

# Un-civil society: the politics of the 'informal people'

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## Introduction

In the years between 1976 and the early 1990s a series of popular activities took place in Iran's large cities which did not receive sufficient attention from scholars primarily because they were drowned out by the extraordinary big bang of the Revolution.<sup>1</sup> Their importance was dismissed in part because they seemed insignificant when compared with the Revolution, that universal image of social change *par excellence*, and in part because they seemed to be ordinary practices of everyday life. Indeed, the origin of these activities goes back decades earlier, but it is only in the late 1980s and early 1990s that their political consequences began to surface.

Since the 1950s hundreds of thousands of poor families have been part of a long and steady migration from Iran's villages and small towns to its big cities, some seeking to improve their lives, some simply trying to survive. Many of them settled quietly, individually or more often with their kin members, on unused urban lands or/and cheap purchased plots largely on the margin of urban centres. To escape from dealing with private landlords, unaffordable rent and overcrowding, they put up their shelters in illegally established sites with their own hands or with the help of relatives. Then they began to consolidate their informal settlements by bribing bureaucrats and bringing in urban amenities. By the eve of the Islamic Revolution the number of these communities in Tehran alone had reached 50. The actors had become a counter force, without intending to be so.

The advent of the Islamic Revolution offered the disenfranchised a freer hand to make further advances. At the time when the revolutionaries were marching in the streets of big cities, the very poor were busy extending their hold over their communities by bringing more urban land under (mal-)development. Likewise in the immediate post-revolutionary period, many poor families took advantage of the collapse of police control to take over hundreds of vacant homes and half-finished apartment blocks, refurbishing them as their own properties.

As the option of home-squatting was limited, land take-over and illegal construction accelerated, despite the police crackdown. This contributed to a spectacular growth of both large and small cities in the years following the revolution. What made these men and women a collective force was a way of

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life which engendered common interests and the need to defend them. The squatters got together and demanded electricity and running water; when they were refused or encountered delays, they resorted to do-it-yourself mechanisms of acquiring them illegally. They established roads, opened clinics and stores, constructed mosques and libraries, and organised refuse collection. They further set up associations and community networks, and participated in local consumer cooperatives. A new and a more autonomous way of living, functioning and organising the community was in the making.

Silent encroachment of a similar type included the domain of work. The unemployed poor, alongside middle-class jobless, resorted initially to an impressive collective action to demand work, maintenance and compensation. They were involved in a movement quite unique in the context of Third World politics. Although the unemployed movement brought some results to a number of factory and office workers, a large majority remained jobless. Having exhausted collective action, the unemployed poor turned to family, kin and friends for support. But many more poured into the streets of big cities to establish autonomous subsistence activities, engaging in street-vending, peddling, street services and industries. They put up stalls, drove pushcarts, set up kiosks. Business sites were lit by connecting wires to the main electrical poles. Their collective operation converted the street sidewalks into vibrant and colorful shopping places. However, the authorities could hardly tolerate such a cheerful and secular counter-culture, such an active use of urban space, and thus waged a protracted war of attrition against the street vendors. Many shopkeepers whose opportunity costs and favourable business environment had been appropriated by the pavement vendors joined the authorities in their clampdown. Confrontation between the vendors and the state/shopkeepers exemplifies a protracted instance of street politics in the Islamic Republic, to which I shall return in more detail later.

The kinds of practices described above are not extraordinary. They occur in many urban centres of the developing world on a daily basis. In the Middle East, Cairo contains well over 100 'spontaneous' communities, or *manatiq al-ashwa'yya*, housing over seven million people who have subdivided agricultural lands, putting up their shelters unlawfully. The rural migrants and slum dwellers, on the other hand, have quietly claimed cemeteries, roof tops and the state/public land on the outskirts of the city, creating largely autonomous communities.<sup>2</sup> By their sheer perseverance, millions of slum dwellers force the authorities to extend living amenities to their neighbourhoods by otherwise tapping them illegally.<sup>3</sup> For instance, illegal use of running water alone in the Egyptian city of Alexandria costs an average US\$3 million each year.<sup>4</sup> The street vendors have taken over many public thoroughfares to conduct their business. Thousands of Egyptian poor subsist on tips from parking private cars in the streets, which they control and organise in such a way as to create maximum parking space. This, in the authorities' eyes, has caused major urban 'disorder' in the country. The government policy of halting such practices has largely failed,<sup>5</sup> as the poor have tended to respond by on-the-spot resistance, legal battles or simply by quiet non-compliance. Accounts from Maidan El-'Ataba, Sayyeda Zeynab, Boulaq El-Dakrour, Suq El-Gom'a in Imbaba, and the forceful relo-

cation of El-Ezbakia booksellers attest to only a few instances of street politics in this city.<sup>6</sup>

The same sort of phenomenon occurs in the Asian setting. In South Korean cities, for example, almost anyone can easily set up a pushcart on a vacant street area, 'but once a spot is taken and business established, it is virtually owned by the vendors'. In these settings, 'tax collections are nil, and regulating business practices is almost impossible. Louis Vuitton's Pusan Outlet could only stop a pushcart vendor from selling counterfeits of its bags in front of the shop by purchasing the spot. Nike International and Ralph Lauren have had similar problems'.<sup>7</sup>

Latin American cases are well documented.<sup>8</sup> In the Chilean city of Santiago during the mid-1980s, for example, as many as 200 000 poor families were using 'clandestine installations' of electricity and running water in the mid 1980s. Police and military vehicles drove through popular neighbourhoods to catch the offenders. In response the residents had to 'unhook at dawn and hook up again after the last patrol', as one settler put it.<sup>9</sup> Of those who had legal installations, some 200 000 had not paid for electricity and 270 000 for water bills.<sup>10</sup> 'Basismo' is the term which signifies the recent upsurge of such grassroots activities in Latin America—with their emphasis on community and local democracy, and distrust of formal and large-scale bureaucracy.<sup>11</sup> In a similar vein, in South Africa over 20% of the urban population live in shacks and shanty-towns. Many poor families have refused to pay for urban services. *Masakhane*, or the 'culture-of-paying' campaign organised by the government and business community after the first multiracial election in 1994, represents an attempt to recover these massive public appropriations by the poor.<sup>12</sup>

Far from being destructive behaviour by the 'lumpen proletariat' or 'dangerous classes',<sup>13</sup> these practices represent natural and logical ways in which the disenfranchised survive hardships and improve their lives. What is significant about these activities, and thus interests us here, is precisely their seemingly mundane, ordinary and daily nature. How can one account for such daily practices? What values can one attach to such exercises? How do we explain the politics of these everyday lives?

Precisely because of this largely silent and free-form mobilisation, the current focus on the notion of 'civil society' tends to belittle or totally ignore the vast arrays of often uninstitutionalised and hybrid social activities which have dominated urban politics in many developing countries. Clearly, there is more than one single conceptualisation of 'civil society'. Existing literature reveals the tremendous diversity of perceptions not only between the classical and contemporary variants, but also within the latter. Yet all seem to agree that associational life constitutes an integral element of 'civil society', and that the latter is essentially privileged over other forms of social expression.<sup>14</sup> Without intending to downgrade the value of 'civility', my point is that the reductionism of the debates on 'civil society' excludes and even scorns modes of struggles and expression which, in some societies like those in the Middle East, are more extensive and effective than conventional institutions outside the state.

My aim in this article is to examine the dynamics of this free-form activism, which tends to characterise the politics of the 'informal people', the disenfran-

chised. Adopting a relative distance from both James Scott and his critiques, I want to show how these ordinary and often quiet practices by the ordinary and often silent people engender significant social changes.

### Current debates

At first glance, the ordinary practices I have described above conjure up James Scott's 'everyday forms of peasant resistance'. Scott, Colburn and others have highlighted the ability of poor people to resist 'oppressors' by such actions as footdragging, dissimulation, false compliance, slander, arson, sabotage and so forth. Peasants are said to act predominantly individually and discretely, but given repressive political conditions, this adopted strategy answers their needs.<sup>15</sup>

The 'everyday forms of resistance' perspective has undoubtedly contributed to recovering the Third World poor from 'passivity', 'fatalism' and 'hopelessness'—essentialist features of the 'culture of poverty' with its emphasis on identifying the 'marginal man' as a 'cultural type'.<sup>16</sup> Scott even transcends the 'survival strategies' model, which limits activities of the poor to mere survival within the daily context often at the cost of others or themselves.<sup>17</sup> As Escobar suggests, the language of 'survival strategies' may contribute to maintaining the image of the poor as victims.<sup>18</sup> Thus, to counter unemployment or price increases, they are often said to resort to theft, begging, prostitution or the reorientation of their consumption patterns.

Scott's work is also important from a different angle. Until recently the prevailing concern of scholars, from both the left and right, focused on the poor's 'political threat' to the existing order; they were preoccupied with the question of whether the poor constituted a destabilising force,<sup>19</sup> thus ignoring the dynamics of their micro-existence and everyday politics. On the other hand, many of these authors still view the politics of the poor in terms of a revolutionary/passive dichotomy.<sup>20</sup> Such a paradigm surely limits the possibility of looking upon the matter in a different light—I do not mean taking a centrist approach,<sup>21</sup> but an entirely new perspective. 'Everyday forms of resistance' certainly contributes to a shift in terms of debate.<sup>22</sup>

Scott's 'Brechtian mode of class struggle and resistance' is, however, inadequate to account for the dynamics of the activities of the urban poor in the Third World. While it is undeniable that concerns of survival constitute the main preoccupations of the urban disenfranchised, they also strive to move forward and improve their lives, however calmly and quietly. Their struggles are not merely defensive, an 'everyday resistance' against the encroachments of the 'superordinate' groups; nor are they simply hidden, quiet and often individualistic. In my understanding, the struggles of the urban poor are also surreptitiously *offensive*, that is, disenfranchised groups place a great deal of restraint upon the privileges of the dominant groups, allocating segments of their life chances (including capital, social goods, opportunity, autonomy and thus power) to themselves. This tends to involve them in a *collective*, open and highly audible campaign. Moreover, in addition to seeking concessions from the state, their individual and quiet struggles, predominantly by direct action, also seek steady and significant changes in their own lives, thus going beyond 'marginally



affect[ing] the various forms of exploitations which peasants confront'.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, Scott's subscription to rational choice theory overlooks the complexity of motives behind this type of struggle, where moral elements are mixed with rational calculations.

Can these undertakings then be analysed in terms of urban 'social movements'—understood as organised and territorially based movements of the Third World urban poor who strive for 'social transformation' (according to Castells),<sup>24</sup> 'emancipation' (Schuurman and van Naerssen)<sup>25</sup> or an alternative to the tyranny of modernity (in Friedmann's perception<sup>26</sup>)? Similarities seem to be quite striking: they are both urban, struggling for analogous aims such as housing, community building, collective consumption, official recognition of their gains, and so forth. Yet they differ from one another in many respects. First, whereas social movements in general represent a long-lasting and more-or-less structured collective action aiming at social change, the activities which I describe here carry strong elements of spontaneity, individualism, and inter-group competition, among other features. They place special emphasis, moreover, on action over meaning, or, in Castells terms, 'urban meaning'.

In addition, while these ordinary practices resemble both the 'new' and 'archaic' social movements—in terms of possessing vague or non-existent leadership, incoherent or diverse ideologies, with a loose or total lack of a structured organisation—they nevertheless differ significantly from both. The 'primitive' social movements explored by Eric Hobsbawm were often 'generated' or 'mobilised' by distinct charismatic leaders,<sup>27</sup> whereas the type of activism I describe are mostly, but not entirely, self-generating. On the other hand, while the 'new' social movements are said to focus largely on identity and meaning,<sup>28</sup> our contenders seem to concern themselves primarily with action. Therefore, in a metaphorical sense, these everyday encroachments may be seen as representing a 'movement in itself', becoming a social movement *per se* only if and when the actors become conscious of their doings by articulating their aims, methods and justifications. However, should they come to assume this feature, they lose their quiet encroachment character. In other words, these desperate everyday practices exhibit distinct undertakings with their own particular logic and dynamics.

### The quiet encroachment of the ordinary

The type of struggles I describe here may best be characterised as the 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary'—a silent, patient, protracted, and pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive hardships and better their lives. They are marked by quiet, atomised and prolonged mobilisation with episodic collective action—an open and fleeting struggle without clear leadership, ideology or structured organisation, one which makes significant gains for the actors, eventually placing them as a counterpoint *vis-à-vis* the state. By initiating gradual 'molecular' changes, the poor in the long run 'progressively modify the pre-existing composition of forces, and hence become the matrix of new changes'.<sup>29</sup>

But unlike Gramsci's 'passive revolution[aries]', the disenfranchised groups

carry out their activities not as conscious political acts; rather they are driven by the force of necessity—the necessity to survive and live a dignified life. Thus the notion of ‘necessity’ and a quest for dignity justify their struggles as ‘moral’, ‘natural’ and ‘logical’ ways to survive and advance their lives.<sup>30</sup> Gramsci’s ‘passive revolution’ ultimately targets state power. I wish to emphasise, however, that quiet encroachment, although it might indirectly follow generalised political implications, implies changes which the actors consider significant in themselves without intending necessarily to undermine political authority. Yet these simple and everyday practices are bound to shift into the realm of politics. The participants engage in collective action, and see their doings and themselves as ‘political’, only when confronted by those who threaten their gains. Hence one key attribute of these movements is that, while advances are made quietly, individually and gradually, the defence of these gains is always collective and audible.

Thousands of men and women embark upon long and painful migratory journeys, scattering in remote and alien environs, acquiring work, shelter, land and living amenities. Driven by the force of ‘necessity’ (economic hardship, war, or natural disaster) they set out individually and without much clamour, often slowly and unnoticeably, as persevering as the movements of turtles in a remote colony. They often deliberately avoid collective effort, large-scale operations, commotion and publicity. At times, squatters, for instance, prevent others from joining them in specific areas; and vendors discourage their counterparts from settling in the same vicinity. Many even hesitate to share information about their strategies with similar groups. Yet, as these seemingly desperate individuals and families pursue similar paths, their sheer cumulative numbers transform them into a potential social force. This complex mixture of individual and collective action results from both the social position of the actors and, to use Tarrow’s terms, the ‘structure of opportunities’ available for them.<sup>31</sup>

The most common agents involved in quiet encroachment movements encompass a variety of largely ‘floating’ social clusters—migrants, refugees, unemployed, squatters, street vendors and other marginalised groups. Rural migrants encroach on cities and their amenities, refugees and international migrants on host states and their provisions, squatters on public and private lands or ready-made homes, and street vendors on businesses’ opportunity costs, as well as on public space in both its physical and social facets—street pavements, intersections, public parks and the like. What brings these groups into this mode of struggle is, first, the initial urge for an alternative mode of life, requiring them to change jobs, places and priorities, and, second, the lack of an institutional mechanism through which they can collectively express their grievances and resolve their problems.

This latter point partially explains why the struggles of these subaltern groups often take the form of a silent repertoire of individual direct action, rather than collective demand-making protests. Unlike groups such as organized workers or students, the unemployed, emigrants, refugees, or street vendors are groups in flux; they are the structurally atomised individuals who operate outside the formal institutions of factories, schools, and associations. They therefore lack institutional capacities to exert pressure, since they lack an organizational power

of disruption—disruption, in the sense of 'the withdrawal of crucial contribution on which others depend', and one which is therefore 'a natural resource for exerting power over others'.<sup>32</sup> They may, of course, participate in street demonstrations or riots, but only when these methods enjoy a reasonable degree of legitimacy,<sup>33</sup> and when they are mobilised by outside leaders. Under exceptional circumstances, land take-overs may be led by leftwing groups; or the unemployed and street vendors may be invited to form unions. This happens mainly in relatively democratic periods, when political parties engaged in competition inevitably attempt to mobilise the poor in exchange for electoral support. This is how the unemployed were organised in post-revolutionary Iran, self-employed women in Bombay, housewives in postwar Britain and street vendors in Lima.<sup>34</sup> However, in the absence of electoral freedoms, the contenders tend to remain institutionally powerless since, more often than not, mobilisation for collective demand making is forcibly repressed in the developing countries where these struggles often take place.<sup>35</sup> However, this initial lack of institutional power is compensated for by the poor's versatility in taking 'direct action', be it collective or individual, precipitous or piecemeal, which, in the long run, might evolve into a more self-regulating/autonomous local life.

Consequently, in place of *protest* or publicity, these groups move directly to fulfil their needs by themselves, albeit individually and discretely. In short, theirs is *not* a politics of protest, but of redress and struggle for immediate outcomes largely through individual direct action.

### The aims

What do these men and women aim for? They seem to pursue two major goals. The first is the *redistribution of social goods* and opportunities in the form of the (unlawful and direct) acquisition of collective consumption (land, shelter, piped water, electricity, roads), public space (street pavements, intersections, street parking places), opportunities (favourable business conditions, locations and labels), and other life chances essential for survival and minimal living standards.

The other goal is attaining *autonomy*, both cultural and political, from the regulations, institutions and discipline imposed by the state. The disenfranchised express a deep desire to live an informal life, to run their own affairs without involving the authorities or other modern formal institutions. This is not to suggest that tradition guides their lives, but rather to insist that modern institutions, in one sense, reproduce people's 'traditional' relations as solutions to the problems that these institutions engender. In many 'informal' communities in Third World cities, people rely on their own local and 'traditional' norms during their daily activities, whether it be establishing contracts (eg marriage), organising their locality, or resolving local disputes. In a way they are compelled to exert control over their working lives, regulating their time and coordinating their space. They grow weary of the formal procedures governing their time, obligations and commitments; they are reluctant to undertake discipline imposed, for instance, in paying taxes and bills, appearing in public in particular ways, and most broadly in the practice of everyday life.<sup>36</sup>

This distrust of modern state and institutions has aroused two contrasting reactions. Some sociologists, notably followers of the Chicago school and politicians, dismiss the urban poor as 'marginals', outlaws and criminals, and their communities as bastions of 'rural parochialism' and 'traditionalism'. This 'deviance', they suggest, can be corrected only by integrating these people back into the state and society; in short, by 'modernising' them.<sup>37</sup> Others, notably Janice Perlman and Castells, have vehemently attacked the premise of 'marginality', arguing that, far from being marginal, these people are all well integrated.<sup>38</sup> Despite their differences, these rival perspectives share one important assumption. Both assume that the 'ideal man' is the well adjusted and well integrated 'man', in short, 'modern man'.

The fact is that these men and women are neither 'marginal' (ie essentially traditional and isolated) nor fully integrated. Rather, their poverty and vulnerability drive them to seek autonomy from the state and modern institutions. They tend to refrain from resorting to police and other government offices primarily because of the failure of bureaucracies and 'modern' institutions to deliver for them. These institutions impose the kind of discipline (in terms of regulating their time, behaviour and appearance) which many simply cannot afford or with which they do not wish to comply. Only the very poor may favour integration since, at least in immediate terms, it gives them more than it takes. Otherwise many slum-dwellers and those relocated from shanty-towns, are inclined to live in squatter areas partly because they seem free from the official surveillance and modern social control (for instance, in terms of the ability to communicate easily, appear in public and practise their culture). Whereas the poor tend to reject the constraining facet of modernity, they welcome its liberating dimension. Thus, while the squatters do want to light their homes with electricity, use piped water and watch colour TV, they do not want to pay bills subject to strict bureaucratic regulations; they yearn for flexibility and negotiation. Similarly, street subsistence work, despite its low status, low security and other costs, has the advantage of freeing people from the discipline and control relations of the modern working institutions.<sup>39</sup> Although somewhat romanticised, John Friedman's characterisation of the Brazilian *barrios* as a kind of 'post-modernist' movement points to alternative ways of life the poor tend to pursue. In his view, the *barrios*' emphasis on moral economy, trust, cooperation, production of use-values, local autonomy and self-regulation in a sense challenges modern principles of exchange value, bureaucracy and the state.<sup>40</sup>

Let me make two points clear. The first is that the notions of autonomy and integration in views of both the poor and the state are far from straightforward. They are the subject of contradictory processes, constant redefinition and intense negotiation. Informality is not an essential preference of the urban poor; it serves primarily as an alternative to the constraints of formal structures. Indeed, as the examples above illustrate, many poor people perhaps aspire and practice integrated life, only if they can afford its social and cultural, not to mention economic, costs. Thus, in the early 1990s, the settlers of Islamshahr, an informal community in south Tehran, campaigned for the official integration of their community. Once that was achieved, however, new informal communities began to spring up around that township. Beyond that, just like the poor, the states also



exhibit contradictory stands on autonomy and integration. Most governments tend in practice to promote autonomy as an effort to transfer their responsibilities to their citizens, hence encouraging individual initiative, self-help, NGOs, and so forth. Observers like Gilbert and Ward consider these measures a means of social control.<sup>41</sup> However, they fail to recognise the fact that governments, at the same time, display apprehension about losing political space. It is not uncommon to observe states implementing simultaneously conflicting policies of both promoting and restricting autonomous and informal institutions. Third World urban life is characterised by a combined and continuous processes of informalisation, integration and re-informalisation.

The second point is that the rich and powerful may also desire self-regulation and autonomy from the discipline of the modern organisations. However, in reality, unlike the poor, they mostly benefit from those arrangements; it is the powerful who institute them in the first place. Moreover, unlike the poor, by virtue of possessing resources (knowledge, skill, money and connections), the rich can *afford* to function within such institutions. They are able, for instance, to pay their bills or get to work on time.

The two chief goals of the disenfranchised—redistribution and autonomy—are quite interrelated. The former ensures survival and a better material life; the latter serves not only as an end in itself but also as a means to achieve the objective of the redistribution: Acting autonomously from the state, poor individuals may be able to obtain public goods (illegal land, shelter and so on) that they are unlikely to attain through legal and institutionalised mechanisms, unless they are demanded through a powerful collective mobilisation.

In the quiet encroachments, the struggles to achieve these unlawful goals are hardly planned or articulated. They are seen as natural and moral responses to the urgency of survival and the desire for a dignified life, however defined. In the Middle Eastern culture, the notion of 'necessity'—the necessity of maintaining a 'dignified life'—underlies the poor people's sense of justice. The Persian phrase *chare-ii neest* (there is no other way) and its Arabic equivalent *na'mal eih?* (what else can we do?) articulate moral language of urban politics, responses through which the poor often justify their acts of transgression.<sup>42</sup> This idea of 'dignity' is closely associated with the *public judgement*, with the community or 'friends and foes' determining its meaning. To maintain a dignified life, a family needs to possess certain cultural/material abilities. Preserving *aaberou* or '*ard*' (honour) through generosity, bravery and, more importantly, through securing the *haya* (sexual modesty) of the women in the family mark a few such resources. But the essential components more relevant to our discussion include an 'ability to provide', to 'protect the *hareem*' of the household from public intrusion, and finally the 'ability to conceal' possible failures (*aabirourizi*, or *fadiha*). For a poor head of a household, not only would the failure to provide for his family jeopardise their survival, it would also inflict a blow to his honour. Homelessness, for instance, signifies an ultimate loss in all of these accounts. A dwelling, beyond its function of protecting the household from physical dangers (cold, heat and the like), serves also as a cultural location. By preserving the *hareem*, safeguarding people from moral dangers, it conceals shortcomings and preserves *aaberou* before the public gaze. The rich may also

share similar values, but the poor have a lower capacity to conceal failures, thus making their 'dignified life' more vulnerable.

In this perception of justice informed by necessity, one who has a basic need may and should fulfill it, even if illegally, so long as he does not harm others like himself. The rich can probably afford to lose some of their wealth. When the state begins to challenge these notions, thus violating their codes of justice, the poor, morally outraged, tend to rebel.<sup>43</sup> Yet I must emphasise that this 'moral politics' does not preclude the poor from the *rational* use of any political space in which they can maximise their gains. Bribing officials, alliances with political parties, utilising political rivalries and exploiting governmental or non-governmental associations are all part of the rules of the game.

### Becoming political

If these movements begin without political meaning, and if illegal encroachments are often justified on moral grounds (as a way to survive), then how do they turn into collective/political struggles? So long as the actors carry on with their everyday advances without being confronted seriously by any authority, they treat their doings as ordinary everyday practice. Once their gains are threatened, they become conscious of their actions and the value of their gains, and they defend them collectively and audibly. I describe the logic of transformation from individual to collective action later. Suffice it to state here that the numerous anti-government riots by squatters, street vendors and other marginalised groups point to the centrality of collective resistance among these atomised poor. The struggle of the actors is not about making a gain, but primarily about defending and furthering gains already won. In such conjunctures, the contenders may go so far as to give some structure to their activities, by creating networking, cooperation or initiating more structured organisations. Such organising is aimed at maintaining, consolidating and extending those earlier achievements.

When does the state enter the arena? State opposition usually occurs when the cumulative growth of the encroachers and their doings pass beyond a 'tolerable point'. Depending on the efficiency of the particular state, the availability of alternative solutions, and the resistance of these quiet rebels, states normally tolerate scattered offensives, especially when they have still not become a critical force. The trick for the actors, therefore, is to *appear* limited and tolerable while expanding so much that resistance against them becomes difficult. Indeed, many (squatters, vendors, and car-parkers) try deliberately to halt their spread in certain areas by not allowing their counterparts to join them. Others resort to bribing minor officials or minimising visibility (for instance, squatting in remote areas or vending in less provocative areas). Almost all take advantage of undermined state power at times of crisis (following a revolution, war or economic breakdown) to spread further and entrench their position. In brief, the protagonists exploit the three opportunities—crisis, bribing and invisibility—allowing them to remain tolerable when in fact multiplying.

Once the extent of their expansion and impact is revealed, however, state reaction and crackdown often become inevitable. In most cases, crackdowns fail

because they are usually launched too late, when the encroachers have already spread, become visible and achieved a 'critical mass'. Indeed, the description by most officials of the process as 'cancerous' captures the dynamics of such a movement.<sup>44</sup>

The sources of the conflict between the state and the disenfranchised have to do with the economic and political costs that quiet encroachment imposes on the authorities and the rich. 'Informal' and free-of-charge redistribution of public goods exerts a heavy burden on a state's resources. The rich—real estate owners, merchants and shopkeepers—also lose properties, brands and business opportunities. The alliance of the rich and the state adds a class dimension to the existing political conflict.

Beyond the economic dimension, the poor people's drive for autonomy in everyday life creates a big crack in the domination of the modern state. A fully autonomous life renders states irrelevant. Popular control over contracts, regulation of time, space, cultural activities, working life—in short, self-regulation—reclaims significant political space from the state. Herein lies the inevitability of conflict. 'Street politics'<sup>45</sup> exemplifies the most salient aspect of this conflict, accounting for a key feature in the social life of the disenfranchised.

### Street politics

By 'street politics', I mean a set of conflicts and the attendant implications between a collective populace and the authorities, shaped and expressed episodically in the physical and social space of the 'streets'—from the alleyways to the more visible pavements, public parks or sports areas. The 'street' in this sense serves as the only locus of collective expression for, but by no means limited to, those who structurally lack any institutional setting to express discontent. This group includes squatters, the unemployed, street subsistence workers (eg vendors), members of the underworld (eg beggars, prostitutes), petty thieves and housewives. The term signifies an articulation of discontent by clusters of different social agents without institutions, coherent ideology or evident leadership.

Two key factors transform the 'streets' into an arena of politics. The first follows Foucault's general observation about space as power.<sup>46</sup> It results from the use of public space as a sight of contestation between the populace and the Authority. At one level, what makes street activity political is the active or participative (as opposed to passive) use of public space; thus the use of street pavements, crossroads, urban land, the space for assembly and public expressions of culture all become sites of contestation. These sites increasingly become the domain of the state power which regulates their usage, making them 'orderly'. The state expects users to operate passively according to rules it has set. Any active and participative use challenges the control of the Authority and those social groups which benefit from such order.

This kind of 'street' life and these types of activities are by no means a novelty. They could be seen in 16th–18th century Europe,<sup>47</sup> and until very recently in the urban Middle East.<sup>48</sup> They did not entail 'street politics', however. What makes them political are novel features: unlike in the past, when

local communities enjoyed a great deal of autonomy and self-regulation, now they are under centralised governments which regulate and control the street and local life.<sup>49</sup>

The second element in shaping street politics is the operation of what I have called the *passive network* among the people who use public space. Any collective political act—mobilisation—requires some degree of organisation, communication and networking among actors. For the most part, this is constituted deliberately, either formally or informally. Thus squatters, the unemployed, or immigrants from the same place of origin may establish formal associations with constant communications and regular meetings. Or they may instead develop informal contacts among themselves. Vendors on the same street, for example, may get together on an *ad hoc* basis to discuss their problems or simply chat and socialise. In both formal and informal cases, the participants would have an *active* network among themselves in that they become known to each other, talk, meet and consciously interact with one another. However, contrary to Tilly's perception of an organisation—one with high 'catness' (strong cohesion) and 'netness' (interpersonal communications)<sup>50</sup>—networks need not be active. The 'street' as a public place possesses this intrinsic feature, making it possible for people to mobilise without having an active network. This is carried out through 'passive networks'—the instantaneous communication among atomised individuals which is established by the tacit recognition of their common identity and is mediated through space. A woman who enters a male-dominated party instantly notices another female among the men; vendors in a street notice each other even though they may never speak to each other. Unlike, say, dispersed tax strikers, a passive network exists amongst both the women at the party and vendors in a given locality. The tenants of a council housing unit, illegal immigrants to a country, tax strikers, the women at the male-dominated party, street vendors, or spectators at a football match all represent atomised individuals who, at a certain level, have a similar status and an identity of interests among themselves (see Figure 2). For Bourdieu, each of the above signifies a 'theoretical group', becoming 'real' only when they are 'represented'.<sup>51</sup> But how? This is not explored. In his formulation, a fundamental element of groupness—network—is either ignored or taken for granted.

The fact is that these 'juxtaposed individuals' can potentially act together. But acting together requires a medium or network to establish communication. Illegal immigrants or tax strikers cannot resist state action unless they begin to organise themselves deliberately, since no medium like space brings them together (see Figure 3). Tenants, spectators, vendors, squatters and the women described above, even though they do not know each other, may act collectively because common space makes it possible for them to recognise their common interests and identity (see Figure 4)—that is, to develop a passive network.

What mediates between a passive network and action is common threat. Once these atomised individuals are confronted by a threat to their gains, their passive network spontaneously turns into an active network and collective action. Thus the threat of eviction brings many squatters together immediately, even if they do not know each other. Likewise, the supporters of rival teams in a football match often cooperate to confront police in the streets. This is not simply



a	h	m
o	d	x
n	p	b

FIGURE 1 *No network*  
Atomised individuals without a common position.

a	a	a
a	a	a
a	a	a

FIGURE 2 *No network*  
Atomised individuals with a common position.

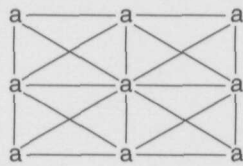


FIGURE 3 *Active network*  
Individuals with similar positions brought together by a deliberate attempt: associations with an active network.

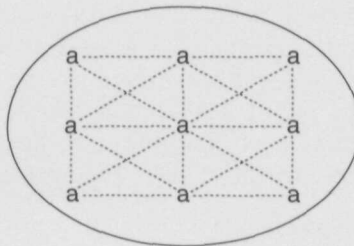


FIGURE 4 *Passive network*  
Possibility of atomised individuals with similar positions brought together through space.

because of psychologically induced or 'irrational' 'crowd action' but to a more sociological fact of interest recognition and *latent communication*.

Already organised individuals may also attempt to *extend* their (passive or active) network to those other than their immediate members. Students, factory workers or women's associations, for instance, who demonstrate in the streets, do so in order to publicise their cause and gain solidarity. The very act of demonstration in public means, in a sense, attempting to establish communication with those who are *unknown* to demonstrators, but who might be subject to similar conditions as themselves; they hope to activate this passive communication to extend collective action.

It has to be stressed that the movement from passive into active network and collective action is never a given. It is subject to the same complexity and contingent upon similar factors as the movement from a consciously organised network into mobilisation.<sup>52</sup> Factors like a legitimacy crisis of the state, division within ruling elites, breakdown in social control and access to resources may all facilitate collective action; and, in turn, the threat of 'repression',<sup>53</sup> inter-group division and the usefulness of temporary compliance are likely to hinder mobilisation. The point here is not that a threat to evict a group of squatters may not necessarily lead to their collective resistance; trade unions may also acquiesce before a threat of lay-off. The point rather is to show how groups of *atomised individuals* without active networks and organisation can and *do* engage, often instantly, in collective action; that is the result of the operation of passive networks among them.

This unplanned, unstructured and instantaneous possibility of group action renders the street as a highly volatile locus of conflict and thus politics. It is the operation of 'passive networks' that lies behind the political 'danger' of the streets—as the streets represent public space *par excellence*. No wonder every unpopular government pays such close attention to controlling them. While states may be able to restrict deliberately organised demonstrations or rallies, they are often incapable of prohibiting street populations from working, driving or walking—in short, from street life. The more open and visible the public place, the broader the operation of passive networks and therefore the wider the possibility of collective action becomes. Passive networks represent an inherent element of street and back-street life; they ensure instant cooperation of the individual actors once they feel a threat to their well-being. In the absence of the concept of 'passive networks', many find it difficult to make sense of the 'surprising', 'unexpected' and spontaneous mass eruptions in urban settings.<sup>54</sup> This dialectic of individual and collective action—the possibility of collective resistance together with the moral justification for individual encroachment—perhaps explains the resilience of the disenfranchised in carrying on their struggle for survival and betterment of their predicaments.

### The making of the quiet encroachment

How universal is the quiet encroachment of the ordinary? And under what conditions is such activism likely to emerge? Quiet encroachment in developing

countries seems to evolve from a combination of structural and cultural factors, rendering it a historically specific phenomenon.

To begin with, the raw material of the movement—the actors—originate largely from the desperate clusters of the urban unemployed, underemployed and other marginalised groups.<sup>55</sup> It seems that natural population increase (primarily resulting from poverty) and especially the classical model of rural–urban migration (resulting from the maldistribution of land, rural unemployment, natural or man-made disasters, urban bias and limited industrial expansion) have been the primary reasons for urban unemployment. Evidence shows that, for the most part, the urban economy is unable to absorb fully the amount of labour created by natural population growth.<sup>56</sup> Thus a large number of relatively educated and first-time job-seekers remains out of work. Overall, urban migration serves as the primary factor. On average, nearly half of the increase in urban population in the Third World has resulted from migration. This rate for both Ghana and Tanzania is 60%, and for Ivory Coast 70%.<sup>57</sup>

Besides this classic scenario, some new developments have in recent years multiplied the size of these groups. A global crisis of populist modernisation in a number of Third World countries since the 1980s, and the collapse of socialist economies since the 1990s, have led to a massive de-institutionalisation, proletarianisation and marginalisation. The alternative strategies—structural adjustment and stabilisation programmes—tend to make a sizable segment of already employed people redundant, without a clear prospect of boosting the economy and creating viable jobs. In the early 1990s, during the transition to a market economy in post-socialist, 'adjusting' Latin American countries and in the Middle East, formal employment fell by between 5% and 15%.<sup>58</sup> In Africa, the number of unemployed grew by 10% or more every year throughout the 1980s, while labour absorption in the formal wage sector kept declining.<sup>59</sup> By the early 1990s the open unemployment in Third World countries had increased dramatically.<sup>60</sup> Thus a large number of the once well-to-do and educated middle classes (government employees and students), public sector workers, as well as segments of the peasantry, have been pushed into the ranks of the urban poor in labour and housing markets.

The state's unwillingness and inability to offer adequate work, protection and urban provisions puts these people in a similar collective position, even if it does not give them a collective identity, as the unemployed, squatters, slum dwellers or street subsistence workers—in short, as potential 'street rebels'. Lack of an institutional setting leaves these men and women to struggle in their atomised formations. Many developing countries seem to have experienced similar processes. What distinguishes the form of mobilisation within these nations has to do with local political cultures and institutions.

The repressive policy of the state renders individual, quiet and hidden mobilisation a more viable strategy than open, collective protest. Under such conditions, collective and open direct action takes place only at exceptional conjunctures, in particular, when states experience crises of legitimacy, such as the revolutionary crisis in Iran during 1979; Egypt after the 1967 defeat; and South Africa after the fall of apartheid in the early 1990s.

However, where some degree of political openness prevails, competition

between political parties provides a breathing ground for the collective action of ordinary people. In order to win electoral and mass support, rival political groupings and patrons inevitably mobilise the poor (as in India, Mexico, Peru, Brazil and Chile in the early 1970s).<sup>61</sup> This is unlikely to happen under autocratic systems where winning votes is not a concern of the political leadership. Quiet encroachment is therefore largely the feature of undemocratic political systems, as well as of cultures where traditional institutions serve as an alternative to civic associations and social movements. This may partially explain why in most Middle Eastern countries, where authoritarian rule dominates, and where family and kinship are pivotal for individuals' support and security, it is largely the strategy of quiet encroachment that seems to prevail,<sup>62</sup> whereas in many Latin American nations, where some tradition and practice of political competition and political patronage operate, mobilisation tends to assume a collective, audible and associational character; urban land invasions, urban poor associations and street trade unionism appear to mark a major feature of urban politics in this region of the world.<sup>63</sup>

States may also contribute to quiet encroachment in another way. This type of movement is likely to grow where both the inefficient state bureaucracy and rigid formal organisations, notably the 'mercantilist' state described by De Soto,<sup>64</sup> predominate, since such institutions tend to encourage people to seek more informal and autonomous living and working conditions. The situation in more efficient and democratic settings is, however, quite different. The more democratic and efficient the state, the less ground for the expansion of highly autonomous movements; for, under such circumstances, the poor tend to become integrated into the state structure and are inclined to play the prevailing games, utilising the existing means and institutions, however limited, to improve their lives.<sup>65</sup>

## Notes

I am grateful to Samir Shahata, Clarisa Bencomo, Sami Zubaida, Farhad Kazemi, Richard Bulliet and Joe Storker for their comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this article. I would also like to acknowledge the Middle East Research Competition (MERC) of the Ford Foundation for its support for a project of which this article is a preliminary result.

<sup>1</sup> This essay draws on the introductory chapter of my forthcoming book, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran, 1977-1990*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> For documentation see Frederic Shorter, 'Cairo's leap forward: people, households and dwelling space', *Cairo Papers in Social Science*, 12(1), 1989, pp 1-111; A Soliman, 'Informal land acquisition and the urban poor in Alexandria', *Third World Planning Review*, 9(1), 1987, pp 21-39; A Soliman, 'Government and squatters in Alexandria: their roles and involvements', *Open House International*, 10(3), 1985, pp 43-49; A Soliman, 'Housing consolidation and the urban poor: the case of Hagar El Nawateyah, Alexandria', *Environment and Urbanization* 4(2), 1992, pp 184-195; G El-Kadi, 'Le Caire: La ville spontanée sous contrôle', *Arabe Monde*, 1 (special issue), 1994; I Tawfiq, 'Discourse analysis of informal housing in Egypt', graduate term paper, Cairo: The American University, Department of Sociology, 1995; and *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 1-7 September 1994.

<sup>3</sup> See N Abdel Taher, 'Social identity and class in a Cairo neighborhood', *Cairo Papers in Social Science*, 9(4), 1986, pp 1-119.

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Alexandria Water Authority, in a conversation with Samir Shahata, May 1995.



- <sup>5</sup> For instance, out of 104 'spontaneous settlements' in Cairo and Giza only six have been relocated. However, as a study suggests, the new state-sponsored settlements have in large part failed to respond to the needs of the inhabitants who, in turn, have persisted in organising their own space. See I Tawfiq, 'Discourse analysis of informal housing in Egypt'; and F Ghannam, 'Relocation, gender and the production of urban space in Cairo', unpublished paper, 1992.
- <sup>6</sup> Largely based upon my own observations; see also *Al-Wafd*, 17 January 1995, p 3; *Al-Wafd*, 9 December 1994; *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 11–17 February, 1993; see also reports by M El-Adly & M Morsy, 'A study of street vendors in Cairo', graduate term paper, Cairo: The American University, Department of Sociology, 1995. H Tadros, M Feteiha & A Hibbard, 'Squatter markets in Cairo', *Cairo Papers in Social Science*, 13(1), 1990, offers a very useful description of vendors' day-to-day activities in Cairo.
- <sup>7</sup> The report appeared in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 June 1992, p 68.
- <sup>8</sup> See, for instance, H De Soto, *The Other Path: The Invisible Revolution in the Third World*, New York: Harper and Row, 1989; J Cross, 'Organization and resistance in the informal economy', unpublished mimio, The American University in Cairo, 1995; H Bienen, 'Urbanization and Third World stability', *World Development*, 12(7), pp 661–691; and A Leeds & E Leeds, 'Accounting for behavioral differences: three political systems and the responses of squatters in Brazil, Peru, and Chile', in J Walton & L Magotti (eds), *The City in Comparative Perspective*, London: John Wiley, 1976.
- <sup>9</sup> Documented in F Leiva & J Petras, 'Chile: new urban movements and the transition to democracy', *Monthly Review*, July–August 1987, p 117.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p 113.
- <sup>11</sup> See M Stiefel & M Wolfe, *A Voice For the Excluded: Popular Participation in Development, Utopia or Necessity?*, London: Zed Books, p 201.
- <sup>12</sup> From a lecture given by Professor Gail Girhart on New South Africa, The American University in Cairo, 3 May 1995.
- <sup>13</sup> These loaded terms are often incorrectly attributed to Marx who had a different understanding of them. Marx used the term 'lumpen' to point to those people who lived on the labour of others. The exploiting bourgeoisie, the well-off classes, were, of course, in this category. By the 'lumpen proletariat', Marx referred to those non-bourgeois poor elements who did not produce their own livelihood and subsisted on the work of others. The agents which are the subject of this book, the urban disenfranchised, are not of this group. For a detailed discussion see H Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: The Politics of Social Classes*, Vol 2, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978.
- <sup>14</sup> For a comprehensive review of literature on the debates relating to the Middle East, see J Schwedler, *Toward Civil Society in the Middle East? A Primer*, Boulder, CO: Lynn Rienner, 1995.
- <sup>15</sup> See J Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990, pp 150–151; also F Colburn (ed), *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New York: Sharpe, 1989; J Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985; and J Scott, 'Everyday forms of resistance', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 31(2), 1986. This volume of the journal contains several pieces discussing this theme.
- <sup>16</sup> The major exponent of the 'culture of poverty' thesis is Oscar Lewis; see his 'Culture of poverty', in Lewis, *Anthropological Essays*, New York: Random House, 1970 and his introduction to *Children of Sanchez*, London: Penguin, 1961. For a critical appraisal of the 'culture of poverty' thesis see E Leacock (ed), *The Culture of Poverty: A Critique*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971. The notion of 'marginal man' goes back decades; see G Simmel, 'The stranger', in K Wolff (ed), *The Sociology of George Simmel*, New York: Free Press, 1950; R Park, 'Human migration and the marginal man', *American Journal of Sociology*, 33(6), 1928, pp 881–893; E Stonequist, 'The problem of the marginal man', *American Journal of Sociology*, 41(1), 1935, pp 1–12; L Wirth, 'Urbanism as a way of life', *American Journal of Sociology*, 44, 1938, pp 1–24, and other sociologists belonging to the Chicago school. For a strong critique of the 'marginality thesis' see J Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976.
- <sup>17</sup> For this perspective see J Power, *World Hunger: A Strategy for Survival*, London: Temple South, 1976; M Morrison & P Gutkind (eds), *Housing Urban Poor in Africa*, Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, 1982.
- <sup>18</sup> A Escobar advances his argument specifically in relation to poor women. A Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- <sup>19</sup> On the right, see S Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Society*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968; J Nelson, 'The urban poor: disruption or political integration in Third World cities', *World Politics*, 22, 1970, pp 393–414; and S Huntington & J Nelson, *No Easy Choice: Political Participation in Developing Countries*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976. On the left see F Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Penguin, 1967; H Bienen, 'Urbanization and Third World stability', *World Development* 12(7), 1984, pp 661–691.
- <sup>20</sup> Most of these works originate from Latin American experience of which the institutionalisation of community participation is a salient feature with significant political implications. On the 'revolutionist' position see, for instance, M A Garreton, 'Popular mobilization and military regime in Chile: the

- complexities of invisible transition', in S Eckstein (ed), *Power and Popular Protest: Latin American Social Movements*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989. Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*, is a well known example of this position. For the 'passivist' approach see W Cornelius, *Politics and Migrant Poor in Mexico City*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975.
- <sup>21</sup> For instance, S Stokes, 'Politics and Latin America's urban poor: reflections from a Lima shanty town', *Latin American Research Review*, 26(2), 1991, represents a 'centrist' approach.
- <sup>22</sup> At the same time, Scott's work on peasantry seems to have moved many scholars to another extreme of reading too much politics into the daily life of ordinary people. In an otherwise excellent work, Singerman's *Avenues of Participation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, attempting to deduce politics from the daily lives of popular classes in Cairo, virtually mixes up resistance/politics and coping techniques adopted by these people. James Scott is clear about distinguishing between the two.
- <sup>23</sup> Scott, 'Everyday forms of resistance', p 6.
- <sup>24</sup> See M Castells, 'Is there an urban sociology?', in C Pickvance (ed), *Urban Sociology*, London: Tavistock Press, 1976; Castells, 'Squatters and the state in Latin America', in J Gugler (ed), *Urbanization of the Third World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982; and Castells, *Cities and the Grassroots*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983.
- <sup>25</sup> See F Schurman & van Naerssen, *Urban Social Movements in the Third World*, London: Croom Helm, 1989.
- <sup>26</sup> See J Friedmann, 'The dialectic of reason', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 13(2), 1989, pp 217-244; and 'The Latin American *barrio* movement as a social movement: contribution to a debate', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 13(3), 1989, pp 501-510.
- <sup>27</sup> For a brilliant analysis of 'archaic' social movements, see E Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and the 20th Centuries*, New York: WW Norton, 1959. I understand the term 'primitive' or 'archaic' in the particular historical context that Hobsbawm deals with (mainly 19th century Europe) and not as a theoretical category necessarily applicable to social activities that appear to resemble the ones he examines. Some critics of Hobsbawm seem to ignore this historical dimension, leaving therefore no empirical possibility for certain activities actually to be pre-political or archaic. Such perception is implicit in Scott, 'Everyday forms of resistance', p 22; see also Abu-lughod, 'The romance of resistance: tracing transformation of power through Bedouin women', *American Ethnologist*, 17(1), 1990, p 47.
- <sup>28</sup> In general there is no agreement on the definition of the New Social Movements. For a discussion of the prevailing controversies see P Wignaraja (ed), *The New Social Movements in the South*, London: Zed Books, 1993. André Gunder Frank has shown many overlappings between the 'old' and 'new' movements; see A G Frank & M Fuentes, 'Nine theses on new social movements', *Newsletter of International Labour Studies*, 34, July 1987. Nevertheless, many authors have focused on the struggle for identity and meaning as the focal point of the new social movements; see for example, A Mellucci, 'The new social movements: a theoretical approach', *Social Science Information*, 19(2), 1980, pp 199-226; A Tourain, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; Friedmann, 'The dialectic of reason'; and Friedmann, 'The Latin American *barrio* movement'.
- <sup>29</sup> A Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, New York: International Publishers, 1971, p 109.
- <sup>30</sup> This sort of 'moral' justification, which I believe largely guides the activities of ordinary men and women, distances my perspective from those of others such as James Scott, who seem to base their analysis on 'rational choice' theories. For a sharp critique of Scott's framework see T Mitchel, 'Everyday metaphors of power', *Theory and Society*, 19, 1990, pp 545-577. However, I do not deny the fact that actors also react rationally to the structure of opportunities. In other words when the social and political context changes, the form and rationale of people's activities may also shift.
- <sup>31</sup> See S Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- <sup>32</sup> See F Piven & R Cloward, *Poor Peoples' Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*, New York: Vintage Books, 1979, p 24.
- <sup>33</sup> Here I use the concept of legitimacy in the Weberian sense.
- <sup>34</sup> For the case of Iran, see Bayat, *Street Politics*, ch 5. For the Indian case see J Lessinger, 'Nobody here to yell at me: political activism among petty traders in an Indian city', in S Peattaer (ed), *Markets and Marketing: Monographs in Economic Anthropology*, Vol 4, Boston, 1985; and H Spodek, 'The Self-employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India: feminist, Gandhian power in movement', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 43(1), 1994. For the British case, see J Hinton, 'Militant housewives: the British housewives' League (BHL) and the Attlee government', *History Workshop Journal*, 38, 1994. For the Peruvian experience, see H De Soto, *The Other Path*; and for Mexico City see J Cross, 'Organization and resistance in the informal economy'.
- <sup>35</sup> See J Nelson, *Access to Power: Politics and the Urban Poor in Developing Nations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979; Leeds & Leeds, 'Accounting for behavioral differences'; Bienen, 'Urbanization and Third World instability'.

- <sup>36</sup> For the case of Iran see Bayat, *Street Politics*. For Cairo, see Abdel Taher, 'Social identity and class in a Cairo neighborhood'; also see Oldham *et al.*, 'Informal communities in Cairo: the basis of a typology', *Cairo Papers in Social Science*, 10(4), 1987. By the early 1990s, Imbaba, a Cairo slum, had developed, according to the media, 'a state within the state' as a result of the influence of Islamist militants who were playing on the absence of the state in the community.
- <sup>37</sup> E Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, New York: Free Press, 1971 and S Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, New York: WW Norton, 1961, represent early commentators on the issue. Others include Simmel, 'The stranger'; Park, 'Human migration and the marginal man'; Stonequist, 'The problem of marginal man'; and Wirth, 'Urbanism as a way of life'.
- <sup>38</sup> Perlman, *The Myth of Marginality*; Castells, *Cities and the Grassroots*. See also C Velez-Ibañez, *Rituals of Marginality: Politics, Process and Cultural Change in Urban Central Mexico, 1969-1974*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983.
- <sup>39</sup> H De Soto also finds the 'mercantilist' structure of the state and 'bad laws' in many developing countries to be responsible for the growth of 'informals'. He refers to 'mercantilism' as a state of affairs in which the economy is run by political considerations, thus concluding that the informal sector reflects people's desire for a free market as an alternative to the tyranny of the state. De Soto, *The Other Path*. However, De Soto's fascination with the free market as a solution to the economic problems of the Third World appears to blind him to other factors which contribute to the creation of informality. For instance, in the USA, where mercantilism hardly exists, informality has appeared. In addition, he ignores the fact that market mechanisms themselves (on land, for instance) have contributed to the creation of informal communities. For a more comprehensive analysis of informal enterprises, although not informality as such, see A Portes, M Castells & L Benton (eds), *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989. On the somehow autonomous character of informal activities see also N Hopkins (ed), 'Informal sector in Egypt', *Cairo Papers in Social Science* 14(4), 1992.
- <sup>40</sup> See Friedmann, 'The dialectic of reason'. For a critique of Friedmann's romanticisation of *barrios* movement, see D Palma, 'Comments on John Friedmann's "The dialectic of reason"', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 13(3), 1989; B Roberts, 'Comments on John Friedmann's "The dialectic of reason"', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 13(3), 1989; and A Touraine, 'Comments on John Friedmann's "The dialectic of reason"', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 13(3), 1989.
- <sup>41</sup> See A Gilbert & P Ward, 'Community action by the urban poor: democratic involvement, community self-help or a means of social control', *World Development*, 12(8), 1984.
- <sup>42</sup> Interestingly, similar language seems to be used in Latin America. As Miguel Diaz Barriga reports, 'for many colons [in Mexico City] involved in urban politics understandings of culture and power are articulated through *necesidad*', or necessity. See M Barriga, '*Necesidad*: notes on the discourse of urban politics in the Ajusco foothills of Mexico City', *American Ethnologist*, 23(2), 1996, p 291.
- <sup>43</sup> For the literature on the moral economy of the poor see E P Thompson, *Customs in Common*, London: Penguin Books, 1993.
- <sup>44</sup> On the 'cancerous' growth of spontaneous settlements see various issues of *Al-Ahram*, analysed in Tawfiq, 'Discourse analysis of informal housing in Egypt'.
- <sup>45</sup> The term was brought to my attention for the first time by Professor Ayce Uncu of Boghazichi University, Istanbul, during a Joint Conference of Turkish-Egyptian scholars held in Cairo in Spring 1991. Although my definition is entirely different from hers, nevertheless, I am indebted to her for the use of the term here.
- <sup>46</sup> See M Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.
- <sup>47</sup> See C Lis & H Soly, 'Neighbourhood social change in West European cities: 16th to 19th centuries', *International Review of Social History*, 38(1), 1992, pp 15-18.
- <sup>48</sup> See A Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the 18th Century*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989.
- <sup>49</sup> During the early 1990s, the back streets of Imbaba, a poor neighborhood in Cairo were practically taken over and controlled by the Islamist activists and the rival local *futuwwat* groups. To counter the perceived threat in the locality, not only did the government attempt to cleanse it of the Islamists, it also had to transform these types of localities by 'opening them up', (eg widening alleyways) making them transparent to state surveillance. This policy of 'opening up' and transparency was also practised during the colonial time; see T Mitchel, *Colonizing Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp 46, 66.
- <sup>50</sup> See C Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1978, pp 62-69.
- <sup>51</sup> See P Bourdieu, 'What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups', *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 32, 1987; and Bourdieu, 'The social space and the genesis of groups', *Theory and Society*, 14(6), 1985.
- <sup>52</sup> Indeed explaining the link between structure/interests → consciousness → action is still a major preoccupation of sociology. For a review of debates, see Crompton, *Class and Stratification: An Introduction to Current Debate*, Oxford: Polity Press, 1993. Among the contributors to the debate are Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*; Barrington Moore, *Injustice: Social Basis of Obedience and Revolt*, New York: Sharpe, 1978; and N Smelser, *A Theory of Collective Behavior*, New York: Free Press, 1971.

- <sup>53</sup> According to Sidney Tarrow: '...transforming a grievance into a collective action is never automatic; a great deal of communication and conscious planning is involved as well'. S Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, p 49. Like Tilly, who develops concepts of 'opportunity/repression' and resource mobilisation, Tarrow also introduces the element of 'structures of opportunity' to mediate between organisation and action.
- <sup>54</sup> Tilly's concept of collective action is very much conditioned by his notion of 'repression'. Thus, in his scheme, governments, for instance, can easily seal off the streets or declare martial law to suppress public demonstrations. This may indeed happen. However, because his model lacks a concept of the 'passive network', it cannot envisage the possibility of mass action by ordinary people on the streets unless they have developed intense interpersonal interactions.
- <sup>55</sup> Regional estimates by the ILO for 1975 put open unemployment at 6.9% for Asia (except for China and other centrally planned economies); 10.8% for Africa and 6.5% for Latin America. A Gilbert & J Gugler, *Cities, Poverty and Development*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982, p 67.
- <sup>56</sup> See for instance J Vandemoortele, 'The African employment crisis of the 1980s', in C Grey-Johnson (ed), *The Employment Crisis in Africa: Issues in Human Resources and Development Policy*, Harare: African Association for Public Administration and Management, 1990.
- <sup>57</sup> Cited in S V Sethurman (ed), *The Urban Informal Sector in Developing Countries*, Geneva: ILO, 1981, p 5.
- <sup>58</sup> See World Bank, *World Development Report, 1995*, Washington, DC, 1995, p 108.
- <sup>59</sup> Vandemoortele, 'The African employment crisis of the 1990s', pp 34-36.
- <sup>60</sup> In 1991 the rate of open unemployment for 45 developing countries (excluding the ex-communist and the newly industrialising countries) was averaging 17%. In this year the unemployment rate reached 12% in Latin America (19 countries), 17% in Asia (14 countries), and 21% for 12 African countries. Compiled from CIA, *The World Fact Book 1992*, USA: CIA publication, 1992.
- <sup>61</sup> See Leeds & Leeds, 'Accounting for behavioral differences'; N al-Sayyad, 'Informal housing in a comparative perspective: on squatting, culture, and development in a Latin American and Middle Eastern culture', *Review of Urban and Regional Development Studies*, 5(1), 1993, pp 3-18; Lessinger, 'Nobody here to yell at me'; and Cross, 'Organization and resistance in the informal economy'.
- <sup>62</sup> See al-Sayyad, 'Informal housing in a comparative perspective'; and Nelson, *Access to Power*. See also Nelson, 'The urban poor'.
- <sup>63</sup> See Nelson, 'The urban poor'; G Geisse & F Sabatini, 'Latin American cities and their poor', in M Dogan & J Kasarda (eds), *The Metropolis Era*, Vol 1, *A World of Giant Cities*, Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988, p 327; Cross, 'Organization and resistance in the informal economy'; and De Soto, *The Other Path*.
- <sup>64</sup> De Soto, *The Other Path*.
- <sup>65</sup> For a detailed discussion of this point see Piven & Cloward, *Poor People's Movements*.