

Seceding from Responsibility? Secession Movements in Los Angeles

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Summary. This paper seeks to understand why secession movements gained momentum in Los Angeles and what their effect will be on regional governance. A brief discussion of liberal theories of secession demonstrates that they cannot explain secession movements at the urban scale, as they are exclusively focused on cases of nationalist secession from a nation-state. Furthermore, liberal theories of secession offer normative arguments on the *right* to secede. Following a change in California legislation granting municipalities the right to secede, the secessionist debate in Los Angeles is not so much concerned with normative issues, but more with devising an effective and revenue-neutral process for secession. Using a threefold theoretical approach based on theories of secession, regulation theory and theories of state rescaling, and theories of social movements, this paper argues that the ‘political opportunity structures’ provided by globalisation and the prevalent neo-conservatism, might explain how secession movements in Los Angeles were able to mobilise large efforts to their cause. We hold that globalisation has forced cities to re-open the debate on size and governance. Secession movements have been very successful in raising public awareness on the issue. Their strength lies mostly in their populism, well in tune with the prevalent wave of neo-conservatism. These movements use arguments well grounded in Southern California’s complex history of regional fragmentation and consolidation. As a social project of the Right, they offer secession as a potential ‘solution’ to the problems of urban governance in the age of globalisation, in a context of simultaneous consolidation.

1. Introduction

Los Angeles is usually referred to as a place of spatial fragmentation, societal dysfunctionality and political disjuncture. A current wave of secessionist movements in southern California, trying to split large parts from the City of Los Angeles—at first glance—looks like yet another pearl in a string of historical attempts by individual communities in the

region ‘to go it alone’. Yet, at closer inspection, the situation may be more complex than suggested in this linear history. Accordingly, this paper examines these current secessionist movements—especially the ones in the San Fernando Valley in the north and in the San Pedro/Wilmington area in the south of the city—in a different light: rather than

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presuming a one-sided history of fragmentation, we start from an interpretation of Los Angeles' regional history as one of oscillation and dialectical reinforcement of consolidation and fragmentation. We will argue, specifically, that while largely conservative middle-class movements are attempting to 'secede from responsibility' in an increasingly complex regional-metropolitan environment, they do so in a context of simultaneous consolidation. It is by viewing secessionism against the needs and emerging realities of regionalism in southern California, that its true significance must be understood. It is possible to argue, we propose, that secessionism finds its political *raison d'être* and popular support precisely because of the mushrooming regional agenda in southern California. Viewed against the real and envisioned regionalism in environmental, transport, social welfare and other policy areas, urban secessionism is brought into full relief.

We will make the case that secessionism in Los Angeles is mostly a class-based, and strongly racialised, movement of *social* separation couched in *political* terms. It is also a matter of economic gain for some middle-class groups articulated in a language of civic rights and liberalism. The social core of the movement's significance is well described by political pundit Harold Meyerson

What's not in question is that, whether or not the Valley secedes, Los Angeles already has become a collection of separate cities, divided by a widening chasm of wealth and income, superimposed over its fault lines of race. What's not in question is that the primary challenge to confront our next mayor will be to make L.A. into one city—at a time when neighborhoods are walled off, people still fear to walk the streets at night, middle-class parents have pulled their kids from the public schools, and the city is home every day to a million private secessions (Meyerson, 1999).

In the eyes of local as well as international observers, LA is often seen as the emblematic, nightmarish, ungovernable urban entity

of this era. Confusion about the urban region's future reigns supreme. In Los Angeles, it was believed widely at the end of the 20th century, political deliberation and social change activities had fallen into disrespect, oblivion and irrelevance. The political classes who traditionally had run the affairs of the city, appeared to have disappeared. A telling commentary in *The Economist* rehashes the cliché of the rudderless anarchy that is Los Angeles

[T]he mayor inherited a city whose upper class had all but disappeared. The big companies that had been decapitated by mergers or transplanted to the suburbs. The universities had fallen victim to Marxists and postmodernists. And the entrepreneurs who increasingly drove the economy—many of them recent immigrants—had no time for black-tie dinners. The sprawling city risked disintegrating into a collection of inward-looking suburbs (*The Economist*, 1999).

While we do not share the concern about Los Angeles' governability as expressed here, we note the necessity to explain the persistent presence and recent success of middle-class socio-political movements attempting to fill the apparent void left by what appears to be the abdication of the old ruling classes of southern California. We are aware that the disappearance of power is, of course, largely an urban myth. Rather than disappear, traditionally powerful groups in the urban region have regrouped into new power coalitions, often with the involvement of global capital, immigrant leadership and other new power brokers (Keil, 1998). Yet, we argue that the specific cases of secessionism under scrutiny here demand a theoretical explanation of the power and influence of certain middle-class segments on the course of local politics. We will argue that the social and economic secessionism of Los Angeles has to be viewed against the historical and current tendencies of consolidation characterising the region's polity, economy and society. Los Angeles had to deal with these dialectics continuously

throughout its complex history and, like many other cities in the world, is currently facing acute pressures to find new solutions to the question of urban governance. Secessionism is but one reaction to these pressures brought on—to a large degree—by globalisation and rescaling of urban governance generally (Brenner, 1999). Consolidation remains a competing tendency. The political class of Los Angeles (or what is left of it) is dabbling in rethinking the city region's governance system in order to respond to these external and internal pressures for innovative articulation and integration.¹ In a quest to reregulate the city's system of self-governance, for example, Angelenos voted for a new city charter in June 1999, after a contested debate amongst the political class, but largely ignored by the majority of city-dwellers (Keil and Boudreau, forthcoming). According to many political observers, mayor Riordan's drive for charter reform was prompted by secessionist challenges in the San Fernando Valley.² The success of charter reform has led some to confirm the restructuring opportunities prevailing in the city: "People are into the reform mind set at this point. I think the charter reform vote is indicative of that" (Eric Schockman, reported in Coit, 1999a).³ The need for restructuring is present, as was illustrated by the bi-partisan coalition to change the state legislature in order to facilitate secession. The question that remains is: who are the actors able to mould the new Los Angeles now that this window of reform seems to have opened?

We will proceed in four steps. First, we will look at the history of the dialectics of fragmentation and consolidation in Los Angeles. Secondly, we will present three theoretical approaches to explaining the current secessionism: political theory, regulation theory and social movement theory. Thirdly, we will present the cases of San Fernando Valley and Harbor secessionism. Finally, we will conclude with an assessment of the Los Angeles cases in light of our theoretical propositions and possible significance of the cases for developments elsewhere.

2. Los Angeles Secessionism: Trajectories of Fragmentation and Consolidation

To be as place-less as we are is to be history-less, to have no setting for either public or private life (Waldie, 1999).

The history of urban governance in California has shown a consistent reliance on philosophically conservative (neo)liberal rationale. The political structure of the urban region today reflects a history of deliberate jurisdictional splitting, of industrial and residential enclosures and endless sprawling suburbs, often only held together by municipal service contracts. Reactions to publicly funded programmes culminated in the 1978 property tax revolt that led to Proposition 13. One of the proponents of this citizen initiative said that Proposition 13 would defend "the most essential human right ... the right to own property" (quoted in Miller, 1981, p. 2). It was argued that the government threatened property rights by taxing property to provide 'inessential' redistributive services despite the preferences of the property-owning majority. Miller's study (1981) of incorporation and annexation in Los Angeles County examines the effects of this rationale on the distribution of resources and people. His central argument is that property owners' discontent expressed in the 1978 tax revolt was anticipated by a full quarter-century of 'quiet' tax revolt, in which property-owners expressed dissatisfaction individually by means of 'exit' rather than collectively through the use of the state-wide initiative (Miller, 1981, p. 8). Current secession movements follow this line of thought as well. In order to understand the current development, though, it seems necessary to look briefly at the history of fragmentation and consolidation as it unfolded in Los Angeles during the 20th century.

The history of local state formation in Los Angeles was mostly one of fragmented separatism, an orderly movement of containment of race, class and land use (Hoch, 1985; Miller, 1981). While much of Los Angeles' political landscape seems like a dream come true of public choice theory and the ideal

testing-ground for Tiebout's famous hypothesis (1956), not all the boundary-setting and incorporation that took place during this century can be considered a fruit of rational consumer choice (if there is such a thing) and market regulation of local services. Large parts of southern California have been patterned by unrestrained imperialism of the central city whose thirst for water, land and world market access have made it into the dog-shaped oddity whose hydrocephalic rump is connected to the south bay by a shoestring of sub-divisions along the Harbor Freeway. Small wonder that it is at the margins of this strangely shaped creature—in Eagle Rock, Venice, Wilmington/San Pedro and the San Fernando Valley—that secessionist movements have now lifted their head, while the real secessions have already splintered LA's internal governance into—often geographically emphasised—fiefdoms of race and class like 'the westside', 'South Central,' 'Koreatown' or 'the Valley'. Annexation has been the name of the game in Los Angeles and the current secessionist movement can be seen as both a reaction to the contradictions created by this historical trend and a departure from its practices in that it introduces an alternative mode of local governance.

In Los Angeles, consolidation has always been a means of local government formation and so have voluntary associations of local governments into action groups and temporary purposive coalitions (an example of which is the banding-together of the Hub Cities in the old industrial core of the urban region into an alliance during the 1980s to rake in redevelopment and economic development dollars). Equally important has been the formation of rather self-contained political units such as West Hollywood where public choice would be a rather superficial explanation of local state formation. Instead, economic arguments would have been fairly subordinate to social, political and cultural considerations of incorporation. While we should also remember that, on many occasions, Los Angeles' Progressivist city charter was considered a potential model for 'metro-

politan leadership' (Crouch and Dinerman, 1963), the urban region has more recently really been considered the opposite of a forerunner in metropolitan governance (Schockman, 1996).

The Los Angeles agglomeration grew out of a series of territorial annexations and later was fragmented through a series of municipal incorporations that competed with the enormous City of Los Angeles. This capacity to determine municipal boundaries and jurisdictions began in the late 19th century by the home rule principle, which competed with Dillon's Rule (an earlier legal decision which characterised local governments as creatures of the state) (Frug, 1999). Los Angeles County was granted home rule in 1913. Incorporating cities had to provide expensive municipal services such as policing and fire protection on their own. The 1954 Lakewood Plan changed this by permitting Los Angeles County to contract these services to newly incorporated cities. The plan considerably reduced the costs of creating separate municipal entities and facilitating fragmentation. This resulted in awkward islands of unincorporated territories with inadequate services. Overall, the post-Lakewood incorporation movement led to a largely middle-class patchwork of small to medium-sized cities held together by the consolidationist service monopoly of the County. In an attempt to reform institutional procedures for urban growth, Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCOs) were established in each California county in 1963. LAFCOs are empowered to approve or disapprove new incorporations, special district formation, dissolution or annexation. LAFCOs usually process non-controversial applications for readjusting the boundaries of water and sanitation districts. They have not faced a secessionist petition since their creation and the LA LAFCO now has to define the process as it unfolds.

2.1 Fragmented, Privatised and Horizontal: Images of Los Angeles

There are abundant common mythologies

when it comes to Los Angeles. Both in the literature and on the street, people have vied for workable images to deal with what some have described as indescribable. One need not repeat the many attempts of finding that *one* gripping metaphor allegedly capturing the body and soul of the southern California metropolis. Many are well known as Los Angeles has become somewhat of a meta-narrative of urbanisation at the 20th century's *fin de siècle*. Most recently, Mike Davis' *City of Quartz* (1990) and *Ecology of Fear* (1998) have contributed most powerfully to the external image of Los Angeles as a prototypical dystopia which capitalist urbanisation potentially has in store for all cities. In a similar, more academic, and not quite as popular manner, Allen Scott's economic view of a structured post-Fordist metropolis (1988) and Ed Soja's construct of a post-modern "thirdspace" (1989, 1996) have set the pace for Los Angeles-gazing.

Rather than returning to these important images, we would like to mention a few others more relevant in the context of our paper. One is certainly the image of the 'fragmented' metropolis as put forward most prominently by Fogelson (1997) in his classic study. Related but not entirely compatible with this view is the myth of the 'private' city, chastised most outspokenly by the great Jane Jacobs in her New York City-centred view of Los Angeles as a dysfunctional public entity (1961). Fogelson's and Jacobs' perspectives are complemented by the image of Los Angeles as the 'horizontal' city, the unknown suburban territory, the national antipode of New York City (Krim, 1992).

Fragmented, private and horizontal have been strong and often decisive markers of place-making in Los Angeles since at least the property boom of the 1880s which eventually propelled the former cowtown to metropolitan status by the 1920s (Wagner, 1935). Particularly since the 1954 Lakewood Plan led to what Charles Hoch (1985) called "privatising with class": the intended creation of fragmented political spaces divided by class and often race. This privatised mosaic was, of course, largely the result of the

most generalised, industrialised and publicly funded programme for urbanisation and the never-ending spiral of corporate real estate speculation, a perverse success story of the managerial, warfare Keynesianism prevalent in the US during much of the century. This landscape was built with federal highway programmes, subsidies for builders of residential homes and loans administered through the Federal Housing Administration and the Veterans Administration. Its hallmark was the paradoxical interplay between the practical privacy of one's own backyard and the theoretical accessibility of the entire grid of sameness which long-term Lakewood resident D. J. Waldie (1996, p. 46) in his fascinating 'suburban memoir' *Holy Land* has characterised as such

Drive from the ocean to Los Angeles, and you'll stay on the same grid of streets. The drive passes through suburb after suburb without interruption. It is a distance of fifteen miles, over land so worthless a hundred years ago that house lots on it could not be given away.

The illusionary dialectics of privatism and openness, still celebrated by the revisionist literature since the late 1960s, particularly in Reyner Banham's *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (1971), had taken a beating during the Watts Riots of 1965 when it became obvious that shutting out difference and poverty from the suburban *privatopia* had to lead to eruptions of the urban *dystopia* sooner rather than later. Racism and classism had been the invisible builders of that fragmented, private and horizontal city. It was time to start accounting for the damage they had done. It became clear, as Pulido recently pointed out, that suburban city incorporation had in fact acted as a segregation tool

The exclusionary nature of suburbanization is underscored by the fact that once people arrived, they sought to insulate their investment through incorporation (Pulido, 2000, p. 29).

Later, by the end of the 1980s, when another

uprising was in the making, the public spaces of Los Angeles seemed to have shed any resemblance they once might have had to the democratic openness still celebrated by Bannham. They had degenerated into a combination of carceral spaces, corporate citadels and gated communities, all watched over by a burgeoning army of public and private police forces (Davis, 1990, 1998).

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Let us approach the fragmented, private and horizontal urban myth from yet another perspective. We argue that the fragmentation, privatisation and horizontalisation of Los Angeles has developed in tandem with the urban region's integration and structuration. Indeed, the specificity of Los Angeles during the period when other cities created deliberate metropolitan entities was its capacity to fashion structured coherence *through* fragmentation. We are proposing to see these dialectics traditionally at work on three scales: the city, the county and the region.

2.2 *Coherence through Fragmentation*

One way in which this occurred historically was certainly the growth and development of the City of Los Angeles itself. Founded in 1781, it grew little beyond its core by the Los Angeles River during the 19th century. The boom and push for expansion came around the turn of the 20th century when first the port and later the San Fernando Valley were annexed and gave Los Angeles its odd form with a big 'head' and a shoestring connection with the southern districts. An expansive web of real-estate-oriented streetcars and trains provided the infrastructure of sprawl long before the automobilisation of the city truly set in. Through what amounts to a series of imperialist acts which privatised regional and even supraregional wealth by making some place entrepreneurs rich, but which also brought water and commerce into the reach of common Angelenos, the growth of Los Angeles through annexation can be interpreted as resulting in a largely integrated urban area with a hegemonic primary city in a sea of industrial, agricultural and residen-

tial communities.⁴ Water, in forms as diverse as the Pacific Ocean and the Owens Valley aqueduct, was the public lifeline through which the region was tied together by its dominant city. The consolidation of Los Angeles through annexation also concentrated economic and political power in the hands of a few place entrepreneurs around the *Times* empire. The persisting dominance of Los Angeles (over other regional cities) is buttressed by the continuing presence of much of corporate power there. In addition, the administration of some of the City's special districts coincides with the City boundaries while their powers reach far beyond. Neither water nor transport nor any other large service or infrastructure issue can be discussed in southern California without the City of Los Angeles making its weight known.

Other hegemonic projects to pull the region ideologically together from the centre have been the Rebuild LA effort since the 1992 riots and the continuing redevelopment of the downtown which has recently come to be supported by a high-price, commuter- (rather than community-) oriented, rail-based transport policy including subways, light rail and regional trains that radially converge in the downtown of Los Angeles. These institutions and projects, their policies and regulations as well as their planning and political practices, attempt to implant a new sense of Los Angeles as a unified political space. In the absence of a unified élite strategy, however, this process which is driven by the traditional and emergent power centres of Los Angeles leaves cracks and niches where counter-hegemonic forces and competing élite groups can make their mark.

Another type of consolidation has been at the level of the counties. In Los Angeles County, the Lakewood Plan of 1954 allowed individual communities that sought to incorporate into cities to buy municipal services from the County rather than having to run these services themselves at a premium. The experience of almost half a century of life under the Lakewood plan has been a steady consolidation and densification of urban areas in the County while furthering political

fragmentation. Some of Los Angeles' post-war suburbs grew into old suburbs, edge cities and dense urban centres. Together, the 88 cities of Los Angeles County and the interspersed unincorporated areas have grown into one consolidated metropolis with lateral ties to neighbouring counties and to the entire globe. LA County is the core area of this huge urban region and the City of Los Angeles is something like the downtown of this core area.

Other forms of consolidation, finally, have included the attempt to create a body of all municipal governments through the voluntary member organisation Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) with 188 cities in 6 counties. SCAG has acquired some regional planning and policy co-ordination capacity and has been able to play a certain role in transport planning and research. However, it remains a largely toothless tiger among many well-financed and politically powerful single cities or counties. SCAG, without doubt, is the prime example of what Scott Bollens has called 'shadow regionalism'. Another prominent example of this tendency is the intended regulation of air pollution through the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) which encompasses the non-desert areas of 4 southern Californian counties and 13 million people.

Bollens has discussed the 'shadow governance' of the Los Angeles region in the context of an increased interest 'in multi-jurisdictional governance by public, private and non-profit sectors' which he sees spawned first by the necessity for city-regions to come to terms with their internal divisions in an age of international economic competition; and, secondly, by the necessity to deal decisively with the siting of unwanted facilities in an era of NIMBYism (Bollens, 1997, pp. 105–106). Contrasting 'regional activism' with the myth of local government home rule, Bollens takes us through some of the traditions of municipalism and regionalism in southern California and develops a typology of current attempts at regionalisation in the area. Bollens' insights into the

fragmenting capacities of the typically single-purpose, technocratic regional agencies of Los Angeles are remarkable in many ways. He summarises the significant characteristics of southern California regional governance as

- (1) its scientific technical emphasis, (2) its single-purpose compartmentalisation of regional policy, and (3) its institutional insularity (Bollens, 1997, p. 117).

The technical focus has undermined effective handling of social and environmental issues; the single-purpose compartmentalisation has replaced geographical with functional fragmentation; and the institutional insularity of southern California regionalism has established an aloof and bureaucratic, as well as unaccountable, regional governmental structure. Bollens concludes:

Shadow regionalism bears but a faint connection to the true potential of regional governance. A more robust regional governance would be a more democratic and broader regionalism that would elevate the level of intergovernmental discussions, overcome the distorting effects of single mandate regionalism, and integrate environmental, social, and economic policies on a metropolitan wide scale. ... Local governments wary of a more robust regionalism should realise that in many cases their authority has already been usurped by empowered single focus regional agencies. Indeed, incorporation of single purpose foci into an integrating 'theater of collective action' may reintroduce general purpose local government to the decisionmaking table (Bollens, 1997, pp. 119–120).

Political community and social territoriality have to be created in and beyond the economic. Cities and regions are largely made by the people that live in them in a constant struggle with the constraints put upon them by larger processes such as capitalist globalisation. Thus, Bollens' observations can, we believe, be complemented and added to by a couple of critical considerations. His analysis

remains largely limited to institutional arrangements of regionalism. There is little recognition, in his account, of metropolitanism and regionalism as contested terrain. But there is an emerging alternative tendency to establish a larger political community in the city which is represented by social movement groups and other initiatives coming out of civil society. They seek to create a critical regionalism from below. Yet another tendency altering the spatial meaning of fragmentation and community is the creation of (progressive) cities. Let us look at regionalism from below and progressive cities in turn.

2.3 Insurgent Regionalism

One unlikely form of alternative regionalism has crystallised around the arcane world of air pollution control. The 1989 Air Quality Management Plan had called forth political reactions on several planes of discourse and activism, including the one of popular resistance. This was an entirely new development. Where consolidation, regionalisation or metropolitanisation had taken place prior to this time or where it was proposed traditionally, it mostly occurred on purely technical grounds such as air quality management, transit, flood control, etc. and was usually met with neither public involvement nor resistance. And whereas there has been much organising around and against this kind of governance technocracy, especially since the emergence of stronger environmental movements, few actual inroads have been made by progressives into these institutions. This certainly changed, for a while, when air pollution became a public issue rather than just a public nuisance in the late 1980s. Mainstream environmental organisations such as the Clean Air Coalition and more radical environmental justice organisations called business as usual into question and demanded environmental change as well as democratisation of regional governance. The attempt to establish a regional planning process from below has been expressed consistently in the consecutive campaigns of the Labor/Community Strategy Center: first, in

the 1980s, when activists argued that their struggle to keep the General Motors plant in Van Nuys open constituted an instance of 'regional planning from below' in the absence of any employment-related policies in local government; secondly, when the Center, as part of its campaign in the early 1990s to raise an environmental justice agenda in the fight against air pollution, attempted to democratise the Board of the Air Quality Management District, arguably the Southland's most powerful regional agency; and, thirdly, when Strategy Center involvement in the Bus Riders Union in the mid 1990s opened up a rather self-contained regional transport planning debate to public scrutiny and legitimation. Regional transport issues can now not be discussed anymore without central reference to the Bus Riders Union which brought issues of class, race, gender, social justice and civil rights to the debate (Burgos and Pulido, 1998; Brown, 1998).

The core of each of the Center's campaigns was an anti-hegemonic appropriation of the political space of the urban area: from the shop floor at General Motors to the airshed in the Southland, from working-class residential communities to the transit routes in the communities of colour, the L/CSC's politics established new spatial meanings. Like the L/CSC, other community groups have participated to redefine their political space innovatively. In almost all such cases, there is an aspect of territoriality and political control over space involved. The now defunct Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project (LAMAP) in the 1990s, which sought to organise workers along the industrial Alameda corridor in Los Angeles' industrial core, is another case in point. Similarly, while Los Angeles lacks the intense debate common in other cities on issues of urban sustainability and bioregionalism, regional interventions of progressive movement groups have occurred in the ecological field, where organisations like the Friends of the Los Angeles River, Heal the Bay, Unpave LA and the Tree People have proposed a radical rethinking of southern California's system of regional environmental regulation

in the direction of a more ecological approach. A large number of initiatives to re-naturalise and resocialise the LA River and to make it an axis of community development along its banks is a prime example.

2.4 Progressive Municipalism

Finally, there is the emergence in Los Angeles of 'progressive cities'. Apart from a certain limited presence on the County Board of Supervisors in Los Angeles (with a weak but consistent representation of liberal and civil rights supervisors) and in the Bradley regime in the City of Los Angeles (1973–93), progressives in southern California have had more success in secessionist and small-scale politics. While the fragmentation of the political territory in southern California into dozens of small incorporated cities has historically been an instrument of class and racial segregation, it has, in the recent past, also created the possibilities for smaller communities to establish progressive municipal administrations. Always under pressure of falling into line with the rest of the region's more conservative municipal policies, West Hollywood and Santa Monica have still been important testing-grounds of alternative urban governance over the past 20 years and have, at least in the metaphorical sense, been 'secessionist' to a degree. For almost 20 years since 1979, in Santa Monica, a coalition of middle-class radicals and renters was able to sustain a progressive regime. A strict rent control law (until its recent abolition), managed urban growth and an exemplary homeless policy have been the most consistent 'progressive' features of this seaside community which has also experienced large-scale gentrification and economic expansion. West Hollywood, a city which was only incorporated in 1984, brought together a majority tenant population and a strong lesbian and gay community to form a municipality which—15 years after its inception—can still be considered pathbreaking in questions of social policy, human rights and rent control. While these westside communities are fairly well off in socioeco-

omic terms, poorer communities on the eastside have also been experimenting with new municipal strategies to revive their deindustrialised economic base, to discuss sustainable development and to build links with other progressive municipal initiatives around southern California (Keil, 1998).

We can summarise the argument so far. Rather than seeing metropolitanism/regionalism in Los Angeles as an historical antipode to the region's traditional home-rule fragmentation, Bollens' analysis actually points to the two as being compatible strategic options in an attempt to create government in the region. Both come with similar assumptions on the predominance of private over public spaces; on the need to segregate functions and uses of urban space (including social and economic segregation as an option); and both are usually driven by the same type of middle-class citizens—albeit on different sides of the political divide. This dialectic of fragmentation and consolidation is also present in the current era of secession and charter reform—both appealing to the same kind of voting, tax-paying public which, of course, is only a part of the overall democratic polity of the region.

2.5 Centrality and Identity

Contextually, it is possible to interpret the current round of boundary redrawing and fragmented consolidation as an immediate reaction (and in some cases pro-action) to the challenges posed by globalisation. The emergence and formation of a 'world city' Los Angeles came with a wildly differentiated local urban reality. By this, we do not just mean the usual argument about the increased social polarisation and spatial segmentation produced by the global city (Sassen, 1991), but the social, spatial, cultural and economic (one can even argue ecological) differentiation of world city society. Regionalised globalisation occurs through fragmentation of labour markets, consumer markets, niche economies, marginal cultures and the like. This has had its most visible effects in cities like West Hollywood and

Santa Monica where progressive governments have created middle-class niche spaces in the overall globalised metropolitan area of southern California. Fragmenting here becomes the condition for participation in the consolidated whole. One could go so far as to argue that, in West Hollywood, a strongly gay community where identity and lifestyle have become grounds for cityhood and citizenship, difference has once again been privatised. While seemingly resembling of the earlier forms of suburban fragmentation of difference, the substance of this development is one which allows for and does not shield off the democratisation of both the niche and the larger society. Indeed, a developing literature on urban secession in France supports this argument. Referring to Castells' early work, Donzelot, for instance, argues that the 'urban question' is today more a question of the political capacity of cities to create coherence in ever more diversified, fragmented and open societies. Faced with the secession of the privileged, reforming urban governance means finding ways to democratise these new and flexible forms of social solidarity based on individual aspirations and localised identities (Donzelot, 1999; Ascher and Godard, 1999).

Previous waves of fragmentation and consolidation tended to be fuelled by the articulation of centrality versus decentrality, of city versus suburb, of big government versus community, etc. The current round of fragmented consolidation, however, seems to be driven by different dynamics. Partly in replacement of the old centre-periphery model of the urban region which has dominated urban research from Max Weber through the Chicago School and beyond, urban spaces are no longer just or predominantly articulated or disarticulated with centrality but rather with identity. Whereas the global city commands centralised spaces of control and decision-making and whereas these forces have strong centripetal powers, it also rests heavily on the existence of highly decentralised and variegated spaces at the street level, in the residential neighbourhoods and in the interstices of the official economy. The

glue that keeps the region together in an era of globalised centrifugal forces is a complicated amalgam of centralised and concentrated globalised regional economies and decentralised and deconcentrated local identities. The articulation of competing identities of place and people helps to create the socio-cultural and political space of the world city. Interestingly enough, while these identity-based differentiations span the political spectrum from the left to the right, they are all framed in terms of political rights and the enhancement of regional democracy through localised governance structures. Theoretically, fragmented consolidation can be a political strategy for both progressives and conservatives, with different degrees of articulation between the seceding group and the wider region. We will see below that in reality the agenda of secession has been largely occupied by conservative political forces.

3. Political Rights, Governance Rescaling and Social Movements

After having provided some historical context, in this section we briefly lay out our theoretical and methodological framework for explanation of current Los Angeles secessionism.

3.1 Secession as a Political Right

Secession movements are usually studied at the national or regional scale. There is, in the literature, a general constitutional and liberal democratic debate on secession. Theories of secession are firmly grounded in liberalism with an emphasis on individual rights and/or nationalism. Most theories of secession are concerned with secessionist challenges to the sacredness of national territories and they exclusively deal with cases of complete secession of one nationalist region from a nation-state. Therefore, secession is seen as a dramatic break-up at the level of moral and political legitimacy. Buchanan (1998) identifies two basic types of theories on the right to secede: remedial right only theories; and,

primary right theories. The former holds that the people have the right to overthrow the government only if their fundamental rights are violated and more peaceful means have not given any result (Freeman, 1998). The theories of primary right take one of two different directions. Either they assert that groups with ascriptive non-political characteristics (even in the absence of injustices) have the right to secede (most often ethnic groups); or they maintain that no ascriptive characteristics are necessary for the right to secede, but instead that is the voluntary political choice of the majority of the group members. Reflecting the communitarian/individualist rift, both theories are grounded in the moral universe of liberal political thought. These theories hold that political legitimacy rests on the contractual consent of the people to remain within the state. When this contract is not honoured and when people do not want to be part of the polity anymore, secession is morally acceptable on liberal grounds. Individualist theories are even more explicit on this voluntary scheme of legitimacy, arguing for the human right to personal autonomy and thus for a freely chosen political association (Beran, 1998).

There are clear differences between secessionist movements on the scale of the nation and those in the municipal context as in Los Angeles. Secession movements in Los Angeles are definitively more concerned with the practical institutional issues of secession than its moral legitimacy. However, moral legitimacy is invoked by secessionist activists all the time and secessionists often take a position of moral indignation common in populist political positioning. There are also traces of remedial rhetoric in the movements studied below. We nevertheless suggest there are similarities that allow us to benefit from the extant secessionist literature which, so far, has not considered administrative motives or municipal boundary changes cases of secession. One could argue that, at the urban metropolitan scale, secession is indeed political—and rests on fundamental beliefs held by US citizens about their rights—but it is not nationalist or separationist as movements

on national or regional scales. Secession at the urban scale—at least rhetorically—is less about recognition or self-determination in nationalist terms, but self-determination and autonomy in fiscal and political terms, which has important repercussions for the redistribution and collective responsibility in urban settings.

Perhaps more conducive to understand secession movements in Los Angeles are arguments focusing on secessionist territorial claims and emphasising individualism over communitarianism. Freeman holds that

strictly speaking ... the people, not the state, are the owners of the territory. The state is the agent of the people in relation to 'its' territory. The state has territorial sovereignty, i.e. a set of jurisdictional powers over territory, and not a property right (Freeman, 1998, p. 23).

Property rights are individual rights and, for this type of liberalism, all legitimate group claims must be aggregations of the legitimate claims of individual persons. This would mean that "a group's legitimate territorial claims can extend no further than the legitimate territorial holdings of its members or their agents" (Steiner, 1998, p. 65). Because other types of territorial claim (such as traditional occupancy of a homeland or communal needs) do not apply to the San Fernando Valley and the Harbor communities, it would follow that secessionist arguments focus mostly on the right to a fair share of the power to govern the justly acquired land of the Valley. This purely liberal-individualist interpretation of territories as the voluntary 'aggregations of their members' real-estate holdings' (Steiner, 1998), might highlight the rationale offered by Los Angeles Valley secessionists. Led by home-owners' associations and chambers of commerce, the secessionist groups in southern California rely much more on this type of argument than the more traditional secessionist rhetoric of nationalism.⁵

This rationale has been well entrenched in US political culture since the Civil War (Ab-

bott, 1998). Libertarian Donald Livingston goes as far as stating that

the very concept of secession and self-determination of peoples, in the form being discussed today, is largely an American invention. It is no exaggeration to say that the unique contribution of the eighteenth-century American Enlightenment to political thought is not federalism but the principle that a people, under certain conditions, have a moral right to secede from an established political authority and to govern themselves (Livingston, 1998, p. 1).

In this theoretical tradition, secession is understood as a *moral and economic individual right*, more than as a nationalist quest for recognition. If we transpose this to the urban scale, the argument is that smaller is better and more efficient. Competition between municipalities will favour economic growth and citizen satisfaction over redistribution. In an article frequently cited by Los Angeles secessionists, Howard Husock writes that

independent jurisdictions are a crucial means through which a nation as diverse as the U.S. can develop a *modus vivendi* among peoples of sharply different values and widely various backgrounds (Husock, 1998).

His argument rests on Tiebout's economic theory stating that different people want different services and that local governments compete with one another for residents by offering different packages of services (Tiebout, 1956).

While the principles of this debate need to be taken into account when studying secession at the metropolitan scale, they do not provide—in themselves—a satisfactory explanation for secession movements in Los Angeles. We will need to situate the debate on rights in the context of the rescaling of urban governance and need to discuss the agents of change in the secessionist discourse as social movement actors.

3.2 Rescaling Urban Governance

Our second theoretical approach to secession in Los Angeles derives from current debates on regulation, scale and governance. We posit that, under the current conditions of globalised urbanisation, local states are being restructured to meet the needs of the reregulation and rescaling of governance. Brenner has argued that globalisation has to be viewed as reterritorialisation (Brenner, 1999) and that in large metropolitan regions we can observe the rise of what he calls the 'glocal territorial state' (Brenner, 1998, p. 19). He concludes

Because urban regions occupy the highly contradictory interface between the world economy and the territorial state, they are embedded within a multiplicity of social, economic and political processes organised upon superimposed spatial scales. The resultant politics of scale within the political-regulatory institutions of major urban regions can be construed as a sequence of groping, trial-and-error strategies to manage these intensely conflictual forces through the continual construction, deconstruction and reconstitution of relatively stabilised configurations of territorial organisation. The rescaling of urbanisation leads to a concomitant rescaling of the state through which, simultaneously, territorial organisation is mobilised as a productive force and social relations are circumscribed within determinate geographical boundaries (Brenner, 1999, p. 447).

The participants in this debate on rescaling and governance have clarified recent state-regional and state-local relationships. Jessop, in particular, has enhanced our understanding of the spatial selectivity of the state (for a summary of this work, see Jones, 1997). The focus of these debates has been economic development policies (Clarke and Gaile, 1998; Jonas and Wilson, 1999). Yet, the interest of researchers has recently branched out into other substantive fields, most notably into environmental regulation (Gibbs and

Jonas, 2000). What has been rarely discussed, though, is the emergence of a new *sub-local* scale of government as part of an overall regional governance of large urban regions. We suggest that secessionism can be viewed as one instance of such sub-local institutionalisation of rescaled governance. With the growing flexibilisation and ‘liquefaction’ of territories in the global economy (Storper, 1997; Brenner, 1998, 1999; Cox, 1997), opportunities to restructure territorial jurisdictions are opened. And secession movements in Los Angeles are to a large degree responses to these opportunities. Urban governance at the turn of the millennium needs to respond to the dialectics of fragmentation and regional consolidation (Keil, 2000). In Los Angeles, secession is one of the many battle cries of local élites (and those who would like to be élites) to enter their local territory more successfully into the global interurban competition:

The idea of secession raises so many potential problems that before we add up benefits and drawbacks, it makes sense to ask what the Valley—and all of southern California—really needs to succeed in today’s global economy (Flanigan, 1997).

3.3 *Social Movements*

The debate on rescaling, reregulation and reterritorialisation has largely been structuralist in nature. The increased insistence on the larger context of structural change has been partly a reaction to what was perceived as the rampant voluntarism of much urban regime literature (for an excellent discussion, see Jessop *et al.*, 1999). Yet, while largely sympathetic to this project of regrounding urban political theory, we feel that a simultaneous glance at the actual actors of rescaling may be of help. Hence, we consulted recent social movement theories—both in the new social movement tradition and in the resource mobilisation tradition—in order to heighten our understanding of the motivations, tactics and strategies that guide the urban secessionists. In addition to our critical

review of liberal political theories of secession and neo-Marxist theories of rescaling and reregulation of urban governance, we now turn to theories of social movements.

Our point of departure is the existence of middle-class movements in regions in several parts of the world which are in one way or another intent on reframing the governance of the urban regions where they occur. The case of the Italian Northern Leagues, in particular, has received much attention over the past decade as researchers have puzzled over the stunning success of what many consider a right-wing populist movement in benefiting from the political opportunity structures created by the crisis of the post-war political system in Italy (Schmidtke, 1996; Diamanti, 1997; Agnew, 1997, 1999). The League has had great electoral success regionally in northern Italy but also in national elections culminating in their participation in government under the prime minister Berlusconi until December 1994. The collapse of the right-wing government led the League to concentrate on more explicitly secessionist goals and to the proclamation of an ‘Independence Declaration’ for the northern state of Padania in September 1995 (Diani, 1996). While the significance of the political style, rhetoric and social composition of the north Italian movements for urban social movements has been noted and its lessons applied to other cases (Keil and Ronneberger, 1994), little systematic research has been done in applying the lessons from the Italian case to an urban situation.

The Northern Leagues have to be understood as a populist phenomenon whose identity is built on hostility against those forces that do not belong to ‘the people’. While in the case of the Leagues, this hostility has a fairly clear spatial, ethnic and national dimension, it works socially—through symbolic politics—in two directions: upward against élites, particularly against politicians but also against big capital (there is ample disregard for intellectuals and journalists); and downward against the badly defined ‘Other’ of the South and the foreigners. League members and leaders display open

suspicion and hostility against marginal social groups and they demonstrate a suspicious attitude against the mediating role of political institutions, particularly parties (Diani, 1996, pp. 1059–1061; Sciortino, 1999). This confirms Tilly's (1998, p. 467) observation

Social movements take place as conversations: not as solo performances but as interactions among parties.

We shall indeed see how urban secessionists in Los Angeles are caught in a similar "conversation" with the larger Los Angeles over claims of 'normalcy' and rights to 'difference'.

Social movement theory has often been broken down into resource mobilisation (RMT) and new social movement (NSM) orientations (Carroll, 1997). NSM can be used with much success in explaining the general conditions of social change in Los Angeles (see Keil, 1998, ch. 11, for a discussion of movement politics in this tradition). The concept of 'political opportunity structures' employed in our analysis here, however, emerged out of the literature on collective action and social movements usually connected with RMT (Eisinger, 1973; Tilly, 1978, 1998; Tarrow, 1994; Diani, 1996; Schmidtke, 1996). In brief, political opportunity structures emerge from a combination of structural conditions, systemic cleavages of existing political camps and the resource mobilisation capacity of individual and collective actors. Building on two major lines of investigation—resource mobilisation theories and constructionist approaches focusing on the capacity of actors to reshape systems of meaning—the question asked by these students of social movements evolved to take a more structuralist stance: Under which conditions will some mobilising messages be more effective than others? Thus, it was pointed out that mobilisation is affected by variables such as differential access to power and the possibilities opened by the political system.⁶ Diani (1996) adds that different combinations of dimensions of the political environment will lead to different

'frames' for action, from realignment to inclusion, to revitalisation, and to anti-system frames. According to this typology, we could qualify the charter reform drive as a revitalisation effort (Keil and Boudreau, forthcoming), while secession movements—as examined in this paper—would fit more in the anti-system frame. Diani defines anti-system frames as

any representation of political reality that defines political actors along lines other than established cleavages and denies legitimacy to the routinised functioning of the political process (Diani, 1996, p. 1057).

And he adds in a footnote "without necessarily aiming at revolutionary outcomes or acting violently".

Recently scholars have defined a social movement as

a kind of campaign, parallel in many respects to an electoral campaign. This sort of campaign, however, demands righting of a wrong, most often a wrong suffered by a well-specified population (Tilly, 1998, p. 467).

While social movements cannot be regarded as pure political actors but as products of interchange with third parties with direct links to the political process (such as parties), they rely on two kinds of mystification: the non-contradictory character of their constitutive elements; and their internal solidarity, a quality which is usually constructed through historical cohesion of a given group. It is this set of mystifications through which social movements gain internal strength and external profile in relation to the larger society and authorities on which claims are being made. We believe all of these aspects can productively be applied in the analysis of Los Angeles and we will try to demonstrate their usefulness below.

3.4 Summary of Theoretical Approach

In sum, we are proposing a three-pronged theoretical approach which combines the dis-

course on secession in political theory with the debate on urban governance and regulation and the literature on (new) social movements. Theoretical work from the liberal-rights-based discussion on secession allows us to understand the US political culture and context in which claims for secession are made. While developed for the national context, these considerations have some relevance for the urban level, particularly in the way individuals and communities in cities ground their arguments for self-government in a fundamental understanding of legitimacy of statehood and citizenship as resting with the people. The usefulness of this literature is obviously limited. While urban secessionists develop positions of class-based and ethnically based ‘founding’ of community and individual rights in the political struggle they are waging, they are neither nationalists nor regionalists in the way these terms have been used in the traditional literature on secession. We suggested, therefore, to join the liberal secessionist debate with the discussion on the rescaling and reregulation of urban governance. One of the preliminary results of this discussion has been the insight that urban governance is under pressure from globalisation. It is in the specific context of globalised urbanisation—the tying-in of local with global circuits of capital, commerce, consumption and cultures that some have called ‘glocalisation’—that rights-based demands for self-government and localisation of services gain significance beyond their locality. Having established major urban areas as an arena of intense negotiation over the meaning of globalisation and the role of the state, we have, finally, addressed the question of who the driving-forces of secessionism are. Who are these social groups holding conservative liberal views on how to govern themselves? What kind of locality can be expected to gain shape as a consequence of their drive for the rescaling of governance? We sought answers to these questions in taking our cues from newer social movement theories. New social movement theories (NSM) help us to understand the social structures leading to the emergence of movements

in an era of crisis of Fordism and emergence post-Fordist globalism (for a lengthy analysis inspired by this tradition, see Keil, 1998). In the current review, though, we concentrated on the contribution of RMT which holds that it is largely the political opportunity structures afforded to social movements that allow them to operate successfully. From this combined approach, we have developed the following hypothetical propositions:

1. Rights-based liberal theories of secession have limited use in describing the political mindset and philosophical background of urban secession movements.
2. Urban secessionism is part of a larger process of governance rescaling in Los Angeles. It can be understood as a part of the spatially strategic selectivity of the regional state structure in southern California.⁷
3. Urban secessionism can be understood as a social movement which reacts to specific political opportunity structures created by the crisis of regulation of Fordist Los Angeles and the onset of a globalised mode of urban regulation in that urban area. The actors driving the secessionist movement tend to be conservative. Secession appears as the project of the political right.

4. Secession in Los Angeles: The Cases

We turn now to an overview of the main two secession movements in Los Angeles, the San Fernando Valley and the Harbor area, in light of their meaning in the current phase of redefinition of urban governance in the context of globalisation.

4.1 Divorce Requested by a Neglected-feeling Partner: The San Fernando Valley

There was even a song written about the Valley, suggested perhaps by the popular ‘California Here I Come’. The recurrent theme in ‘San Fernando Valley’ was ‘I’ll make the San Fernando Valley my home’. Sung, whistled, and played throughout the

nation, the song helped—along with the increasing presence of movie stars, glamorous estates, and numerous swimming pools—to make more and more people do something about making their Valley dream come true (Robinson, 1961, p. 41).

Yes, there are stupid girls and drunk boys and malls and bad hair, but the valley also has the closest thing to a ‘real life’ in the Los Angeles area. It is a suburb, but it is a suburb of the city of movies (Anderson, 1999).

Now marketed as the ‘Valley of the Stars’ for its concentration of movie studios (see Blankstein and Robinson-Jacobs, 1999), the San Fernando Valley struggles to redefine the suburban US dream. No longer the white suburbia of the 1960s when the Census indicated that 92 per cent of Valley residents were white, the 1.2 million population was down to 74 per cent white in 1980 and 57 per cent in 1990 (Dixon *et al.*, 1993, pp. 6, 9). The Valley is a diverse region, in many respects as diverse as the rest of Los Angeles. Pacoima, for instance, at the northern end of the Valley, is where Rodney King was pulled over and beaten and arrested in 1992.⁸ Yet, the political class of the Valley and elsewhere in the Los Angeles region still think of the Valley as a predominantly white US suburb. For instance, Valley politician Bobbi Fiedler said that

the Valley is principally homeowning families who are upwardly mobile, trying to get their kids through school and live in a decent safe neighborhood (Hill-Holtzman, 1997b).

The possible racialised markers of such a depiction and alleged open allegations of racism in Valley VOTE’s campaign were often denounced (Garvey, 1998; see also *Los Angeles Times*, 19 January 1999). This representation of the Valley is rather one-sided. It does not recognise that past experience with incorporation and secessions has always been pushed for by, and in the interest of, mostly privileged social groups. The Valley seems to be seeking an easily readable identity pre-

cisely at the time of its growing complexity. As Norman Klein puts it

The denser, the more ‘urban’ the postwar suburbs get—more slums, more corporate headquarters, more banking districts, media companies and gridlock—the more the cry for secession (Klein, 1997).

The current wave of secessionism began in the early 1990s in a climate of state-wide debates on local governance restructuring. A Commission on Local Governance for the 21st Century was established to “complete a study of potential revisions to the policies, practices, and statutes that govern city, county, and special district boundary changes”.⁹ The new momentum brought the emergence of a concerted effort of state and local politicians as well as local activists to roll back the disastrous consequences of Proposition 13 (1978) on local government finances.¹⁰ One of the immediate causes of the wave of secessionism is the crisis of governance in Los Angeles—a crisis that rose after the demise of the Bradley coalition (1973–93) and the series of social and environmental disasters. The 1994 Northridge earthquake, for example, hit the Valley very strongly. It is often cited as a turning-point in the identity of the area as citizens of the Valley found a spirit of mutual care and help in this moment of crisis which nurtured the idea that it was possible to go it alone as a city (Chu, 1997; Gordon, 1997).

On 12 October 1997, California Governor Pete Wilson signed into law Bill AB62. This Bill gives San Fernando Valley and other California communities the right to secede through a much-simplified process. It replaced the 1977 more restrictive law that was passed in the California legislature to impede secessionism in San Jose at the time. The most important change won by Valley lawmakers was to “remove city council veto power over so-called detachment petitions submitted by an area of the city” (Hill-Holtzman, 1997a). This requires majority votes in both the entire city and the area affected, as well as revenue neutrality. The secession Bill calls for the collection of the signatures of 20

per cent of voters in the secessionist area to ask for a feasibility study. After receiving an extension of the period during which they could collect the necessary number of signatures in late 1998 (Martin, 1998a), Valley VOTE collected 202 000 signatures and 132 490 were ultimately verified. This amounts to roughly one-fourth of the San Fernando Valley's registered voters. Conflicts over who would pay the expected cost of the study emerged after this successful drive (Bustillo, McGreevy and Riccardi, 1999; Bustillo, McGreevy and Fox, 1999).¹¹

While bi-partisan legislators from the Valley, former Republican Assemblywoman Paula Boland, Tom McClintock (R-Northridge) and Bob Hertzberg (D-Sherman Oaks) supported the drive for the legal change, the movement was rooted in a broad coalition of Valley community activists, many of whom have had a long history of participation in tax struggles, anti-busing campaigns and other issues often identified with conservative populist causes (Willon, 1998). The previous drive for secession, led by the Committee Investigating Valley Independent City/County (CIVICC) in 1975 was formed by insurance salespersons, real-estate agents and business people, two of them currently members of LAFCO (Larry Calamine and Hal Bernson). Paula Boland who lobbied for the state legal change was also member of CIVICC.¹²

These activists, and particularly those from existing groups such as the Sherman Oaks Homeowner Association, formed the group Valley VOTE in 1996. Valley VOTE lobbied for the passing of the bill and subsequently the feasibility study for secession, one of the bill's requirements (Hill-Holtzman, 1997a). A caution note needs to be made as it would be too easy to equate secessionism with populist and conservative politics. The secession bill had strong supporters in all political camps from arch-conservative Bobbi Fiedler on the Right to progressive Democrat Tom Hayden on the Left (Schockman, 1997). In addition, the secessionist movement has followers all over Los Angeles and has attempted to create an

Alliance for Self-Determination as an umbrella body of local organisations, but it eventually faded away (Haynes, 1998). As we will argue below, this illustrates the strength of the opportunity structure provided by globalisation and favouring territorial restructuring. However, in the case of the Valley VOTE and Harbor VOTE leadership, populist right-wing arguments clearly emerge as the main motivations behind the movements.

As it is often noted in the literature, secession does not seem to have apparent limits. In fact, at the political level, some of the architects of the new legislation are already speculating about the possibility of further 'balkanisation' of southern California. Bob Hertzberg, one of the writers of the bill, predicted in 1997 that Valley residents would not stop at creating a new seceded city of 1.2 million

Clearly, there is a frustration level. That is why this bill was written. But ultimately, if we have a secession in the Valley, it will be lots of different secessions. I think it will break up into a number of pieces (Hertzberg, quoted in Martin, 1997).

The desire for more small-scale polities is directly linked by various commentators to the challenges posed by globalisation, as we will elaborate below (Flanigan, 1997).

Other observers note the timeliness of current secessionism in a period when "people focus more on neighborhood, regional and international ties" (words attributed to Rick Cole, former director of the West Hollywood marketing corporation, mayor of Pasadena and southern California Director of the Local Government Commission; quoted in Gordon, 1997). In another newspaper article, Kevin Starr, California's state librarian and chronicler of the state's history, is paraphrased as having said

these secession movements are part of a natural human desire for community—a desire that ironically is made more intense by the globalisation of people's lives

brought on by technology from television to the Internet (Bernstein, 1998).

While many Los Angeles politicians, particularly those from secession-prone communities, are very careful about the issue in public, Mayor Richard Riordan, who will be out of office in 2001 due to term limits, has been on record calling secession “a terrible idea, both for the Valley and for the rest of the city” (Riordan, quoted in Newton, 1998). He constantly repeats his clear opposition at every possible occasion and pitted his hopes (and much of his own and his wealthy friends’ money) on the successful passing of the new City Charter in the polls in June 1999 as a possible antidote to secession.¹³ Many supporters of secession also weighed in heavily in favour of charter reform before the 8 June 1999 vote. Secessionists, in other words, posed yet another subtle ultimatum: if Los Angeles cannot even find a way to reform its 75-year-old charter, there is little reason to believe the city will be able to change its attitude towards the Valley in the foreseeable future (Newton, 1999).

During the charter reform debate, Valley VOTE submitted its proposal about how they thought the Los Angeles Local Area Formation Commission should conduct its study of the ‘special reorganisation’ of Los Angeles into two separate parts (Valley Study Foundation, 1999).¹⁴ Yet, the secession drive still faces huge obstacles. Among them is a growing sense that ‘revenue neutrality’ should govern any secession. This would mean that the potential new Valley city would need to reimburse the old city of Los Angeles for any costs incurred by the split to the old city (Bustillo, 1999a). Moreover, the issue of water distribution will remain very complex.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the political momentum is on the side of the secessionists. Whether they can ultimately split the city apart will be a matter of the future political choice of Los Angeles’ voters, within the highly structured arena of political power in southern California. It is now clear, however, that secessionists have been able to challenge the old political consensus of coalition-building

across the city’s diverse neighbourhoods that had endured through the Bradley years and even partly during Riordan’s mayoralty.

In this context, the main arguments supporting secession are a desire for local control and autonomy, a greater return on tax dollars locally, greater efficiency, a fear of the big size of Los Angeles and the feeling that the Valley is not getting a fair share (these are the top five reasons identified by an independent survey, reported in Martin, 1998b). Forty-seven per cent of registered voters city-wide favour the Valley secession, a percentage that rises to 60 percent in the Valley (Newton and Bustillo, 1999a).

The term ‘secessionist’ is very much disliked by Valley VOTE and its supporters.¹⁶ The Valley’s *Daily News* newspaper, financial supporter of Valley VOTE, wrote in an Editorial

The issue is not—nor has it ever been—about secession. The issue is the quality of our lives and the quality of our government (Daily News, 2 July 1999).

For these reasons, the secession movement is often likened to a divorce demanded by a neglected-feeling partner; the secession study being “the first attempt to outline the divorce, allowing the parties to begin haggling over who gets the silverware” (Jones, 1999, p. B1). An important reason for rejecting the term ‘secessionist’ is the willingness to present the movement as a rational, efficient and morally just liberal claim for local control, personal autonomy and a fair share. In order to legitimate these claims, Valley VOTE constantly calls for depoliticising the issue. Valley VOTE President Jeff Brain said to the Ad Hoc Committee on Secession of the Los Angeles City Council

The issue here is not secession, but getting the facts. Being such a politically charged term used by the media, we would request that you rename the Committee to the Ad Hoc Committee on ‘Reorganization’ (reported in Siegel, 1999).

Valley VOTE presents itself as a fair player, who at this point is only seeking the facts and

to demonstrate that both the new city and the City of Los Angeles will be better off divorcing.

Secessionists' position themselves as fighting the corruption of LA's big political machine: the days of obstructionist in this city rule are over. The people running Los Angeles need to come to grips with that and change their attitude about how they treat the ordinary, working-class residents who only want to live out the American Dream in peace, safe in the knowledge that city leaders will provide the basics of urban life in the 21st century (Daily News, 27 August 1999).¹⁷

Valley VOTE insists very much on the reasonableness of their application for a feasibility study. They do not want to 'throw fire' on a very sensitive issue (interview with Jeff Brain, President of Valley VOTE, 12 May 1999). However, it is clear that once the study is completed and secession is on the ballot for city-wide approval, it will become much politicised. In the end, as professor of urban and regional planning Willson puts it,

Valley secession may trigger passions similar to those raised in Canada by the independence movement in the province of Quebec ... But in the end, Angelenos will base their decisions on bread and butter issues, not philosophy (Willson, quoted in Gordon, 1997, p. A19).

4.2 *The 'Good People' of San Pedro-Wilmington*

Still, all this talk about distant rulers and taxation without representation has an appealing ring. Maybe it's time to throw a tea party (*Press-Telegram*, 1998).

In the final days of the political tenure of Tom Bradley, traditional modes of urban regulation—based on geographically and functionally concentrated control and service provision, concentrated civic power and technocratic professionalism—failed to integrate Los Angeles urban society into a common project. In the crevices and at the

margins of the old model, citizen-driven initiatives realised this new opportunity structure. The political principle of centrality, which had driven LA since the beginning of the century, started to be replaced by a politics of geographical identity. This territorialised politics was undergirded and intersected by a set of class-based, racialised and gendered interests that made individual places connect in specific ways with the structured coherence of the urban region. San Pedro-Wilmington is such a special place. A movement in these southernmost Los Angeles communities, connected to the city by a mere 'shoestring' of land and encompassing the entire port area, is seeking secession and the founding of a new city in the South Bay.

Wilmington was incorporated in 1872. It would have been one of California's oldest incorporated cities if it had not been annexed by the City of Los Angeles in 1909 (Cultural Affairs Department, 1995). It is a lower-income, blue-collar and very diverse community that provides the largest tax-base in the City of LA because of its many oil refineries.¹⁸ San Pedro was incorporated in 1888 and was annexed—not without opposition—by the City of Los Angeles at the same time as Wilmington in 1909 (Wilton, 1999). It has always been a tight community, with many original families from Portuguese, Scandinavian, Greek, Italian, Latino and African-American descent still residing there.¹⁹ San Pedro is usually credited with a strong cultural identity developed from its past as a port town and its mixed European and Mexican ancestry. Industries and unions, churches and other institutions provide for a qualitative distinctness from the rest of Los Angeles (Wilton, 1999, p. 177). While San Pedro is more of a "gentrifying, insular community with an Italian-Balkan flavor", Wilmington is most of the time described as a "gritty Latino enclave that is struggling to overcome years of zoning monstrosities and municipal neglect" (*Press-Telegram*, 1998).²⁰ The proposed new city would also include parts of Harbor city and would encompass about 140 000 residents. Despite being overshadowed by the better-funded, better-

organised and bigger Valley secessionist movement, secession of the Harbor area would have enormous impacts on the City of Los Angeles because it is home of the large Port of Los Angeles. Indeed, access to a deep-water port was the main interest for Los Angeles to annex the two communities at the beginning of the century, linking the area 27 miles from downtown by a long, shoestring strip officially named Harbor Gateway, but disdainfully known as the 'umbilical cord'. It is important to note, though, that San Pedro, in particular, has played a major role in the strategic early geography of southern California. Rather than being back-water villages swallowed by an imperial Los Angeles, the port communities were major sites of the early insertion of Los Angeles into the national and global economies. Their connections to Los Angeles via rail, telegraph and road were important beyond the region.

Yet, this centrality in the early geography of the region has been discursively overshadowed by the trope of marginality. Despite their strategic location and function, the communities evolved on their own and activists in the secessionist movement tend to express an apparently contradictory position. On the one hand, residents speak proudly of their community's historical autonomy (a fact which belies the strong federal military interest in the area at least since the Spanish-American war; Abu-Lughod, 1999, p. 430, n. 27). On the other hand, among the residents, there is a strong feeling of neglect by the City of LA—a sentiment which often takes centre stage in the secessionist discourse. Realising the potential political fallout from these feelings, the forces of central power in Los Angeles, in turn, have started to create a discourse of inclusion with respect to the south bay neighbourhoods. Strategists in Mayor Richard Riordan's Office, while firmly opposed to secession, are taking the secessionists seriously. The Mayor is said to spend much time there and his policy-makers begin to understand that Harbor Vote is a distinct group that must be reckoned with. The Mayor's people express much empathy

for the emotions involved but, given that the Harbor is a regional resource, just like the Los Angeles International Airport or water, secession is assumed to be unlikely, undesirable and unfeasible (interview with Kelly Martin, Deputy Mayor and Chief of Staff, Los Angeles, 19 May 1999).

While secessionism has had long roots in San Pedro (Wilton, 1999), Harbor VOTE came together in 1991, as a joint effort by San Pedro Citizens for Cityhood and the New Wilmington Committee (itself the result of local activism dating back to 1988). Both organisations decided to continue the fight together and also created the California Association of Detaching Cities (including grassroots representatives from La Jolla, the San Fernando Valley, Hollywood, Venice, Westchester, Eagle Rock). Founded by Howard Bennett, current Co-chair of Harbor VOTE, the association was a means of protection against possible lawsuits. Bennett felt that as a grassroots organisation, Harbor VOTE was vulnerable and needed to build a support network. Harbor VOTE launched their cityhood study petition initiative in November 1998 and had gathered the necessary signatures by April 1999. The LAFCO will now undertake a parallel feasibility study at the same time as the Valley study, with California state funding as well (\$320 000).

Often cited as the 'sibling movement' of Valley VOTE (Smith, 1999), Harbor VOTE is nevertheless different in many respects. Most striking is the level of funding and institutionalisation. Harbor VOTE insists on its grassroots character (Harbor Vote Creed).²¹ Members are much more openly passionate about secession, contrasting with Valley VOTE stance of a 'reasonable' drive for information. For that matter, the group had internal dissension between the ardent secessionists and those who are first of all seeking for information. Whereas Valley VOTE officially took the second position, Harbor VOTE chose the first one, which eventually led to the formation of a smaller group of less 'passionate' information-seekers.²²

The Harbor area also differed in its rejection of the new City of Los Angeles Charter, adopted by voters on 8 June 1999. This could be explained, apart from the fact that some Valley VOTE leaders had come out in favour of the charter, by Harbor VOTE's strong populist vision. They saw charter reform as strictly 'the Mayor's baby', politically motivated by the attempt to create dissension amongst secessionists and take time away from the petition drive (interviews with Frank Fasullo, Howard Bennett and Frank Broidy, 26 May 1999). Harbor VOTE representatives are generally much less confident in current city government and display much suspicion about the City of Los Angeles. They would hold that the old charter was drafted in the 1920s as a means to deal with corruption. However, currently, they would argue, Los Angeles has grown so big and so complex that it became an enormous system where it is impossible to trace back any transactions nor contributions. Instead, Harbor VOTE support their secessionist position with arguments about the loss of common sense, the lack of a fair share, the fact that the Harbor faces numerous unfulfilled promises, that policy does not reflect the needs of the community; that the current system gives them taxation without representation and so on.²³ Argumentative momentum has been building for a genuine 'San Pedro Tea Party'.

The group's populist perspective is further accentuated by a language of family values, building on the sense of community, and trying to be good people, good citizens caring for their 'own' disadvantaged people. What they find difficult, they argue, is to face the constant influx of disadvantaged people coming into their community from Los Angeles. They want to gain local control on zoning requirements to stop the increasing number of special-need housing complexes in the area. They claim that most of these are unlicensed and harm the security of their families while driving down property values (interviews with Frank Fasullo, Howard Bennett and Frank Broidy, 26 May 1999). The 'good people' of San Pedro-Wilmington are

strongly grounded in grassroots community control and pride. This is not to attain homogeneity, they argue, but to create a space for their diverse community to blossom

Our potential ability to become a CITY on our own will not effect the tremendous ethnic diversity that we have. In fact, CITYHOOD will help us together, all diverse people of San Pedro & Wilmington, to say 'enough' to being treated as second class citizens (Harbor VOTE, FAQs).

Our analysis of community sentiment behind the secessionist drive in San Pedro coincides with and partially builds on an in-depth study of the San Pedro community by Robert Wilton (1999).²⁴ His focus is on community attitudes towards human service facilities and clients. He concludes that during the 1990s there were

growing concerns about the number of human service facilities in [San Pedro] and the impact of these facilities upon the local quality of life (Wilton, 1999, p. 162).

In addition, local residents had a number of concerns: among them were that facility operators were not from the local area, that problems would be brought to the community from the outside and that San Pedro had to accommodate more problem facilities than other areas in LA (Wilton, 1999, pp. 162-163). Similarly, specific anger was expressed in our conversations with local activists about the existence of halfway houses in middle-class residential communities.²⁵

Wilton reports on the emergence of a local group formed to advocate tougher controls on service providers and facility clients which turned out to be instrumental in publicising concerns about the number and location of human service facilities and was thus responsible for the growth in local awareness and the concomitant increase in support for restrictions on facility siting (Wilton, 1999, p. 164). This group and the political ideas they embrace can also be seen as one of the

points of origin of the current secessionist drive

It is unrealistic to suggest that the whole community was caught up in this debate [on facility siting], but there is considerable evidence to suggest that it did touch a great many people (Wilton, 1999, p. 166).

The debate certainly gave focus to other sentiments in the community that had different and longer roots such as anger about the common lack of implementation of plans such as a 1962 plan to deal with rapid growth which was not followed through “by the City Council in faraway Los Angeles” (Wilton, 1999, p. 175). In addition, Wilton reports that an increase in rental housing structures had become a major concern for many residents during the 1970s and 1980s. In summary, the context of community politics in San Pedro has been characterised by geographical isolation, political isolation, economic restructuring, socio-demographic change, the special situation of housing and poor representation (Wilton, 1999, pp. 176–211).²⁶

Particularly the last issue is constantly foregrounded by activists of the San Pedro Citizens for Cityhood who maintain that in terms of representation, Los Angeles is too large and there is no equivalent representation of San Pedro that would match the economic income drawn by the city from the port. Wilton concludes that, on the surface, Los Angeles secession movements overall seem to “constitute a NIMBY reaction on a grand scale which would create an impoverished, inner-city Los Angeles surrounded by wealthier suburban satellites”. Yet, San Pedro’s “secession efforts have been directly linked to more specific concerns, including the special needs housing issue”. In fact, secessionist statements link concerns about political isolation and underrepresentation with the perceived problems of special needs housing, immigration and welfare dependency (Wilton, 1999, pp. 185–186). It is this kind of specificity of populist secessionism in various places which makes any general theory on urban secessionism quite difficult.

5. Conclusion: Secession in Los Angeles as a Social Project of the Right?

Revisiting our initial propositions, we can now conclude in the following manner:

1. Secessionists in Los Angeles operate in the tradition of US rights-based liberalism. Their language and political strategy are replete with references to the rights of citizens (i.e. property-owners and tax-payers) to rule their own matters on as local a scale as possible. In this scheme, the voluntary basis of the liberal democratic contract is seen to function better at the local level. An Executive Officer for the Los Angeles LAFCO noted that in his opinion this process was democracy in action and that citizens have the right to question government. The current events in Los Angeles are viewed as nothing more than the democratic process (even though at a different size and scope) in a “nation created by secessionists” (interview with Larry J. Calemine, Executive Officer, LAFCO, 21 May 1999).²⁷ The concepts of exit, voice and loyalty take their full significance in this voluntary contractual tradition, where individuals can legitimately ‘vote with their feet’ in case of dissatisfaction with the political system. (Tiebout elaborated a similar theory with respect to economic dissatisfaction.)

But beyond these individualistic economic and political explanations, we have argued that secessionism in Los Angeles is also based on niche identities largely determined by class, race and place. However, nationalist and communitarian theories of secession cannot provide full explanation of these right-wing populist and local responses to globalisation. Given the lack of theoretical underpinnings, as well as the uncharted terrain secession movements are opening in Los Angeles and other cities, there is an array of conflated terms used to define these social projects: reorganisation, detachment, division, secession, deconstruction, divorce, independence, partition, localism and so on. The political meaning of these terms is the very terrain on which urban secessionists have fought for the legitimacy of their

symbolic claims for real independence and enhanced democratic governance.

2. We found secessionism to be a central element in the current debate on rescaling urban governance in Los Angeles. Most immediately, this fact is confirmed by the view held by many that the threat of secession prompted the passing of Los Angeles' new city charter in 1999. But beyond this, too, secessionism has offered the real possibility of creating significant new global-local and nation/state/region-local relationships in southern California. While still in the realm of imagination, a new city of more than 1 million people in the San Fernando Valley or a feisty harbour municipality whose political class dreams of turning the sleepy coastal communities into a bustling California Hong Kong, might have a tremendous effect on the regulation of capital, land, the environment, etc. in the urban area.

The charter reform campaign did not address questions of regional governance, nor do secession movements. Nevertheless, the latter are more successful in populist mobilisation because they frame their argument with the rhetoric of efficiency and boosterism. Harbor VOTE activists' insistence on the necessity to clean-up their city and engage in massive up-scaling (see Littlejohn and Brady, 1999 on these many pending projects, which they claim are currently stalled by the City of Los Angeles) capture the imagination of a significant number of middle-class voters to make secession a force to reckon with. Similarly, Valley VOTE activists hope to recuperate LA's entertainment reputation in their 'Valley of the Stars'.²⁸ Positioning of the LA region in the global economy, according to this logic, passes by the creation of boosterist reputable niches offering an excellent quality of life and flourishing, as they will be liberated from the weight of a 'Big Brother' political machine. Downtown business interests respond, however, that secessionists are much less concerned about Los Angeles as a global city; they are isolationist and parochial (interview

with Sam Bell, President, LA Business Advisors, 19 May 1999). And, as Jones puts it, the mayor and other opponents to secession "ask Valleyites to reject cityhood, in part, to maintain the size and stature of Los Angeles, as if the Valley shares in its Pacific Rim glory" (Jones, 1999, p. B6). It is exactly this share in global glory that the Valley and the Harbor area are seeking by seceding. Secessionists want their own city, while remaining part of the regional global city. Success is considered to depend on flourishing communities with their own identity. Regionalism, therefore, is not considered as a means for the well-being of the region as a whole (particularly through redistribution), but more as a tool to position their little community within the global economy by developing particular identity, offering an excellent quality of life and governing efficiently.

This articulation between fragmentation and regionalism is located on the opposite side of the political spectrum than usually more leftist regional activism. While Los Angeles is rarely recognised for being a particularly regionally inclined system of governance, Bollens (1997) holds that it has developed, in articulation with its well-known fragmented system, a sort of 'shadow regionalism'. Alongside this weak form of regional governance, a critical regionalism from below is springing up. 'Insurgent regionalism' is developing, particularly in the areas of environmental activism, labour and community planning and regional transport rights. But this kind of regionalism is miles away from the regional vision of Valley VOTE and Harbor VOTE.²⁹

3. In this sense, secession movements in Los Angeles are now a social project of the Right. In contrast with the use of fragmentation for more leftist purposes in the 1980s with the incorporation of West Hollywood (1984) by middle-class radicals and the victory of progressives in the Santa Monica Council (1979), the current wave of secessionism takes full advantage of the oppor-

tunity structures offered by a neo-liberal globalising economy.³⁰ As Beauregard (1999, p. 45) explains, in the struggle over who would represent the city, neo-conservatives currently hold the momentum

Although the euphoria surrounding the cities in the 1990s might well be short-lived, it is defining a new politics of urbanism whose momentum belongs to neo-conservatives. All others are critics or spectators.

The rescaling and spatial selectivity of the state is not an anonymous process occurring strategically behind local actors' backs. It is rather driven by a group of middle-class conservatives who act and operate like a social movement. As a social movement, these actors have articulated secessionism as a right-wing political project based on the political 'opportunity structures' (Diani, 1996) afforded to them by the changing situation of a globalised Los Angeles region. These 'political opportunity structures' of the global restructuring processes have provided the necessary conditions for the success of such mobilisation efforts. Although we have not discussed these other cases in detail in this paper, similar projects (although within very different political systems) are emerging, for example, with the Montreal partitionist movements (Boudreau, 1999), the citizen movements in the north of Frankfurt in the early 1990s (Keil and Ronneberger, 1994) and most importantly the Italian Northern League (Diani, 1996). Secession, in all of these cases, is about populism and/or individual interests.

In Los Angeles, the political opportunity structures for secession were defined in the 1990s by a series of shifts in the material conditions of life in the city. On a macro scale, it seems evident that the general crisis of the Fordist-Keynesian post-war mode of regulation provided the cleavages—of Fordist defensiveness versus neo-liberal aggression—where urban secessionism could take hold. More specifically, the economic crisis of the early 1990s, the urban rebellion of 1992, rising tax burdens, political regime change after the end of the mayoral tenure of

Tom Bradley in 1993 and changes in globalisation dynamics (Keil, 1998) can be counted as the structural conditions for political opportunity structures of Los Angeles secessionism. Yet, these 'grievances' are not enough to explain the mobilising success of the secessionist groups—at least at this preliminary stage.

Diani's theoretical framework helped to understand why, even after the new charter was voted in Los Angeles, secession movements have continued to dominate the political momentum. The charter reform campaign largely failed to mobilise citizens in Los Angeles and remained an internal debate amongst the political class of the city (Keil and Boudreau, forthcoming). On the other hand, both Harbor VOTE and Valley VOTE are much more successful in mobilising citizens to their cause, perhaps because their message is more consistent with the prevalent anti-system rhetoric. In other words, the general perception of politics in Los Angeles is that the governance system is too big, too corrupt and too inefficient to adequately position the region in the global economy as well as to satisfy community needs. As Harbor VOTE maintained, in their eyes, the charter cannot be rewritten. The system needs to be completely revamped and this means, for many, redrawing municipal boundaries (interviews with Frank Fasullo, Howard Bennett and Frank Broidy, 26 May 1999).

In sum, secession movements in Los Angeles are not cases of nationalist secession normally explained by normative theories of secession. Their understanding necessitates another theoretical framework focusing on shifting municipal boundaries within the context of globalisation-induced restructuring. We used the concept of political opportunity structures to understand this new context. We also introduced the idea of dialectics between fragmentation and regional governance to highlight the right-wing aspects of these secessionist social projects, with their emphasis on the insertion of little exclusive niches within the global economy rather than seeing regional governance as a means

for redistribution. In fact, to take up Pulido's (2000) argument about the systemic relationship between the use of space and racism in Los Angeles, it can now be argued that secession is a piece in the puzzle of the creation of white privilege in the area. Despite traces of 'remedial' arguments such as the feeling of neglect, the focus of these secession movements is primarily individualist. We traced this back to individualist theories of territorial claims (as the aggregation of private property) and theories based on personal autonomy and the right to create new voluntary political associations. Both theories, at the urban scale, are translated into the Tiebout hypothesis, which is explicitly used to support secession by Husock (1998) who is widely quoted by Valley VOTE and Harbor VOTE.

Still, the Port and Valley communities differ in expressing their political projects. Little in the Valley's proposed new urban identity has any utopian or emphatic ring to it. Valley secession really comes across as the 'liberation' of tax-paying subjects from burdens they think they do not deserve. The Valley project carries with it the anti-social, even anti-communitarian, aspects of previous California anti-tax revolts (Schrag, 1998). This time it has retreated from the political arena of the state to a specifically urban scale. In contrast, the 'good people' of San Pedro make no small plans. They speak enthusiastically about visions for their community that extend beyond individual backyards (yet not necessarily beyond property-owning individualism as an organising principle). These visions can range from the Orwellian (being a Californian Hong Kong) to the Rockwellian (the ever-present image of the small town community). In San Pedro, no one bowls alone. Yet not everyone is given access to the bowling alley. Both the emphatic vision in a small town world and the playful insertion of a specific local community into the whole of a global city (including its exclusionary politics) are characteristics we have also identified for the Italian Legas and the movement fragments of the Frankfurt North above. They tend to be

typical of the kind of right-wing populism that we have argued here drives their politics.

In the end, regardless of their momentum, secession movements do not seem to understand that the articulation of the city with the global economy cannot be restricted to gentrification and local boosterism for the 'Valley of the Stars' or a Hong-Kong-type of Harbor glory. As Margaret Crawford explains

now the larger concept of Los Angeles is the concept of diversity. This is what Los Angeles stands for now, not freeways and beaches and sunshine (Crawford, quoted in Gordon, 1997, p. A19).

Valley VOTE has been accused of advocating a hidden form of white flight (Hutchinson, 1999; Starr, 1999).³¹ Secessionists respond by insisting on the rationality of their application for a feasibility study. They ask who could possibly be against information. But it is clear that the feasibility study's main goal is to provide a framework for breaking up the city peacefully and with revenue neutrality. Therefore, the application to LAFCO is itself a political move that cannot be disguised as a simple neutral search for information. Redefining urban governance is a political debate, not a mere exercise of boundary shifting. It may not be tinged with overt ethno-nationalist motives, but it nevertheless remains grounded in questions of civic, class and political identity. With the neo-conservative and populist momentum, could it be that Valley VOTE and Harbor VOTE are in fact seceding from responsibility?

Notes

1. This real or displayed concern by the political opinion and decision-makers contrasts often with the cynicism of public opinion regarding the question of urban reform. By urban governance, we mean to signify the shift from *government* to *governance*, where governance means the elaboration of a good system to 'conduct government' as well as the opening of governmental institutions to

- more participation and civil-society-based forms of regulating daily affairs (see Keil, 2000).
2. The Mayor's office claims, however, that the Valley secessionist movement did not start the charter reform initiative, although it influenced the debate. Chief of Staff Kelly Martin explained to us in an interview that it all started after the 1992 riots, when Riordan looked into the functioning of the city to find out that the system was not only dysfunctional, but 'broken' (interview with Kelly Martin, 19 May 1999).
 3. State Librarian of California Kevin Starr (1999) also entitled his article in the *Los Angeles Times* 'LA is refounded, and secessionism lives'.
 4. This seems to be true for many US cities (Husock, 1998), but certainly Los Angeles can be considered a strong prototype.
 5. Interestingly enough, an old booklet on the history of the San Fernando valley published by the Title Insurance and Trust Company focuses exclusively on this real-estate identity of the valley and offers "the ownership story of every Valley lot and parcel through Spanish, Mexican, and American periods" (Robinson, 1961, foreword).
 6. Tarrow defines the concept of political opportunity structures as follows

dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure (Tarrow 1994, p. 85, quoted in Diani, 1996).

These dimensions are the stability of political alignments, the formal channels of access to the political system, the availability of allies within the polity and intra-élite conflict.
 7. On this concept, see Jones (1997). Following Jessop, he writes

the state is required to restructure its forms and functions (*strategic capacity*) to secure global capital, and restructuring requires different forms of representation, possibly reflected at the local level, to legitimise and govern new structures (Jones 1997, p. 847).
 8. The 1990 Census sub-divides the Valley population (excluding the cities of Burbank, Glendale, San Fernando and Hidden Hills) as follows: 57 per cent White, 32 per cent Hispanic, 8 per cent Asian-American and 4 per cent African-American (Dixon *et al.*, 1993, p. 9). In the spring of 1997, the San Fernando Valley (including the northern parts of Los Angeles and the independent cities of Glendale, Burbank, San Fernando and Hidden Hills) had the following economic indicators: population 1.71 million people; private-sector employment of 589 922; a total payroll of \$4.55 billion; a commercial vacancy rate of 6.7 per cent; 43 002 private establishments; and 143 272 people receiving aid including AFDC, general relief and local stamp recipients (quoted in Flanigan, 1997).
 9. The Bill was signed into law on 12 October 1997 as Chapter 943, Statutes of 1997 and amended by AB 2621 (Chapter 1038, Statutes of 1998).
 10. This latter move has been strongly influenced by Peter Schrag's (1998) popular critical analysis of the effects of Prop. 13 for the state's service delivery (Rohrlich, 1999).
 11. It was ultimately decided after much lobbying that the State of California would pay 80 per cent of the cost (\$1.8 million), Los Angeles County 10 per cent (\$225 000) contingent on matching funds by the City of Los Angeles. LA City Council lagged behind in voting these funds before ultimately deciding to give \$265 000 (Bustillo, 1999b; McGreevy, 1999a).
 12. See also Davis (1990, pp. 151–219) for an account of home-owner activism in the 1970s drive for secession.
 13. It was later revealed that some of Riordan's supporters also gave financial loans to Valley VOTE (McGreevy, 1999b).
 14. The Valley Study Foundation, Inc. is, by its own definition, "a Non-Profit California Corporation, by and on behalf of 132 490 qualified petitioners of the San Fernando Valley".
 15. The Valley was annexed to the City of Los Angeles in 1915 specifically to obtain water from Los Angeles. But because the water crosses the Valley from north to south, Valleyites receive the premium water. And because the City of Los Angeles is obligated to provide water to its own citizens first, if a new city in the Valley would succeed and still receive this premium water, this could be seen as discrimination and result in a massive class action suit against the city (Furgatch, 1998).
 16. In a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, an Executive Committee member of Valley VOTE wrote

We are not acting as secessionists, we are only seeking greater participation by the people in this government and demanding a study by the L.A. Local Agency Formation Commission ... We all have one goal: to better the quality of life in Los Angeles (Leyner, 1999).

17. Richard Close, Chairman of Valley VOTE, also said "The history of the Valley is about power and politics and money. We now have the chance to find out what the true facts are" (reported in Coit, 1999b).
18. The 1990 Census found that Wilmington is 62 per cent Hispanic, 24 per cent White, 8 per cent Asian-American, 5 per cent African-American, 0.4 per cent American-Indian and 0.6 per cent Other (Cultural Affairs Department, 1995, p. 74).
19. The 1990 Census showed that the population of San Pedro was 54 per cent White, 35 per cent Hispanic, 5 per cent African-American, 5 per cent Asian-American, 0.5 per cent American-Indian, and 0.5 per cent Other (Cultural Affairs Department, 1995, p. 76).
20. The landscape of Wilmington is dominated by giant shipping containers, auto wreck yards, junk yards and very precarious housing hidden among these giant containers and this industrial and byproducts landscape.
21. In describing how Valley VOTE successfully lobbied the state legislature for changing the legislation in 1997/98, San Pedro Harbor VOTE Co-chair Frank Fasullo explained how they were the "people-power engagement" behind Valley VOTE success, flooding the State Legislature with last-minute support phone calls (interviews with Frank Fasullo and with Howard Bennett, Co-chair, Wilmington Harbor VOTE and Frank Broidy, Advisory Committee, Harbour VOTE, also on 26 May 1999).
22. Chairman of Harbor VOTE Advisory Committee, Xavier Hermosillo said: "We are secessionists and proud of it. Our message here is who do you want planning your future" (reported in Coit, 1999c). Three days after the completion of the petition drive, three former Harbor VOTE volunteers founded a new organisation called Harbor Study Foundation and filed the signatures with LAFCO, in the name of Harbor VOTE, causing great rift in the Harbor area. Similar disputes also occurred within Valley VOTE, when Bobbi Fiedler left the organisation to form the San Fernando Valley Secession Board, a more openly secessionist organisation.
23. They write: "We will see our hard-earned tax dollars spent on the kinds of projects we prefer and will have a greater assurance that interest groups will not usurp local government for their own benefit" (Harbor VOTE, FAQs). See also Littlejohn and Brady (1999) for a discussion of the many 'unfulfilled promises' of development projects in San Pedro.
24. In Wilton's detailed study, San Pedro is given the fictitious name 'Milford'. We are grateful to the author to grant us permission to use the results of his study in this paper and to be able to disclose the identity of San Pedro for the purposes of our analysis.
25. During our tour with secessionist community activists in San Pedro, we were taken to a house in a well-to-do San Pedro residential neighbourhood which allegedly was operated without a license by a private operator who provided services to recovering drug and/or alcohol addicts. While we could not verify this story, it was indicative of the kinds of issue that fuel the secession drive in San Pedro.
26. Rob Wilton pointed out to us in a personal communication that particularly the restructuring of the economic base of the port communities must not be forgotten as an important impact on the mood in the community. As the industries that had helped to define this community disappeared, the vulnerability of the people there was on the rise. At the same time, however, some of the activists we spoke with were not personally affected by economic change or had rather benefited by it.
27. Similarly, in signing on the state funding for the feasibility study, California Governor Davis said

I believe in democracy and if the people of San Fernando Valley and the people of the remaining parts of Los Angeles vote to allow the Valley to secede, they're entitled to. It's important that a study be done to determine if the Valley can be financially independent and can support itself should it ultimately become a separate city (reported in Orlov, 1999).
28. This image of the Valley is contested by the film director Paul T. Anderson who gave us *Boogie Nights*, a movie about pornography in the Valley. He writes

I grew up in Studio City. It is not as lush as it sounds. There is no 'studio' in Studio City. It is a suburban area with houses and trees and all the rest. The only sort of film production there is pornography (Anderson, 1999).
29. For instance, local officials in the San Fernando Valley proposed to break away from the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and to run their bus lines themselves in order to get rid of what they see as the monopoly of unions on their big bureaucracy labour contracts. A state legislation was nevertheless pushed through the Assembly by Democrats to protect bus workers in case regional transit districts are divided from the MTA (Bustillo, 1999c).

30. For more details on the incorporation of these progressive cities, please refer to Keil (1998).
31. Starr holds that

Los Angeles, meaning the entire city, can thank its lucky stars that a new generation of Latino elected officials is entering center stage. One suspects that it is not the leading item on their agenda to deconstruct the city. Why should they assent to the breakup of Los Angeles just as they are coming into political possession of a city that has, for more than 150 years, spoken English with a Spanish accent? (Starr, 1999).

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