity and self-empowerment. Particularly in Barcelona, their process of meaning-making, or the collective contest over interpretation (Kurzman 2008), of housing rights was done by combining two strategies. On the one hand, an institutional vision, by collectively learning about housing law and regulations and by negotiating with other social movements, real estate developers, and the City Hall ('the legal path' in their words). On the other hand, PAH also developed a 'squatting path,' or a repertoire of contention (Tilly 2003: 45), by undertaking direct action (*escraches*) against parliamentarians and counter-action against evictions and by successfully relocating evicted families into homes that remained empty due to the real estate bubble. In this sense, PAH broke down the barriers between grass-roots mobilization and legal strategies, 'shifting power to low-income constituencies through a particular type of legal advocacy … ultimately subordinate to grassroots organizing campaigns' (Cummings and Eagly 2001: 447), where knowledge about the law was not provided by lawyers, as is traditionally assumed in academic literature, but rather collectively acquired through open assemblies: 'this information often contradicts that provided by banks, and it empowers both new people and those with more experience because they can pass on what they have learned' (PAH member interview).

By appealing to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Spanish Constitution itself, all of which explicitly contain the right to housing, PAH used human rights language and frameworks in a strategic way, both to empower those whose rights had been violated, and to force politicians and decision-makers to acknowledge housing as a human right. Going beyond its justiciability, PAH used the right to housing as a banner to address wider issues such as social inequality, corruption, and opacity in political processes. Although their actions have often been misrepresented in the media, and political and legislative initiatives by the Platform have been actively boycotted, PAH forced discourses to shift from one of guilt and shame for losing one's home, to one of dignity and empowerment, contributing to a broader change in perceptions of social justice and human rights. Through claiming municipal space, both physical urban and symbolic policy space, PAH challenged existing meanings of housing rights.

3.1.2 Valladolid Toma la Palabra and Plataforma por la Gestión 100% Pública del Agua on the right to water

In 2016, after 20 years of privatization, Valladolid City Council approved the remunicipalization of water services for the city of Valladolid in the Autonomous Region of

Castilla y León in the north-west of Spain. This achievement marked a victory for the people and social movements of Valladolid, who formed the Valladolid Toma la Palabra (Take the Floor, VTLP) political platform in 2014, and the Plataforma por la Gestión 100% Pública del Agua (100% Public Water Management Platform, PWMP) in 2015, which together were able to inform and influence the decision to remunicipalize water in 2017. Placed within a global conversation on the politics of water governance, movements for the right to water such as PWMP exemplify the ambivalence of rights discourses in regard to water provision.

In 1996, the city approved the privatization of the water supply, until then managed by a profitable public company that was providing a satisfactory service. A citizens' water platform was immediately formed to protest against the decision. However, by 2005, wastewater treatment and sewerage had also been privatized and contracted, along with water provision, to the same company, Agualid-Aguas de Valladolid S.A. While the contract between the municipal government and Agualid was due to expire in June 2017, discussions regarding its renewal or replacement began in earnest in 2015 when a new municipal government was elected.

The past five years have seen a significant change in Spanish political culture, with a more prominent role played by political parties with strong affiliations with social movements, such as Podemos with 15M. In Valladolid in 2014, with the support of the local government, social movements and civil society groups organized into a political platform, Valladolid Toma la Palabra (VTLP), to participate in the 2015 local elections. The platform used participatory processes to develop an electoral programme that included a commitment to remunicipalize water management in the city. VTLP did not win the election outright, however it won enough seats to enter into a coalition with Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), and Valladolid Sí se Puede, the local branch of Podemos. Although the coalition supported the remunicipalization of water, the management model still needed to be agreed on: a public enterprise, a public–private company, or state management model? VTLP conducted a substantial participatory process, bringing together social movements and civil society, to discuss the options, and finally, a vote was held where a public enterprise was chosen as the preferred model.

During the period of negotiations, social movements and civil society played three important roles. The first was through the close engagement between VTLP and the city council, inputting into negotiations, and reminding the municipal government that the structures and networks were in place, if needed, to campaign more strongly for a public enterprise model. The second was in providing a space for discussion and resolution of difficult issues which had arisen during the remunicipalization negotiations, including the issue of labour: what would remunicipalization mean for the wages and working conditions of those workers in the water sector? VTLP was able to bring together trade union members with local council members to solve the issue.

Thirdly, the platform was particularly successful in strategically untangling the social, political, and economic arguments for remunicipalization. They simultaneously supported the city council's technical report on grounds of cost and efficiency and framed the issue in terms of the human right to water and sanitation and a common good to raise political awareness.

The PWMP manifesto, which arose from these discussions and was supported by members of VTLP, recognizes the right to water and sanitation as well as principles of equality, equity, progressive realization and non-discrimination, and accountability and sustainable, participatory, transparent management (Plataforma por la Gestión 100% Pública del Agua en Valladolid 2016).

In light of the move to remunicipalize water services, the municipal government of Valladolid was sued unsuccessfully by both Agualid and state prosecutors. The city is also under pressure from the central Spanish government, which drafted a provision into the national budget that has significantly hampered remunicipalization efforts.[2] Despite these challenges, the public enterprise (Aquavall) is fully operational, overseen by a committee that includes politicians, technical staff, workers, and members of neighbourhood associations. Ultimately, the remunicipalization of water was boosted by social movements, who self-organized to respond to a political opportunity. By consciously making arguments for remunicipalization on grounds of the right to water and on economic, political, and social grounds, the platform was able to strategically use human rights to navigate the various spaces in which local policies are made and contested.

These two case studies reveal several interesting aspects that challenge the boundaries of the critiques outlined at the beginning of this section. In the case of PAH, citizen groups did appeal to human rights legislation; however, the achievements of the group lay in its strategy to develop a supportive space for conscientization and mobilization. Their work evidences the importance of working across both locally embedded conceptions of democracy and autonomy and state-centric conceptions of rights. Moreover, the case of PAH problematized a national, regional, and global issue in a collective way that challenged the centrality of the national state as guarantor. The final significant contribution of the case of PAH lay in drawing in other, non-state, actors such as private developers, predatory landlords, and financial speculators to the narrative of (un)just urban management, while simultaneously remaining open to negotiating with them. This narrative reflects the complex reality of cities, and the broader urbanization processes, where the renegotiation of rights takes place through both institutional engagement and direct confrontation. Issues resulting from unjust urbanization and unjust urban management cannot be reduced to the relationship between urban inhabitants and the state. Rather, as PAH demonstrated, the realization of social rights in the city can only be achieved through a critical engagement with the dynamics of power and politics that define even the most day-to-day elements of urban management.

---

2 As a result, the law established that local governments with a budget surplus would be required to use it to contribute towards prior debt or for 'financially sustainable investments' (Ley 27/2013, de 27 de diciembre, de racionalización y sostenibilidad de la Administración Local, 2013, Disposición final tercera, Disposición final cuarta), with pre-eminence over, for example, social services. Despite there being numerous cases open before the Constitutional Court regarding this law, and the Court declaring some of its provisions unconstitutional (among them, Constitutional Court Judgments STC 41/2016 of 3 March, STC 111/2016 of 9 June, STC 168/2016 of 6 October, and STC 44/2017 of 27 April), it is still fully valid and applicable in Spain, which severely restricts the margin of manoeuvre of municipal governments seeking to implement progressive policies.

The case of VTLP demonstrates the value of engaging strategically with the human rights discourse and language to better articulate social rights-based claims to municipal governments. What is significant in this case is the way that the right to water was expressed in terms of cost–benefit in some spaces, and as a basic human right in others. The contradictory role of the state, as guarantor and violator of the human right to water, did not disappear during the campaign. However, VTLP successfully mobilized at the city level to campaign for a right to water that is collective and cannot be reduced to concepts of access or consumption at the household level. Moreover, through a rights-based campaign, VTLP have become significant agents of change in the long-term infrastructure development in and around the city. This has significant implications for issues beyond water, including urban planning and management, labour and livelihoods, the local economy, and the natural environment. In this instance, a rights-based claim has been the starting point for the recognition of the right to water, but also for greater autonomy and agency for urban inhabitants within the city.

While the clash of state roles is a clear obstacle for international human rights advocacy, urban citizen groups such as PAH and VTLP are reaffirming the universal and permanent value of social rights (to housing and to water) through appealing to traditional human rights texts and principles, but they are also resignifying them to create a collective consciousness regarding wider values such as dignity for social equity, respect for public finances against corruption, and transparency and participation against the opacity of political and bureaucratic processes. Instead of simply demanding more intervention by the state after it violated rights, in the context of social rights in urban policy processes, groups like PAH and VLTP are redefining state intervention processes, particularly in terms of decision-making and the resulting prioritization of policy goals in the city.

3.2 Emancipatory rights at the local level: participation and accountability from below

Critical scholarship has highlighted a second main critique that remains crucial in our study: the role of the state in categorizing humans and land. These categorizations, which could be called processes of subjectification (de Carvalho 2016: 75) and simplification (Scott 1998), are crucial to understanding the lack of adaptability and fluidity of many key concepts that today we understand as natural in human rights.

The jurisdictional and administrative avenues that the modern liberal state gave itself through various historical processes during the nineteenth century led to notions and categories such as 'human', 'community', or 'land'. In order to 'read' society, the state created standardizing categories of individuals, groups, and territories, which, despite resistance from affected groups, have historically succeeded in imposing themselves (Scott 1998). Similarly, in order to 'read' the territory and to be able to catalogue, define, and manage it, governmental discourse, through its use of territorial power, produced what we now understand as 'local' (Ford 1999: 911).

These categories ('human', 'woman', 'child', 'community', or 'local') are still used today as a basis for the scope of applicability of human rights. As products of the state, human rights in turn shape political spaces and identities by demanding, justifying, or delegitimizing certain practices (Donnelly 1998: 22). These limiting categories simplified

reality for state purposes and created a specific kind of human autonomy, automatically excluding others.

In this context, critical scholars have argued that it is this state-centric character of human rights that would make of them an inherently passive concept: institutional human rights, as a discourse, can be used to produce passive citizenship in that this resulting citizenship would be dependent on power (the power created by human rights discourses) for its own existence (Neocosmos 2006: 357). This, it is claimed, makes it virtually impossible for human rights to embody the vision of active citizenship that many social movements demand, and social rights would inevitably end up caught in this passive state-centric reality.

Despite their explicit resonance with ideas of social justice and their potential to challenge power structures, social rights have been argued to ultimately benefit middle and upper classes (Landau 2012), and the fact that they are 'formulated, interpreted, and enforced by institutions that are embedded in the political, social, and economic status quo' can hinder their transformative potential (Pieterse 2007: 797). Human rights, presented as the solution to all evils and thereby overpromising, would ultimately trap those who use them in a false reality of agency that results in depoliticization. Social rights, framed as claims or demands for state recognition or action, would therefore be inherently passive and negate agency even though they continue to promise an end to injustice.

The case of Just Space in London provides an example of a local citizen platform that used a collective rights-based approach to participation in the field of urban planning. Through their activism, they challenge the critique of human rights as leaving no space for autonomy and agency and resulting in depoliticization. Just Space, pushing for community-centred rights, successfully repoliticized the traditionally apolitical issue of city planning, thus refuting the critique of human rights as only passive and state-centric.

3.2.1 Just Space on the right to participation

Just Space is a community-led network of voluntary and action groups from across London. The network emerged in 2007 in order to influence the London Plan, a periodic spatial development strategy for the city, developed by the Greater London Authority (GLA) and overseen by the London Mayor.3 Just Space now provides a community voice on a wide range of planning issues at the city level, and supports community involvement in urban planning processes.

Just Space grew out of London residents' frustration with lack of transparency in the community consultation processes within the development of the London Plan. Some residents felt that the consultations were held only to find a way to proceed with an already developed plan. Moreover, while the process of developing each London Plan involved

---

3 There have been five versions of the London Plan since 2004, with the latest published in 2016. The Plan lays out the city's strategic development priorities for the next 20–25 years, including housing, land use, the environment, transport and culture, amongst other things. The latest published draft for public consultation can be found in GLA (2017).

extensive consultation with urban stakeholders, priority was given to public interests and private developers, with little official recognition of community interests.

Just Space identified one element of the London Plan process in particular that could be leveraged by community groups, the Examination in Public (EiP). In this process, organizations are invited to provide testimony and evidence to assist government Planning Inspectors and test the soundness of the London Plan. Members of Just Space realized that while written testimony was for a single issue, such as affordable housing, the EiP could be used as a platform to raise a wide range of other issues, such as zoning, infrastructure development, or service provision. Participation in the EiP allowed new testimonies to be brought into the process. This was not only new evidence, but a new type of evidence, which emerged from lived, grass-roots experiences.

Just Space attempted to influence not only the content of the EiPs, but the process as well. In particular, they wanted community-based organizations to be officially recognized as a third party in the London Plan process (along with public and private interests). This was achieved through one-third representation of the community sector at the 2010 EiP and the recognition of a 'hot seat' to bring into the process those community groups who had not made written submissions. During 2015–16 Just Space developed their own document, 'Towards a Community-Led Plan for London', which explicitly outlines policy priorities that reflect the lived experiences of London communities (Just Space 2016). Just Space was also part of a steering group that organized an event called 'Land for What?' that sought to raise the issues relating to the political economy of land in the UK by bringing together urban and rural interests from across the country.

The philosophy and approach of Just Space is framed in terms of a collective right to a just and inclusive planning system. However, while the network aims to empower and mobilize London residents, it also appeals to national and international conventions in order to encourage the GLA to recognize the residents' participation in urban planning processes. These include the Aarhus Convention, which was ratified by the UK government, and which establishes the right to information, public participation, and access to justice in environmental matters (UNECE 1998). Just Space also appealed to the 'community right to neighbourhood planning', as outlined in the UK Localism Act 2011, ss. 116–121. While Just Space engages with the GLA, and participates in many GLA-organized events, the network is keen to remain autonomous from the City Hall, recognizing the importance of community-managed spaces and processes.

Just Space has made progress in several key areas. Firstly, they have collaborated with a wide range of community-based organizations and academic institutions to produce knowledge and evidence that reflects grass-roots experiences and to support inclusive community engagement in key urban policy processes. Secondly, Just Space has engaged in a form of strategic action planning, by which community organizations can connect and develop a more collective, strategic, and long-term vision for urban development in London. Thirdly, the network has formed alliances with others in a way that brings together urban tenants with small-scale rural food producers to look for common struggles, and share potential solutions.

The case of Just Space demonstrates the ways that urban inhabitants can mobilize both to claim space in urban policy processes and to challenge the ways that the state categorizes, and thus implicitly conceptualizes, urban inhabitants. Disenfranchised by the City Hall's inclusion of public and private interests as the primary interest groups in the development of the London Plan, Just Space successfully made the case that London residents and community represent a distinct set of priorities, concerns, and claims within the city. Like the case of VTLP, appealing to human rights declarations and conventions was one of a number of strategies that Just Space employed and, used this way, human rights do not overpromise, nor do they risk becoming the basis for individualized claims. Rather than a solution to all evils with depoliticizing effects, human rights was used as language and a tool for the redefinition of urban policy processes in terms of collective participation in the shaping of the city. But perhaps most significantly, in the context of Just Space, urban inhabitants are framed as agents within the city—human rights become useful only in so far as they galvanize urban groups and enhance their collective claims to the city. This contrasts with scholarly critiques of human rights emphasizing their potentially pacifying effect, or privileging state-centric articulations of human rights claims. By claiming participation in state policy spaces in order to give voice to local communities, Just Space did not assume the ambivalent position towards human rights of simply demanding 'more state'; on the contrary, they ensured a grass-roots vocabulary was present during the development of the Plan, thereby re-associating the right to participation to larger urban processes and ensuring their presence in future negotiations.

The three case studies reflected here illustrate how the critiques of human rights as a hegemonic, totalizing language that leaves no space for agency, resulting in depoliticization, state-centric, and ultimately disempowering, are being refuted in practice by groups engaging with urban policy spaces and processes. Although using rights language and claims in urban processes can never be fully free from contradictions, the redefinition of social rights to housing, water, and participation in the city by grass-roots organizations does point at potential answers to those critiques. Particularly through alternative participation and accountability mechanisms where citizen groups are 'makers and shapers' of policy processes (Cornwall and Gaventa 2000), urban municipal-level institutions represent a unique opportunity to experiment with institutional support to agency.

While some have argued that the appropriation of international norms and mechanisms by local communities can only happen when those norms and mechanisms are responsive to local needs and realities (Gómez Isa 2011: 74), this article has in fact shown the opposite: that it is despite the fact that human rights can be state-centric, passive, and totalizing that local communities decide to use them, whether in their practice, language, or claim forms. In this way, local-level action by citizen groups using social rights in urban policy spaces constitutes a reaction to those critiques through the reappropriation of the meaning and practice of human rights.

4. Concluding remarks

This article has made two key contributions to critical literature on human rights and to human rights practice more generally, particularly for social movements, community-based

organizations, and community-led networks aiming to influence urban policy spaces. First, we have demonstrated that a focus on the experiences of urban groups brings to light how human rights can be effectively mobilized at the municipal level despite the limitations identified in critical academic literature. This is not to make the critiques addressed to the nature of human rights and the role of the state regarding human rights disappear. Rather, this article has argued that human rights can be combined with other strategies in practice, such as local articulations of self-determination, democracy, and autonomy, in a way that critiques of the emancipatory potential of human rights can be reworked into opportunities for more empowering notions of social rights. As demonstrated by each of the case studies, human rights can for instance be effectively mobilized to shift prevailing urban narratives, with important repercussions for the development of new conceptions of social rights. The case of PAH demonstrates the value of strategically combining human rights claims with direct action and engaging with the media to shift the prevailing narrative regarding social justice in the city. VTLP also demonstrates how effective it can be to mobilize human rights language to generate popular momentum for a cause, whilst making parallel technical arguments in terms of cost–benefit analysis when dealing directly with the city hall.

In this sense, while human rights can be characterized as a totalizing, hegemonic language that can ultimately lead groups to frame their concerns in a language that is not theirs, our article has shown that in practice this is not always the case. While human rights, by virtue of being stated as rights in the law or otherwise, can force grass-roots groups to adopt problematically foreign discourses, the evolution of human rights, from civil and political rights to economic, social, and cultural rights and beyond, towards new rights, shows that it is possible for human rights advocates to generate new categories and meanings of rights. Specifically, actors rejected the framing of social rights as state allowances and as a technical problem to be solved by technocrats, adopting a political, politicized approach with the capacity to reinstate the emancipatory potential of socioeconomic rights.

We have shown that in urban policy processes human rights language can be used strategically as a means to a politicized end, but when the language is not useful, the same goals can be pursued through other strategies. Such was the case of the citizen groups presented here, who viewed human rights both as a framing and as a strategic tool for advancing their goals. As seen through the experience of Just Space, there is great value in combining holistic thinking with targeted, strategic action. All organizations need to manage limited resources; however, Just Space was particularly effective in directing their resources towards leveraging issue-specific platforms and specific moments in policy-formulation processes to drive their broader rights-based agenda.

The second contribution of this article has been to show that there exists a conceptual discrepancy between the localization debates in human rights theory, and local spaces, specifically urban spaces. By drawing on critical urban theory and literature dealing with the politics of scale, we have demonstrated that not all local spaces are equal, and that urban policy processes represent a particularly significant opportunity for claiming and exercising social rights. We believe that working with both critical urban and critical rights perspectives represents an important area for further scholarship.

Acknowledgements

References

Amnistía Internacional España. 2015. Derechos desalojados: El derecho a la vivienda y los desalojos hipotecarios en España. https://grupos.es.amnesty.org/uploads/media/informe_vivienda_jun_15_Derechos_desalojados.pdf (referenced 14 February 2020).

Andersson, K., and F. van Laerhoven. 2007. From Local Strongman to Facilitator: Institutional Incentives for Participatory Municipal Governance in Latin America. *Comparative Political Studies* 40(9): 1085–111.

Brenner, N. 2000. The Urban Question as a Scale Question: Reflections on Henri Lefebvre, Urban Theory and the Politics of Scale. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 24(2): 361–78.

————. 2004. *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood*. Oxford University Press.

Brenner, N., and N. Theodore. 2002. Cities and the Geographies of 'Actually Existing Neoliberalism'. *Antipode* 34(3): 349–79.

City of Montreal. 2006. Montréal Charter of Rights and Responsibilities.

Claeys, P. 2015a. *Human Rights and the Food Sovereignty Movement: Reclaiming Control*. Routledge.

————. 2015b. The Right to Food: Many Developments, More Challenges. *Canadian Food Studies / La Revue canadienne des études sur l'alimentation* 2(2): 60–8.

Cornwall, A., and J. Gaventa. 2000. From Users and Choosers to Makers and Shapers: Repositioning Participation in Social Policy. *IDS Bulletin* 31(4): 50–62.

Cox, K. R. 1998. Spaces of Dependence, Spaces of Engagement and the Politics of Scale, Or: Looking for Local Politics. *Political Geography* 17(1): 1–23.

Cummings, S., and I. Eagly. 2001. A Critical Reflection on Law and Organizing. *UCLA Law Review* 48(3): 443–517.

de Carvalho, B. 2016. The Making of the Political Subject: Subjects and Territory in the Formation of the State. *Theory and Society* 45(1): 57–88.

De Feyter, K. 2006. Localizing Human Rights. University of Antwerp Discussion Paper (No. 02). https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/6698800.pdf (referenced 8 May 2020).

—————. 2011. Sites of Rights Resistance. In K. De Feyter, S. Parmentier, C. Timmerman, and G. Ulrich (eds), *The Local Relevance of Human Rights*, pp. 11–39. Cambridge University Press.

Dogliani, P. 2002. European Municipalism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: The Socialist Network. *Contemporary European History* 11(4): 573–96.

Donnelly, J. 1998. Human Rights: A New Standard of Civilization? *International Affairs* 74(1): 1–24.

Duncan, S., and M. Savage. 1989. Space, Scale and Locality. *Antipode* 21(1): 179–206.

Escobar, A. 2001. Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Localization. *Political Geography* 20(2): 139–74.

European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City. 2014. List of Signatory Cities in 2014. https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/sites/default/files/signatory_cities_European_Charter_2014%20%281%29.pdf (referenced 14 February 2020).

Fernandez-Wulff, P., and C. Yap. 2018. Leveraging Urban Policy for Food Sovereignty and Human Rights. Amsterdam and Heidelberg: Transnational Institute–FIAN International.

Ford, R. T. 1999. Law's Territory (A History of Jurisdiction). *Michigan Law Review* 97(4): 843–930.

Frate, B. 2016. Human Rights at a Local Level. In B. Oomen, M. F. Davis, and M. Grigolo (eds), *Global Urban Justice: The Rise of Human Rights Cities*, pp. 64–80. Cambridge University Press.

García Chueca, E. 2016. Human Rights in the City and the Right to the City: Two Different Paradigms Confronting Urbanisation. In B. Oomen, M. F. Davis, and M. Grigolo (eds), *Global Urban Justice: The Rise of Human Rights Cities*, pp. 103–20. Cambridge University Press.

Gilbert, J., R. S. Süß, and A. Kolioulis. 2018. Radical Democracy and Municipal Movements. 22 September. Open Democracy. https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/radical-democracy-and-municipal-movements (referenced 14 February 2020).

Gómez Isa, F. 2011. Freedom from Want Revisited from a Local Perspective: Evolution and Challenges Ahead. In K. De Feyter, S. Parmentier, C. Timmerman, and G. Ulrich (eds), *The Local Relevance of Human Rights*, pp. 40–75. Cambridge University Press.

Goodale, M. 2006. Reclaiming Modernity: Indigenous Cosmopolitanism and the Coming of the Second Revolution in Bolivia. *American Ethnologist* 33(4): 634–49.

————. 2007. Locating Rights, Envisioning Law between the Global and the Local. In M. Goodale and S. E. Merry (eds), *The Practice of Human Rights: Tracking Law between the Global and the Local*, pp. 1–38. Cambridge University Press.

Goodale, M., and S. E. Merry (eds). 2007. *The Practice of Human Rights: Tracking Law between the Global and the Local*. Cambridge University Press.

GLA (Greater London Authority). 2017. The London Plan. The Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London: Draft for Public Consultation. https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/new_london_plan_december_2017.pdf (referenced 14 February 2020).

Grigolo, M. 2016. Towards a Sociology of the Human Rights City: Focusing on Practice. In B. Oomen, M. F. Davis, and M. Grigolo (eds), *Global Urban Justice: The Rise of Human Rights Cities*, pp. 276–93. Cambridge University Press.

Gwangju City (South Korea). 2012. Gwangju Human Rights Charter.

Harris, N. 1988. Economic Development and Urbanisation. *Habitat International* 12(3): 5–15.

Harvey, D. 2006. *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*. London: Verso.

Huerga, C. 2015. Desde V de Vivienda a la PAH, la lucha por el derecho a la vivienda. *Viento Sur* 138: 57–62. https://vientosur.info/IMG/pdf/VS138_C_Huerga_Desde_V_de_Vivienda_a_la_PAH_la_lucha_por_el_derecho_a_la_vivienda.pdf (referenced 14 February 2020).

International Council on Human Rights Policy. 2005. Local Government and Human Rights: Doing Good Service. http://www.ichrp.org/files/reports/11/124_report.pdf (referenced 14 February 2020).

Just Space. 2016. Towards a Community-Led Plan for London: Ideas for Discussion and Debate. https://justspacelondon.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/towardse280a6final.pdf (referenced 14 February 2020).

Kennedy, D. 2002. The International Human Rights Movement. Part of the Problem? *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 15: 101–26.

————. 2011. *The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism*. Princeton University Press.

Kurzman, C. 2008. Introduction: Meaning-Making in Social Movements. *Anthropological Quarterly* 81(1): 5–15.

Landau, D. 2012. The Reality of Social Rights Enforcement. *Harvard International Law Journal* 53(1): 190–247.

Marston, S. A. 2000. The Social Construction of Scale. *Progress in Human Geography* 24(2): 219–42.

Marston, S. A., J. P. Jones, and K. Woodward. 2005. Human Geography Without Scale. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30(4): 416–32.

Merry, S. E. 2006. *Human Rights and Gender Violence. Translating International Law into Local Justice*. University of Chicago Press.

Mexico City. 2010. Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City.

Miller, B., and W. Nicholls. 2013. Social Movements in Urban Society: The City as a Space of Politicization. *Urban Geography* 34(4): 452–73.

Neocosmos, M. 2006. Can a Human Rights Culture Enable Emancipation? Clearing Some Theoretical Ground for the Renewal of a Critical Sociology. *South African Review of Sociology* 37(2): 356–79.

Oomen, B. 2016. Introduction: The Promise and Challenges of Human Rights Cities. In B. Oomen, M. F. Davis, and M. Grigolo (eds), *Global Urban Justice: The Rise of Human Rights Cities*, pp. 1–19. Cambridge University Press.

Oomen, B., and M. Baumgärtel. 2014. Human Rights Cities. In A. Mihr and M. Gibney (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Human Rights*, pp. 709–30 (online). SAGE.

Oomen, B., M. F. Davis, and M. Grigolo (eds). 2016. *Global Urban Justice: The Rise of Human Rights Cities*. Cambridge University Press.

Pieterse, M. 2007. Eating Socioeconomic Rights: The Usefulness of Rights Talk in Alleviating Social Hardship Revisited. *Human Rights Quarterly* 29(3): 796–822.

Plataforma por la Gestión 100% Pública del Agua en Valladolid. 2016. Manifiesto. https://pg100pav.wordpress.com/manifiesto (referenced 20 August 2018).

Pont, M. L. 2014. International Municipalism between the Wars: Local Government as Modernizing Actors. In N. J. Doyle and L. Sebesta (eds), *Regional Integration and Modernity: Cross-Atlantic Perspectives*, pp. 21–41. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Purcell, M. 2006. Urban Democracy and the Local Trap. *Urban Studies* 43(11): 1921–41.

Purcell, M., and J. C. Brown. 2005. Against the Local Trap: Scale and the Study of Environment and Development. *Progress in Development Studies* 5(4): 279–97.

Russell, B., and O. Reyes. 2017. Fearless Cities: The New Urban Movements. *Red Pepper*. 16 August. https://www.redpepper.org.uk/fearless-cities-the-new-urban-movements (referenced 14 February 2020).

Sánchez Rodríguez, A. M. 2016. The Right to the City in Mexico City: The Charter. In B. Oomen, M. F. Davis, and M. Grigolo (eds), *Global Urban Justice: The Rise of Human Rights Cities*, pp. 220–36. Cambridge University Press.

Scott, J. C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press.

Smith, N. 1992. Geography, Difference and the Politics of Scale. In J. Doherty, E. Graham, and M. H. Malek (eds), *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences*, pp. 57–79. Palgrave Macmillan.

Snow, D. A., S. A. Soule, and H. Kriesi. 2004. Mapping the Terrain. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, and H. Kriesi (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, pp. 3–17. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Stammers, N. 1999. Social Movements and the Social Construction of Human Rights. *Human Rights Quarterly* 21(4): 980–1008.

Swyngedouw, E. 2009. The Antinomies of the Postpolitical City: In Search of a Democratic Politics of Environmental Production. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33(3): 601–20.

Taylor, M. 2014. 'Being Useful' after the Ivory Tower: Combining Research and Activism with the Brixton Pound. *Area* 46(3): 305–12.

Taylor, P. J. 1982. A Materialist Framework for Political Geography. In *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* (Vol. 7): 15–34.

Tilly, C. 2003. *The Politics of Collective Violence*. Cambridge University Press.

Tsutsui, K., C. Whitlinger, and A. Lim. 2012. International Human Rights Law and Social Movements: States' Resistance and Civil Society's Insistence. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 8(1): 367–96.

UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments). 2011. Global Charter-Agenda for Human Rights in the City.

Uitermark, J. 2004. Looking Forward by Looking Back: May Day Protests in London and the Strategic Significance of the Urban. *Antipode* 36(4): 706–27.

Uitermark, J., W. Nicholls, and M. Loopmans. 2012. Cities and Social Movements: Theorizing beyond the Right to the City. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 44(11): 2546–54.

UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe). 1998. Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention).

UK (United Kingdom). Localism Act, 2011.

van den Berg, E., and B. Oomen, 2014. Towards a Decentralization of Human Rights: The Rise of Human Rights Cities. In T. van Lindert and D. Lettinga (eds), The Future of Human Rights in an Urban World: Exploring Opportunities, Threats, and Challenges, pp. 11–16. Amnesty International Netherlands.