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# The Right to the City and Gendered Everyday Life<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This paper discusses new forms of belonging and citizenship in cities in the age of globalization from a gendered and feminist perspective, and connects them to women's everyday lives and to the planning and governance of cities. In doing so, it challenges the Lefebvrian notion of "the right to the city" using a gendered and feminist critique, by arguing that the identification of the right to the city according to this notion pays insufficient attention to patriarchal power relations, and therefore does not produce a relevant standpoint for this discussion. This critique will be developed by looking at women's everyday experiences and their reflections on their feelings of comfort in, and sense of belonging and commitment to, the city in which they live.

Some of the current discussions on citizenship in this era of political and economic restructuring indeed point to the reconstruction of forms of citizenship and belonging. While traditional definitions of citizenship discuss the legal and jurisdictional aspects of the concept, referring mainly to equality, communality and homogeneity as components of the meaning of citizenship, new forms of this concept

incorporate normative expressions of belonging which highlight issues of difference, and cultural, ethnic, racial and gender-based diversity.<sup>2</sup> The result is a shift in the discussion from the widely-used conceptualization of citizenship to more complex, sophisticated, and for some less optimistic, interpretations of exclusion, and towards new formations and normative definitions of belonging, particularly on a gendered basis (Kofman, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1997, 2000).

The current literature on citizenship shows how women have been the object of discrimination in numerous cultures and political contexts at all levels and within all sectors, from the private - the home - to the public - the city and the state - in economic, social, welfare-related and political contexts (Yuval-Davis, 1997; McDowell, 1999; Lister, 1997; Young, 1990).

Within this framework, this paper attempts to shed a gendered light over the discourse on citizenship and belonging in the city, rather than the state. In particular, it looks at the Lefebvrian idea of 'citadenship,' that is, the right to the city. This idea connects the everyday life of the individual to local governance activities and, as argued in this paper, is blind to the



effects of gendered power relations on the fulfilment of women's right to the city. The paper demonstrates how, in fact, the abuse of the right to the city has become a daily experience for many women, as is expressed in their narratives.

The paper begins with a brief contextualization of the notion of the right to the city within the discourse on new forms of citizenship. It then analyzes the right to the gendered use of the city, by revealing the tight links between the discussion on the right to use public spaces – the city – and the right to use private space – the home. This analysis is followed by a discussion of everyday belonging and gendered practices, gendered exclusions from the right to the city resulting from issues of fear and safety, and the practices of 'sacredization' of public spaces.

The analysis in this paper is based on research carried out between 1999 and 2002, in the course of which residents of London and Jerusalem<sup>3</sup> were interviewed about their everyday experiences as they relate to comfort, belonging and commitment, as three elements which together comprise quality of life. They presented their interpretations of these three components with regard to the various scales which form part of their daily environment: home, building, street, neighbourhood, city centre, city, and urban parks (Fenster, 2004).

### **Citizenship and Belonging in the Era of Globalization**

As Purcell notes, radical reconstructions of formal citizenship point to three main changes in its formation (Purcell, 2003). The first is a

*rescaling of citizenship*, whereby the former hegemony of the national scale is weakened by the creation of other scales of reference.<sup>4</sup> The second change involves a *reterritorialization of citizenship* so that the tight link between the nation state's territorial sovereignty and political loyalty to the nation state is called into question. Such a situation follows from a redistribution of authority to the local – to the city. The third change entails a *reorientation of citizenship* far away from the nation as the predominant political community and from citizens as homogenous entities. Here the notion of differentiated citizenship introduced by Iris Marion Young (1998), or the multi-layered citizenship introduced by Nira Yuval-Davis (2000), replace the ideal of universal citizenship according to the liberal democratic approach. As Purcell argues (2003), this reorientation of citizenship leads to a proliferation of identities and loyalties to multiple political communities.

One of the alternative voices in the growing discourse on traditional and legal forms of citizenship is the normative notion of "the right to the city" developed by Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1991 a, b; Kofman and Labas, 1996). Lefebvre's right to the city constitutes a radical rethinking of the purpose, definition and content of belonging to a political community. Lefebvre does not define belonging to a political community using the terminology of formal legal citizenship status, but grounds the right to the city in a normative definition based on *inhabitation*. Those who inhabit the city have a right to the city. The right to the city is earned by living in the city, and belongs to the urban dweller, whether citizen or stranger.



Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city evolves within it two main further rights (Purcell, 2003):

- *The right to appropriate* urban space in the sense of the right to use: the right of inhabitants to 'full and complete use' of urban space in their everyday lives. It is the right to live in, play in, work in, represent, characterize and occupy urban space in a particular city.
- *The right to participation*: the right of inhabitants to take a central role in decision-making processes surrounding the production of urban space at any scale, be it the state, capital, or any other "actor" which partakes in the production of urban space.<sup>5</sup>

The specific rights to appropriate and to participate are earned by meeting particular responsibilities and obligations, through which each person helps to create the city as an artwork by performing one's everyday life in urban spaces.<sup>6</sup> This perspective expands the discussion on citizenship and views citizenship as a 'spatial strategy,' as a spatial process whereby identities, boundaries and formations of belonging are fixed and then deconstructed (Secor, 2004).

Within this conceptual framework, the first question that comes to one's mind is to what extent this notion of the right to the city is sensitive to issues of identity difference. Lefebvre indeed includes the right to difference as a right which complements the right to the city (Dikec, 2001). In this he relates to, "the right not to be classified forcibly into categories which have been determined by the necessarily homogenizing powers" (1976, in Dikec, 2001: 35). However, as Dikec notes, Lefebvre's

emphasis is on the 'be' of the right to be different rather than the 'different' itself. As such, his definition does not relate to the notions of power and control, which are identity and gender-related. Therefore, it does not challenge gendered power relations as one of the dominant factors affecting the potential to realize the right to use the city, and the right to participate in urban life. The gendered aspect is not the only aspect absent from Lefebvre's model. Other identity-related issues and their affect on the fulfillment of the right to the city also seem to be missing (Mitchell, 2003).<sup>7</sup>

### **The Right to Gendered Use of the City – The Private and Public in Lefebvre's Theory**

A large amount of work has been dedicated to different definitions and perspectives of the 'private' and the 'public': their cultural orientation (Charlesworth, 1994; Fenster, 1999b); their associations (at least the public space) with the political sphere (Cook, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997); their roots in Western liberal thought and different forms of patriarchy (Pateman, 1988, 1989); and their feminist perspectives. In this context, Lefebvre's right to the city clearly refers to the public – to the use of public spaces, those which create the *oeuvre* – a creative product of and context for the everyday lives of its inhabitants. However, the *oeuvre*, the 'public,' is perceived by some feminist critics as the domain of the white, upper-middle class heterosexual male. This means that women in cities, both Western and non-Western, simply cannot use public spaces such as streets and parks, especially when alone



(Massey, 1994), and in some cultures cannot wander around in them at all (Fenster, 1999a). Women belong to the 'private' sphere.

However, what women's narratives uncover is that their right to use is denied even in the 'private.' This means that we must look at the right to use from both private and public perspectives in order to fully understand the roots of the abuse of the right to use. Therefore, the discussion in this paper on the right to use public spaces and the right to participate in decision-making must begin at the level of the home. As the narratives below show, in spite of the idealized notion of the 'home,' the 'private' - the women's space, the space of stability, reliability and authenticity, the nostalgia for something lost which is female (Massey, 1994) - home can be a contested space for women, a space of abuse of the rights to use and to participate. Two narratives follow which exemplify how the rights to use and participate at the level of the home are abused when women talk about their feelings of comfort or discomfort:

I feel very uncomfortable and like I don't belong to the home because I live with my partner and he has his own needs and his own tastes, which are different from mine. The way the house is arranged is not exactly how I would have arranged it. It is too neat. I don't like the furniture...it makes me feel less like I belong. Belonging for me means to be in my own space, and that I decide what will be in it. Total control. (Amaliya, 30's, married with one child, Jewish-Israeli (living in London), London, 22 August 1999).

This narrative<sup>8</sup> in fact illustrates the extent to

which the right to use and the right to participate is sometimes abused at the level of the home because of patriarchal domination, which for many women around the world becomes a daily routine. For Amaliya, the order and arrangement of space in her home, which was made without her participation, is what makes her feel a lack of comfort and belonging. This experience perhaps reinforces the feminist critique of the division between the 'private' and the 'public' inherent in Lefebvre's ideas. As feminists argue, these divisions are invoked largely to justify female subordination and exclusion, and to conceal the abuse of human rights at home from the public sphere (Bunch, 1995). By isolating the discussion on the right to the city from the right to the home, Lefebvre creates a rather neutral 'public' domain, which ignores gendered power relations as a dominant factor in the realization of the right to use, and which therefore has no relevance to the reality of women's everyday lives in cities. Obviously, this does not mean that women who experience strong patriarchal control at home also necessarily suffer from restricted use of the city, but it is important to highlight the strong linkages between the 'private' and 'public' when evaluating Lefebvre's notion of the right to the city.

These strong links sometimes find contrasting expressions, as Fatma's narrative shows. She describes a situation of strong patriarchal power relations at the level of the home, which makes her feel less comfortable in and less like she belongs to the home than to the city. For her, as her control within her home is very restricted, the city becomes a liberated space:



## MAKAN

Home – prison! Although in my room I have all I need to ‘get out’ – computer, internet, video, T.V. Cables with 50 channels... I have everything, but this is not enough.

City – freedom, personal freedom, atmosphere, spring.

For Fatma, an unmarried Muslim woman in her 40’s who lives with her mother, home is a place of no rights whatsoever. It is a culturally-constructed space in which she feels constrained by the strong patriarchal control of the extended family and local community, while the city is where she feels liberated, a place where it is easy for her to practice her citizenship as a negotiated process. It is as if the city becomes her ‘private’ or ‘intimate’ space, where she is able to be herself. “These cities,” writes Elizabeth Wilson in her book, *The Sphinx in the City* (1991), “brought changes to the lives of women. They represented choice” (p. 125). Here she refers to the new colonial cities of West Africa. However, the role of cities in providing choice in women’s lives also seems relevant to women in other places.

The above examples emphasize the necessity of discussing the right to use at the level of the home as part and parcel of the discussion of the right to the city. The narratives suggest that many women, even those who identify themselves as ‘Western’ or part of the majority, experience gendered, controlled, power relations at home. However, some narratives show that those who experience strong patriarchal power control at home may find the city an easier space in which to negotiate their sense of belonging and citizenship. These narratives emphasize the

importance of connecting the private and public domains in the discussion of the right to use.

The dominance of patriarchal power relations in the private domain obviously affects the different ways in which women fulfill their right to the public sphere - to the city. For example, women cannot always leave their homes and engage in activities in the public sphere, such as studying, let alone partake in political activities, which usually take place in the public sphere. Moving onward in the discussion, let us now explore the right to use the city, and the different formations of belonging in the narratives of women.

### Everyday Belonging and Gendered Practices

The right to belong inheres in the right to use the city. In fact, the possibilities of the daily use of urban spaces are what create a sense of belonging to the city. De Certeau’s book, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) connects between these two elements of ‘use’ and ‘belonging.’ Belonging for him is a sentiment, which is built up and grows with time out of everyday life activities and use of spaces. De Certeau terms it ‘a theory of territorialization’ through spatial tactics: “*Space is a practical place*.” Thus, the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers” (p. 117). For de Certeau, everyday corporal activities in the city are part of a process of appropriation and territorialization. He actually defines the process through which a sense of belonging is established by a repeated fulfillment of the right to use. Belonging and attachment are built here upon a base of accumulated



knowledge, memory and intimate corporal experiences of everyday use, mainly by walking. These daily practices of appropriation and re-appropriation of space – ‘tactics’ in de Certeau’s terminology – become the means of encountering and contesting the hegemonic notion of citizenship (Secor, 2004). Citizenship is thus viewed as a technique of spatial organization in which gendered identities, gendered roles and patriarchal powers become markers in negotiations and contestations over rights and formations of belonging in city spaces. For de Certeau, citizenship is a strategy which works to define and lay claim over a bounded space of belonging (de Certeau, 1984; Secor, 2004).<sup>9</sup>

Claim and appropriation of space are a construct of the everyday walking practices as noted by de Certeau, and are part of the strategies used to define and position claims to a specific space. These practices, which are repetitive, engage what Viki Bell (1999) defines as ‘performativity and belonging.’<sup>10</sup>

Using urban spaces for the practice of belonging and the spatial negotiations of citizenship results in the sense of spatial knowledge which women experience in their environment, a spatial knowledge which comes out of claims to and symbolic appropriation of spaces:

I know the street. I live here. I know the building – every stone of it. I know it more and more. A very intimate knowledge. (Susana, 30’s, married with one child, Jewish-Israeli, Jerusalem, 13 July 2000).

I feel connected to Salah al-Din and some places in the Old City. I have memories from my school

days and boarding school in front of the Orient House. I used this area a lot in my life so I feel connected to it (Saida, 30’s, single, Palestinian-Muslim, Jerusalem, 30 December 2000).

The use of space and knowledge of it is an expression of the right to use and the right to appropriate public spaces. Knowledge comes with intimacy of use and a sense of belonging. Everyday practices are expressions of gendered role definitions within households. Women experience their daily practices - their strategies and tactics of formulating their frameworks of belonging - when they fulfill their gendered roles and responsibilities for maintaining the cultural norms of their communities by raising children or cooking. To perform their social and familial duties, they must negotiate their spatial practices of citizenship in order to ensure that they can realize their right to use, so that they can go to work, do their shopping, take their children to educational and health services, and so forth. Here, the right to use public spaces engages ‘fundamental human rights,’ to food, shelter, health and employment: the basic necessities of human survival (Kaplan, 1997). Here, too, the connection between the ‘private’ and the ‘public’ becomes clear. For women to fulfill their duties in the private sphere, they must negotiate their ‘public’ citizenship.

### **Gendered Exclusions from the Right to the City**

The narratives presented so far have exposed everyday practices in which the right to use has been fulfilled to a certain extent within the context of women’s traditional gendered roles.



However, there are other experiences, which indicate the violation of the right to use and belong to the city by patriarchal, cultural and religious powers' construction of public spaces as forbidden.

Legitimized forms of exclusion are usually associated with traditional definitions of citizenship.<sup>11</sup> These definitions are viewed as identity-related, in that they dictate which identities are included within the hegemonic community, and which are excluded. These definitions can have negative effects on women, children, immigrants, people of ethnic and racial minorities, gays and lesbians and sometimes also on elderly people. In this respect, the normative definition of the right to the city seems to be inclusive with regards to marginal groups, such as transnational migrants or people of different identities living in the city, and also to women. However, these inclusive practices are not always fulfilled, precisely because of patriarchal domination at the various levels discussed in this paper: home, building, street, neighborhood, city, and so on. In the previous section we saw how the dominance of patriarchy abuses the right to use at the level of the home. At the level of the city, patriarchal practices are expressed in feelings of fear and safety, and in gendered exclusions from public spaces, in accordance with religious and cultural norms. Both practices create 'forbidden' spaces for women and limit their right to the city.

### 1. Fear and Safety

Fear of using public spaces, especially the street, public transportation and urban parks, is what prevents many women from fulfilling their right

to the city (Valentine, 1998; Pain, 1991; Madge, 1997).<sup>12</sup> Fear and safety can be seen as a social as well as a spatial issue connected in many cases to the design of urban spaces:

The avenue in my street is scary because there is only one exit to it – you can't leave it from everywhere. And there are benches where weird 'creatures' can sit and molest you and you feel trapped... so it is not so pleasant... if you get into the avenue you are lost... it is really male-planned – 'they' did it because of the transportation, but it prevents me from walking in the avenue. (Rebecca, 30's, married, Jewish-Israeli, Jerusalem, 3 February 2000).

Rebecca expresses an experience common to many women when their daily use of the city is disrupted because urban spaces are designed in such a way that they become a 'trap' for women, unpleasant and thus unused. They become a 'planned trap.' That is, planners created or designed those spaces without paying sufficient attention to gendered sensitivities, and again created unused spaces in the city. Here women voluntarily restrict their mobility and movement, and reduce their right to use. Resisting these male spatial constructions of space can be part of women's negotiations over the expansion of their use of public spaces.

Urban parks have the same association. Some women perceive parks as 'hostile male areas': "They are 'conquered' areas. I feel angry that I can't use them." (Aziza, 30's, single, Palestinian citizen of Israel, Jerusalem, 7 August 2000). What Aziza expresses here is mainly a sense of exclusion from public spaces because of fear and lack of safety, but perhaps she is also



expressing her anger at the misuse of public spaces in a way that prevents her from using them, because they are controlled and dominated by men. It seems that fear is a feeling which transforms urban parks into forbidden spaces after a certain time of day. Most women in both Jerusalem and London avoid using this space at night. Indeed, other research (Madge, 1997) shows that fear of urban parks, especially at night, is the main common denominator in their lack of use, not by women but also by men.

What, then, are safe spaces? These are the spaces which allow for practices of citizenship and the fulfillment of the right to use. Aziza's narrative illustrates the characteristics of such areas:

I feel most comfortable in this neighborhood because it is the most beautiful place in the city of Jerusalem. I am a person of constraints: I am a woman, Palestinian, alone, [this neighborhood is like] a microcosm – it reminds me of London; a variety of people... in such places I bloom, like a fish in the water, this is my sea. I feel very protected because this neighborhood is on the border between West and East Jerusalem and it is the ideal place for me. I lived once in Rehavia [a Jewish neighborhood] and felt suffocated. From here I can easily get to the Old City. (Aziza, 7 August 2000).

What Aziza expresses here is precisely what is incorporated in the notion of the right to the city. For her, a safe space is an urban space, which allows her to live as an anonymous person. This is a space which allows her to negotiate her rights as a citizen. As a single

Palestinian woman, she acknowledges the constraints which exist for women in her culture, and also for people of her nationality in the current political situation of the occupation. The right to the city is therefore fulfilled when the right to difference on the basis of nationality is also fulfilled, and people of different ethnicities, nationalities and gender identities can share and use the same urban spaces.

## 2. 'Sacredization' and Gendered Exclusion as a Result of Religious & Cultural Norms

The second example of gendered exclusions in the city is expressed through the cultural and religious norms of the body and its representations. The 'cultural guards' of society, i.e., men and elderly women, dictate the boundaries of sacred spaces and privatize them so that only those who follow restrictive rules of clothing can use them (Fenster, 1999a). Such symbolic spaces are often the symbol of a particular national collectivity, its roots and spirits (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Therefore, women's spatial mobility is very much dictated, if not controlled, by these cultural-symbolic meanings of space. In this way, religious and cultural norms create 'spaces of belonging and dis-belonging,' which then become, for example, forbidden and permitted spaces for women in certain cultures, and certainly have their effects on practices of 'the right to use' as expressions of citizenship (Fenster, 1998, 1999b).

In 1999, I wrote about the cultural construction of space of Arab Bedouin women living in the Negev [Naqab], in the south of Israel (Fenster, 1999b, c). There I mentioned





the construction of the public/private dichotomy as forbidden/permitted cultural constructs of space, which become restrictions on Arab Bedouin women's movement within their towns. The narratives of women living in Jerusalem and London reveal that these terminologies are relevant not only for Arab Bedouin women, but also for women in other cities around the world. In Jerusalem, for example, most women I talked to, both Jewish and Palestinian, mentioned the ultra-orthodox Mea Shearim neighborhood as an area they associate with discomfort, because they have to dress according to certain cultural codes. They therefore avoid walking in this area because of the sense of threat they feel there. (Fenster, 2004).

### Conclusions

This paper exposes the multi-layered nature of the everyday gendered belonging and citizenship entailed in the Lefebvrian right to the city, and presents a feminist critique of this notion. The basic premise of the paper is that citizenship and belonging should be seen as spatial dynamic processes, and not as static definitions which are articulated in women's everyday lives and identities.

The paper highlights the extent to which the right to the city, that is, the right to use and the right to participate, are violated because of gendered power relations. These violations are expressed through women's daily lives in Jerusalem and London when they talk about their sense of comfort in, belonging and commitment to their cities.

To conclude, "the right to the gendered city"

means that evaluations of the right to use and the right to participate must be included in any serious discussion of patriarchal power relations, both in the private and the public spheres, as well as of the extent to which these power relations harm the realization of the right to the city for women, people of ethnic and racial minorities, etc. Such a discussion is missing from Lefebvre's current conceptualization of the right to the city, an omission which makes this concept rather utopian.

### Notes

- 1 An elaborated version of this paper entitled, "Identity Issues & Local Governance: Women's Everyday Life in the City" appears in *Social Identities*, 11(1) (2005), pp. 23-39.
- 2 Nevertheless, one of the most widely-used interpretations of citizenship remains the one Marshall defined (1950, 1975, 1981) as "full membership in a community", encompassing civil, political and social rights. Critiques of this definition have based their arguments on current political and social crises, wherein the exercise of the power of the nation state is challenged.
- 3 The reason for the selection of these two cities is that they reflect contrasting images and symbolisms. Jerusalem is a home to people of diverse identities, especially in light of its image as one of the holiest cities in the world; a place of symbolism for Muslims, Christians and Jews. Jerusalem is also a city associated with rigidity, perhaps fanaticism, strict rules and boundaries, which sometimes find their expressions in spaces of sacred belonging. These spaces sometimes exclude women (B'Tselem, 1995; Bollens, 2000; Cheshin, Hutman & Melamed, 1999; Romann & Weingrod 1991; Fenster (forthcoming). London is a city famous for the impacts which globalization has had on it, and for its cosmopolitanism, openness, and tolerance, but also for negative and depressing connotations, especially for non-English people (Fainstein, 1994; Forman, 1989; Jacobs, 1996; Pile, 1996; Raban, 1974; Thornley, 1992). Analyzing the narratives of women living in these two cities helps to expose the multi-layered nature of gendered belonging, which is constructed through daily urban practices.
- 4 This change works in two directions: either *upscaling*, including EU citizenship, which results in new forms of cosmopolitan citizenship and global democracy, or *downscaling* citizenship, which refers to shifts to subnational scales, such as municipalities, neighborhoods, regions, or districts, particularly in cosmopolitan cities.
- 5 As Dikec (2001) points out, the right to participation entails



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- the involvement of inhabitants in institutionalized control over urban life including participation in the political life, management, and administration of the city.
- 6 For Lefebvre, the city should be thought of as a work of art. The artist is the collective routines of daily life of urban dwellers and inhabitants. The city is a creative product of and context for the everyday lives of its inhabitants.
  - 7 Mitchell (2003), for example, examined how homeless people were excluded from using public spaces through their regulation in such a way that aesthetics are elevated above people's survival needs. Anti-homeless laws, he argues, undermine the very right to the city. This example again demonstrates the sometimes opposed and contradictory meanings of citizenship, and the extent to which new formations of belonging can be identified when expanding definitions of citizenship.
  - 8 Due to limitations of space, only a few narratives are presented as examples in this paper. For an elaborated analysis, see Fenster, 2004.
  - 9 Examples of such practices are the different uses of public spaces, mainly urban parks, by individuals and groups, which occur as part of casual daily encounters between people or groups: individuals wish to appropriate sections of public settings in order to achieve intimacy or anonymity, or for social gatherings. These appropriations are mostly temporary, but even temporal appropriations are sometimes negotiations over the rights to belong, to be part of a community, and to be visible (Fenster, 2004).
  - 10 Performativity is the replication and repetition of certain performances, which are associated with the ritualistic practices through which communities colonize various territories. These performances are in fact the realization of the right to use in certain spaces, and through them a certain attachment and belonging to a place is developed (Leach, 2002).
  - 11 Many critics from both the left and right recognize that citizenship is by definition about exclusion rather than inclusion for many people (McDowell, 1999).
  - 12 Fear of harassment in public spaces cuts across women's everyday life experiences in both London and Jerusalem. It also cuts across other identities, such as nationality, marital status, age, sexual preference, etc.

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