

## CITIES FOR PEOPLE OR THE REASON FOR SOCIAL RADICALIZATION? DAKAR'S SPECIAL CASE

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**Abstract:** *In West Africa, in particular Dakar, Senegal, due to the lack of coherent programs of control of chaotic urbanization, in the popular neighborhoods without any kind of infrastructure, a series of profound crises emerged in the last 15-20 years have led to an unprecedented increase in the differences between urban development levels and, implicitly, social segregation and radicalism. The issue of housing has a major impact on the welfare of the citizen, especially from a social point of view. The home is a private space necessary for personal security and isolation from the world, a space of relaxation and everyday life, one that should provide the necessary comfort for every individual.*

**Keywords:** *radicalism, inequality, housing, globalization.*

### 1. The issue of Housing

Starting with the 90s, the growing importance of the complex role which the issue of housing can have in social cohesion has led to the emergence of a new fundamentalist approach of policies in the area. Thus, understanding how the architecture of a home, its location and the facilities associated with it, decisively influence the social relationships of the individual and his/her degree of social satisfaction has become necessary. From this perspective the issue of housing should always be seen in a multidisciplinary approach and resolved through multi-sectoral action.

In the midst of the financial crisis that has shaken the world's socio-economic order, Neil Brenner<sup>3</sup> published in 2009, in the *City* magazine, the article *What is critical urban theory?* and reintroduced the history and development of the “critical urban studies”

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<sup>3</sup> Neil Brenner is Professor of “Urban Theory” at the Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD). His works focus on the theoretical, conceptual and methodological dimensions of urban questions. In his research, Brenner focuses on the issues of comparative geopolitical economy and radical sociospatial theory, on the processes of urban and regional restructuring, on the generalization of capitalist urbanization and, particularly, and the remaking of urban governance configurations under contemporary neoliberalizing capitalism.

concept into discussion. (Brenner, 2009, p. 198). From the very beginning, Brenner emphasizes that modern cities are fertile grounds to resist capitalism and the emergence of political alternatives. Throughout their existence, urban centers have been the exclusive scene for capital accumulation and, implicitly, for increasing social differences.

Referring to the interpretation of social phenomena, Brenner brings into discussion the post-Marxist philosophy, basically a revised version of traditional Marxism, which is not supposed to preserve the fidelity of the Marxist Orthodox ideas, but proposes its dilution with poststructuralist and post-Freudian ideas, respectively. However, the common element of post-Marxism with its original variant is the idea of emancipation of society, especially after the discrediting of the original Marxist theory in 1968.

In other words, post-Marxism is the post-metaphysical theoretical approach to political-social ideas, also constituting a reevaluation of traditional Marxist postulates. The holistic-essentialist interpretation of social facts is dropped, applying post-structuralist terminologies of interpreting discursive practices in the social field. A new social theory is prepared, moving to the anti-systemic reading of the Marxist work. The term “post-Marxism” was used for the first time by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who proposed going beyond the classical themes of traditional Marxism, such as class consciousness, the idea of communism, or that of the social subject (Mouffe&Laclau, 1985, p. 134). The two take over the Marxist concept of autonomy and use it to create a new socio-political model that combines the elements of Marxist orthodoxy with post-structuralism and post-Freudism. Their idea is a revision of Marx through Gramsci's work and of the hegemony described by him (see Gramsci, 1971).

Post-structuralist social theory is built around the analysis of discursive practices, which highlight the contingent nature of existing objects. Social reality is built from a set of discursive practices that can change the perception of it. This is a perpetual game of differences, social relations taking place in closed and well-defined contexts. The entire social space is dominated by two approaches, one of difference and another of equivalence. While the former functions as an extension of social space, the latter has a function of uniformity and reduction of political space. Both situations require the use of mutual exclusion practices for the existing difference.

## **2. Cities for People, not for Profit**

Coming back to Brenner, we state that both in “*What is critical urban theory?*”, as well as in “*Cities for people, not for profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City*” (edited in cooperation with Peter Marcuse and Margit Mayer), he expands on the post-structuralist idea of the usefulness of critical urban theory that synthesizes intrinsic inequities generated by capitalism, but especially the inherent contradictions of the political system that suppresses alternatives. “Capitalist cities are not only sites for strategies of capital accumulation; they are also arenas in which the conflicts and contradictions associated with historically and geographically specific accumulation strategies are expressed and fought out.” (Brenner, 2009, p.198)

The issue of housing has a major impact on the welfare of the citizen, especially from a social point of view. The home is a private space necessary for personal security and isolation from the world, a space of relaxation and everyday life, one that should provide the necessary comfort for every individual. Altogether, the location of the home can influence the social relationship of the individual, his/her relationships, access to public services, etc.

*"Cities for people, not for profit: Critical Urban Theory and the Right to the City"* was published in 2008, during the economic recession and social instability. The authors somewhat rebuilt the 1968 times of crisis faced by the society, still experiencing a mixture of emotional feelings, for capitalism is vulnerable to crises, even though its processes are both creative and destructive. The capitalist city is exactly in the midst of such processes, being the place where both the influential elite and the excluded proletariat exist. According to Brenner, the latter shall fight to reconquer their city, to regain their "right to the city".

In *"Cities for people, not for profit"*, Brenner lays the foundations for the cooperative association between critical social theory, in particular that of the School of Frankfurt, and urban critical theory developed by the Chicago School of Sociology. From this perspective, critical urban theory „synthesizes the politically and ideologically mediated, socially disputable and at the same time malleable character of the urban space, which takes into account the continuous (re)construction as a space, as an environment for the development of specific historical relations of the social power. Urban critical theory is thus caught in an antagonistic relationship not only with the inherent urban information, but more generally, with the existing urban forms. From this perspective, another form of urbanization is possible, a more democratic, socially just, and, at the same time, sustainable, even if this possibility is suppressed, for the moment, by institutional arrangements, practices and ideologies. In short, critical urban theory encompasses ideological criticism and criticism of power relations, inequality, injustice and exploitation, both in and across cities." (Brenner, 2011, p. 213)

The issue of housing from an economic, social and political perspective is also analyzed by Paul Balchin in *Housing Policy in Europe* presenting the policies and practices for choosing a home in 15 Northern, Southern, Western and Central European states. The various housing systems are analyzed and linked to a series of conclusions about the links between them and the welfare of the inhabitants. Paul Balchin's concludes that their occupation and living standards are directly reflected in the choice made, in connection with the change of political regime, from social democracy or communism to neo-liberalism.

Given that the issue of housing affects and depends on a multitude of aspects of the individual's socio-economic life, it comes as no surprise that the average spending on housing tends to reach 20% of the income of a European citizen. And for this reason, the vast majority of European states have developed a number of public policies related to this issue over the last 50-60 years.(see Rental Market Regulation in the European Union [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/publications/economic\\_paper/2014/pdf/ecp515\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/economic_paper/2014/pdf/ecp515_en.pdf)). Thus, work has been done to develop Europeans' accessibility to housing by stimulating the growth of services and associated maintenance. Furthermore, by

economic measures, an attempt to control rent levels has been made to guarantee citizen access, but they haven't always been successful.

### 3. Dakar's Special Case

As compared to the situation in Europe, in West Africa, state intervention through the development of social housing areas has been made since the 80s, at a time when the state, as political entity, increasingly gained a secondary role. The local population gives the state and its programs less and less legitimacy and most of the time regards the central organization as a threat to its own sovereignty. In this part of the world, the state exists only in the capital and in the immediate vicinity, where most of the political and economic elites are.

In the last 20-30 years, the government of the most developed West African state, the Republic of Senegal has launched a series of "re-urbanization" programs, whose primary role was to change the image of theoretically urbanized areas, practically still in an intermediate stage, in a type of "purgatory" of the city, where poverty, crime and social problems dictate the city's landscape. Currently, more than half of the Senegalese urban population lives in Dakar. Most of the neighborhoods have been installed in improper areas for housing, with state intervention being reduced as a result of huge economic interests of construction companies, especially from France. In short, in Dakar, urbanization has been done at such a rate that land reserves, socio-cultural areas and rainwater crossings were transformed into residential areas under the "gentle" observation of the authorities.

*Statistic indicators - the situation of Senegal*

Table 1

Ref	Country-Senegal	Data
1	Area	196,200 sq. km
2	Population	9,003,000
3	Urban Population	46.7 percent
4	Population Living Below Poverty Line	50 to 60 percent
5	Population without safe water & sanitation	37 percent to 61 percent
6	Capital City	Dakar
7	Human Development Indicator	158
8	Life Expectancy at Birth	50.3
9	GDP Per Capita	US\$550
10	Density	68 inhabitants per square kilometer
11	Unplanned Dakar Area	80 percent
12	Dakar Density	900 inhabitants/hectar

Source:<http://web.mit.edu/urbanupgrading/upgrading/case-examples/overview-africa/country-assessments/reports/Senegal-report.html>

The Contemporary Metropolis, the capital, Dakar was built by the French colonial administration around 1857, by grouping four rural areas (communes): Dakar, Rufisque, Goree and Thies. The expansion of the city was the result of French urban development strategies and it was continued by Senegalese decision-makers, after declaring independence, mainly by deploying the native population of the area that will become the urban center to the outskirts of the Medina, Grand Yoff and Pikine neighborhoods.

This social segregation policy has focused mainly on the “liberation” of the urban center, having as the official motivation the struggle of authorities, which was initially colonial, then national, with the propagation of tropical diseases specific to the area, such as yellow fever, smallpox, cholera and plague. In fact, the French colonial administration has always sought to settle the space located in the area called Cape Verde, both given its geographic position and especially the ease with which the territory located in the westernmost point of Western Africa could be administered.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Dakar was already made up of two distinct areas. On the one hand, there was “Le Plateau”, the neighborhood of European expatriates, respectively the areas located on the outskirts of the city, known as the “black village”. Even in the colonial era, the city is comprised of two contrasting areas, the population having totally opposed living conditions. The habitat structure of the two areas reflects the social situation in the metropolis and the segregation of the West African society.

After declaring independence, the structure of the metropolis habitat did not change, the modern urban center consisting of the Plateau, Almadies, Mermoz, Hann and Point E neighborhoods, while in the “popular” neighborhoods, HLM, Grand Yoff, Colobane and Medina, the living standard of the inhabitants was in contrast to the one in the center of the capital. To further aggravate the situation, in the adjacent areas of Dakar, two suburbs have been created, Pikine and Rufisque, considered “traditional areas”, without access to the infrastructure and to the benefits of a minimal urban center.

In the 60s, the Senegalese authorities launched a comprehensive social program, based on the structure of the French Government’s obsolete “Urban Code for Colonies”, creating a series of institutions to finance real estate development in order to quickly resolve the housing crisis and the fight against insanitation and insecurity in the capital. (see Craibe, 2000). Thus, the West-African Land Credit Western Company and the Credit Bank of Senegal have emerged, institutions designed to develop investments in the real estate sector, in order to promote a modern habitat for citizens. In fact, the Senegalese government has only launched a program for the construction of social housing, located outside the area inhabited by former European colonies, without full access to utilities and isolated from the rest of the city. (see Nerfin, 2009)

It should be noted that this governmental land-use policy has been carried out at a 3-4% annual growth rate, one of the highest in the world. (source: NASD, EMSILD-2010)

After the 80s, facing a series of domestic financial and economic difficulties, corroborated by regional political instability, the Senegalese authorities would abandon the social housing construction program, leaving the real estate market solely under private control. Thus, in the coming decades, private real estate companies, most of them with French capital, would only develop the already arranged areas, creating even greater imbalance in the market (source: NASD, EMSILD-2010).

Currently, as a result of these policies, or more precisely the lack thereof, the average rent for a room is around 52,000 CFA / EUR 80 - according to figures provided by the National Agency for Statistics and Demography (NASD), in August 2015, in a state where the average salary is approximately 114,152 CFA / EUR 172 and where the unemployment rate is approximately 65-70% (source: NASD, EMSILD-2017).

We mention that the demographic history of Dakar shows an exponential population growth, so that, in 1878, the population was estimated to approximately 1,600 inhabitants. In 1947 there were 135,000 inhabitants, the city doubling its population between 1961 (424,000) and 1976 (942,000), so that in 2000 the threshold of 2,000,000 inhabitants was reached. 70% of the region's population is under 35 years of age. (see Pison, Hill, Cohen & Foote, 1995, 254 p)

During the period 1965-1972, 45% of the Senegalese population moved to Dakar. Since the year 2000, public authorities have been campaigning for the release of land plots illegally occupied by migrants arriving in Dakar, both from within the country and from neighboring countries. It should be noted that such lands do not benefit from any infrastructure, the inhabitants lacking the minimum hygiene or decent living conditions.

Between 1952 and 1969, the Senegalese authorities "exiled" from Dakar around 100,000 migrants to the new city created specifically for this purpose, namely Pikine, on the outskirts of the capital, today a metropolis neighborhood. Pikine neighborhood is inhabited by approximately 1,000,000 individuals. Currently, a Senegalese out of 4 lives in Dakar. In addition, the Senegalese capital area is the annual destination of several thousand African migrants from the neighboring states of Mali, Guinea, Mauritania and Gambia. Therefore, in 2009, for example, the population density was of 4,646 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>, in a space of only 550 km<sup>2</sup>.

Given the lack of any infrastructure in popular districts, Dakar city center has been experiencing, over the last 15-20 years, a series of deep seizures caused by migration and land management malfunctions, plus the serious problems created by unemployment, congestion and lack of any income.

#### **4. Reason for Radicalization**

All these have led to an unprecedented increase of differences in the development levels of the various urban areas, the consequence of various policies in the "issue of housing" being the deepening of social discrepancies in urban areas. The rise of concentration of over-populated housing in poor neighborhoods, on the outskirts of major urban centers, leads to even greater social segregation and to a total lack of cohesion among individuals.

In a sociological research conducted by Timbuktu Institute and the African Centre of Peace Studies in 2016, in order to determine the radicalization factors of Senegalese youth, more than half of the interviewed young people indicated extreme poverty as the main factor of radicalism. 68% of the 400 interviewed subjects, aged between 18 and 35, have no confidence in the Senegalese state and in the services provided to its citizens. The analysis of the research results shows that for the Senegalese youth, the state, as an entity, is primarily responsible for increasing radicalism. (see: <http://timbuktu->

[institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/TIM.1610-Rapport-radicalisation-Dakar.pdf](http://institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/TIM.1610-Rapport-radicalisation-Dakar.pdf)). The investigation was carried out exactly in the popular neighborhoods, on the outskirts of Dakar, to which I have previously referred, namely Grand Yoff, Parcelles Assainies, Pikine and Guédiawaye. 68% of the respondents declared they were single, more than a third of them without any occupation, but 90% with at least a minimum level of schooling.

The results are all the more conclusive, as they come from a 2006 study conducted by the National Agency for Statistics and Demography (NASD) in Senegal, according to which the average poverty level in Dakar is 46.7%. In addition, the Senegalese average family includes 9 members, according to the same study. Strictly with respect to Dakar, the average family is comprised of 8 members, while a family out of 3 has 11 members. Only one family out of 4 has between 1 and 5 members. (see: [http://www.NASD.sn/ressources/rapports/Rapport\\_ESPS.pdf](http://www.NASD.sn/ressources/rapports/Rapport_ESPS.pdf))

In terms of living space in Dakar, only 46% of families live in houses with more than 3 rooms. This generates a series of issues related to promiscuity, lack of hygiene and a minimal environment for decent living. 46.2% of the homes do not have running water and only 39% of the homes are connected to a sewerage system. Electricity is found only in 47.5% of urban households, compared with only 14.9% of those in rural areas.

All these explain the 68.5% dissatisfaction rate of Dakar residents about the benefits of living in the urban area. (ibid). For a Senegalese or migrant young man from West Africa, living in the capital is one of the few possibilities he would have to lead a decent life. However, the shortcomings encountered and the inexistence of a predictable future turn the “Dakar dream” into a forced choice: emigration or violent radicalization.

## 5. Afterword

“Get out or die” is the phrase guiding West African young men trying to illegally enter the Western space, using improvised boats, led by members of clandestine networks presenting them the West as the solution to all their problems. And when they cannot carry out this plan, or when they are rejected by the place of their dreams, young Africans choose the second way: violent radicalism. To them, radical movements are the provision of a relative social security that the state is no longer able to offer. And when the state is shown powerless to act and manifest its sovereignty, different entities begin to monopolize its functions.

The link between socio-economic shortcomings and increased levels of radicalization among young people reopened in the intellectual debate immediately after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. Modernization theorists believe that social radicalization is directly proportional with poverty and in direct correlation with the level of education. (see: A.J. So, *Social Change and Development*, Sage Publication, 1990). We can add to this the great gap between the expectations of young people and the real development opportunities, for in a world in the process of globalization, the illusion of opportunities from “across the border” leads to frustration, victimization and humiliation among social groups in an early stage of urbanization, with a very low level of education and without any professional growth perspective.

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