

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Warren Magnusson. *Local Self-Government and the Right of the City.* McGill-Queen's Studies in Urban Governance Series. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015. 384 pp. \$110.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-4564-9; \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7735-4565-6.

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Review Editor's Note: When I announced H-Citizenship's plan to feature Warren Magnusson's most recent collection, *Local Self-Government and the Right to the City*, there were immediate interests from scholars all across the social sciences to review it. Such interests reflect Magnusson's stature as a political theorist of contemporary urban governance, especially in his adopted home of Canada, where he is professor emeritus of political science at the University of Victoria. I am very excited to present H-Citizenship's first ever review forum, featuring four different scholars' critical evaluations of Magnusson's collection. The four reviewers come from different institutional and research contexts, and each offers a unique take on Magnusson's contribution to studies of democracy and urban politics. The four reviewers are presented in alphabetical order. Casey Lynch finds the collection particularly insightful in parsing out contemporary theories of democracy in cities but questions Magnusson's failure to address various axes of difference. John Saunders raises a similar critique and suggests that this shortcoming could be attributed to, in part, Magnusson's catholic approach to incorporating potentially conflicting theorists ranging from Henri Lefebvre to Michel Foucault in his thinking. Catherine Wilkinson praises how Magnusson's insistence to localize democratic politics brought him to a fruitful engagement with the right to the city literature. Last but not least, Julie E. Young brings Magnusson's framework of urban governance to the ground and asks whether we can square it with ongoing negotiations of membership locally vis-à-vis borders and migrations. Collectively, the four reviewers offer sharp evaluations of Magnusson's text and identify points

of departure for future research. I hope you will find this review forum as intellectually stimulating as I had while editing it.

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**Reclaiming Democracy, Reclaiming Place?** â by Casey Lynch

The ideal of direct democracy through local town hall meetings, such as those of the early New England colonies, was long ago lost in contemporary thinking on democratic government. Yet, against claims that life is too complex and interconnected for such arrangements to function in the contemporary world, Warren Magnusson argues for an approach to political praxis that reclaims the right to self-government through a focus on place, activities, and community. To reclaim the ideals of democracy in the contemporary world, communities need to carve out new political spaces, create new institutions, and assert their right to the city against the claims of capital and nation-states. This requires a fundamental rethinking of the state, politics, and the individual in society. This is the primary project of *Local Self-Government and the Right to the City*. In examining these questions, Magnusson makes a valuable contribution to ongoing discussions across political and urban studies on the rescaling of the state, the erosion of democracy, and the radical potential of contemporary urban social movements.[1]

A collection of previously published essays and new

materials and reflections, Magnusson's book is divided into an introduction, three parts, and a conclusion. Each part is made up of three chapters and a postscript in which the author reflects on the essays, highlights his main arguments, and points toward new directions of inquiry. Part 1 is composed of three essays, written between 1981 and 1985, examining the history of thought regarding the possibilities for self-government and the status of the municipalities in Anglo-North America and the United Kingdom, which have experienced similar historical trends in the organization of municipal government. The final chapter questions established ways of thinking about scale in government and points toward an understanding of the local state. In part 2, with essays written between 1997 and 2009, Magnusson draws on the Foucauldian notion of governmentality to decenter the state from his thinking and from traditional conceptions of politics. These chapters highlight the multiple and various *movements* that constitute contemporary urban life and call for ways to rescale government to fit the emergent scales of politics. Part 3 focuses on the fundamental principles of local self-government and their relation to the right to the city, and the possible role of the municipality in such a vision. Finally, in a short conclusion, Magnusson reframes local self-government through three organizing principles: place, activities, and community. The compilation of these essays spanning thirty-four years of work, coupled with the author's reflective introductions and conclusions to each essay, gives the reader a long-term view of the evolution of Magnusson's thought.

Over the course of the book, Magnusson makes a number of contributions that will surely be of interest to a broad range of readers across political science, human geography, sociology, urban studies, and other disciplines. The first such contribution is in the author's discussion of the local state and in his rethinking of national states as municipalities within a global political and economic order. Magnusson argues that "the local state is not composed of autonomous municipalities, but rather of a network of competing and overlapping agencies for particular purposes" (p. 108). While this assertion will not surprise anyone familiar with contemporary work on governance—a term the author is rightly critical of—Magnusson employs the theory of the local state to re-politicize particular arrangements of government that he believes have been de-politicized in contemporary political theory and practice.[2] The theory of the local state asserts the potential for radically rethinking the role of municipalities as sites of political contestation, without

falling into the numerous problematic understandings of municipal government that he outlines in chapter 3.

Beyond this, Magnusson leverages a well-argued critique of the notion of sovereignty—drawing on Michel Foucault's critique from his 1975-76 lectures, *Society Must Be Defended*—in which he calls for a rethinking of the function of nation-states in a global order as similar to the function of municipalities in the local state, constrained by their interaction and overlapping with other governmental entities. Despite renewed critical discussion around the notion of sovereignty in recent years, much work across political studies continues to assert the place of the sovereign nation-state as the foundational unit of government globally.[3] Magnusson's approach recognizes the authority exercised by states without describing them as the central focus of politics and government. While Magnusson's arguments and reflections are insightful and articulate a useful approach to the study of the state, they could surely have benefited from an engagement with assemblage theories of the state, which more fully escape the problems of scale and embrace the ontology of movement that Magnusson asserts later on.[4] These alternative approaches may also offer a more critical and robust method for considering exactly *how* the local state or the nation-state are continually assembled and reassembled through everyday practice.

Magnusson's discussion of a broadened conception of politics, his focus on movements and grounded praxis, and his engagement with left-libertarian and anarchist notions of democratic mutualism offer another important contribution to ongoing discussions about democracy in the current neoliberal conjuncture. While for some observers the current political moment has effectively foreclosed most opportunities for true democratic government, Magnusson's approach seeks to highlight the multiplicity of times and spaces that could be opened up to emergent democratic institutions. By conceiving of government broadly through the notion of governmentality, Magnusson sees politics everywhere. If we are governed through a multiplicity of everyday relations and processes, then those relations and processes also offer opportunities to assert a right to local self-government and produce new political spaces. This approach requires a deep inquiry into the actual daily practices that seek to govern human (and human-nonhuman) relations. For Magnusson, this means trying to "see like a city" rather than "see like the state" (p. 195). While the state is constituted by an abstraction, the city is constituted by movement and emergent practices. In this way, Magnusson makes an articulate and persuasive argument against

narrow political economy and abstract, structural approaches to politics that aligns with contemporary work inspired by various flat ontologies.<sup>[5]</sup> Again, Magnusson's work could have benefited from a more thorough engagement with this literature.

While Magnusson makes an insightful contribution to contemporary theories of democracy, his analysis and proposals fail to fully address the question of difference, and, despite claims to the contrary, he tends to override the notion of community. While he invokes the notion of difference throughout the book, his engagement with the actual differences that constitute contemporary urban life is quite limited. Through his conception of community, it appears that Magnusson expects that differences—such as those of race, gender, sexuality, ability, and religion—can all be overcome if people can agree to focus on their common claim to a particular place. Such a view fails to interrogate and address the daily violence faced by many residents of our contemporary cities, a violence that comes as often from neighbors or from within urban social movements as it does from the state or capital. While Magnusson claims that a dual focus on local self-government and the right to the city allows us to move beyond the question of identity politics, this part of his argument is less convincing. Instead of moving through and addressing the messiness of contemporary identity politics, Magnusson seeks to go around it. For those scholars attuned to the micro-politics of difference and domination in contemporary society, Magnusson's work leaves something to be desired. His analysis could have benefited from an engagement with the broad critical literatures from (trans)feminist, queer, postcolonial, and critical race theories that explore the deeper roots of these questions.<sup>[6]</sup>

Despite some shortcomings, Magnusson's *Local Self-Government and the Right to the City* is an interesting, well-written, and engaging inquiry into the possibilities for a more democratic and locally grounded politics, attuned to shifting global (or interlocal) dynamics of government. It offers a nice mix of critique of what currently exists, theoretical inquiry, and grounded, practical proposals for what might be. I highly recommend this book for anyone with interests in urban political movements, democracy, the state, or globalization.

#### Notes

[1]. Neil Brenner, *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone

Books, 2015); and Oscar Rivas, Pablo Gallego, Fabio Gandara, and Claudia Alvaraz, *Nosotros, los Indignados: Voces Comprometidas del #15-M* (Madrid: Destino, 2011).

[2]. Harvey Lazar and Christian Leuprecht, eds., *Spheres of Governance: Comparative Studies of Cities in Multilevel Governance Systems* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007); Robert L. Bish and Vincent Ostrom, *Understanding the Urban Government: Metropolitan Reform Reconsidered* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1973); and Warren Magnusson, "Urban Politics and the Local State," *Studies in Political Economy: A Socialist Review* 16 (1985): 111-142.

[3]. John Agnew, *Globalization and Sovereignty* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009).

[4]. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); and Manuel Delanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (London: Continuum Books, 2006).

[5]. Sallie Marston, John Paul Jones III, and Keith Woodward, "Human Geography without Scale," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no. 4 (2005): 416-432.

[6]. Susan Stryker and Talia Bettcher, "Introduction: Trans/Feminisms," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3, nos. 1-2 (2016): 5-14; Alexander Weheliye, *Habeas Visus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014); and Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64-81.

#### ~~~~~ Rethinking Democracy through the Lens of the City by John Saunders

The problem of democracy has been a long-standing puzzle for Warren Magnusson. In *Local Self-Government and the Right to the City*, he assembles different pieces to build a compelling argument for empowering cities and their residents. As a resource for tracing Magnusson's work and thoughts over the past thirty-four years, this book is invaluable. Magnusson's additions, in the forms of postscripts and short introductions, help set the context for his thinking at the time of writing and provide more contemporary insights. These additions strengthen the book and help the reader follow Magnusson's mission. While the collection follows a chronological path,

this review is focused more on Magnusson's later work, which incorporates aspects of critical citizenship studies and work on governmentality. It is in these areas that Magnusson offers the most productive critique of conventional approaches to thinking about nation-states, cities, and governance. It is also here where cracks emerge, as he pulls in a host of sometimes-conflicting perspectives to wrestle with his own unease about the place and role of the city and those who dwell in it.

The introduction sets the stage for a fight for democracy, as conceived through the establishment of the American Republic and North America's continual movement away from empowered, locally oriented forms of governance. While a passionate beginning, it does not adequately discuss the concept of "the right to the city" or rather, Magnusson's take on Henri Lefebvre's phrase. Where Lefebvre might have seen a multitude of political acts of resistance, of negotiation, Magnusson focuses predominantly on channeling local actions toward an institutional, formal notion of political processes. While Lefebvre sought revolution, Magnusson fails to read this as a continual engagement with the spaces and politics of everyday life, assuming instead a simplistic notion of a reversal of the political order in the undetermined future. This is an important distinction, because, at times, the various positions the author stakes out are not immediately reconcilable. This is a significant tension that runs through the collection.

I am interested in pursuing these various cracks and tensions, not merely to present criticism but also to explore further debates over what constitutes the political. To do this, I briefly examine how Magnusson situates the city as a site of political and social relations, as well as how he uses Marxist (largely through Lefebvre) and Foucauldian thinking to critique and attempt to move past conventional liberal perspectives that foreground the nation-state as the primary force and site for Western politics. I also raise concerns with how Magnusson conceives of groups and group politics, and point to critical perspectives in citizenship studies that could help navigate some of these tensions.

Magnusson possesses a deep understanding of the historical and administrative background for urban government, particularly in Canada. The promise of more direct, reflexive democratic rule at the urban level has never fully materialized, a point he makes clear in chapter 1. Yet while his earlier work focuses on the relation between local government institutions, reforms, and liberal and Marxist preoccupations with the nation-state, his later

analyses shift to consider economic globalization and social movements. This shift reflects a deepening concern with scale and governance reflected in chapters 4 and 6. It also helps spur a provocative rejection of conventional constitutional politics in Canada, as seen in chapter 8. At first glance, centering the city as the site of the political lends itself well to Lefebvre's concept of "the right to the city." In chapter 9, Magnusson sees the right to self-government and the right to the city as "complementary challenges to the existing order" (pp. 255-256). But despite developing a critique of the role of capitalism in urban development, Magnusson eschews Karl Marx (or perhaps more accurately his interpreters), arguing at different points in the book that Marxists, alongside liberal thinkers, share a fixation with the state as the site and source of political power. This is at best an incomplete reading of Lefebvre's Marxism, which is far more complex and nuanced than Magnusson makes it out to be.

For Magnusson, the right to the city is a parallel concept to his ideal of local self-government. But again, tensions arise in how he presents his case. At one point he argues, "To say that people have a right to the city is to say that the city belongs to everyone, and that means that everyone has to be included" (p. 265). Yet he prefaces this with a much narrower, legalistic interpretation of the phrase, when he states that "a right to the city might be interpreted as a right to *have* institutions of local self-government" (p. 263). Again, the political can be found in institutions and formal processes of government, something quite different than what Lefebvre (and *his* interpreters) intended. Magnusson dismisses Lefebvre's (and Marx's) notion of revolution as "vacuous" (p. 265), preferring instead to speak of expanding rights within existing (or perhaps to-be-created) political and administrative institutions. This is quite a superficial reading of Lefebvre, who clearly grounded his understanding of the political in struggles and negotiations in everyday space, as forms of resistance and appropriation, to counter alienation and domination.[1] And while Don Mitchell's invocation of the same phrase may be decidedly too Marxist for Magnusson, it offers an array of examples and analyses that demonstrates political institutions' inability to produce equality in urban space without strong (if not constant) struggle and negotiation.[2] If anything, Lefebvre (and Mitchell, among others) points to the role of institutions in attempting to *contain* struggle, not enable it.

Similarly, Magnusson uses Foucauldian concepts in his attempt to recenter the city as the site and source of the political. Yet again he selectively interprets and de-

loys them to support reform through what is essentially a liberal perspective (despite his claims to the contrary). In a 2008 article titled "Urbanism, Cities and Local Self-Government," Magnusson describes governmentality as "a strategy to control populations by liberating them."<sup>[3]</sup> This conflates governmentality with discipline and control. Yet in *Politics of Urbanism: Seeing Like a City* (2011) and in the book under review, he modifies this perspective. In the introduction to the essay on globalization and social movements (chapter 5), for instance, he distinguishes governmentality more clearly from discipline (and control), describing it as a means of inducing particular behaviors and outcomes modulated through forms of freedom.

While this is clearly a stronger explanation, Magnusson needs to clarify its application to local government further, examining specific examples or instances. He also needs to clarify his understanding of power and how it relates to governmentality. For instance, at one point, he argues: "We are all in the business of government, and so 'governmentality'—the way of thinking and acting involved, whereby we try to influence the way people use their freedom individually and collectively—is a pervasive feature of human life, especially modern life" (p. 152, emphasis added). In this case, it appears as if governmentality operates equally as a shared tactic among all subjects, as well as various institutions, not initially or predominantly operationalized through the state. But others have described urban governmentality as a means of concretizing the modern state.<sup>[4]</sup> If Magnusson wishes to challenge or go beyond these interpretations, he needs to describe the role of governmentality in self-government more clearly. This is particularly important given his own acknowledgment of neoliberal strategies of governing that mobilize freedom to achieve specific outcomes.

So how can Magnusson address these tensions? He could push his critique even further, deploying these ostensibly incompatible perspectives on the very object of his analysis: the city. Throughout this volume, the city is understood largely as it is constituted historically and legally; that is, as a creation of colonial rule and later, as a confederation (in Canada), and more generally as a unit of governance for the modern nation-state. Magnusson accepts the city as it is given to us. He also accepts "some-what uncritically" narratives developed by Louis Wirth that urbanism is a way of life, despite efforts to describe this condition as a political movement rather than a natural phenomenon. The question of the city, then, remains unaddressed. It is an idealized site of the political, but its own genealogy is still buried. It is a privileged scale of

politics and yet remains unexamined.

Other perspectives, notably by Engin Isin, take a critical look at not only the city but also its citizens. For Isin, the city described by Max Weber is part of a political narrative that traces contemporary notions of citizenship and democracy directly to Greek political practices. Isin interrogates this continuity, and considers the city itself as a site and a source of governance and subjectivity, a "difference machine" in which groups constitute themselves as citizens, while others are constituted as outsiders and aliens (acknowledged briefly by Magnusson on page 174).<sup>[5]</sup> Like Magnusson, Isin also rejects the primacy of the nation-state but instead argues that the city materializes "power—power of empire, power of state."<sup>[6]</sup> He disrupts the path traced from Greek city-states to medieval city guilds to modern citizens (and takes Lefebvre to task for his own uncritical acceptance of this narrative).<sup>[7]</sup> Instead, Isin provides a genealogical account of the city and citizenship—an account Magnusson is familiar with but does not take on directly in his own work.

In a similar vein, Magnusson needs to develop further his take on groups as agents of political change. He offers a rereading of how social movements decenter the state and produce new spaces and processes for political action and identity. They are presented to us as attempts from civil society to destabilize scalar politics of the state and to expand the public sphere. Yet we lack a solid framework for understanding how groups constitute themselves and their actions, relying instead on Magnusson's categorization. While Magnusson may see the value and potential in exploring what Isin and Patricia K. Wood call "substantive citizenship" (in *Citizenship and Identity* [1999]), he ultimately returns to formal institutions and practices of citizenship instead.

Despite these concerns, *Local Self-Government and the Right to the City* offers several points for reconsidering the role of the city in the political. While Magnusson wrestles with potentially incompatible theoretical and political approaches, he nonetheless reminds us of the need for engagement with the very institutions he critiques. He reminds us that whatever our political perspectives, we are nonetheless thrown together in the city and must find ways to get along. This is a point made clear in the concluding chapter, where Magnusson calls for meaningful and productive forms of engagement and connection. Magnusson's enthusiasm for democracy may occlude some of his arguments, but he does show a willingness to incorporate a range of perspectives and to rethink conventional politics.

Magnusson makes productive use of a range of theorists and observers to build insights for citizenship studies, particularly with regard to public policy and administration in urban government. His deep concern for overcoming the inequalities of neoliberal rule (often carried out under the guise of empowering local government) carries throughout his work, and this collection reflects his long-standing passion for justice.

#### Notes

[1]. See, for instance, Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre* (London: Continuum, 2004); Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1999); and Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); as well as Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 1, *Introduction* (London: Verso, 1991).

[2]. Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003).

[3]. Warren Magnusson, "Urbanism, Cities and Local Self-Government," *Canadian Public Administration* 48, no. 1 (2008): 96-123, quotation on 96.

[4]. See, for instance, Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom* (London: Verso, 2003); and Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[5]. Engin Isin, *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

[6]. Engin Isin, "City.State: Critique of Scalar Thought," *Citizenship Studies* 11, no. 2 (2007): 211-228; and Engin Isin, *Cities without Citizens: Modernity of the City as Corporation* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992).

[7]. Isin, *Being Political*, 47.

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More Peaceful Politics? Local(ized) Self-Government and the Right to the City by Catherine Wilkinson

Local Self-Government and the Right to the City by Warren Magnusson is a text of much strength. Well written and well considered, it is a collection of essays in which Magnusson, using the traditional model of the town meeting as a touchstone, reflects on his own efforts to make sense of what local self-government can (and does actually) mean. Magnusson engagingly argues that putting more trust in government—especially self-

government—will make cities work better and will enable citizens to observe how to localize democracy appropriately. Doing so requires citizens and governments to realize that multiplicity, indeterminacy, and insecurity are implicit in politics, thereby avoiding sovereign solutions. Exactly how this could work in practice is central to this text. Magnusson's overarching thesis is an old-fashioned one. He maintains that people can assemble in their own communities and decide, for themselves, how things should be: what rules ought to apply, what items should be provided collectively, and what should be left to everyone's own initiative. Despite decades of talk about globalization, democracy still depends on local self-government, which Magnusson argues is the principle behind claims to personal autonomy, community control, and national self-determination. Local self-government, Magnusson contends, holds the promise of more peaceful politics.

A great strength of this book is its organization. Magnusson justifies the structure of the text in the introduction. He advises that each chapter should be read as a contribution to a conversation, as opposed to a "conversation-stopping declaration" (p. 29). The text is divided into three parts: "The Local State in Capitalist Society," "Social Movements and Political Space," and "Rethinking Local Democracy"—each containing three substantive chapters. In parts 1 and 2, as Magnusson confesses in the introduction, the author is in dialogue with his younger self. The conclusions of these two parts are postscripts that reflect on changes in the last thirty years since these essays were originally written and the implications of these changes on the content and the arguments of the chapters. Part 3 concludes with an essay that Magnusson wrote recently, thus no postscript is required. Structurally, my only critique is that the notes are provided near the end of the book. These would have been much more helpful if placed immediately after each chapter so as to minimize disruption to the flow of reading. There is an impressive array of references within the bibliography, which will function as a useful resource for many scholars.

In lieu of detailed summaries of every chapter, I focus herein on those that present the most striking arguments in relation to future thinking of local(ized) self-government. In chapter 1, Magnusson deals with the "peculiar history" of political efforts that seek to engage the urban working class without giving them the right to govern their own communities (p. 34). Geographically, Magnusson focuses on Britain, Canada, and the United States between the 1830s and the 1970s. He be-

gins the chapter by declaring that urban government has never performed the democratic function traditionally attributed to it. By putting great numbers of people under the same authorities and giving exclusive powers of decision to elected or appointed officials, early municipal reformers ensured that democracy would not be government by the masses, and so would not be a threat to property. Furthermore, the tasks of city government were immense, demanding skills and ideas that ordinary workmen lacked. Magnusson goes on to discuss the pressures for decentralization; local governments were particularly vulnerable to these demands, partly because they were charged with the immediate delivery of multiple services, but also because they were expected to provide citizens with their main opportunities for political participation. This chapter does well to set the context and scene for what follows in an accessible way.

In part 2, chapter 5, "The City as the Hope of Democracy," Magnusson asks: in what sense could the city ever be "the hope" of democracy (p. 156)? Magnusson stresses that any notion of "policy" should be treated with caution. The idea of overcoming disorder by means of well-thought-out and strictly implemented policies fits well with state-centric thinking, but not so well with the idea that we are all engaged in proliferating practices of government and self-government. A welcome addition to this chapter is Magnusson's reflection on what a global city is; the definition he provides would be a useful resource for student geographers.

In a statement that will strike chords with any geographer, Magnusson states that scale is a fundamental issue when it comes to government and politics. This is the key theme running through chapter 6, "Scaling Government to Politics." As Magnusson claims, in the conventional view, local self-government becomes possible when we scale things down to the level of the community. But he asks: What does such scaling down actually involve? And which activities of the state can be scaled down to the level of the community without impairing state capacities? The answer to these questions are reflexively considered throughout this chapter. No clear-cut answer is provided, and the reader is left with more questions perhaps than the chapter initially provokes.

In part 3, chapter 7, "The Principle of Local Self-Government," Magnusson opens up the idea of liberal democracy by problematizing the relationship between sovereignty and self-government. He argues that the standard relationship between municipalities and the state should be reversed, so that the latter is modeled

on the former. Magnusson's straight-talking approach to communicating his ideas is commendable. Chapter 9, "Local Self-Government and the Right to the City," further develops this theme. Magnusson starts from the ideas and practices in our existing institutions, and shows how the right to the city and the right to local self-government might be understood together. To make sense of our political possibilities, he asserts, we must be much more attentive to our existing practices of local self-government and the ways in which those practices have been repressed and distorted. This is particularly important for people who consider themselves radicals or progressives. The burning question for Magnusson is: how might a right of *local* self-government relate to a more general right of self-government? The common liberal view is that everyone has a right to freedom, a right that is usually interpreted as a matter of autonomy. I found particularly interesting Magnusson's reflection that, in a Kantian view, autonomy is to be interpreted as a matter of living in accordance with a law or rule that one gives to oneself, and liberals usually pay little attention to government as an activity emanating from the self at issue. Instead, as Magnusson notes, the focus is on the restrictions that have to be swept away, to allow for freedom.

In the conclusion, titled "Visions of Democracy," Magnusson reflects on how debates about democracy have changed considerably over the last forty years. For instance, there is much less talk about participatory democracy than there used to be, and a heightened concern about developing deliberative institutions has taken its place instead. Magnusson is critical of the tendency by leading commentators to evade most of the issues he raises in this book, to focus on issues supposedly of national concern, or to talk about "global" trends, without addressing the question of localizing politics. The fact that democracy has to be localized if it is to work at all gets glossed over, as does the connection between democracy and self-government. Further, Magnusson suggests that although the idea that we have a right to the city is powerful, it focuses more on the environment in which we live than on the activities that we engage in. Reflecting further, he rightly acknowledges that the most notable feature of more recent efforts to provide greater citizen participation is that they are modeled on what companies do to ascertain what their actual or potential customer wants.

Magnusson indicates in the acknowledgments that this will probably be his last book. I sincerely hope not; I hope to read another text of such standard from Mag-

nusson in the future. A crucial value of this text is that it brings to light the importance of considering the activities in which we engage in relation to the right to the city concept, as well as the environment in which we live. I see particular value in this text as a teaching resource for student debates within workshop settings on topics of local government, social movements, urban political economy, and democratic theory. Beyond this more specific function, this timely book would be of interest to academics in the areas of political studies, urban studies, geography, and planning.

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**Navigating the Boundaries of the Right to Local Self-Government and the City** by Julie E. E. Young

In *Local Self-Government and the Right to the City*, Warren Magnusson offers a retrospective of his body of work on democracy, politics, and what he sees as the need for local self-government, building on and circling back to previous research in a way that traces the evolution of his thinking and takes the reader along for the journey. What appears within the pages of this volume are revised and editorialized versions of previous work, stretching from 1979 through the present. The book is invaluable to those who are familiar with Magnusson's research and the debates into which it intervenes, although the terrain he covers can appear repetitive due to the retrospective approach. Importantly, the volume offers a refreshing and instructive look into the process of theory development itself that will be especially relevant for students and emerging scholars in that it exemplifies the iterative and ongoing nature of the research process. The introduction in particular offers a roadmap of the careful and reflective approach Magnusson has taken to arrive at and continuously reevaluate his insights. One of the major contributions of this book is the glimpse it offers into the processes of research and theory development. Magnusson raises many more questions throughout the book than he answers, demonstrating an intellectual project still in process even after many thoughtful years and pages of work. Despite alluding in the acknowledgments that this will likely be his final book, it seems that we can expect to hear much more from Magnusson on all of these subjects.

The book is the inaugural publication of a McGill-Queen's University Press series on urban governance whose stated goal is to examine why cities matter. Through a series of essays, organized into three sections, Magnusson makes his case for why the city is a relevant lens for examining questions of democracy, government,

and politics and why the local ought to be indeed, already is the site at which democracy is negotiated. Part 1 (The Local State in Capitalist Society) sets out Magnusson's research agenda vis-à-vis the need for careful study of what he terms the local state. In part 2 (Social Movements and Political Space), he underscores the significance of the city in the context of globalization, as well as the political opportunities that emerge at the intersections of movements of the state, of capital, and of activists within the city. He contends that the city is the architectonic movement within which the other modern movements arise, not deterministic of these movements but influential upon them (p. 199). Part 3 (Rethinking Local Democracy) demonstrates the limitations of sovereignty in a globalized and urbanized world and calls for the linking of the right to the city with the right to local self-government. Magnusson repeatedly points to the city as the hope of democracy (specifically, but not only, in chapter 5), by which he means that the city is where practices that are essential for democracy have been and continue to be enacted: in other words, life in the city is about strangers being forced through proximity and necessity to work out their differences, find ways to accommodate one another, and address problems together (p. 157). Magnusson finds political promise in the spaces and relationships of the city because working from this vantage point directs our attention to the world in which we actually live rather than to some abstract form, like the state (p. 199). Moreover, starting from the local places we inhabit addresses Magnusson's concern that our governments do not match our lives, since the issues that concern us increasingly intersect with a range of places, activities, and communities.

Magnusson's calls for local self-government have a difficult but intriguing fit with questions of migration and borders, and the policies and practices that govern them, and yet these are precisely where the disconnect between sovereign statist ontologies and how the world actually works is starkly revealed. While Magnusson suggests that the world in which we live is de-territorialized (p. 172), for people seeking to cross nation-state borders and/or living with precarious legal status within a particular state's jurisdiction, territory continues to ground access to membership. Despite many efforts and acts to the contrary, membership and citizenship are still enforced and understood through the mechanism of legal status in a particular national territory. For people on the move, territorialization remains a defining feature of their lives, determining of rights, entitlements, and experiences in the sense that legal status as defined through



the dictates of nation-state sovereignty shapes some of what is possible as people attempt to move across borders and make a place for themselves. And yet alternatives are emerging and already in evidence, in particular through the Sanctuary Cities and No One Is Illegal movements in Canada, the United States, and Europe. People on the move and the actions of local actors and authorities regularly undermine the logic of the central state, even as states continue to violently and insistently enforce their authority over matters of membership. This is especially visible in relation to members of the community who are not formally recognized as part of the political constituency, whether due to undocumented status or perceived recency of arrival. It is also evident in the activities and communities that arise in borderlands and border cities, where people organize their lives despite the international boundary lines that seek to constrain them.

In this regard, Magnusson is right to draw our attention to the city as the space where democracy is actually worked out, as it is in local places where boundaries of membership are being creatively reimagined as well as entrenched. One of the challenges of this book is that its theoretical insights are not sufficiently illustrated through specific local cases. As a result, an ongoing project that emerges from Magnusson's theoretical interventions is to flesh out these examples, in order to lay bare some of the messiness that lies within the 'promise' of the city. For instance, in response to the anticipated question of who has the right to the city and who is the subject of local democracy, Magnusson asserts, 'the relevant fact is that the person lives there' (p. 277). On the surface, there is much to commend about this seemingly simple statement: living in a place<sup>or</sup>, to use Henri Lefebvre's word, 'inhabitation'<sup>[1]</sup> ought to be what determines one's stake in that place and the claims it enables, whether to membership, the right to the city, and/or the right to local self-government. Indeed, Monica Varsanyi has called for citizenship to be defined based on residence in a place,<sup>[2]</sup> and Magnusson's call to link the right to the city with the right to local self-government seems to depend on such a construction.

And yet the devil is in the details, especially when the local place exists at the knife edge of where 'the city' and 'the national' collide. In my work in border cities but also in most major and minor cities of migration, strug-

gles over membership in the local and national communities are at the heart of what's at stake in a range of deliberations. This can lead to exciting movements toward openness but also to troubling expressions of closure: whether through the Sanctuary Cities of the 1980s or today, where local residents took a stance to welcome members of the community without formal legal status against the dictates of the national state, or through the examples of H&Crouxville, Quebec, and Hazleton, Pennsylvania, where overblown fears of residents born elsewhere led, respectively, to the imposition of a code of conduct banning public beatings and the burning to death of women and to the declaration of English as the official language.<sup>[3]</sup> Both can be seen as victories of 'local' democracy to be sure, but each was responding to and inflamed by debates linked to other scales. These cases reveal that deeply held concerns for identity and security are difficult to overcome. Beyond this, however, they demonstrate a reluctance to reimagine who comprises the community and a desire to maintain the structures that silence 'new' or 'other' voices. Indeed, the city of Toronto is still struggling to implement changes that would allow individuals with permanent residence to vote in municipal elections, never mind those people with forms of status defined as temporary or 'illegal' despite their participation in city spaces from workplaces to public transit and from schools to homes. There is vocal and entrenched resistance to the idea of residents with precarious legal status and indeed many other 'other' having a voice in decision making, whether local or beyond. If the city is, indeed, 'the hope of democracy,' then analysis of these movements that disrupt, entrench, and/or reimagine the boundaries of community must be at the center of how we understand struggles for and envision the contours of local democracy.

#### Notes

[1]. Henri Lefebvre, *Writing on Cities*, trans. E. Kofman & E. Lebas (1968; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996).

[2]. Monica Varsanyi, 'Interrogating "Urban Citizenship" vis-à-vis Undocumented Migration,' *Citizenship Studies* 10, no. 2 (2006): 229-249.

[3]. Liette Gilbert, 'Immigration as Local Politics: Re-bordering Immigration and Multiculturalism through Deterrence and Incapacitation,' *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 33, no. 1 (2009): 26-42.

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