TRANSLOCAL URBAN ACTIVISTS:
Brokers and the Geographies of Urban Social Movements

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ABSTRACT

Activists contesting urban neoliberalism are traveling to participate in struggles beyond their place of residence. They are sharing, teaching and advising activists from other struggles. They are also promoters of specific imaginaries and strategies of contestation. I refer to this phenomenon as translocal urban activism, a type of brokerage that aims to draw global connections among local political movements and a global activist network. By the analysis of the translocal practices against gentrification of the Spanish art collective Left Hand Rotation in Latin America, I direct the discussion to identify the mechanisms whereby translocal urban activism shapes the geography of urban movements against gentrification, and to examine how translocal urban activism contributes to the reproduction of and resistance against neoliberal ideas, values, and practices. I argue that power geometries within translocal urban activists, tend to nurture the global activist network with dominant imaginaries and practices, eclipsing other alternatives.

Keywords

Translocality, Urban Activism, Networks, Power Geometry, Contestation, Gentrification.
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“Every day in every context, people acting individually or collectively, produce or reproduce the rules of their society, and translate them into their spatial expression and their institutional management. Because society is structured around conflicting positions which define alternatively values and interests, so the production of space and cities will be, too” (Castells 1983: XVI).

INTRODUCTION

Being a witness of social movements that aim to improve people’s lives is inspiring. Human aspiration for justice is heartening and reassuring. Whether it is an anti-systemic protest, the fight for equal rights, the protection of natural areas, safeguarding a cultural center, or the defense of housing, unity for what people believe is right and fair has led the world to change.

Cities play a central role in social movements advocating for change. On the one hand, cities are scenarios of systemic injustice. They are fields of reproduction, mutation and continual reconstruction of neoliberal economic strategies that have left behind pervasive inequality (Brenner et al. 2010; Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002). On the other hand, they are fertile ground for contestation not only to create more just and livable spaces but as strategic places to fight for broader political and systemic global struggles. In this sense, social movements in cities have become simultaneously local and global at the same time, positioning the urban as "a means to an end rather than an end in its own right" (Miller and Nicholls, 2013:453). The dual nature of the urban, as a local site of global contestation, forces social movements on urban issues to frequently operate across different scales. Indeed, the concept of locality of urban issues is being challenged, giving space for “transnational and local movements to merge, overlap and coincide in the city” (Leontidou, 2006:265). Such dual nature of the city motivates the research question behind this study: what are the geographies of urban activism and how do they contribute to the reproduction of and resistance against of neoliberal practices and imaginaries?

Hence, the thesis is situated in the debate about social movements engaged with urban neoliberalism (DeFilippis, 2007; González, 2017; Hamel, et al. 2003; Leitner et al., 2006; Leontidou, 2006; Mayer & Künkел, 2011; Mayer, 2006, 2013 ; Nicholls, 2009), understood as a politically guided intensification of market rule and commodification (Brenner et al., 2010). Through an in-depth case study of an activist organization that participates in actions against
gentrification in different parts of the Global South, I analyze the complex geographies of urban activism to understand better how place, scale, space, and networks shape social movements on urban issues (W. Nicholls, 2009). More specifically, the study focuses on how imaginaries and strategies of contestation against urban neoliberalism travel, mix, and clash across localities. I look closely at activists that participate in struggles beyond their place of residence, by sharing, teaching, advising, and connecting those movements with the practices of a global activist network. I refer to this phenomenon as translocal activism, a brokerage action that helps to draw global connections among local political movements.

Even though brokerage is a common practice in contentious politics (Tarrow & McAdam, 2005), I focus on its impact on activist movements related to urban issues, which I will refer as translocal urban activism. I pay particular attention to activism against urban neoliberalism and its social consequences (e.g., gentrification and displacement, the erosion of public infrastructure and public space, and spatial segregation). In sum, the study is built around two main objectives: 1) to identify the mechanisms whereby translocal urban activism shapes the geography of urban movements against gentrification; and 2) to examine how translocal urban activism contributes to the reproduction of and/or resistance against neoliberal ideas, values, and practices.

The theoretical framework of this analysis is grounded on the insights of three different literatures. First, I borrow the term translocality, and from the literature on contentious politics the concepts of brokerage. Translocality highlights the spatial and ideological dimensions of urban activism. Brokerage captures a critical mechanism that makes possible the shift in scale in urban activism.

Second, I draw on the notion of power geometry developed by Massey (2013) to make a critical reading of translocal urban activism. The concept of power geometry allows me to ask several important questions about the role that translocal urban activism plays in contestation against dominant paradigms and its impact on local social movements: Which actors can control time-space compression? Which actors are able to move across localities and which are not? How are these activists building flows and transgressing scales? What kind of influence does translocal activism have at the receiving end? These questions help us determine which ideas, practices, and imaginaries are most benefitted by translocal urban activism.
Finally, I engage with the notion of “articulations of contestation” that proposes to analyze contestation not as a power struggle for hegemony, but as an articulation that can potentially reshape both opposites. From this perspective, translocal urban activism can simultaneously be “resilient to, resist and/or rework neoliberal practices and imaginaries” (Leitner et al., 2006).

Empirically, I examine the case of Left Hand Rotation (LHR), a Spanish collective that is part of the “New Urban Activists” in Spain, which are described as “a highly educated group of individuals that use professional expertise for collaborative urban interventions in a context of social innovation” (Walliser, 2013: 330). New urban activists in Spain have become essential players in the contestation of urban neoliberal governance, developing new ways to transform the city at the micro level. However, the activities of LHR are not circumscribed to contestation in the Spanish context. As part of its actions against urban neoliberalism, LHR designs and implements workshops to transfer knowledge related to gentrification, the processes behind it, and ways to oppose it. These workshops are implemented towards activists and communities in other parts of the world, especially in Latin America and offers a webpage to expose various cases of communities facing gentrification. The analysis centers on LHR’s participation in struggles against gentrification in Mexico City, Bogotá, and Sao Paulo.

The case study is based on a combination of research methods: social media ethnography, a thematic analysis of the material shared in the virtual spaces where the organization participates, and semi-structured interviews with local collectives that participated in LHR’s workshop in Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil. All of these tools were necessary to collect and analyze information about the characteristics, meanings, and impacts of translocal urban activism in the case of LHR.

The thesis is organized into six sections. The first section offers a review of the literature on urban social movements. The second section describes the methodology. The third section presents the theoretical framework. The case study discussed in detail is presented in the fourth section, including a description of Left Hand Rotation and the local struggles in which it has intervened. And the last two sections provide a discussion of the theoretical implications of the case study and the conclusions.
LITERATURE REVIEW

In early contributions to understanding the processes in which collective action is formed, Charles Tilly defined social movements as rational, purposeful, and organized action (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). In doing so, he challenged the characterization of collective behavior as impulsive and irresponsible action (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). Later on, Tilly defined three significant elements that were necessary to consider a collective action as a social movement: (1) sustained campaigns that engage in (2) an array of public performances to display (3) worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment to a cause (Tilly, 2010: 183).

Mario Diani defined social movements as “a distinct social process, consisting in the mechanisms through which actors engage in collective action” (as cited in Della Porta & Diani, 2006: 20). Together with Donatella Della Porta, Diani claimed that the origins of social movements lie “in the coexisting of contrasting value systems and of groups in conflict with each other” (Della Porta & Diani, 2006: 13). Consequently, social movements are “accompanied by the emergence of new rules and norms and represented attempts to transforming the existing norms” (Della Porta & Diani, 2006: 13).

In the 1960s, the rise of major social movements such as student protests in Europe and Latin America, the antiwar and civil rights movements in the US, and the early women’s and environmental movements, sparked a vigorous debate on the causes and consequences of social movements (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Alain Touraine (1988) proposed that these “new social movements” differed from old forms of class-based mobilization, and thus required a new line of study that could see them as a postindustrial phenomenon that marked the beginning of non-class based conflicts responding to the pervasive permeation of capitalism (Serbulo, 2008).

In 1983, Manuel Castells further refined the study of social movements with the concept of Urban Social Movements (USM), which he defined as “a collective conscious action aimed at the transformation of the institutionalized urban meaning against the logic, interest, and values of the dominant class. […] where only urban social movements are urban -oriented mobilizations that influence structural social change and transformation” (Castells, 1983:305). The publication of Castells’ *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) propelled the development of a separate field that
focused exclusively on USMs and advanced the debate around the potential of urban-based social movements (Margit Mayer, 2006b).

Castells proposed three elements that contribute to the formation of USM: 1) conflicts for collective consumption, 2) cultural identity, and 3) political autonomy. He claimed that only facing these fronts together, USMs can be formed and build the possibilities of transformation (Castells, 1983). Critics of Castells, highlighted the omission of the contextual influence on his proposition1 (Pickvance, 1986) and claimed that the reduction of social movements to these three fronts narrows the possibilities of many movements to be recognized, "failing to capture their characteristics, their dynamic and their role in contemporary society" (Mayer, 2006b).

After Castells’ major contribution, urban social movements research stalled during the 1980s and most of the 1990s, as scholars increasingly focused on global issues (Serbulo, 2008). Recently, however, the birth of the critical urban studies field has brought interest on urban social movements back to scholarly debates, with a particular interest in the consequences of the new global context, especially neoliberal policies on the urban (Brenner et al. 2012; Marcuse, 2009; Peck & Tickell, 2002). This vein of research has developed an understanding of how cities are central to the reproduction, mutation and continual reconstruction of neoliberalism. The concept of “neoliberal urbanization” has inspired scholars to return to urban movements analysis to address the possibilities of contestation, and highlight activist challenges, constraints, and opportunities within a neoliberal context (Leitner et al., 2006; Mayer, 2006a, 2013).

Mayer (2006a) underlines the dilemmas that social movements face when activism is adopted by the neoliberal discourse and transformed it into an economic asset. She highlights the urge of social movements to find ways to challenge neoliberalism without becoming agents of modernization that can reboot the neoliberal project (M. Mayer & Künkel, 2011).

This approach had induced a significant discussion within the urban social movements debate, to judge their potential for transformative change. One side of the debate scholars central proposition is to avoid the underestimation of the impact of subjectivities, everyday practices, and discourses of resistance (M. Mayer & Künkel, 2011). And the other side of the debate claims that USMs have a low potential for social transformation because the localized nature of their demands

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1 In later works, Castells change his view, highlighting globalization as a significant influence in social movements (Castells, 2009, 2011, 2012)
narrows their political visions rather than opening them up to broader political and systemic struggles (Miller & Nicholls, 2013: 453). In this sense, Harvey (1995) claims that “militant particularism” in urban social movements makes them unable to contest the forces of global capital. And Castells (1983) claims that even though USMs can "nurture the embryos of tomorrow's social movements within local Utopias" (Castells, 1983, 313), the “urban” base predisposes local struggles to defend their particularities instead of the “global space of flows” (Castells cited in Miller & Nicholls, 2013: 453). According to Miller and Nicholls (2013), even the “right to the city” narratives2 based on Lefebvre’s “demand for a transformed and renewed access to urban life” (Lefebvre, 1996), highlight that the “systemic process of capital, through processes of commodification and bureaucratization, disposes and displaces urban residents from their living space” (Miller & Nicholls, 2013:454). According to Lopes de Souza, Lefebvre’s claim has become fashionable, trivializing and corrupting Lefebvre’s radical idea of a more human life in a capitalist city (Lopes De Souza, 2010).

Contemporary social movements challenge these grim assessments. In the past two decades, we have witnessed the rise of strong antisystem movements, such as the Arab spring, the Occupy movements and the Indignados in Spain. In these movements, the city has been both a central stage and a platform for scaling to global contestation.

The unconventional way in which these movements have evolved has opened new lines of inquiry in the literature. First, they have highlighted the role of cities as a space for politicization (Miller, 2016; Miller & Nicholls, 2013; W. Nicholls, 2009; W. J. Nicholls, n.d.; W. J. Nicholls & Beaumont, 2004). Miller and Nicholls claim, for instance, that “the city has been a means to an end, rather than an end in its own right, by claiming spaces, activists challenge the dominant symbolic order, mobilize and concentrate their own symbolic, social, and material power, and make the case for alternative possible worlds” (Miller & Nicholls, 2013). Similarly, other scholars have sought to explain the dynamics that make it possible to bridge the gap between particularistic interests to foster a scale shift in social movements (Leitner et al. 2008; McAdam et al., 2001; Della Porta & Tarrow, 2004; Tarrow & McAdam). Others, in turn, have analyzed the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on urban social movements (Castells, 2008; Earl et al. 2010; Walliser, 2013). Digital social networks, as Castells explains, have formed spaces

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2 Not necessarily city bounded.
of autonomy beyond the control of governments and corporations who have captured the traditional media. He claims that the safety of this cyberspace facilitated the occupation of urban space (Castells, 2008). Likewise, Tufte (2017) bases his work on analyzing the role of communication processes and social change.

Even though there is a robust narrative surrounding the characteristics of the Global South city, the particularities of the urban social movements of the Global South has been neglected (Parnell & Oldfield, 2014; Parnell & Robinson, 2012; Roy & Ong, 2011, 2011; Santos, 2011). Stahler-Sholk et al. recognize that the Global South can contribute with new insights into forms of mobilization, agency, and resistance (Stahler-Sholk, Vanden, & Becker, 2014). For Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the symbolic and linguistic worlds of the cultures of different movements are diametrically opposed, and explains why “on the one side, the language is about class struggle, power relations, society, state, reform and revolution, on the other it is about love, dignity, solidarity, community, rebellion or emotion” (De Sousa 2010 in Mayer & Künkels, 2011:216). Moreover, he claims that there is a need to help these alternative views lead towards convergence and inclusion. Asef Bayat proposes to analyze urban based activism in the global south from a different angle and presents the term “quiet encroachment of the ordinary," which describes a "silent, protracted but pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive and improve their lives." Bayat claims that this unassuming, yet illegal fashion, tends to "contest many fundamental aspects of the state prerogatives, including the meaning of order, control of public space, of public and private goods and the relevance of modernity" (Bayat, 2000:546).

There is a great quantity of research on how USMs use the city as a site of contestation for global issues. This thesis aims to uncover translocal urban activism, as a different way in which the city and the global intersects, by the creation of linkages of highly localized struggles to a global activist network and the role that communication has in these processes.
RESEARCH DESIGN

Case Selection
In order to examine the phenomenon of translocal urban activism, this thesis develops a case study of the Spanish art collective Left Hand Rotation (LHR). This organization was chosen for four main reasons. First, LHR has clear origins in the Spanish New Urban Activist wave around the Indignados movement, which has already been extensively studied (I describe the movement in more detail below). This offered an already vast secondary literature about the social and ideological context in which LHR is embedded.

Second, LHR employs evident translocal practices. They intervene in local communities that are facing gentrification, using a workshop that seeks to share knowledge and information about processes of gentrification and advice about contestation strategies. The activities and knowledge of the workshop then functions as material to create audiovisual items that will be uploaded in their virtual spaces.

Third, LHR has made publicly available a generous amount of information about its activities through its virtual platforms. Documentation is a vital part of their activist strategy, in order to leave registry of what the communities are facing, the struggles of local movements and what is being lost in the process. This gave me access to a vast repository of textual and visual material that reflected the organization values, ideas and strategies, and very detailed documentation of their projects. Access to these materials was an essential resource to identify, trace and analyze their translocal practices and networks.

Finally, LHR’s interventions have been situated in the South of Europe, especially in Spain, Portugal, and Greece, but also in Latin American cities. This North-South exchange maximized the translocal aspect that is the primary goal of the study, offering the opportunity to look closely at a case in which translocal activists from the Global North transfer knowledge, imaginaries, ideas and strategies of contestation to activists of the Global South, and the implications of these processes for the reproduction and contestation of urban neoliberalism.

In order to narrow the analysis, I decided to focus only in a select number of LHR’s interventions in Latin America. They have intervened with the aforementioned workshop in processes of contestation in Mexico City and Guadalajara (Mexico), Sao Paulo, Bello Horizonte
and Brasilia (Brazil), Bogotá (Colombia) and Quito (Ecuador). From those cases, I selected Mexico City, Bogotá, and Sao Paulo, because they showcased very different levels of community organization, politicization, and contestation, as well as significant variation in the forms of gentrification each of them faced: "La Merced" is a neighborhood in Mexico City that hosts one of the biggest popular markets in the world. After an attempt by the local government to "rescue" the market after a big fire in 2013, the community has defended its permanence with a powerful movement. “La Perseverancia” is a neighborhood in Bogotá, Colombia, that is located between areas undergoing evident gentrification processes. The community is starting to feel that those neighborhoods are rapidly changing and there was some incipient community organization with almost no contention when LHR got involved. Finally, “Bairro da Luz” is a highly vulnerable and stigmatized neighborhood in Sao Paulo threatened by a regeneration project that aims to demolish one third of the area to build housing and entertainment for the upper classes. The community, propelled by a robust housing movement with a long tradition and political weight in the city, got together to push back against the project.

Methodology
The analysis relied on three main qualitative methodologies to have access to both online and offline sources: social media ethnography, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis.

1. Social Media Ethnography
Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and the blogosphere are a significant form of communication for activists. In these virtual spaces, they express their opinions, ideas, attitudes, while also keeping track of their impact based on the response of their target audience. The internet is not experienced anymore as a space detached from reality; it is entwined with our everyday experiences as space where identities, social bonds, and activities are created. LHR uses virtual platforms extensively, especially Facebook, websites and blogs, to reach and connect with other local struggles.

Therefore, part of the analysis is based on a social media ethnography. According to Caliandro, "the main task for the ethnographer moving across social media environments is not so much to identify an online community to immerse in or follow but to map the practice through which users construct social formations around an object on the move" (Caliandro, 2017).
immersed myself in the LHR’s virtual connection with its networks and analyzed how and what kind of knowledge circulated in those networks.

I focused on the Facebook profiles, official blogs, and webpages of LHR and their counterparts in each of the three cities included in the analysis. This allowed me to, first, map the network of activists, and, second, the content of the posts, comments, invitations to face-to-face events, expressions, "likes," and "shares" of the actors involved in the network.

2. Semi-structured Interviews

According to Klandermans & Staggenborg (2002), interviews have to be central in contentious politics research to generate data about the motives and perspectives and to guide conversations to a consistent set of questions and topics. Based on information shared by LHR in its website, I contacted one local collective each of the movements in Mexico City, Bogotá, and Sao Paulo. I was able to carry out semi-structured interviews with representatives from each of these groups. In all three cases, I was only allowed to speak to one representative that spoke on behalf of the collective and denied requests to contact other members. The collectives will be maintained in anonymity.

The structure of the interviews considered questions about the specificities of each case, their goals and practices, their relationship with LHR, and their views about the impact of LHR’s workshops on their struggle. The semi-structured interviews were sufficient to address three main issues. First, they allowed me to gain access to the subjective experiences and interpretations of participants about their struggle and LHR’s involvement. Second, they helped clarify the channels and logistics behind LHR’s translocal practices. Third, it offered the possibility to assess motivations, beliefs, identities, imaginaries, and meanings that propel the struggles in each of these cases beyond what is stated in their public documents.

3. Thematic Analysis

Finally, I resorted to thematic analysis to evaluate how the discourse and propositions of the participants in each of the three struggles related to the discourse of LHR. Thematic analysis is “a search for themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon” (Swain 2018; 2). As Swain suggests, thematic analysis as an excellent tool to identify and encode patterns of meaning in qualitative research (Swain 2018).
By comparing LHR’s discourse with the discourse of the local movements, I was able to evaluate the impact of LHR’s involvement. I used specific codes of analysis for each subcase: goals, targets, and tactics of contestation. This coding strategy allowed me to systematically pinpoint the differences and attributions of similarities between the different movements.

**Empirical Constraints**

The most important constraint was the refusal by Left Hand Rotation to give me a formal interview. We had a couple of online interactions through Facebook where I could get some necessary information. However, members of the collective claimed that their amount of work from incoming projects demanded left them with no time for an interview until the end of the year. Nevertheless, the information they shared in their virtual spaces was enough to follow the study without any significant changes in methodology or structure. Even though I could make some inferences about their general goals through their publications and the characterization of the movement they represent, I cannot speak to their motives and goals.

Likewise, the distance was a factor that disallows me to do interviews with people from the communities that where participants of the LHR’s workshop. The local activist that I could interview, even though were very committed, where not part of the community. This represents a predicament in my study since I could not assess the impact of the workshop on the everyday struggle of the community.
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to analyze the ways in which local urban movements form global activist networks and the implications that this has for the reproduction and contestation of urban neoliberalism, I develop the concept of “translocal urban activism” to describe the action of activists that participate in struggles beyond their place of residence, by sharing, teaching, advising, and connecting those movements with the practices of a global activist network. The theoretical framework that underpins this notion is in turn grounded on the concepts of brokerage (Tarrow & McAdam, 2005), and translocality, power geometry (Massey, 2004), and the articulation of contestation (as developed by Leitner et al. 2006). I explain each of these concepts in the next paragraphs:

Brokerage

McAdam et al. (2001) analyze the different practices whereby people make claims and coordinate collective action in contentious politics. They affirm that the way social actors frame their claims, their opponents and their identities is culturally encoded. This is a crucial element when examining the dynamics in which localized contentious episodes spread to other localities: “scale shift.” According to Tarrow & McAdam (2005), scale shift occurs when “information concerning the initial action reaches a distant group which, having defined itself as sufficiently similar to the initial insurgents (attribution of similarity), engages in similar action (emulation), leading ultimately to coordinated action between the two sites” (Tarrow & McAdam, 2005: 127).

The authors propose three different mechanisms by which information reaches a distant group: 1) by non-relational diffusion, which are nonpersonal mechanisms such as media and some online content; 2) by relational diffusion, when information is transferred by long established relationships; and 3) by brokerage, meaning that “the transfer of information depends on the linking of two or more previously unconnected social sites” (Tarrow & McAdam, 2005: 127).

It is the third of these mechanisms that interest us the most. McAdam et al. (2001) define a broker as a “unit that mediates the relation of two or more previously unconnected social sites to build a link with one another and/or with other sites” (2001:26). Following this same line, organizations that participate in local struggles in different parts of the world can perform this brokerage function, especially as they transfer knowledge, practices, and formulas to guide local contestation.
However, information transferred by brokerage, relational diffusion, or non-relational diffusion, does not lead to scale shift if attribution of similarity (identification between innovator and adopter) and emulation (collective action modeled in the actions of others) do not follow (Tarrow & McAdam, 2005). These elements are fundamental for this study since they structure the possibilities of activists to make linkages, create a sense of a shared struggle and nurture the local activist network with specific practices.

Translocality

*Translocality* connotes notions of place, connectivity, and mobility. It represents mobility processes that transgress boundaries creating new socio-spatial dimensions (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013). This mobility process creates networks between two or more localities, where people, resources, and ideas travel.

By adopting this notion of translocality, I follow Brickell and Datta’s (2011) suggestion to analyze the links between micro-processes (as the relation of two group of activist from around the globe) and macro forces (how this connects the local to the global), “without losing sight of the real experiences of globalization operating in particular localities” (Brickell & Datta, 2011: 5). Indeed, translocality allows us to examine how identities across local struggles are negotiated and transformed, and how this, in turn, shapes transnational contestation and the social movement milieu (Brickell & Datta, 2011).

It is important to note that translocality is different from transnationalism, which studies "the movement from the inter(national) towards the local, with a view point that highlights the reverse, i.e., from the local and outwards" (Dahlberg-Grundberg & Örestig, 2017). Translocal activism does not necessarily imply movement across national borders, because even in the same city imaginaries and ideas can change from one neighborhood to the other.3

With the use of the term translocal in *translocal urban activism*, I underline the *spatial* and *ideological* dimensions in the circulation between places, of people, knowledge, practices, and ideas that promote change. The *spatial* dimension refers to the linkage of two or more places with

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3 For example, see Guthman (2008) and her study on food activists in California.
their situated struggle that form connections and networks in search of change. The *ideological* dimension refers to the confrontation of different imaginaries coming from different localities.

**Social Movements and the Internet.**
Castells highlights how social movements have evolved with the use of ICTs. He suggests that in our digital era "the public space of social movements is constructed as a hybrid space between the Internet social networks and the occupied urban space: connecting cyberspace and urban space in relentless interaction, constituting, technologically and culturally, instant communities of transformative practice" (2008:11). Castells calls this hybridity "space of autonomy," due to the capacity that an organization has to challenge the institutional order in a space that is not ruled by any major player (Castells 2014 in 2008:257).

**Power Geometry and Activism in the Global South**
Even though it is strategically necessary to form networks in an era of globalization, it also raises questions about its impact on the identity of local communities and their endemic ways of contestation built through "the realities of popular politics in community struggles, movement organizing and everyday life (Mayer & Künkel, 2011). Therefore, it is crucial to call attention to how power asymmetries permeate the brokerage mechanism in translocal urban activism. Hence, I use Doreen Massey’s notion of “power geometry” to make a critical reading of this issue.

Now, I want to make a simple point here, and that is about what one might call the power-geometry of it all; the power-geometry of time-space compression. For different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to those flows and interconnections. The point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who does not, although that is one element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement. Distinct social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility; some are more in charge than others; some initiate flows and movement, others do not; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it. (Massey 2013:149)
As noted above, Massey’s notion admits essential questions in the analysis of translocal activism: Which activists can control time-space compression? Who travels and who does not? How are these activists building flows and transgressing scales? What are the imaginaries that these activists promote? What kind of influence does translocal activism have at the receiving end? This type of questioning is especially important when the translocal practices reproduce historical patterns of power asymmetries, as is the case with Spanish activists intervening in local movements in Latin American cities.

**Articulations of contestation**

Finally, I engage with Leitner et al.'s (2006) proposition to decenter neoliberalism by focusing on its articulation with contestation as a reciprocal relationship rather than as a simple reaction. The authors suggest that seeing neoliberalism and the contestation against it as an articulation rather than merely a power struggle opens the possibility to evaluate whether the imaginaries of contestation propose alternatives to neoliberalism or move within the market rationality. Contestation possesses imaginaries and practices that respond to spatiotemporal aspects that coevolve with their sociopolitical aspects, which can be “resilient to, resist and/or rework neoliberal practices and imaginaries” (Leitner et al., 2006: 8). I use this approach to analyze the broader context in which the translocal practices of urban activisms are embedded in a global antisystemic movement that aims to contest neoliberalism.
CASE STUDY- LEFT HAND ROTATION AGAINST GENTRIFICATION

New urban activisms in Spain

During the spring of 2011 millions of Spaniards participated in a series of protests that displayed the social anger towards the political and economic system. In Madrid, thousands of citizens, the self-called Indignados, occupied Puerta del Sol on May 15th with demands for real democracy, accountability, and responsibilities for the economic crisis. The protests where broadcasted all over the world.

Two main characteristics defined the frameworks of collective actions in the Indignados movement: On the one hand, the use of ICTs intensified information exchange (especially on social networks), influencing the way “meanings are constructed for participants and their relation with the belief system […] generating and constructing networks around injustice frames” (Walliser, 2013:331). On the other hand, the occupation of symbolic public spaces as stages was a critical strategy that increased their global visibility.

According to Walliser (2013), urban actions and mobilizations had already been taking place, especially in Madrid, before the emergence of the Indignados. For example, short appropriations of space (e.g., gatherings to have breakfast in public spaces convoked by social networks), or more permanent interventions (e.g., community gardens or social center in squatted buildings) or the elaboration of community development plans (e.g., Cañada Real slum development plan). Walliser argues that these “New Urban Activisms” (NUA) make use of a repertoire of action4 that is consistent with their identity (young progressives) and their professional skills, and demand new forms of participation in the production of space.

Walliser (2013) characterize NUAs with several distinct features:

1) They have not organized structures but constitute a constellation of groups with a high presence on the internet, that share similar goals, strategies, and repertoires of action.

2) They are highly professionalized. The lack of job opportunities of some professionals (architects, urbanists, designers, communicators) has led to collaborations with others with the

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4 Repertoire of action are a “whole set of means [a group] has for making claims of different types on different individuals” (Tilly 1986: 2 as cited in Della Porta, 2013).
same interest and values that produced transformative (and political) action and/or has attract the support of bottom-up initiatives from social movements.

3) NUAs have no formal links or identification with political organizations.

4) Social innovation and the consolidation of open source collaborations is a central element in their agenda.

5) NUAs use information and communication technology to build identity, debate and mobilize on line, but also to encourage offline interactions.

6) NUAs promote projects by taking advantage of programs and grants available from public funding. In the case of Madrid, the government has developed an image of being a strong supporter for art and creativity, becoming sponsors of some NUA projects that can be functional to the neoliberal city as a culture producer.

7) NUA promote political debate, challenging mainstream opinions both in and out of their communities (Walliser, 2013 341-342).

If the reader can make a pause, I propose a short online tour to explore some of the collectives, organizations, and individuals that represent the New Urban Activism in the Spanish context. It is illuminating and can complete the image I am looking to describe. I propose a tour with three stops: First, go to www.todoporlapraxis.es (everything for the praxis), a collective of architects, designers and artists that aim to innovate in the urban field, by creating new channels, networks and methodologies with citizen participation as the central element (“About – Todo Por La Praxis” n.d.). In the main page, a wide variety of projects are displayed. For example, “No Pasarás” (you will not pass), a call to collectives and organized communities to place cement cairns with signs, as a small-scale action to make visible “the struggles and demands of citizens in the face of speculative processes that threaten our neighborhoods” (“096 No pasarán – Todo Por La Praxis” n.d.). Similarly, “Ocupaciones Ocasionales” (occasional occupations) aims to detect and enhance appropriations of public space outside the conventional channels of planned urbanism. For the second stop, go to www.estaesunaplaza.blogspot.com and look at the type of workshops that are being offered in a community garden. Finally, go to www.lefthandrotation.com. I am going to center my analysis in this last collective and their translocal practices. So please look at the aesthetics of the website, the language, the intention and type of projects that can give us a
broader sense of the new urban activisms, their repertoire of actions, expressions of identity and skills that were expressed by Walliser (2013). The analysis will be presented in the next sections.

It is essential to reflect on the role that the ICTs have had on NUAs development. Facebook, Twitter, blogs, YouTube, Vimeo, podcasts platforms, and the rest of the online universe, is shaping the way activists are forming networks, reaching audiences, organizing activism, and creating identities and ideologies. According to Castells (2008), the digital age has created a new species of social movement with the significant feature of sharing an autonomous communicative capacity via the social media. In the case of NUA, the use of the internet has to be understood as elemental to NUA existence.

The use of ICTs has reshaped the repertoires of action of the NUA by adding a new element: translocal interventions. These translocal interventions are not possible without the creation of virtual identities that create networks that can eventually become real life interactions. Namely, the possibilities that the ICTs give to urban activists have made possible to expand their interventions to other localities facing other struggles, by virtually contacting other activists that share common systems of beliefs.

The virtual presence of Left Hand Rotation, the collective in which my analysis centers, has made possible to open doors for their ongoing series of workshops in different cities of southern Europe and Latin America. In the next section, I will introduce Left Hand Rotation collective, and describe the two main strategies that have allowed them to intervene in places outside their place of residency: The workshop Gentrificación no es un Nombre de Señora⁵ (Gentrification is not a lady’s name), and their virtual space (website) Museo de los desplazados (museum of the displaced).

Left Hand Rotation

Left Hand Rotation is a collective of artists that was formed in Spain in 2005 in the wave of the NUAs. According to their own words, the collective focuses on projects that articulate intervention, appropriation, recording and manipulation of video content. In other words, they are

⁵ In Spanish, there are a number of traditional women names, such as Purificación, Encarnación, Concepción, that rhyme with the word gentrificación (gentrification). Therefore, the title of the workshop “Gentrificación no es un Nombre e Señora” (Gentrification is not a lady’s name), it’s a creative way to invite people to learn about the meaning of gentrification, that is certainly not a ladys’s name.
artistic activists that contest neoliberalism directly, by making video registry of the consequences of neoliberal urban policies. They do this through multiple angles. For example, they are strong critics of the assimilation of the city as a space for control and the use of the tourism industry as a tool to manipulate the city as a commodity. Similarly, they highlight how art and the accumulation of symbolic capital are used to build exclusive urban spaces for the "creative class" and raise the need to counterclaim art as a tool to contest those forms of urban exclusion. They have designed and implemented a series of workshops with the purpose of spreading information about gentrification and tactics to contest it in different parts of the world. Finally, they have created online spaces to exhibit urban neoliberalism consequences in different places.

The members of LHR are artists and professionals, with close ties with the academic milieu. This can be seen in the close collaborations with researchers, such as the network Contested Cities\(^6\) in their intervention in Mexico City and their contribution in *Urbanistica Tre Journal* from the University of Roma Tre (Left Hand Rotation, 2017). Their written products, for example, the document that presents the results of “Gentrificación no es un Nombre de Señora” after seven years of its implementation, uses references to Lefebvre’s “right to the city” and direct critiques to Florida's "creative class." Their website also offers a long reference list of academic material that shares their political stance against dominant neoliberal values.

The next paragraphs will described the two practices of LHR in with the study centers: The workshop engaging with gentrification, and their online spaces, specifically “Museo de los desplazados”.

*The workshop “Gentrificación no es un Nombre de Señora”*-  
Between 2010 and 2017, the collective implemented the workshop in 15 cities, mostly in Spain, but also in other countries from Southern Europe, and in Latin American cities, such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, Sao Paulo, Bello Horizonte, Brasilia, Bogotá, and Quito. The workshop is design to be implemented in three phases: The first face is an analysis of the local context, which is made together with local activists and community members. They do interviews, walk the area and its surroundings, study the local history and context in order to get a broad picture of the local struggle; The second phase is a seminar that aims to present to local activists and

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\(^6\) Contested Cities is an “international network of action, investigation and exchange of researchers from eight European and Latin American universities located in Madrid, Leeds, Mexico City, Querétaro, Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires, and Rio de Janeiro” (“Contested Cities,” n.d.)
community members to concepts, theoretical analysis and debates. This seminars are given by LHR; And finally, in the last phase, an urban intervention is designed and implemented. All the phases are video recorded and then edited to make audiovisual materials with strong political messages.

Gentrificación no es un Nombre de Señora is a clear example of translocal urban activism, in which activists travel to different places, whether within or outside the borders of their country of residence, to intervene in a local struggle by sharing, teaching, advising and connecting local struggles with global networks. Further in the discussion, I will describe with examples the process behind the organization of the workshop.

Translocal Virtual Spaces- Museo de los desplazados-

The production of images is a central element of the strategies used by Left Hand Rotation. As their members argue, visual action can challenge the symbolic apparatus of gentrification (as an organic process that leaves no other alternative). They claim that images can stimulate collective reflections and counter narratives to challenge gentrification acceptance. Even though they recognize that there are many determinants of the way people perceive images, they underline their capacity to build awareness and empower communities (Left Hand Rotation, 2017).

Therefore, in addition to the workshop, LHR main strategy is to produce protest in the form of artistic audiovisual materials, seeking to reclaim the role of art and symbolic capital to contest neoliberalism. LHR has been an essential contributor of knowledge and ideas in the activist's milieu of the Spanish-speaking world. Their textual and audiovisual materials are released with a Creative Commons label on their website and presented in several settings, such as festivals, artistic scenes, niche spaces, academic events, and activist events in and outside the virtual world.

Within LHR online repository, they offer a website is called Museo de los Desplazados (Museum of the displaced), a webpage that seeks to serve as a collaborative platform to foster collective reflection on the conflicts associated with the processes of gentrification, to generate knowledge about these issues, and to record the collective memories of the communities that have been displaced by gentrification. The content of the website is produced by different collaborators

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7 For examples see Gras, n.d.; Morfin, 2016; Solana, 2015.

8 Go to http://www.lefthandrotation.com/museodesplazados/index.htm
(activists-artist-professionals of other places and other struggles that share the same ideas and values), who upload audiovisual material about the struggles of their locality in the face of gentrification. As expressed by LHR, the platform “is open and incomplete, with a continuous process of development and necessarily collective, where it is decided what is recovered and what is forgotten” (Left Hand Rotation, 2017). Thus, Museo de los Desplazados represents an excellent example of a *translocal virtual space for urban activism*. Following the same logic of the term translocality in *translocal activism*, it highlights the *spatial* (linkage of two or more places) and *ideological* (imaginaries, practices, values emerged from different localities and their intersections) dimensions that interact in a digital platform.

The audiovisual materials take different shapes but hold the same objective to display the forces behind gentrification and its impacts on vulnerable communities. Some of the materials that can be found are: a critical cartography by a collective in Medellin, images of a “gentrificatour” implemented by a collective in Madrid, and a documentary that exposes the eviction of a traditional market in city center of Lima as a result of a modernization project (“Museo de los Desplazados,” n.d.).

Museo de los Desplazados also refers to academic articles, which they call “the basics knowledge”, such as David Harvey’s Right to the City or Smith’s New Urban Frontier. They propose a list of documentaries that expose gentrification, such as Dream Home by Ho-Cheung Pang (Hong Kong, 2010), Les Bobos Dans La Ville by Amal Moghaizel (France, 2007), Some Place Like Home: The Fight Against Gentrification in Downtown Brooklyn by Furee (USA, 2008) and comics such as A Gentrification Reader by Skot. They even offer fragments of novels, such as “The artist of the Floating World” by Kazuo Ishiguro or “Istanbul” by Orhan Pamuk, to highlight how even fiction recognizes how the “new splendor substitutes poverty” (Left Hand Rotation, n.d.).

Museo de los Desplazados also has a Facebook profile that is used for more fluid and networked conversations. For example, it shows invitations to events like a workshop in Barcelona (organized by a different collective) to discuss the hybridization of the neighborhood and the artistic scene, and an audiovisual festival in Lisbon. It also posts celebration comments of
achievements of PAH Barcelona\(^9\) (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca- Platform for People Affected by Mortgages); And images of urban graffities, like one in Athens that reads “Dear Tourist: enjoy your Airbnb. Signed by a future homeless”.

“The Museo de los Desplazados” is a virtual representation of translocal urban activism, in which activists in one part of the world use the power of images about other struggles to inspire emotional mobilization and outrage against processes of gentrification in yet a different set of communities in other parts of the world. As LHR declare, “the video recording has value for its raw footage, as for the potential that every video clip of becoming units of language whose combination and manipulation enables the transmission of complex messages from everyday life details” (a Left Hand Rotation, 2017:34).

In the next paragraphs, I examine three local struggles in Latin America in which LHR intervened with its workshop and through the creation and curation of audiovisual material: La Merced in Mexico City, La Perseverancia in Bogotá, and Bairr da Luz in Sao Paulo.

**Mexico City- La Merced**

*Context and Historical background of La Merced*

If historical experiences remain embedded in the built environment of the spaces and places of every city (Walker, 2008), Mexico City is a mix of pre-Columbian embodiments, strong Spanish heritage, modern representations, and, transversal to all times, inequality and segregation. It holds the history of two cities that struggle to push the frontier of the other. On the one hand, there is the traditional city that hosts the working class, while, on the other hand, is the modern and global city with its new developments that seek “order” and “cleanness” (Ribbeck 1991 as referred in Delgadillo, 2017).

La Merced is part of the territory of traditions, of the “chilangos”\(^10\) and home of the infinite tianguis (outdoor market). Mexican writer Carlos Monsiváis described the neighborhood of La Merced and its market place as “two bastions, two basic references, two legendary centers of urban

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\(^9\) PAH is a Spanish grassroots organization that was formed after the 2008 financial crisis, which focuses on housing rights and stops evictions by direct action.

\(^10\) Chilangos is a term used to refer to the people native of Mexico City. Outside Mexico City is used with a pejorative hint, but inside of the city, the word has appropriated as a means of identity and pride.
popular culture […] It is the center of everything that lives and its loved and memorized and forgotten and feared and frequented” (Monsiváis, 2017).

La Merced has been a battle zone of the two cities since its foundations. In the 1860s, the market was built on the grounds of the Monastery of La Merced as part of the initiatives of modernization and sanitation programs of the city. The construction and exponential growth of the market, alongside the abandonment of the area by the higher classes, transformed the vocation of the neighborhood. The market grew exponentially, attracting informal commerce that flooded the surrounding streets, attracting thousands of buyers from different areas of the city (Tena Nuñez & Urrieta García, 2010).

The growth of the market and the neighborhood created working opportunities such as loaders, water carriers, guards, drivers, shopkeepers, woodworkers, tailors, glassmakers, and different types of business establishments, such as food stands, porterhouses, canteens, and brothels. This newly created job market developed a socially complex area. Different social and ethnic groups were attracted, modifying the previous social structure and creating a favorable environment for the integration of the most vulnerable groups of the population, which in turn developed a strong social identity (Tena Nuñez & Urrieta García, 2010).

In the 1950s, modernity visions arrived at Mexico City. According to Monsiváis (2017) “the popular urban culture got disrupted by the speed of innovation and modernity that brought a cold and hostile city, where familiarity was replaced by anonymity, and where super constructions, welcomed society in masses, annulling the human scale” (Monsiváis, 2017:29). In the 1950s, La Merced, who had maintained a continuous growth, was considered the mayor and most important food supply of Mexico City. Nevertheless, at the eyes of the government, the neighborhood was conflictive: a city within a city, uncontrollable, the largest “urban invasion: seven thousand fixed, semi-fixed and itinerant stalls, invading 110 streets, five public squares and countless sidewalks” (Monsiváis, 2017:29). The market grew from 26 blocks in 1961 to 111 in 1982 (Cuesta, 1980: 2). La Merced represented an obstruction of modernity, overcrowded and chaotic, where the circulation of vehicles was impossible, the warehouses and shops were insufficient, and prostitution and crime flourished. Therefore, in 1982, as an attempt to grasp the uncontrollable, the government build a new supply center in the southeast of Mexico City.
The construction of the new supply center triggered massive migration of minor businesses fracturing the structure of the neighborhood. Nevertheless, the inertia was too strong. La Merced was (and still is) "a habit of the city, a solemn and thunderous institution of commerce, where diversity reaches passionate ranges" (Monsiváis, 2017). Rapidly, all commercial activity was recovered and kept on attracting thousands of people that repopulated the market areas and took the streets and sidewalks again (Tena Nuñez & Urrieta García, 2010).

The history of La Merced has shaped the neighborhood, forming three main characteristics that are essential to understanding its endemic contestation. First, La Merced is a complex and diverse neighborhood with a strong sense of belonging and identity. Second, it has developed successful survival strategies based on informal street vending. Third, the inhabitants of La Merced understand that its traditions, aesthetics, meanings, and ways cannot survive within visions of “modernity”.

La Merced under a new threat.

Today, inhabitants of la Merced are being threatened (again) by a government led program. A private-public association aims to “rescue” the national heritage of Mexico City Historic Center by recovering the architectural legacies of the colonial period. The “rescue” concept is mostly used in an apolitical way, which liberates it from its semantic weight to avoid questions such as, from whom or from what the Historic Center is being rescued? (Delgadillo, 2017)

Nevertheless, along with the architectural preservation, the program aims to reactivate the economy of the center of the city (in the case of la Merced it ignores that it is already an economic hub), by upgrading the living conditions, solve the insecurity and clearing it from street vending in order to make it attractive to the upper classes (Crossa, 2014).

La Merced, enclaved in the historical center of Mexico City, concentrates 40% of the historical buildings considered national heritage, therefore, it is essential to the "rescue" project of the city center (Delgadillo, 2017). For La Merced, the project envisions to recover the built heritage from its state of deterioration, obsolescence or inappropriate use (warehouses), which is the case in most buildings of the area. Decades of overpopulation, lack of maintenance and the

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11 Accordingly to the local government, La Merced receives between 200,000 and 250,000 people daily (SEDECO, 2014, as cited in (Delgadillo, 2017)
difficulty to use the space in other ways than in its economic specialization, have played as factors to the physical deterioration.

However, La Merced has characteristics (and challenges) that have been holding back the new attempts of modernization:

1) La Merced is stigmatized as an area of great insecurity, drug abuse, drug dealing, prostitution, and alcoholism.
2) Informal commerce has surrounded the Market and expanded into the streets, interfering with any attempt of renovation.
3) Local struggles delineate the complexity of La Merced: formal traders against informal traders; Local authorities trying to regulate informality; Informal traders defending their right for a piece of street.

In 2013 a fire destroyed a hall of the main market. Official declarations framed the fire as an “opportunity” to modernize and improve the area. Nevertheless, it was clear that the fire also represented an opportunity to push forward the frontier of the “rescued” area of the historic center. In response of the “opportunity” that the fire presented, a project named “Integral Rehabilitation Program of La Merced” was published. The masterplan showed disassociation with the reality of La Merced: it presented a new National Centre for Gastronomy, branch offices of banks, the creation of a new public square in the heart of la Merced (at the expenses of the destruction of several buildings) and a network of pedestrian routes to increase the commercial potential of the area (something that this area does not lack) (Delgadillo, 2017:30). The same year of the publication, an advisory council was set up, which did not include tenants or traders of the market or residents of the neighborhood, underlining the indifference towards the community.

Contesting as Chilangos do

The continuous threats to the neighborhood of La Merced have left distrust towards outsiders (government and investors) and a strong and well-organized community with historic ties, which get reactivated each time a new threat is detected. Contestation in la Merced has unique characteristics:
1. They do not contest neoliberalism directly-

   Contestation in La Merced is not anti-neoliberal in its roots. People from La Merced do not oppose neoliberalism as a coherent project but instead target an outcome of a neoliberal policy. Specifically, contestation is triggered by the lack of confidence in the government actions, that are constantly threatening their right to work and live in their neighborhood. Most of the public demonstrations have been a demand for the renovation and prompt delivery of the area affected by the fire.

2. Different imaginaries, different objectives, different discourses-

   There is not unity among the actors that oppose the "Integral Rehabilitation Program of La Merced." The different groups contesting the governmental program have contradictory views about what La Merced should be. These contradictions show the complexity of the contestation and underline the power struggles within La Merced. Different social groups support different interests: established traders, property owners, stallholders in markets and shopping centers, street vendors, carriers, sex workers, indigenous and religious organizations, among others (Delgadillo, 2017). This is displayed, for example, in the discourse of formal traders who conflict with informal vendors, claiming unfair competition as the result of tax avoidance, their offers of similar products, their obstruction of the market logistics and functioning, and the congestion of the area (Delgadillo, 2017).

3. Street Vending as the significant contention element-

   Street vending is embedded in the imaginaries of the inhabitants of La Merced. As in many other countries of the global south, street vending and other types of self-help actions (e.g., informal housing) are not seen as activism, but as a tolerated act and a valve scape. Nevertheless, when the self-help action becomes oppositional to government goals, then it is transformed into political action that “challenges the notions of order, the modern city and urban governance espoused by Third World political elites” (A. Bayat, 2000).

   This endemic way of contestation of the Global South is exposed by Asef Bayat alternative proposition of "the quiet encroachment of the ordinary," which he describes as a "resilient, protracted but pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive and improve their lives. This is marked by quiet, largely atomized and prolonged
mobilization with episodic collective action-open and fleeting struggles without clear leadership, ideology or structured organization” (Asef Bayat, 1997: 57-58).

This is seen in La Merced throughout its history, where the invasion of street vending on the surroundings of the market has blocked government projects that aim to “order and clean” La Merced, holding back the “rescue” program and gentrification.

4. Reaffirming local identities

One of the most evident organized strategies of contestation in La Merced is various efforts to reaffirm the sense of belonging and the strengthening of local identities. For example, Keren Tá, a cultural center that is located in the upper part of a food stand inside the main market, offers workshops for the kids of La Merced, such as poetry, recycling, theatre, and radio. Another example is Radio Aguilita, a "radio-bocina (speaker)," integrated by an audio console with two big speakers to make a radio that reaches as far as the sound waves do. The radio is conducted by a local leader, that has gained the confidence of the community. They use the space for different purposes: opinion forum; a scene for local musicians, poets, street artists; to promote local events; as an educational program about the origins, history, and culture of La Merced. Radio Aguilita has been very successful in two fronts: by giving a loud voice to the community, and by serving as an element to re-appropriate the public square where the radio sets every week.

Left Hand Rotation’s "Permanecer en la Merced."

LHR’s participation in La Merced in 2015 was named Permanecer en la Merced (To remain in La Merced). It was carried out in collaboration with two local organizations: The first one, Contested Cities, is an international network of researchers from universities of Europe and Latin America. They contribute to the debate on the consequences of urban neoliberalism and its contestation in different geographical contexts. Researchers of Contested Cities have worked in the analysis of the dispute in La Merced12 and other markets threatened by its incorporation to the global economy and its dynamics of elitization and turistification13. Scholars of Contested Cities collaborated with Left Hand Rotation, and also serve as gatekeepers to the community where they had previously work.

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12 See (Delgadillo, 2017)

13 See (González, 2017)
The second organization is a local collective of architects named Somos Mexas (We are Mexicans in slang). They run ATEA, a cultural/activist center that hosted LHRs workshop and other related events (e.g., screenplays and team meetings). According to their members, ATEA is a “rescued” rundown warehouse in La Merced that was transformed in a multifunctional space, with the objective of encouraging the interaction not only of the people interested in the topics proposed by the collective but by people from the neighborhood. It is a space that encourages the debate around public space, social housing, citizens participation and art diffusion, and is mainly used as a space for experimentation, gallery, forum and workshop area (Otero, 2014).

_Permanecer en la Merced_ project was programmed in two phases. The first phase was a three-day workshop imparted in ATEA, that was divided into three sessions: origin and historical cases of gentrification, neoliberal cooptation of culture and strategies of resistance. The workshop was publicized in LHR, Contested Cities and Somos Mexas websites, and as a Facebook event that was circulated between the local collectives and other people interested in the topic. Leaders from local organizations, such as business and neighbor’s associations where invited directly.

The participants of the workshop where members of local organizations and activists that worked with people from La Merced (but did not live or work in the neighborhood), students from local universities, and some members of the neighbors and tenant’s associations of La Merced. According to my interviews, the workshop gave clear examples, encourage debate and used educational dynamics in order to encourage the correlation of the term gentrification with what was happening in their places.

The second phase of the project was a series of screenings in public spaces of the market and the neighborhood, of documentaries about other Latin American communities facing gentrification, such as La Parada Market in Lima, Peru, and Bairro da Luz in Brazil. The invitation to these sessions was also circulated online and with posters in the market: "Do you want to know about other cases like La Merced? Also, how the neighbors and businesses got organized in other cities in Latin America against imposed transformation processes in neighborhoods and Markets?"

One of the main strategies of resistance proposed by LHR for La Merced, was knowledge diffusion and promotion of critical thinking within the neighborhood. Therefore, as part of the outcomes of the workshop, they designed an activity book that was distributed throughout the market and neighborhood. This activity book, filled with word search games and labyrinths, was
conceptualized as a tool to simplify complex information to be able to reach a wider part of the community (that did not participate in the workshop). The content of the activity book explains, in a very simplified way, what is gentrification, its phases, and the forces that propel it. It exposes the symbolic violence behind the use of the words “rescue” and "revitalization," and highlights the lack of representation of the interest of the community within the governmental project. It raises questions such as “What is the city model they are trying to impose us?” and it proposes further actions: “Do you want to remain in La Merced? Get informed, get organized, recover and save the collective memory and the identity of the neighborhood. Look for support with the voluntaries” (Left Hand Rotation, 2015).

Finally, LHR produced “Permanecer en la Merced” documentary, a 96 minutes film that exposes the mechanisms behind the rehabilitation program in La Merced. It describes the project as a plan in disguise to displace the traditional city and rescue the area for the elites, it exposes the intentions of the government and the rationale of the urbanists and architects that designed the project, and it presents a series of interviews with local actors that give voice to the community’s resentment and claims. Permanecer en la Merced is an actual referent of the struggle of La Merced and has been widely circulated in various spaces, such as different film and documentary festivals, universities, activist meetings events, as well as in Museo de los Desplazados and other forums online (Left Hand Rotation, 2016).

**Bogotá- La Perseverancia**

*Context and Historical background of la Perseverancia*

Bogotá has suffered from a strong “touristification” in the last decades. The central areas of the city, which are rich in historical and cultural heritage, have been the target of state led projects that mobilize resources and energy to private agents (Vargas Rincon, 2015). The growth of the tourist sector has led to changes in land use, an increasing real estate interest in the area, the rise in the prices of goods and services and the displacement of its original population.

Bogotá’s city center has faced significant changes that have fractured social relations among the residents: constant closure of local business that are being replaced by “high standard” buildings, a strong real state pressure to acquire strategically localized spaces, government induction of property selling by the enforcement of rules that preclude low income families to
maintain their houses, and the growing amount of displaced people for “renovation projects” (Vargas Rincon, 2015).

Specifically, La Candelaria and La Macarena (primary UPZ Zone Planning Unities of the city center), are facing an aggressive process of gentrification. According to Manrique (2013) in some neighborhoods of these UPZs, lower class inhabitants are already being displaced and the re-appropriation by middle and high classes — who practice consumption patterns related to the cultural, recreational and gastronomy offer that the “bohemian heart” of the city has to offer — is already happening.

La Perseverancia is a neighborhood that forms part of La Candelaria UPZ. The history behind “La Perse,” as it is called by its inhabitants, has shaped the identity of the neighborhood. It was founded at the beginning of the 20th century as settlement for workers of a beer factory called Bavaria. The owner of the Bavaria factory, a German named Leo Kopp, provided the land and supported the workers to acquire a piece of land by deducting part of their salary. He facilitated resources and encouraged the workers to build their own houses.

The "bavaruinos," as people called the workers of the beer factory, responded to the inability of the state to provide basic services, by joining into a common project of building the necessary infrastructure for their new neighborhood. Basic services such as the construction of wells, stone pavement, a market, and outdoor drainage where built by the community. Little by little, the neighborhood which was named La Perseverancia (perseverance) to honor the value of its inhabitants, consolidated.

Building their neighborhood was the first step. Subsequent mobilizations demanded public services, which eventually came responding more to the city’s growth that to the community demands. La Perseverancia responded to the growth of the city by strengthening its identity as a working-class neighborhood. This identity attracted the support of progressive politicians, such as Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, a politician of the Liberal Party with socialist ideas that led a populist movement in Colombia. According to Ruiz and Cruz (2007), there was no inhabitant in the neighborhood that did not identify as a gaitanista. Furthermore, La Perseverancia was an inspiration for Gaitán who named it “The red belt of Bogotá.”

In 1948 Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was murdered causing outrage in the city, but specially within La Perseverancia. The anger escalated to riots and contributed to what was later called El
Bogotazo\textsuperscript{14}. After that, La Perseverancia was left without a political leader, but its political identity remained as \textit{gaitanist}. This part of history is essential to understand not only the identity of the community but also the perception of the community in the rest of the city.

Since the time of the “bavaruinos”, La Perseverancia has been an active and organized community. During the 80s, the community had around 30 independent and self-managed organizations, from which activities ranging from the cleaning and maintenance of public spaces to the promotion of art and cultural activities were managed with high efficiency (Ruiz & Cruz Niño, 2007).

Nevertheless, the arrival to Bogotá of waves of migrants from the rural areas modified the organization and dynamics of the community. Congestion of the spaces led to the reorganization of the neighborhood in order to accommodate the newcomers. However, eventually, the community was unable to deal with the transformation through their usual community dynamics.

New economic stratus started to form. The original owners where located in the lower part of the neighborhood, and the newcomers in the upper parts. The houses where overcrowded. There was a high permeation of illegal activities such as drug dealing and robbery, and policing was needed as a form of control of an area that gradually became highly conflictive.

Today two opposite characteristics describe the neighborhood: the first one carries the stigma of a highly violent and insecure place. This stigma has drawn a psychological line that hinders the possibilities of the community to prosper. The second one reflects a community that even though is being affected by an economic and social crisis, it preserves its original ties and values of a “perseverant” community.

La Perseverancia holds all the characteristics of a target for gentrification: It is located in the city center and it is surrounded by areas that are already gentrified (La Macarena the "Bogota´S Soho," and Bosque Izquierdo, a place for the elite). It maintains its “town” feeling due to its unique urban fabric that still shows self-constructed origins. The community holds cultural element that raises the “attractiveness for gentrifiers,” such as the production of Chicha, a fermented alcoholic beverage made of corn, which is a strong identity symbol of the community (despite many attempts

\textsuperscript{14} The “Bogotazo” was a violent episode of protest in Bogotá, that was triggered by the assassination of the liberal politician and candidate for the Presidency of Colombia Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 1948.
of the government to forbid it). Finally, its stigmatization and lack of public maintenance have kept the real estate prices low.

Even though the patterns of the city indicate gentrification is on its way to La Perseverancia, there is not an organized social movement within the community to hold it back. The threats are still not evident. Media has not reported community reactions that indicate any opposition, and there are not public statements of community leaders. The community's primary concern is to repair the local values and form opportunities for the youth in order to tackle the violence that represses its progress.

**Left Hand Rotation in La Perseverancia**

In 2013, “La Otra Bienal” (Contemporary art biennale) supported by a Colombian art foundation, took place in Bogotá. It was presented with the objective of “inhabit and activate diverse locations and abandoned buildings, in order to bring art and audience to unconventional places, allowing interactions and dialogues more consistent with contemporary artistic practices” (Española, 2013). The neighborhoods of La Perseverancia, La Macarena and Barrio Izquierdo were selected as the areas for the artistic interventions. Different artists were invited to participate in three conceptual axes: Public space and invisible frontiers; Historical and memory enhancing and contemporary urban fabric; Radical ecology/sustainability and food autonomy.

Various Spanish collectives, including Left Hand Rotation, participated in the event\(^\text{15}\). The role of the biennale was contradictory. On the one side it exposed the debates around gentrification (and other issues) in the city to a wide audience, and on the other side, it was also a supporter of the same characteristics that reaffirm gentrification processes of the neighborhoods. Notably, the artist portrayed the three neighborhoods as unique enclaves in the middle of a big city, highlighting local traditions, history and unique spaces of the neighborhoods (in the case of la Perseverancia the Chicha production and cultural identity with local Hip Hop). Artist endorsed the neighborhoods as places for artistic creation, contributing to the image that is attracting the middle and upper classes.

\(^\text{15}\) Some of the Spanish artist/activists that participated in La Otra Bienal where Jose Luis Bongore who did a short documentary about the Hip-Hop movement in La Perseverancia, and Caldo de Cultivo in collaboration of Todo por la Praxis who created a gigantic sing of one of the representative phrases of the workers' movement: *Arriba los de Abajo* (Above those below)
Additionally, the “artivism” of the biennale situated the community as a spectator of an exhibition and did not achieve to turn it into a politically engaged movement. People engaged with the debate promoted by the artistic interventions, were the audience of the biennale and other artist and local collectives (who are not necessarily part of the communities), all of which were mainly middle-class young professionals that share similar interest. According to my interview, “La Otra Bienal” ends up being an event framed within and for a gentrification process. The Bogotá collective that I interviewed, engaged in a self-reflection about their participation with LHRs workshop in the context of the biennale. They claim that the workshop was useful to learn and give audience to the debate around gentrification in Bogotá, but they state strong critics about the role of La Otra Bienal: "They do not convince me, I don't think they are interested in the neighborhood. They are coopting the neighborhood's authenticity and taking it to the world of contemporary art” (Interview Collective from Bogotá).

The participation of LHR in the biennale had two objectives. On the one side, they proposed a collective reflection on the contribution of the artists and spectators of the biennale to the gentrification process (which was celebrated by the collective I interviewed). They self-reflect on their entanglement in the production of urban inequality when art interventions in vulnerable neighborhood contribute to its transformation to a creative/touristic destination. “¿Are we, the artists and the biennale spectators, spearhead in this process (gentrification)?” (Left Hand Rotation, 2013a). On the other side, they highlighted the threats that the gentrification forces mean to La Perseverancia, “Can this gentrification process that is already instituted in La Macarena and Bosque Izquierdo affect the community of La Perseverancia?” (Left Hand Rotation, 2013a).

As part of the workshop, Left Hand Rotation designed a photo comic that showed a story of two artists that were hypnotized by a real estate broker, who wanted to convince them into moving to the neighborhood. They claim that the photo comic facilitates the comprehension of a problematic associated with gentrification and serves as a tool of diffusion of a complex message within La Perseverancia, and as a reflection exercise within the artistic community. The photo comic which was named “La Perse no está en venta” (The perse is not on sale), was distributed in the venues of the biennale and throughout the neighborhood (Left Hand Rotation, 2013b).

Since the residents of La Perseverancia where not the primary targets of LHR workshop, the debate remained immature within the community. The photo comic targets the reflections
among the artists, so it did not resonate within La Perseverancia either. "This little book is very nice. I like it because is going to bring more clients to buy chicha and I’m going to get more money” Doña Tere, a chicha seller from La Perseverancia who’s story was presented in the photo comic (Territorios Luchas, 2013).

**Sao Paulo- Bairro da Luz**

*Context and Historical background of Bairro da Luz in Sao Paulo*

Sao Paulo, like many other megacities of Latin America, suffers from high levels of inequality that leaves a perceptible gap between reality and legality and between formality and informality (Ribeiro et al. 2016). The city living in a prosperous fast-paced global economy clashes with the left-out city that struggles to survive.

Inequality and segregation are undeniable in Sao Paulo. On the one side, there are 1567 registered favelas and 1060 irregular settlements (Secretariat for Housing, 2008 as cited in Donaghy, 2017). And on the other side, the alliance between the public and the private sector has influenced the city’s planning, land regulation and housing programs towards private interest who had boost real estate profit.

According to Pinto, urban operations in Sao Paulo have been based on one of two main discourses: to meet the requirements of the “global city” with the “revitalization” of the city center and to gain “environmental sustainability” (Pinto, 2015). This has promoted gentrification processes induced by the government, whose objective is to follow international trends to clear the way for the upper classes to live, work and invest in the central areas. These public policies have been inspired by the creative class theory of economic development (Florida, 2014), which tends to ignore local families that do not fit into the creative city imaginaries.

Nova Luz project is an example of the government’s efforts to follow international models. The area envisioned for the project is located in Bairro da Luz, a traditional neighborhood just north of the historical downtown of Sao Paulo, that is occupied by a high-density population formed by lower and medium income groups.

The area has been neglected by the municipality for decades, showing clear signs of decay and concentrating drug dealing activities, prostitution and a large portion of the city’s homeless
drug-addicted population. The last two decades, the government has implemented projects aiming to improve the area by developing cultural infrastructure. The São Paulo Concert Hall and some museums were opened, with the expectation that the cultural activities would create favorable dynamics of revitalization. Nevertheless, the lack of engagement to the real issues was evident when the expected results were not reached.

However, in 2011 the government’s (and investors’) priorities changed after the construction of the train station La Luz. This new element, together with a high concentration of abandoned buildings, new cultural facilities, and architectural and historical value, upgraded the neighborhood “attractiveness”.

The area, referred to as Cracklandia, was targeted with a new “rescue” discourse that justified the Nova Luz project that aimed to intervene 45 blocks. Additionally, the project was also justified as a means to avoid more sprawl in the peripheries by densifying the city center.

Nova Luz was executed through an imbalanced private-public scheme, where the government assigned half of the economic recourses, plus the domain of the land and tax cuts to investors (Samora, 2012). A single entity, composed of a pool of companies, was appointed as responsible of the project with the legal figure of "urban concession." This legal figure is used by the local government to allow private companies to work for a public purpose. With this instrument, the power to develop or redevelop parts of the city, gaining any possible resulting profits, was handed over to the private interests. The consortium was given the power to evict, demolish, renovate and build. In other words, the local public power and decision-making over urban spaces were transferred to private agents.

Nova Luz project was inspired in international urban policies, emulating strategies of globally symbolic “creative class” hubs. 450 million dollars where calculated to create, in five phases, a Ramblas inspired development, with boulevards, cultural spaces, shopping centers, restaurants, and new residential areas of modern apartments and office buildings.

Within the perimeter of the project, a ZEIS area (Special Zone for Social Interest) is located. A ZEIS is an urban planning tool that aims to respond to a range of socioeconomic
concerns and a vital instrument to generate construction of new social housing units in suitable locations.

In many cases, the delimitation of ZEIS areas has “acknowledged the right of residents to reside in the city and was one of the few institutionalized ways to attempt to curb real estate market and allow people to remain living in situ” (Ribeiro et al., 2016: 452). Nevertheless, in the case of Nova Luz was utilized as a tool to support this massive and profitable urban project, by using a “sustainable” discourse that claimed that the evictions would be mitigated by the ZEIS, without recognizing that most of the people living in Bairro da Luz does not qualify or cannot afford the requirements to get a new house in the ZEIS (Alvarez, 2016).

Within the rules of the ZEIS, it is required to form a Managing Committee with civil society representatives, with the objective to verify the compliance of its primary objectives. In the case of Nova Luz, the committee was created two years later of the completion of the master plan, only after an intense demand of the community that claimed that their voices where not being heard (Samora, 2012).

_A mature contestation against Nova Luz_

Contestation in Sao Paulo, especially the struggles of people defending their right to live in the city center, has been supported by the 1990s housing movements. These movements have influenced the adoption of self-construction housing programs and had created new policy alternatives (Donaghy, 2017). With the redevelopments of the city center, this movement has gained importance and has been guiding urban activism in the area.

According to Donaghy (2017), Housing movements in Sao Paulo recognize that the struggle is systematic and they focus their efforts in reinserting municipal government into financing and constructing viable solutions for the shortage of dignified housing. The movement has brought more than 10,000 families to the inner city, by squatting 44 empty buildings. This strategy has been more efficient than the government’s efforts of densification and has drawn attention to the logic of commodification of the city and the right of the poor to live in the inner city (Donaghy 2017).

16 964 ZEIS have been integrated into the city’s strategic masterplans (Samora, 2012:409).
Nova Luz project ignored that the Mauá squatter by including in the Master Plan an entertainment center instead. Mauá is one of the largest squatted building of Sao Paulo, which is inhabited by 235 families, all supporters of the Sao Paulo housing movement.

This affront triggered the formation of an organized movement (led by the Sao Paulo housing movement leaders) with clear strategies against the Nova Luz Project:

1. The unification of interests within the Amo Luz association.
2. To fight for a place in the Managing Committee of the ZEIS social organizations that represent all the social groups of the community (residents, traders, squatters, homeless people, owners, renters)
3. To seek the implementation of text-based law through interaction with the state. Donaghy explains that in Sao Paulo the line between government and social influencers is often blurred by overlapping memberships, formal partnerships, and institutions that incorporate government and civil society.
4. To diffuse knowledge within the community in order to raise awareness and support. They use virtual platforms (a blog and social media), and street base tactics, such as the use of loudspeakers within highly transited areas.

These strategies enhanced debates related the right to the city and citizens participation, permeating high levels of the political arena. In January 2012, a federal judge suspended the Urban Concession of the project, due to the lack of a heterogenous representation of the community. In June 2012, the associations that participated in the ZEIS committee, achieve the suspension of the Nova Luz project, by filing complains about the legal irregularities of the project. In January 2013, the Nova luz Project was officially canceled by the new local government, who adopted a stance to review and change the concepts related to the rehabilitation of the area. In July 2013, Maua squatter was officially declared a building for social housing.

Even though the project was canceled, numerous residents are still being displaced, due to the repossession of properties of private property by owners betting in a future project. This has kept the social movement alive and active.
Left Hand Rotation in Barrio da Luz

LHR workshop for Sao Paulo was called "Gentrificação: colonização urbana e instrumentalização da cultura" and was organized in collaboration with two organizations: Matilha Cultura and Pensart.

Matilha Cultura is a cultural space created by a local film studio that supports events related to socio-environmental issues, defense of human rights and the promotion of the independent art scene. They foster art exhibitions, cultural productions, film sessions, music events, book fairs and different type of workshops. LHRs workshop was promoted as part of their third edition of Setembro Verde (Green September), which aimed to address socio-environmental issues in Brazil. The program included talks about different topics such as the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant, gentrification, and mobility in São Paulo. Additionally, it also included artistic displays, musical events, and film sessions. The promotion of Setembro Verde was made as an open event, mostly via Facebook and other virtual forums, and attracted a group of young progressist of the city, including students from local universities, members of local organizations and independent artists.17

Pensart is a non-profit cultural association formed by a group of professionals related to the artistic production, artistic education, and social action. They function as a cultural mediator, by creating, organizing, managing and producing cultural projects. LHR workshop in Sao Paulo was supported by Pensart inside of the context of a broader project named "Is This Spain? Which invited to question how Spain is perceived in the world, and challenged Spanish clichés through works of Spanish artists who portrayed different interpretations. The workshop and audiovisuals created by LHR was conceptualized as a way to portray not only the reality of Sao Paulo but also the Spanish reality (Pensart, 2013)

Days before the workshop, LHR met with the association of residents and merchants Amo Luz, and Raquel Rolnik, urban planner and professor of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Sao Paulo and UN rapporteur on adequate housing. Their interviews form part of their documentary "LUZ." They are essential leaders related to the struggle against the Nova Luz

17 See Catraca Livre, 2011; Nascimento, 2011)
project and help them to get informed about the local context and the local strategies of the community to avoid displacement.

According to my interview, the workshop was organized in two sessions. The first session focused on knowledge transfer about gentrification and the processes behind it, and a displayed of power point charts that presented similar cases of other cities in the world. In the second session, the participants of the workshop made a tour through the neighborhood, where posters where pasted in the buildings to be demolished, in order to tag them by colors that represented each of the phases of the project and in how many years that particular building was going to be demolished: "isto irá desaparecer dentro de apenas # anos" (This will disappear within just # years) (Left Hand Rotation, 2011).“ I think that the tour facilitated the understanding about the threat that Nova Luz represents” (Interview with a collective of Sao Paulo).

With all the audiovisual materials that LHR collected during the intervention in Sao Paulo (interviews, images of the streets, the people and images that reflected the history of the neighborhood), LHR produced a short documentary called “LUZ.” This documentary has been uploaded to Museo de los Desplazados, and to other virtual spaces within the network’s activist. It has also been presented in several international events, such as the Argentine festival PAFID (Patagonia International Festival of Experimental Documentary) and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid.
DISCUSSION

In this section, I present a discussion on the implications of Left Hand Rotation translocal practices. I divide the discussion in two levels: The first level is descriptive and speaks directly to the first objective of my research- to identify the mechanisms whereby translocal urban activism shape the geography of new urban movements against gentrification (see the upper part of figure 1).

The second section is normative and refers to the second objective - to examine how translocal urban activism contributes to the reproduction of and resistance against neoliberal ideas, values, and practices (represented in the lower part of figure 1).

*Figure 1.
Dynamics of LHR translocal practices*

Translocal Urban Activists and the search of scale shifting

The hybridity of contemporary social movements expressed by Castells (2008), which is constructed between the internet social networks and the occupied urban space, is central to
address urban activism. Virtual spaces are being used to expose problematicsthat occur in the urban, to share efforts of activists and local movements, to display victories, boost dialogue and debate, and to organize interventions. However, most importantly, virtual spaces enhance visibility of the urban conflicts, positioning them into a broader social and political discussion and linking them with wider concerns.

This dynamic is very clear in the case of LHR’s activism, especially with Gentrificación no es un Nombre de Señora workshop and Museo de los Desplazados website. The workshop - independently of the impact in the local struggles, which will be discussed below - is used as a tool to gain access to the community to be able to register the local impacts of gentrification. This registry, which takes the form of audiovisual material, is being shared (uploaded) in virtual spaces (Museo de los Desplazados in this case). In this sense, Museo de los Desplazados functions as a translocal virtual space, which collects the experiences of local conflicts and nourishes a political discourse with examples of local grievances. On the other hand, Museo de los Desplazados is also an effort of scale shifting local movements, by linking them, in a virtual autonomous space, to a global antisystemic network.

However, the workshop is not the first step for Left Hand Rotation to gain access to local struggles. There is a long and powerful communication process behind the face-to-face interaction, which is wrapped with histories, stories, negotiations, identities, new ideas, propositions and imaginaries. In this sense, ICTs have changed the activist milieu redefining both time and space. The evolution has been dramatic, going from emissions of messages from one source towards receptors with low interaction with each other, to communication where multiple sources emit messages to multiple receptors with high interaction with each other (Castells, 2014). The use of social media, with its massive number of users, offers to activist different possible ways of interaction.

ICTs (social media in particular), and the faster and cheaper means of transport, has facilitated, or better said, has allowed activiststos transgress borders. In the case of LHR, it has been crucial to build links with activist from other places engaged with urban activism, and to whom they share high attribution of similarity. The Latin American groups and activists that opened the doors to LHR interventions, such as Contested Cities and Somos Mexas in Mexico City, La Otra Biennale in Bogotá and Matilha Cultural and Pensart in Brazil, share the same
characteristics as their Spanish equals. They are part of a highly educated middle class, with interest in challenging the system by intervening the urban with social innovations. Their high attribution of similarity provides the possibilities to form linkages that propel collaboration and emulation. During my ethnography, I noticed similarities in the aesthetics of the materials and the tone of the discourses of the members of the activist's network around LHR, as well as constant support to each other activities, projects, and ideas on their websites and social media.

It is through these dynamics of brokerage that we observe translocal urban activism emergence as an actor that reshapes the geography of new urban movements. This analysis is important, because existing social movements, and the seeds of future ones, are being nurtured in social media and virtual spaces. People with the same belief systems are joining, but also identities are being created and negotiated. Therefore, it is important to analyze what projects are being promoted, and how does these projects articulate with neoliberalism (I will analyze this idea deeper in the next section).

In this sense, translocal activists and their translocal virtual spaces fulfill two tasks: First, they serve as a flag that points specific systems of believes so others that share them can join and strengthen a network. Second, they promote those beliefs through the use of audiovisual and texts to trigger local mobilization, by adding emotional elements such as outrage against injustice and hope for possible changes (Castells, 2012).

Local communities and Left Hand Rotation’s cause

In this section, I assess the normative characteristics of translocal urban activism, by engaging with (Leitner et al., 2007) proposition to focus on “articulation of contestation," to analyze how LHR translocal practices contribute to the reproduction of and or resistance against neoliberal practices and imaginaries.

Low attribution of similarity with the communities

In the previous section, I described the mechanisms whereby translocal urban activisms shape the geography of new urban movements against gentrification. Within that analysis, I highlighted the high level of attribution of similarity that LHR has with the local collectives, groups or activist with whom they collaborate in order to be able to intervene in the local communities.
These characteristics are important because they contrast with the low attribution of similarity (McAdam et al., 2001) that LHR has with the local communities facing the threats of gentrification.

I explain further: According to my research, the local activists and collectives that are linked with a global activist network (with the mechanisms that I presented in the previous section) are not members of the community. That is, they don’t live, work or have familiar ties with the community that is facing the negative consequences of gentrification, but they support the cause in different ways. These local activists, which have been forming ties with the community based on trust and support, served as gatekeepers for LHR in order to be able to enter as a supporter to the local community’s struggle. Nevertheless, this doesn’t mean that there is a common understanding or sharing of imaginaries.

On the contrary. My research showed that LHR (together with the local activists and collectives) and the local communities, responded to different goals, targets, and tactics of contestation. As I show in table 1, LHR, together the local activists and collectives whom with they share high attribution of similarity, frame their discourse with notions of justice and equality and aim to the implementation to alternative worlds. They direct their contestation to urban neoliberalism and hold an antisystemic discourse as an umbrella. To do so, Left Hand Rotation main tactics to contest gentrification is to 1) contribute to the visualization of gentrification as a systemic issue and challenge its symbolic structure, 2) by the creation of awareness within the local community, and 3) by strengthening the activist networks in translocal virtual spaces.

Nevertheless, LHR radical stance does not resonate within the local communities. In my analysis, I identified that the communities do not hold an antisystemic discourse and differ on the targets for their claims. In my research I could identify that La Merced and Bairro da Luz, which are both facing the threat of a government led urban “redevelopment” and “rescue” projects, direct their demands to the local governments and frame their claims with the same elements: we are not against the project, we are against that the project does not take us into consideration. In the case of La Perseverancia, where gentrification is not propelled by a specific project but by the logic of the market, the community is not organized and does not hold a target or a clear discourse against gentrification. According to the local collective from Bogotá that I interviewed, the intervention of LHR in La Perseverancia responded more to the art biennale structure and objectives (even
though LHR made an explicit critic of the role of the artist in gentrification) than to support a local movement.

In contrasts, the strategies that the communities use focus in gaining permanence in their neighborhood: In la Perseverancia, even though there is not an organized local movement, there are initiatives to protect local traditions and support new ones, such as the production of Chicha and the Hip Hop movement. These cultural elements strengthen the cohesion of the community, making it possible to face threats in the future.

In la Merced, identity building projects are also main strategies, with projects such as Keren Tá and Radio Aguilita. Nevertheless, informality is the essential element that protects their continuity in the neighborhood. The quiet encroachment of street vending and the overpopulation of the streets has overpass government control and its holding back gentrification due to the difficulty and high political price, to “normalize” the street in order to develop the amenities that could attract the upper and middle classes.

In Bairro Da Luz, the traditional housing movement of Sao Paulo has taken control of the social movement against the Nova Luz project. They have been using their experienced and political strength achieved during years of activism, to influence government decision by the use of legal strategies such as permeating the ZEIS Managing Committee to make institutionalized pressure, seeking implementation of text-based law, the creation of a neighbors and merchants association, and by diffusing empowering knowledge to the community.

Table 1-

*Differences in targets, goals, and tactics that cause low attribution of similarity between Left Hand Rotation and the local communities.*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>TARGETS</th>
<th>GOALS</th>
<th>TACTICS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEFT HAND ROTATION (gentrification)</td>
<td>Contests neoliberalism directly</td>
<td>-Translocal virtual spaces to strengthen contestation- Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Justice and equality Implementation of alternative worlds (imaginaries)</td>
<td>-Challenge the symbolic structure of gentrification with audiovisual content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Creates awareness about the systemic roots of gentrification within local communities</td>
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Furthermore, the low attribute of similarity between LHR and the community form weak linkages that they only preserve if the local collective that acted as gatekeepers maintain them. The weakness of the linkages are also result of LHR low level of intervention in the communities, which answers to the difference between being a "project activist" and being part of the community frontline struggle (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010). That is, Left Hand Rotation's main strategies of contestation are not to continually participate in a specific local struggle, but to transfer knowledge to build awareness in a local scale to nurture a global consciousness, and to collect local experiences against gentrification to be able to exemplify the pervasiveness of neoliberal urbanism effects. These two objectives are achieved with the sessions in the workshop and the register in the audiovisual material of the local struggle that will then be part of the translocal virtual space.

Additionally, I found that the community (neighbors, business associations, or local leaders) does not participate in LHR virtual network. The low attribution of similarity within both parts, avoids them to share the same public sphere. These divide affects their possible future relation, with finally ends when LHRs intervention in the community is over.

As a result, the lack of participation of the local communities in LHR network causes that the ideas, identities, and imaginaries they promote are barely challenged.
Homogenization of the anti-gentrification discourse

Left Hand Rotation workshop is a tool that transfers information around the topics of gentrification and neoliberal urbanism and implements strategies of contestation that relate to the NUA wave. In both the workshop and the elements that originate from it (urban intervention strategies and audiovisual material), they use an antisystemic discourse based on academic debates that arose from the Anglophone world.

At a first glance, this knowledge transfer is empowering to local collectives (the primary targets of the workshops and participants of the translocal virtual space), and in many ways it is. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this knowledge transfer tends to homogenize the discourse among local activists.

Using the lenses of Massey's power geometry, we can situate LHR as a group that is more in control of space-time compression that the local activists, and in more profound ways, than the local communities. Namely, LHR, as young professional Europeans, possess capabilities that allow them to move and communicate across space, stretching out of their geographic social relations (Massey, 2013). Power geometry in activism means that LHRs and its imaginaries (western vision of neoliberalism, gentrification, strategies of contestation and alternative worlds) can eclipse the imaginaries of those who are at the receiving end of the flows. Additionally, the north-south relation of LHR translocal activism in Latin America is also influenced by and replicate the existing power geometries.

Therefore, this homogenization can be troublesome if it inhibits local reasoning about urban phenomena and the opportunity to shed light on alternative knowledge that can only be produced with local lenses. In Massey's words, if we take space seriously as the dimension that we create with our relations, which are all full of power, and as the dimension which presents us with the multiplicity of the world, then it opens up politics to the possibility of alternatives (Massey, 2004).

In the same line, the discourse that LHR brings to the local struggle is disassociated with the city context, its fundamental rules, local traditions, habitus of the inhabitants, self-perceptions, cultural practices, and meanings that can shape the understanding and interpretation of the discourse. Furthermore, the transfer of an epistemological framework to understand gentrification
as a descriptive phenomenon, is the first step to inhibit the creation of endogenous ways of contestation.

Slater underlines the power of the discourse on gentrification when he claims that "academic discourses affect not only how we understand gentrification but how we address it and ultimately how we use our knowledge to contribute to groups and individuals who are trying to do something about it. It would thus be progressive to follow the lead of one urban researcher and examine the connections between discourse and action, by investigating the relationship between dominant and alternative discourses about a place, and the activism of residents within It" (Slater, 2002:134).

In this sense, it is hard to ignore the "missionary zeal" of translocal activisms and the opportunity they face to patronize subaltern subjects. The good intentions can blur the need to look further the "education missions" and analyze its impacts (or lack of impact) on the communities where they are delivered. Contestation against urban neoliberalism does not have a model that can be boxed and transported but emerges from particular places, bodies, traditions, cosmologies, spatialities of power, forms of capital and the state, epistemologies, and histories of struggle (Mayer & Künkel, 2011).

As De Sousa Santos explains when he talks about epistemologies from the south: “On the one side [north], the language is about class struggle, power relations, society, state, reform, and revolution, on the other [south] it is about love, dignity, solidarity, community, rebellion or emotion (Santos, 2011).

Finally, the creation of a uniform discourse and similar ways to contest gentrification, might not only invisibly local knowledge that speaks from the place, but it might reinforce stereotypical images of the neoliberal city. For example, the urban interventions related with art (artivism) that is being used by LHR and other members of the Spanish NUA wave, have been co-opted by the "creative city" paradigm (e.g., community gardens, protest murals, reclaiming all buildings to create a cultural center). This type of strategies is part of the repertoire of action is now being promoted in LHR translocal virtual space.
Gentrification as a global issue.
The critical approach towards LHRs translocal activism provided in the previous section must not dismiss the power of networks against urban neoliberalism, especially, considering that the struggle against urban neoliberalism in particular, and neoliberalism as a project, can only be assumed globally (Harvey & Williams, 1995; Mayer & Künkel, 2011)

If we want to assess the success of translocal urban activism in the case of Left Hand Rotation, as if measuring if they defeated any neoliberal policies, it is downplaying, as Leitner et al. suggest, the complex articulation of sociospatial struggles through which negotiation and reworkings of neoliberalism and its others take shape across space and time (Leitner et al. 2006: 22).

Left Hand Rotation's translocal activism may not result in policy change, or in organizing a beneficial and unified contestation model that will avoid displacements or gentrification processes in every city, but it might contribute to the creation of stronger social movement that can achieve a better negotiating position to move further the "boundary between neoliberal instrumental rationality, and the communicative rationality of the everyday life they seek to enhance and represent" (Leitner et al., 2006: 10). Moreover, it contributes to the need to sustain post-capitalist imaginations, “by the continual work of making and remaking a space for it to exist in the face of what threatens to undermine and destroy it” (Gibson-Graham 2006, xxvii as cited in Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010).

Nevertheless, is essential to reveal that translocal urban activist, if failing to assume local differences, dissipate the possibility to transform them into a factor of convergence and inclusion. Recognize, understand and promote different ways urban neoliberalism can be contested (gentrification in particular), creates the possibilities to strengthen neoliberal contestation globally. Like Massey (2004) argues, "local practices are indeed powerful and viable forms of political action in today's globalizing world."
CONCLUSION

This thesis attempted to uncover the complexities of translocal urban activism, a phenomenon in which activist participate in local struggles beyond their place of residence, by sharing, teaching, advising, and connecting those movements with the practices of a global activist network.

The analysis of Left Hand Rotation's translocal practices provided an example of a different mechanism in which the city and the global intersects, and an insight on the mechanisms whereby translocal urban activism shapes the geography of urban movements against gentrification. The study showed how ICTs had reshaped the actual activist scene, by open the possibility for activists to act as brokers between local struggles and the global activist network. The use of social media and other virtual communication platforms provide ways to identify and reach local collectives to build linkages to gain access to local struggles, and to connect local activist to a global antisystemic movement.

In my analysis, it was evident the vital role that attribution of similarity has to the dynamics of translocal urban activists. That is, the local activist reached by LHR to collaborate in the organization and implementation of the workshop, showed similar characteristics than their Spanish counterpart (young professionals that use their expertise to collaborate in urban causes), granting them high attribution of similarity that facilitated the creation of links. Nevertheless, my study showed that the local activists and collectives are usually not part of the communities facing gentrification, but committed young professionals supporting the local struggle. On the contrary, the discourses, imaginaries, and strategies of LHR had low attribution of similarity within the communities facing gentrification. This low attribution of similarity responds to the differences in targets, goals, and tactics of contention, lowering the possibilities of preserving the links made in the local intervention and impossibilities the integration of the community (or community leaders) into the global activist network. These dynamics causes that the ideas, identities, and imaginaries of the global network of activists against gentrification are barely challenged.

Left Hand Rotation translocal practices in Latin America, illustrates the complexities and contradictions of translocal urban activism, which can be influenced by and or replicate the existing power geometries. As young professional Europeans, LHR possesses capabilities that allow them to move and communicate across space, stretching out of their geographic social
relations (Massey, 2013). This means that the imaginaries of the global activist network respond to the ones in charge of time-space compression, eclipsing the imaginaries of those who are at the receiving end of the flows.

Additionally, the interventions of translocal urban activists homogenize the anti-gentrification discourse which is based on academic debates originated in the global north. The discourse can be disassociated with part of the local context, such as fundamental rules, local traditions, habitus of the inhabitants, self-perceptions, cultural practices and meaning. The estrangement of the discourse can affect its understanding and interpretation locally, and it can overshadow local knowledge that could contribute to strengthening neoliberal contestation on a global fashion.

Finally, recognizing that gentrification, and neoliberalism as a project, needs to be fought globally, it is crucial to question whose imaginaries are nurturing the global activist network. This questioning can be the first step to, as Massey (2004) propose, recognize the multiplicity of the world that will open the possibility of alternatives.
REFERENCES


Left Hand Rotation. (2013b). La Perse no está en venta. Una fotonovela sobre gentrificación en La Macarena y La Perseverancia.


