

8. Human rights cities: making the global local

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This chapter analyzes human rights cities as sites or pathways of influence and change. Human rights cities (HRCs) are a worldwide and growing phenomenon, yet conventional human rights scholarship has paid them little attention, and they have been ignored altogether by political scientists. Scholars in geography, sociology, anthropology, and urban studies have taken notice of HRCs, though they typically focus less on the human rights dimension than on urban and transnational social movements, on glocalization, and on anti-neoliberal politics (e.g. Belda-Miquel, Peris Blanes, and Frediani 2016; Borja 2010; Mathivet 2010; Mitchell and Heynen 2009; Sites 2007; Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans 2012). Legal scholars have focused on cities/municipal *governments* as possible sources or sites of implementation and enforcement efforts for international human rights, but this focus downplays the grassroots component of HRC activism (e.g. Davis 2016; Meyer 2009; Soohoo 2007; Wexler 2009, 2006). Networks and NGOs involved in the movement have produced policy reports, case studies and other materials, but the recent publication of *Global Urban Justice: The Rise of Human Rights Cities* (Oomen, Davis, and Grigolo 2016) marks the first direct and sustained academic engagement with the topic.

Part of my aim in this chapter is simply to help bring scholarly attention to this intriguing phenomenon. In doing so, I shall argue that human rights cities represent an innovative and distinctive political praxis, an important pathway of influence that challenges and expands our thinking about how norms, institutions, and practices shape the realization of human rights and human dignity in the contemporary world. I draw throughout on examples from my own experience in the City of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with the Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance (HRCA).

WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS CITIES?

The term “human rights city” can apply to several related local human rights practices often centered in urban areas. Typically HRCs promote *human rights in the city*, the recognition and realization of human rights principles in municipal settings (García Chueca 2016). In this model, an HRC is “an urban entity or local government that explicitly bases its policies, or some of them, on human rights as laid down in international treaties, and thus distinguishes itself from other local authorities” (Oomen and Baumgärtel 2014, p. 1). These community-based initiatives combine significant grassroots autonomy with global solidarity, emphasizing participation, empowerment, and social change oriented by international human rights principles (Marks, Modrowski, and Lichem 2008, pp. 39–40). Many commentators interpret HRCs narrowly as sites or mechanisms for the dissemination of international human rights norms and their implementation and enforcement (e.g. Berends et al. 2013; Oomen and Baumgärtel 2014, p. 19; Soohoo 2016), while others view them more expansively as creative and open-ended social movements (e.g. Grigolo 2017; Smith 2017b).

The HRC movement grew from the inspiration and efforts of the People’s Movement for Human Rights Learning (PDHRE).¹ PDHRE defines as a human rights city any “city or a community where people of good will, in government, in organizations and in institutions, try and let a human rights framework guide the development of the life of the community” (PDHRE 2007, p. 3). The PDHRE-prescribed process for building an HRC involves creating a steering committee, developing a plan of action, implementing human rights education and other activities, evaluating this work, and expanding and promoting it (Marks, Modrowski, and Lichem 2008, 47ff.).

Human rights cities come into being along numerous vectors, however. While some have followed the PDHRE’s prescriptions, others have adopted or endorsed charters, statements, and agreements promoted by various international organizations.² Still others work in partnership with

¹ The mismatch between the name and the acronym traces to the organization’s founding (in 1988) as the People’s Decade for Human Rights Education; the corresponding acronym has been preserved for continuity; see <http://www.pdhre.org/about.html> (accessed August 10, 2018).

² These are numerous and include The European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City, (Saint-Denis, France, 2000); the World Charter on the Right to the City (Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2001); the Charter of Rights and Responsibilities of Montreal (Canada, 2006); the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City (Mexico, 2010); and the Gwangju Human Rights Charter (South Korea, 2012).

local government, alongside local and transnational networks of NGOs, and through the local adoption of specific international treaties.³ All of these pathways traverse some common terrain: the forging of new alliances, involving governments and civil society actors, to promote a local human rights agenda; the “intensely political process involved in translating universal and abstract norms into values and indicators” relevant at the local level; and, the development of new practices for realizing social justice locally (Oomen 2016, p. 4).

Pittsburgh’s distinctive path to becoming an HRC crossed all of this territory. In 2011, high school students participating in the American Friends Service Committee’s program on Racial Justice through Human Rights proposed to the Pittsburgh City Council that Pittsburgh should commit to recognizing, respecting, and promoting its residents’ human rights. In April of that year a Proclamation to that effect was issued, and Pittsburgh became the fifth human rights city in the United States. Little came of this Proclamation initially, despite the students’ efforts to develop human rights education curriculum. But in 2012, as the Occupy Movement faded, a small group of activists comprising University of Pittsburgh faculty and graduate students and community social justice organizers began strategizing how they might develop a sustainable, broad-based coalition that could leverage the Proclamation to orient and animate its work.⁴

Guided by the example of others, these organizers created the Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance (HRCA), an all-volunteer network of individuals and organizations promoting human rights learning and culture and advancing programs and policies to realize the vision of a true human rights city. The Alliance sought intentionally to build an intersectional movement for human rights, mindful of the importance of beginning with a focus on those least able to enjoy their rights. From the beginning, its work has involved engagement with existing social justice and other civic and community groups across the city, listening to and learning from their experiences in shaping a vision of what it might mean to live in a human rights city. In December 2014, the HRCA introduced its Human Rights City Plan of Action, the product of more than a year of consultations. The plan offers specific recommendations for action, based on the work already being advanced by activists, in the areas of Cultural and Institutional Change, Economic Justice, Education, Environmental Justice, Gender Justice, Police and Justice Reform, Racial Justice, and Social Inclusion.

³ For more expansive discussions and examples of these various pathways see Berends et al. 2013, pp.171–2; Marks, Modrowski, and Lichem 2008; Oomen 2016; Oomen and Baumgärtel 2014; PDHRE 2007; SALAR 2017.

⁴ This narrative draws on Smith (2015) and the author’s recollections.

As this highly abbreviated history indicates, the formation of new alliances and the translation of human rights norms into locally meaningful values to guide action have been essential to the work of the Pittsburgh HRCA (and others – see Gready et al. 2017 on the experience of York, UK). Each of the eight areas in the Plan for Action contains specific proposals that tailor international human rights principles to local needs and circumstances. While the Pittsburgh HRCA has consciously sought to build on and amplify existing social justice practices, the *process* of organizing an intersectional alliance of this kind itself represents a new practice of sorts, one intended to unify alliance members around shared principles and projects in line with best practices of social justice organizing (see Working Group Meeting on Globalization and Trade 1996). At the same time, the HRCA has developed novel methods of organizing suited to the alliance model, among them the Human Rights Days of Action, in which members organize and cross-promote numerous events in the days leading up to International Human Rights Day each December 10th. This successful model has been adopted by the National Human Rights City Alliance.⁵

(RE)DEFINING THE HUMAN RIGHTS COMMUNITY

Michele Grigolo defines HRCs simply as those “organized around norms and principles of human rights” (Grigolo 2016, p.277). He hopes that this definition can accommodate all of the complexity of human rights practice at the local level—a practice that is embedded in larger human rights discourses and practices without being wholly bound by them. This definition reflects Grigolo’s sociological conceptualization of HRCs “as a *process of collaboration and competition between different social actors*, especially within the field of progressive politics” (Grigolo 2017, p.13). This definition treats human rights principles as settled or accepted within HRCs, yet the actual practice in HRCs shows that human rights norms invariably remain contested and that the contestation is often sharp. Local demands for human rights frequently emanate from social movements that are both oppositional and aspirational in character; they frequently rely on radical critique anchored in a human rights framework.

I prefer a more parsimonious and yet conceptually more expansive definition of the human rights community as *a critical political praxis oriented to the realization of all human rights for all inhabitants of a locality*. This definition emphasizes both the theory and the practice of local human

⁵ See <https://www.ushrnetwork.org/events/2016-national-human-rights-days-action> (accessed August 10, 2018).

rights movements (praxis); it draws attention to the needs and interests of the deprived and marginalized (all rights for all inhabitants); it calls for an integrative and intersectional analysis of existing social arrangements, highlighting the contentious character of human rights politics (critical, political).

Notice that I've substituted *community* for *city* and defined the concept in terms of a locally-grounded and -oriented praxis. Doing so addresses a significant analytic and conceptual flaw pervasive in the emerging literature on HRCs – namely, that the terms city, urban, and local are used essentially interchangeably.⁶ This is a mistake: many important questions get lost in this equivalency. I think the mistake occurs because those writing on the subject understand both the profound importance of local government in the realization of human rights and the present concentration of local human rights activism in urban areas and regional conurbations. Cities are constitutive of social movements because they are dense, large, and diverse enough to generate conflict, to incubate and sustain movements, and to facilitate the formation of new networks and ties among activists (Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans 2012, p. 2546). Cities concentrate the conduits through which social relations fostering social movements form, and they are also concentrated sites of power and privilege that social movements challenge (Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans 2012, p. 2550).

Yet while human rights activism in cities is facilitated and encouraged by these concentrations, it is also driven by the recognition that local authorities have a profound impact on the realization of human rights. As numerous scholars have observed, local government is on the “front line” of service provision, making it an especially important mechanism for the implementation and realization of human rights, especially social and economic rights, and for the enforcement of a wide range of rights (Soohoo 2016). Its proximity to the populace puts it in the forefront of service provision and legal enforcement. This role is not unique to cities: as research by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) shows comprehensively, municipal governments of all kinds play a vital role in protecting and promoting human rights (SALAR 2017; Davis 2017).

Alongside growing awareness of the centrality of local government to the enjoyment of human rights, significant developments in the international human rights regime have propelled a shift toward local realization – and thus activism. One such development is the accelerating move

⁶ The same does not hold for the critical urban studies literature, as one would expect.

from standard-setting to implementation, which directs attention to localities as the sites where many services are delivered and many rights enforced. Greater attention to social and economic rights, in particular, has reinforced the salience of the local, since many of these rights must be delivered locally. (Global patterns of decentralization in recent decades further amplify this trend.) Moreover, efforts to strengthen supranational enforcement of human rights, through the creation of the Human Rights Council and its power of universal periodic review (see Elizalde, Chapter 5 this volume) and through the empowerment of special rapporteurs to investigate issues such as housing and violence against women, lead – perhaps counterintuitively – to increasing reliance on and opportunities for local involvement in monitoring, implementation, and enforcement of human rights (Oomen and Baumgärtel 2014, pp.3–4). Recently, the UN Human Rights Council itself has emphasized the importance of local action to protect and promote human rights (UN General Assembly 2015).

It's tempting to focus on cities for these reasons, if not simply because, as of 2010, over half of the world's population dwells in cities (a proportion that will only continue to grow). Again, however, many of the trends and conditions favoring local realization of human rights and local mobilization around them obtain also in non-urban areas. Conflating cities with other types of locality hides the very different and significant challenges in mounting a critical praxis of human rights anchored in rural or suburban areas. At the same time, it's crucial, normatively and politically, for HRC scholars and activists not to ignore rural and suburban communities and small towns. Normatively, a commitment to human rights for all requires attention to all of the places where people live. Politically, it's vital to find ways to bridge the tensions between urban and rural dwellers apparent in recent nationalist backlash in Europe and the United States. HRCs are a promising way to do so because they speak to people's lived experiences. Integrated intersectional analysis can ground greater understanding and solidarity by highlighting the structural forces promoting precariousness and undermining dignity throughout our economy and society, however differently they manifest in particular local settings.

PATHWAYS OF INFLUENCE

The extant literature on human rights suggests two complementary pathways of influence that might aptly characterize HRCs: *downward diffusion* of human rights norms and *grassroots localization*. In downward diffusion, rights norms flow from international institutions through

institutional channels and professional networks to the local level, representing an expansion or deepening of the existing human rights regime. The key actors in downward diffusion can include city councils, mayors, and administrations interested in progressive reform, in increasing their governance capacity, or simply in branding and marketing their communities (Berends et al. 2013; Oomen 2016, p. 7; Oomen and Baumgärtel 2014). Downward diffusion relies on strong collaboration with municipal authorities in adapting existing human rights norms to local settings.

Grassroots localization, by contrast, emphasizes the efforts of activists and NGOs in driving the local adoption of human rights norms. Often, broad, vocal coalitions of civil society actors contribute significantly to local adoption efforts (Oomen 2016, pp. 8–9). Sometimes communities adopt or endorse some of the various charters or agreements promoted by various IGOs (see note 4). Sometimes they decide to adopt and implement – to “ratify” – specific international human rights conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) or the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Both downward diffusion and grassroots localization make legalization a primary strategy of implementation (Davis 2016; Soohoo 2016; Wexler 2009, 2006). Viewed systemically, such efforts have a top-down feel, though the involvement of activists in selecting, translating, and legitimating global norms at the local level suggests “glocalization” rather than pure “top-down” diffusion or grassroots localization (Oomen 2016, p. 10; see Goodale and Merry 2007; Merry 2006b, 2006a).

Glocalization aptly characterizes the recent successful campaign for a CEDAW ordinance in Pittsburgh (one of nine in the United States). A local branch of a long-established NGO, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), partnered with a local foundation (the Pittsburgh Women and Girls Foundation) and a grassroots organization (New Voices Pittsburgh, which advocates for the complete health and well-being of women of color through a reproductive justice framework) to push for CEDAW implementation locally.⁷ They did so in partnership with a national coalition of Cities for CEDAW that includes the Women’s International Network (an NGO with consultative status at ECOSOC) and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. Working closely with the steering committee of the Pittsburgh HRCA, Pittsburgh for CEDAW began tabling, making presentations for local

⁷ I am indebted to Marcia Bandes, chair of the Pittsburgh for CEDAW Coalition, for sharing her presentation “Pittsburgh CEDAW Process” with me; I have relied heavily on this documentation in crafting this summary. For more information, see <http://pgh4cedaw.org/>.

organizations, and seeking endorsements.⁸ They found a champion in City Council member Natalia Rudiak, who helped to draft an ordinance (drawing on models provided in the national coalition toolkit) and shepherd it to a vote in Council. Along the way, the core coalition grew, joined by the Women's Law Project and the League of Women Voters of Greater Pittsburgh, and it garnered over 30 endorsements. On December 6, 2016, Council passed legislation enacting key elements of CEDAW locally, establishing a Gender Equity Commission and committing to an intersectional gender analysis of city policies and programs.⁹

Both the downward diffusion and grassroots localization models assume a receptive and progressive governmental partner and broad support for the human rights agenda locally. In Pittsburgh, a progressive Mayor and City Council already committed to human rights proved receptive to the CEDAW initiative. Such a high degree of congruence of interests among activists, governmental authorities, and other powerful actors at the local level cannot be assumed, however; often the politics of human rights is far more contentious. Local officials and institutions are frequently tepid and sometimes hostile toward demands for human rights. Powerful entrenched interests – police, developers, political parties, city bureaucracies, large employers, and even some long-established NGOs and activist networks unfamiliar with the human rights framework – often dismiss or condemn calls for human rights as too costly, radical, utopian, or divisive (!) to be implemented locally. Indeed, both can be true in the same community; in Pittsburgh, issues like housing and police violence remain deeply contentious. (Sometimes, states or regional governments preempt city-level reforms, especially when more progressive or left-leaning cities are situated within more conservative or right-leaning areas.)

Where human rights prove controversial, local communities figure less as arenas for their implementation, as the downward diffusion and grassroots localization models suggest, than as the terrain of contestation on which struggles for rights and emancipation play out. In such cases, activists – usually social movements more than established NGOs – may partner with other activists and movements through trans-local (and often trans-national) networks to share experiences, develop strategies and best practices, and build solidarity horizontally. For example, a partnership among the Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance and the Washington, DC Human Rights City, supported by the University of Pittsburgh's

⁸ There is significant overlap between the steering committee and the PGH4CEDAW coalition.

⁹ Some aspects of CEDAW, e.g. those regarding health and healthcare, lie outside the city's jurisdiction.

Global Studies Center, catalyzed the creation of a national network of HRC activists ultimately formalized under the umbrella of the US Human Rights Network as the *National Human Rights Cities Alliance*.¹⁰ These networks and the political struggles in which they are engaged are best characterized as instances of bottom-up globalization (Smith 2017a), a process that involves re-appropriation and re-articulation of existing rights as well as demands for new rights as part of a struggle to democratize communities. Rights to democratic control over planning and budgeting are examples of rights being reclaimed and reconfigured at the local level; rights to housing and to public transit are examples of new rights.

Bottom-up globalization represents a distinct and important pathway of influence under-appreciated by human rights scholars. It highlights the innovations that characterize human rights community praxis and the actors and dynamics that sometimes block the influence of human rights norms locally. Whether HRCs are examples of regime development is a question that reveals more about how we conceive of the human rights regime than about HRCs. HRC praxis entails the adoption, implementation, and enforcement of international human rights norms, to be sure, but it also involves the translation, adaptation, and often the transformation of those norms in concrete political settings. Thus HRC praxis represents more than simply the extension or expansion of the existing regime; it also represents its *pluralization*. This pluralization of the human rights regime cuts against the notion of “universality” on which international human rights doctrine is predicated. This is not lost on scholars of HRCs, who recognize that the “interplay between the global and the local . . . can strengthen local struggles but also fortify international human rights discourse” (Oomen 2016, p.4). The idea of “interplay,” however, conceives of the relation between local and global as harmonious and mutually reinforcing. I prefer the term “dialectic” because it calls to mind an ongoing process of recreation in which both elements are transformed through their interaction. HRC praxis actually *remakes* the existing human rights regime – in ways that few have directly acknowledged or reckoned with.

CRITICISM AND ALTERNATIVES – THE RIGHT TO THE CITY

While the HRC approach contributes welcome innovations within this understanding of rights – in the form of proximity-based rights related to

¹⁰ See <https://www.ushrnetwork.org/our-work/project/national-human-rights-cities-alliance> (accessed August 10, 2018).

urban issues and local governance including transportation, sustainable urban development, accountability, and local administration of justice – critics worry that it remains “programmatically” and “top-down” (García Chueca 2016, p.119). In their view, HRCs preserve the state-centric human rights framework, merely substituting the city for the state as the responsible actor (Grigolo 2016, p.285; García Chueca 2016, p. 108). Some critics have complained that HRCs uncritically reinforce a hegemonic conception of human rights that:

[G]ives pre-eminence to an individual conception of rights and to the idea that institutions . . . grant rights to individuals. Despite the importance given to citizen-participation in local governance, here the role of citizens is basically related to the conception, implementation and monitoring of local policies aiming at realizing already recognized human rights rather than redefining them. In other words, the leading role belongs to local administrations. (García Chueca 2016, p. 119)

Some conclude that these efforts amount to little more than exercises in naming and branding (Mayer 2009, pp. 368–9) and that, because of its reliance on local government as a partner, the HRC model “conceals and contradicts the social, political, and economic reality of the city.” HRCs are a “brand,” the “product of the kind of neo-liberal city that [more radical] activists contest” (Grigolo 2016, p.287). Several scholars go even further, suggesting that HRCs cannot offer an integrative and systemic analysis of structural injustice or an inclusive platform for social transformation because of their imbrication in a conventional human rights framework (Marcuse 2010, 89; cf. Attoh 2011; García Chueca 2016).

Criticisms like these are not merely impartial analyses; they are frequently leveled by advocates of the *right to the city*. The right to the city is not a (human) right in any conventional sense; Mathivet (2010) describes it as a demand for the realization of other rights (cf. Attoh 2011; Grigolo 2016). Similarly, Marcuse (2010, p.90) views it as a common right comprising all existing rights as well as the future-oriented demand that people be able to shape an alternative future for the city. Harvey (2008, p. 23) calls it “a right to change ourselves by changing the city”; for him, it is both a slogan and an ideal.

To many of its proponents, the right to the city is both oppositional and aspirational, predicated upon a form of radical openness that gives it a capacious character and a valuable “strategic fuzziness” (Attoh 2011, p.678). It is less a political program than a cry or demand in which the city figures as a kind of ideal (Marcuse 2010, pp.87–8). It emerged as a political reaction against and critique of transformations in urban life and democracy wrought by capitalist development policies – specifically

changes effected through “accumulation by dispossession” – in Paris and other European and North American cities in the late 1960s (Lefebvre 1996; Harvey 2008). Today the right to the city is frequently associated with movements in the global South and with radical political movements opposed to the distinctive brand of urban displacement and expropriation associated with neoliberalism (García Chueca 2016; Marcuse 2010). Some describe it as the political banner under which various social forces engaged in counter-hegemonic politics march, a slogan evoking a moral claim for inclusion, redistribution, and resistance to neoliberalism on behalf of the deprived (García Chueca 2016, pp.113–14; Mayer 2009, p.367; Marcuse 2010, p.90).

Many of its proponents regard the right to the city as a radical alternative to HRCs, one more supportive of an integrative, structural analysis of power (Marcuse 2010, 92ff.; García Chueca 2016; Grigolo 2016). While the two discourses are certainly distinct, it’s unhelpful and misleading to essentialize and reify the differences between them (Grigolo 2016, p.287, though cf. Grigolo 2017, p.17). They are often deeply intertwined in practice (though some commentators allege that the right to the city is more loved by academics than by activists; (Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans 2012, pp.2547–8). Even scholarship that purports to find significant differences between them (e.g., Grigolo 2016, p.287; García Chueca 2016) actually reinforces their overlapping and complementary nature. The key distinction seems to be in the focus of the two discourses and their associated practices. The right to the city is more narrowly focused, addressing neoliberal urban development policies and programs. It perhaps appears more radical and confrontational because it specifically targets a contentious configuration of power relations, while HRCs address a much broader array of issues. Even this distinction can be overdrawn, however. As we have seen, the right to the city, whether understood as a new (kind of) right or as a political demand, entails or strives for the realization of existing human rights. Likewise, the local pursuit of human rights is itself an oppositional and aspirational idea, notwithstanding its countenancing of cooperation with local authorities. In an era of “austerity urbanism” (Peck 2015), it’s hard to imagine an urban human rights movement that did not take the right to the city seriously – just as it’s hard to imagine a campaign for the right to the city that did not embrace all human rights.

It’s especially important to reject the suggestion that HRCs lack critical edge or radical/transformational potential. The very point of human rights analysis is to provide an integrative, intersectional analysis and critique of existing social arrangements and to call for their reform or replacement as a necessary step toward a more just society (e.g. Ackerly 2018, 2008; Goodhart 2018, 2005; Hall 2015). Besides, this is not how most

activists understand their own critical practice. In claiming their rights, people articulate, enact, and remake their own (and others') conceptions of themselves as citizens and as members of their communities. Such a practice "allows individuals silenced by illness, class, race, and other factors to unite and engage in acts of democratic citizenship that shift the very meaning of democratic community" (Zivi 2012, pp. 22–3). Indeed, "social movement struggles around human rights have contained a dimension which points toward democratizing all forms of social relations" (Stammers 2009, p. 249). The critical human rights framework adopted by local activists "is grounded in the understanding that we can only realize our full human rights when we change social relationships, structures and institutions" (Hall 2015).

EMERGING PARADOXES

By way of conclusion, I want to reflect on some emergent paradoxes that HRC praxis creates with respect to the international human rights regime (hereafter, the regime) and its underlying logic. I refer to *paradoxes* rather than *contradictions* because I am confident that these tensions will be worked out dialectically – in theory and in practice.

One paradox concerns what we might call the multi-level politics of human rights. This politics is evident in the assertion of autonomy implicit in the local adoption and adaptation of international conventions – especially where national governments have declined or refused to adopt them. This assertion marks a radical extension even of doctrines like subsidiarity (Gosepath 2005; Landy and Teles 2001), contravening the conception of national sovereignty on which the regime rests. On a narrow or conventional understanding, such innovations must appear as challenges to – perhaps as subversions of – the existing, state-centric regime. Yet that regime has long been criticized for the inherent absurdity of making states primarily responsible for protecting and promoting human rights when they are often the most egregious violators of rights. This absurdity has been – partially and problematically – acknowledged by the regime itself in the creation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and in the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

Local human rights practices and transnational networks linking those practices are no more disruptive of sovereignty or of the regime than the ICC or R2P. They are, however, *differently* disruptive, as they shift agency and responsibility away from state actors and international elites to social movement activists and their allies in various coalitions of local actors (sometimes of course including government and elected officials). Rather

than a challenge or contradiction, I see local human rights praxis as an urgent pragmatic adaptation to growing frustration with the failures, limitations, and conservatism of the regime and with national reluctance to take responsibility for human rights. They are also much more in keeping with the participatory and democratic ethos of human rights: whereas the ICC and R2P both rely on states and inter-state politics to solve the problems of the international human rights regime and risk – or perpetuate – neocolonial instrumentalization of that regime, HRC praxis relies on local translation and adaptation by grassroots actors.

Social movements and other civil society actors working to implement and realize human rights at the local level take responsibility for human rights across a broad range of policy areas, regardless of whether local authorities are (in a positivist sense) or have traditionally understood themselves to be responsible for human rights in these ways. In doing so they engage in a form of insurgent citizenship (Holston 2009), one of the points of which is to transform the way we think about responsibility. For example, when housing activists occupy foreclosed homes and intervene to prevent evictions resulting from mortgage fraud and lending discrimination, they not only make an immediate defense of human rights but also challenge us to think differently about responsibility for people's right to housing. In addition, the idea that new rights might be worked out at the local level, as with the right to transit mentioned earlier, disrupts the deeply-entrenched notion that, whatever their moral or philosophical underpinnings, human rights' legitimacy derives from their status as international positive and customary law. (Pittsburghers for Public Transit is an active member of the HRCA.) This proliferation of rights seems to take us beyond any "margin of appreciation" afforded to accommodate contextual variation in implementation. Traditional ways of thinking about the regime and about responsibility for human rights can't comprehend the extent to which social movement actors and networks are taking responsibility for their own human rights in demanding more democratic input, greater accountability, and better results. Taking responsibility, in this sense, means seizing the political initiative to redefine conventional thinking about who bears responsibility for what (Goodhart 2017; cf. Goodhart 2018, chapter 7).

The other paradox I want to address concerns the deeply political nature of local human rights praxis. I have discussed numerous ways in which this praxis is political; from treating the community as contested political terrain to taking responsibility for human rights locally to asserting a radical form of urban autonomy, HRC praxis reconnects human rights with their radical, emancipatory roots (see Goodhart 2005, esp 81ff.). This politicization of rights contrasts sharply with the idea that has animated much post-Cold War thinking about human rights and much

of the international legal practice of treaty-making, monitoring, and enforcement – namely, the idea that human rights are somehow above politics. Surprisingly, this notion has crept into the literature on HRCs: Davis (approvingly) cites one local politician who observes that support for human rights approaches frequently erodes when politicians are confronted “with concrete questions and conflicting interests and individual rights. Jimmy Baker, a member of the Botkyrka Municipal Council, observes that politicians must ‘rise above politics’ to address human rights issues” (Davis 2017, p. 6).

I have argued that, at the local level, human rights proponents frequently run up against powerful interests and systems of structural injustice; demands for human rights are political precisely insofar as they call for the dismantling of these structures and the transformation of social relations and social arrangements. The radical cry of the right to the city reminds us that these power structures can and must be challenged locally if human beings are to lead lives of dignity. At its core, the praxis of human rights in the community is that challenge.

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