

# Conflict in Cities and the Struggle for Modernity. Toward an Understanding of the Spatiality of the October Crisis

## Les villes en conflit et la poursuite de la modernité. Une analyse spatiale de la Crise d'octobre

Jason R. Burke

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Article abstract

By the 1960s, Quebec was poised for change. Two visions of a modern Quebec began to emerge that clashed throughout the decade, culminating in what has become known as Canada's most significant encounter with terrorism: the October Crisis. While the newly elected Liberal government pushed forward with social and economic reforms, the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) emerged with a different vision for Quebec characterized by independence and socialism. This article argues that with modernization comes geographical transformation and violence. It looks at the spatial implications of FLQ violence during the 1960s and the government's response to the October Crisis as an attempt to provide a new understanding of the crisis.

# Conflict in Cities and the Struggle for Modernity. Toward an Understanding of the Spatiality of the October Crisis

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Jason R. Burke  
Department of Geography and Program Planning  
University of Toronto  
Burkej@geog.utoronto.ca

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## Résumé

À partir des années 1960, le Québec était prêt pour le changement. Au cours de cette décennie, deux visions pour un Québec moderne prirent forme et s'affrontèrent, culminant par ce qui est connu comme la rencontre la plus significative du Canada avec le terrorisme, la Crise d'octobre. Pendant que le gouvernement libéral nouvellement élu poussait en avant des réformes sociales et économiques, le Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) émergeait avec une vision différente pour le Québec caractérisé par l'indépendance et le socialisme. Cet article soutient que la modernisation est presque toujours accompagnée de transformations géographiques et de violence. Il examine les implications spatiales de la violence du FLQ pendant les années 1960 et les réponses gouvernementales à la Crise d'octobre afin de fournir une nouvelle compréhension de cette crise.

## Mots-clés

Crise d'octobre, terrorisme, état de siège, géographie de la violence, contrôle urbain, droit à la ville.

## Abstract

By the 1960s, Quebec was poised for change. Two visions of a modern Quebec began to emerge that clashed throughout the decade, culminating in what has become known as Canada's most significant encounter with terrorism: the October Crisis. While the newly elected Liberal government pushed forward with social and economic reforms, the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) emerged with a different vision for Quebec characterized by independence and socialism. This article argues that with modernization comes geographical transformation and violence. It looks at the spatial implications of FLQ violence during the 1960s and the government's response to the October Crisis as an attempt to provide a new understanding of the crisis.

## Keywords

October Crisis, terrorism, state of exception, geography of violence, urban control, right to the city.

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Four decades after the October Crisis of 1970, images of the Canadian military occupying the streets of Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City remain potent. Calling in the troops was done to relieve the Montreal and provincial police of some security duties and to allow them to devote more resources to track down the kidnappers of James Richard Cross, a British diplomat, and Pierre Laporte, Deputy Premier and Minister of Labour for Quebec. Thus, while the Crisis had underlying nationalist and socialist echoes, it was at the urban scale, and more particularly in Montreal, that the conflict took place. The military aimed to protect the same spaces that the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) had targeted throughout years of bombing campaigns; namely, those symbolic spaces of Anglophone (British, American and English-Canadian) imperialism, culture and economic hegemony. This contested urban terrain became increasingly securitized, culminating in both the deployment of the military to protect civilians and the October 16 declaration of the War Measures Act (WMA). While the FLQ took advantage of a complex urban fabric to outmanoeuvre the police, an intense form of spatial control was imposed on this terrain. But while much has been written about the history of the crisis, the politics of the time and the lives of the most influential players, these geographical dimensions have been largely overlooked.

In recent years, geographical concepts have become important for understanding conflict. Scholarship on critical geopolitics and scale has been crucial in dismantling the traditional emphasis on the state as the key player in political struggle. When examined within this geographical framework, a new understanding of the October Crisis emerges. Furthermore, this particular case raises geographical questions concerning such concepts as the “right to the city” (Lefebvre, 1968) and spatial control (Foucault, 2007). By introducing a new geographical perspective that underscores the violence of everyday life in Montreal, the view presented in this article supersedes the purely historical and political approaches to the crisis.

The social circumstances and the radically changing society of the time played a major role in transforming Quebec’s geography, not only in the physical sense but in the imaginative sense as well. Therefore, this article will endeavour to trace competing notions of modernity in 1960s Quebec and demonstrate that in the quest for modernization, violence became manifest in a spatially significant way. To achieve this goal, secondary sources are used to develop a framework for future work on the longer history of cities as secure/insecure spaces. This exploratory article seeks to open up a perspective for research on the spatial dimensions of violence and security practices. It represents one aspect of a larger research project that will ultimately make extensive use of archival documents and other primary data.

The article begins with the presentation of a framework for re-interpreting the October Crisis, seen from a geographical perspective. It goes on to discuss the competing concepts of modernization: one orchestrated by the Liberal Party of Quebec, the engineers of Quebec’s “Quiet Revolution”, the other promoted by the FLQ.<sup>1</sup> Finally, it examines the geographical dimensions of the crisis itself. The October Crisis was characterized by some of the most controversial government interventions Canada has ever experienced. It was a moment in security planning history when civil liberties were suspended and tanks rolled through the streets in a demonstration of force and power. Cities were treated as war zones, and the police and the military were free

to manoeuvre in different ways in order to thwart any terrorist threat. As the army patrolled Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City, a different sense of space as a site of struggle emerged in opposition to that presented by the FLQ.

## Reinterpreting the October Crisis

Previous work on the October Crisis has analyzed and interpreted the events from a national viewpoint. In other words, the crisis has been traditionally construed, especially in English Canada (LaPierre, 1971), as a national crisis with sovereigntist overtones. The struggle for national liberation has rarely been considered outside a nation-state framework and, in the case of the October Crisis, interpretations have tended to focus on its national scale, ignoring urban spatial upheaval and the experience of everyday life in cities like Montreal. This is not to suggest that the state had no role to play in orchestrating the crisis. But the nexus between the urban and the national scales can be used more readily to provide a better understanding of the crisis.

The bridge between the nation and cities is the production of space and scale. As with nationalism, scale and space are produced; they are social constructions intertwined with politics (Smith, 1992; Marston, 2000). Space is a social product of state and non-state processes (Lefebvre, 1968), and these processes have material consequences for citizens' daily existence. Concerning scale, the local scale, it has been argued, is the actual scale at which the national and international processes that produce social life and which shape the urban environment can be observed (Taylor, 1992; Lefebvre, 1968; Holston and Appadurai, 1999; Brenner, 2000; Smith, 1992; Isin, 2007). Of course, this does not discredit the concept of the nation-state as a structural force; it simply suggests that the local scale is the most useful scale for understanding the various social processes and, more specifically, the geography of violence.

The geography of violence is more extensive than the nation-state. In many parts of the world, violence is a fact of life and, in its visceral or material form can have a negative impact on the different segments of a society. Processes of modernization, for example, have been linked to violence against cities (Berman, 1996; Gregory, 2003). The destruction of rundown neighbourhoods for super-projects and the unequal distribution of economic opportunities and social services are a common feature of state modernization. If violence is taken in its broadest sense, then the state's monopoly on violence, both physical and structural, can be legitimized as part of its modernization project. The unequal distribution of capital can also result in serious public grievances, which in turn can manifest themselves in the form of illegitimate violence (Graham, 2004). According to Hardt and Negri (2004), only one distinction between types of violence actually matters: the violence that maintains the world order and that which challenges it. To understand the spatiality of both terrorist and government violence as it pertains to the October Crisis, it is crucial to examine the relationship between the nation and the city, the loci of modernity.

According to Isin (2007:221), "the state emanates from the city, organized through it and assembled by it." He argues that the concept of the state and the nation are operationalized in the city by "various symbolic and material practices," but that the city should not simply be imagined as a physical or material space (*Ibid.*: 221-222). Instead, the city should be interpreted as a site of struggle, where local citizens and



structural forces such as capitalism, globalization, modernization and nationalism are continually transforming urban space and producing new concepts of the city. Looked at from this viewpoint, the October Crisis can be seen as a violent struggle between the FLQ and the state for control of the city.

Mitchell (2003:19) describes the right to the city as “the right to the uses of city spaces, the right to inhabit.” Harvey (2006) suggests that the concept refers to the ability to change the city through collective struggle. In some ways, the Quiet Revolution and the October Crisis both concerned the exercise of a “right to the city.” Most of the economic grievances, spatial inequalities and language injustices that typified this period occurred or stemmed from the particular class and ethnic cleavages that existed in Montreal. French was not threatened elsewhere in Quebec; it was in Montreal that French unilingualism was a hindrance to economic opportunities and spatial mobility. Montreal was also where symbols of colonialism and economic imperialism were present and significant. Therefore, the city was not just the backdrop for the crisis, it was where people created their identity and enacted citizenship (Isin, 2007: 223). In no way does this framework condone the FLQ violence. It simply suggests that the FLQ’s violent struggle for a more just society was linked to the right to the city. The October Crisis was the brutal climax of this struggle. The only way for the state to contain this uprising was to resort to its own form of violence through controversial methods of spatial control.

## A brief history

### Pre-1960 Quebec

Prior to the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, English-Canadian and American companies dominated the Quebec economy. The conservative Union Nationale party, the dominant political party of the time, believed that a *laissez-faire* economy was the best way to accommodate the economic power of the Anglophone population. The Francophone majority rarely contested this *fait accompli* of the Anglophone-controlled economy and preferred linguistic peace to any conflict. This meant that the economic power remained in the hands of the wealthy Anglophone elite and limited the economic opportunities for Francophones who could not speak English.

The Catholic Church was also influential during this period. It controlled the social sphere of the Francophones, including education and health care; it urged the population to reject the evils of a liberal economy so that they could preserve their French-Canadian identity and avoid being assimilated into the North American English-speaking majority. Since the 1759 Conquest, the primary concern of the French-speaking nation had been “la survivance.” This form of nationalism was characterized by the preservation of the traditional French-Canadian culture and way of life based largely on language, religion and a rural agrarian lifestyle (Levine, 1990; Laur, 2002; Kaplan, 1992). The clergy promoted spatial separation and its ideologies in the Catholic education system in order to minimize the threat to cultural survival.

## Quiet Revolution 1960

The situation for Francophones in the province began to change with the onset of the “Quiet Revolution.” This period witnessed massive social investment and a transformation of the state. The Quebec government was poised to modernize society and improve the socio-economic context of the Francophone majority. The Quiet Revolution saw a major increase in public-service jobs and consequently, an expansion of the Francophone middle-class. Furthermore, school taxes were standardized, substantially improving the French school systems (Kaplan, 1992; Levine, 1990).

Even before the Quiet Revolution, there was a sense that a major societal change was in order. Urbanization was rapidly increasing, values were becoming more liberal and a fresh feeling of national/cultural identity was beginning to emerge. The French language became the major link uniting the nation, while influential literature such as *La revue socialiste* and *Cité libre*, both of which were to become reputable journals, argued in favour of Quebec modernity.

The FLQ’s modern vision, nearly always overshadowed by the Quiet Revolution, also embodied the idea of emancipation and advocated a socialist state purged of all class divisions. Taking insight from Harvey (2003) there are two competing views of modernity: one put forward by the Francophone bourgeois that proposed a liberal-capitalist state run by Francophones, and the other promoted by the Francophone proletariat calling for an independent Quebec based on a socialist state structure. It is evident that society was ripe for change. However, there were also competing visions for a modern Quebec state, both of which advocated a break with tradition. All liberation movements seek to eliminate heterogeneity by unifying the nation and expelling the colonizer (Fanon, 1963). Shifting the subordinate majority into a position of power is, in essence, the premise for such a struggle. In this instance, the governing Liberal party and the FLQ both had different visions for a modern society and different methods for transforming it.

## Competing visions of modernity

### The Quebec state and modernization

The Quiet Revolution was part cultural and part ideological (Cohen-Almagor, 2000). First, it reflected the interests of the Francophone majority, which had been economically subordinate to the English-speaking population, by reaffirming the right to use French in all aspects of social and economic life. *Maitre chez nous* was the slogan used during this period to convey the concept of taking economic and social matters out of the hands of the clergy and the Anglophone minority and placing them within reach of the Francophone majority. Second, it involved social and economic development that entailed massive provincial government intervention in the modernization of the state. The government expanded its role in health care, welfare and education and sponsored many government-owned enterprises and major industrial projects (Charters, 1997).

Despite the centralizing tendencies of the state, the modernization project had much in common with capitalistic ideals. However, under capitalism, the benefits of modernization are rarely shared equitably. Quebec represented around 40 percent of



the unemployment rate in Canada (Cohen, 1970: 13), while the English-owned banks continued to increase their profits year after year (Simard, 2000). This particular form of modernization engineered by the state came under the umbrella of the liberal capitalist state (Thériault, 1994) and was at odds with the vision of the FLQ.

The Quiet Revolution ended the ethnic phase of French-Canadian identity and replaced it with a more modern, *Québécois* cultural identity (Simard, 2000). Although individualism played an increasingly prominent role, Quebec's collective identity was reinforced and recast in terms of cultural uniqueness. This contradiction occurred in conjunction with the growth of the state; the nation became more united, since it was now based more on modern public institutions than on traditional ideas of kinship and religion. The citizens of Quebec came to be defined as a people linked by the French language, a common history and a delimited territory, all of which was entrenched in the emerging state apparatus. More generally, "the modernization of politics was thus as much a process of territorialization as it was a process of secularization and rationalization" (Neocleous, 2003: 411). In Quebec, this project involved "nationalizing the masses" by initiating a re-conceptualization of the nation as a vast territory united in a collective struggle by Francophones wishing to become "masters in their own house." According to Thériault (1994), identity is always transformed when it is subject to a modernizing project.

The modernization processes associated with the Quiet Revolution contributed to a re-conceptualization of the nation and its territory, laying the foundation for the emergence of a competing vision of a modern Quebec based on territorial sovereignty. According to Laurendeau (1974: 73), "... [la] révolution tranquille, dont l'objectif était l'intégration fonctionnelle et rationnelle du Québec au développement du Canada, a finalement dépassé son objectif en donnant une vigueur considérable aux aspirations indépendantistes." Therefore, the promotion of Francophone territorial control during the Quiet Revolution laid what Neocleous (2003: 411) would call the groundwork for sovereignty. Neocleous argues that historically, sovereignty has often been achieved through violence. The real potential for violence led the federal government to engage in many questionable and illegal practices against separatist groups, including legitimate political parties such as the Parti Québécois (Fidler, 1978). In essence, the modernity project, designed broadly to bring stability, justice and prosperity to all, triggered a separatist movement within which some factions turned to violence as a means of attaining their political goals. This, in turn, forced the government to react with repressive measures. Revolution begins in urban spaces and it is within these spaces that the FLQ emerged with an alternative vision of the state.

## The FLQ and modernization

Along with the concept of a Francophone-controlled territory in Quebec, the FLQ also shared two major visions with the Liberal government of the time: both wanted Quebec purged of its clergy, which advocated a life away from politics, and both sought to liberate Quebecers from the economic oppression suffered at the hands of the mostly Anglophone upper-class. In its desire to eliminate class divisions, however, these visions overstepped the boundaries of modern ideas associated with the Quiet Revolution. The FLQ blamed every social ill on colonialism and the church, and social reform was considered to be just as necessary as independence (Laurendeau, 1974).





As the signs of modernization linked to the Quiet Revolution became apparent, they exposed many lingering inequalities (Simard, 2000). For the FLQ, this simply reinforced the need to establish an independent and socialist Quebec state. In the following section of this article, the FLQ's competing vision for a modern Quebec is discussed in relation to left-wing ideology, to revolutionary movements which sprang up at the time, and to terrorist violence.

While the FLQ is mostly remembered as a separatist organization advocating independence for the territory (its initial *raison d'être*), independence based solely on nationalism was deemed too restrictive. Consequently, it dissociated itself from political jargon such as *maître chez nous* and built its vision on the idea of class struggle and the plight of the working-class. Eliminating the struggle between capitalists and the working-class was paramount for their cause and also unusual in Quebec politics. Thus, the FLQ turned to Marxism as a framework for creating a more equitable Quebec society.

The FLQ's understanding of the Quebec situation and its vision for improving the latter remained forward-looking and, as such, in line with modern thought (Bédard, 2002). Forward-looking was not synonymous with *tabula rasa*. Contacts were made with all those who had fought on behalf of the Quebec nation in the past (*Ibid.*). One of the myths of modernity is that it signifies a break, a clean slate, unadulterated by the past (Harvey, 2003). But the break did prove not to be quite so clean. The FLQ was forced to rely on the masses for support by harking back to memories of their collective historical struggle. This struggle, however, connoted a selective appropriation of the past as a way to promote the vision of a modern future. Modernity for the FLQ did not imply fostering individual development or ignoring a collective past. The FLQ's modern vision did require a subordination of individualism to the collective cause of the group and the nation (Bédard, 2002).

The FLQ believed that using a political framework as a channel for pushing its agenda was futile. Politics in a liberal democracy was viewed as a tool to guarantee the survival of a bourgeois society, which it wanted to dismantle. Taking their cue from the writings of revolutionaries like Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Carlos Marighella and the Black Panthers, many FLQ members were convinced that only violence could overthrow a class-stratified society rooted in colonialism and repression. Vallières (1968:66) believed that the crux of the societal problem was neither moral nor metaphysical but material. Hence, any solution could not be theoretical, it had to be pragmatic. One of the FLQ's goals was to challenge the legitimacy and the root cause of the socio-political situation rather than orchestrate a *coup d'État* (Laurendeau, 1974). Its goal was to expose repression and cripple the capitalist system. Various factions of the FLQ wanted to use shock tactics to dispel people's feelings of alienation. Only force, it believed, could achieve a new sense of nationhood, and the FLQ had a duty to be in the vanguard of the struggle (Bédard, 2002). At the same time, violence was believed to be the final arbiter when every other means employed by the FLQ to realize its goals had failed (Laurendeau, 1974). The FLQ contended that the "system" was inherently violent: "Un système d'oppression économique (qu'il soit colonial ou racial) peut se perpétuer calmement, sans troubles apparents et être horriblement brutal" (Laurendeau, 1974: 21). In other words, political violence was simply a response to structural forms of economic and social violence. Nowhere was this dichotomy more apparent and more disputed than in Montreal.



## Spatial dimensions

### FLQ actions

The transformation of social and economic institutions was accompanied by the modernization of space. Modernization, however, often leads to disenfranchisement, and the FLQ found itself disenfranchised by the particular type of modernization taking place in Quebec at the time. The FLQ turned to violence against symbolic institutions and businesses in its opposition to the socioeconomic hierarchy. This section examines the spatial implications of FLQ violence and the significance of the loci of contestation.

The economic, social and linguistic grievances violently expressed by the FLQ and shared by a majority of Francophones were explicitly rooted in urban life. The appalling living conditions in most of Montreal's Francophone neighbourhoods added to these grievances. The city was where the disenfranchised were aware of their subordination to the Anglophone "other" and where the Francophone intelligentsia and proletariat started to wake up to their collective oppression as a nation. According to Taylor (1970:27), "the image of a society dominated by the Anglo-capitalist elite fits with the sense of powerlessness which is part of the feeling of alienation." The violent actions committed by the FLQ were a way of shocking people out of their alienation. In fact, the FLQ's actions during the October Crisis garnered a great deal of sympathy and support, even if most people refused to condone violence.

Terrorism is almost always an urban phenomenon (Savitch, 2008). Cities are attractive terrorist targets for several reasons: they have symbolic value, there is the potential for massive destruction and disruption, they are the sites of media attention, and they are loci of anonymity (Savitch and Ardashev, 2001). Consequently, a terrorist act must be carried out with great attention to geographical detail.

From 1963 until the October Crisis in 1970, the FLQ carried out a series of bombings, targeting symbols of monarchy, colonialism and private American enterprises (Laurendeau, 1974). Bombs are effective in achieving publicity and coercion but they are also symbolic. The FLQ attacked military, police, and government buildings, as well as specific parts of the city such as the wealthy Anglophone neighbourhood of Westmount. However, according to Charters (1986: 60) the FLQ was unable to devise an appropriate strategy for revolution. Consequently, it spent most of its time spreading fear by attacking symbolic targets such as the Montreal Stock Exchange, and, until the October Crisis, it did not represent a significant threat to the stability of the state.

This violence was an urban phenomenon, perpetrated more specifically in Montreal (David and Maheu, 1971). According to Charters (1997: 141)

most of the incidents (at least 125) occurred in or near Montreal – a clear reflection of the city's political and economic significance in a modernizing Quebec. The majority of the bombings were directed against the property of the federal government (armouries, mailboxes, government offices, businesses) and, occasionally, transportation links (railways and bridges).



At this time, Montreal was Canada's largest city and the hub of its economy. In a city strictly divided along economic and linguistic lines and burdened with economic and political symbols of Anglophone hegemony, spatial contestation and intimidation became a method of asserting control over the city.

Terrorists often try to attract media attention to their cause. The perpetration of violent acts in Montreal, the heart of the French-Canadian media, was therefore ideal for promoting the FLQ's cause. Many newspapers offered a sympathetic view of the FLQ while others, such as the intellectual newspaper *Le Devoir*, played a particularly antagonistic role during the October Crisis by constantly questioning and challenging the federal and provincial governments' response to the crisis (Lachapelle, 2005). Moreover, the media served to further the FLQ's cause and give prominence to the October Crisis. When the FLQ manifesto was broadcast on Radio-Canada, the first major link between the FLQ and the people of Quebec had been established. This broadcast reached every household and attracted popular support (Crelinsten, 1987: 70). Furthermore, it forced the government to negotiate in the public arena and endowed the FLQ with political legitimacy.

Finally, by virtue of being in the city, the FLQ was able to maintain a certain level of anonymity. Many of the terrorist acts could be carried out with relative ease, and staging the attacks in different parts of the city made it easier to circumvent the authorities. Furthermore, the city is where terrorists find support for their cause. As the FLQ obtained wider coverage by a sympathetic French media, support for the FLQ's ideas continued to gain ground. When Pierre Laporte was murdered, however, the city literally fell silent. Radwanski and Windeyer (1971) describe the scene in Montreal as exceptionally quiet while the usually exuberant public life of the city faded when reports of the assassination came in. When the corpse of Pierre Laporte was recovered, it dispelled the spontaneous outbreak of revolutionary fantasy (Bédard, 2002), while support for the government peaked and sympathy for the FLQ fell dramatically (Auf der Maur, 1995). The prospect of any popular revolution or street uprising dimmed once the War Measures Act (WMA) was declared (Radwanski, 1971).

## Government responses

During the October Crisis, both the federal and provincial governments' actions were highly contested. Many segments of the population criticized the suspension of civil liberties through the imposition of the War Measures Act (WMA) as well as the military's occupation of Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City. Essentially, criminal law enforcement was considered inadequate under the circumstances (Maloney, 1997; Fidler, 1978; Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 1971). Government response to terrorism is practically always about increasing spatial control in terms of heightened security rather than addressing some of the fundamental socio-economic malaises inherent to any uprising. According to Torrance (1995: 313), "the tendency for democracies to transform themselves into authoritarian regimes when confronted by violent challenges" poses a great danger. This final section looks at the spatial implications of the government's responses to terrorism.

In the same way as the violent FLQ actions targeted symbolic sites, so the WMA and military occupation were symbolic acts. With sympathy for the FLQ continuing to grow, government credibility started to wane. These issues had to be resolved, and



the calling-in of the military and the declaration of the WMA constituted a symbolic show of force designed to intimidate the FLQ and antagonize its sympathizers. Around 7000 troops were deployed to protect important buildings, high-profile individuals and strategic spaces; “their presence added an eerie aura of war to the already tense atmosphere” (Radwanski and Windeyer, 1971: 61). It has been argued that this display of force was actually intended to antagonize the sovereignty movement and left-wing radicals (Vallières quoted in Charters, 1986; Fidler, 1978; Brodeur, 1980; Whitacker, 2002). In fact, it was not until the police obtained enough names of people associated with left-wing groups that the government was able to justify its request for emergency powers (Fidler, 1978).

Under the WMA, “support for the FLQ was a crime subject to five year’s imprisonment but anyone, supporter or not, could be jailed for three weeks without any charge” (Haggart and Golden, 1971: 34). The Act allowed for a huge police operation, which led to roughly 500 arrests, 238 of them during the first morning (Beaton, 1971, Charters, 1986), and over 3000 searches (LaPierre, 1971). In addition, public dissent such as demonstrations and marches were declared illegal, which effectively gagged support for the FLQ cause. According to Lefebvre (2003: 20) “wherever threatened, the first thing power restricts is the ability to linger or assemble in the street.” The WMA essentially denied the democratic right to dissent in public space and withdrew the space where citizenship and identity are enacted.

After the WMA was declared, basic rights and civil liberties were suspended, a situation which could be described as a “state of exception” (Agamben, 1998). According to Hannah (2007:59), “the state of exception is not the chaos that precedes order but the situation that results from its suspension.” In the week leading up to the declaration of the WMA, pandemonium broke out in Montreal: a foreign dignitary and a minister were abducted, and strikes and rallies declaring support for the FLQ took place. Consequently, Prime Minister Trudeau decided to institute a state of exception by suspending civil liberties pursuant to the declaration of the WMA and thus restoring calm and order to the streets.

Enactment of legislation like the WMA not only suspends the law and juridical order by stripping the population of its rights, but also affects territorial space (Hannah, 2007). The WMA is a tactic of sovereignty by which the state geographically exerts control over a territory (Butler, 2004). To be able to detain or arrest people, the state must exert some form of geographical control over a particular population by suspending rights within the framework of emergency powers, or tightening security measures in the form of military intervention (Hannah, 2007: 63). As a result, the state was able to exploit people’s vulnerabilities and bring them back under the control of the authorities.

The feelings of fear and anxiety present in many aspects of urban life prior to and throughout the October Crisis were not provoked by the FLQ but rather by the state, the media and the police (LaPierre, 1971). Historically, states have always sought to maintain order in their systems by way of security mechanisms such as the military and the police (Foucault, 2007: 296). The police, in particular, have always been connected with the creation of violence. The October Crisis occurred at a time when police brutality, military intimidation and unlawful incarceration were typical of a society subject to a state of exception. Most of the arrested were never charged, a

fact suggesting that the arrests were never carefully planned but rather an abuse of newly granted powers (Cohen-Almagor, 2000). Michel Brault's film, *Les Ordres* (1974), vividly reflects the impact of the WMA on the everyday lives of civilians. In some cases, those who were unlawfully detained lost their jobs and had their public image harmed. The actions of the police, operating under the WMA, affected not only individuals and their families, but also entire neighbourhoods known to harbour a significant number of separatists and left-wing radicals.

Although the WMA and military involvement had a high approval rating at the time, they received much criticism, too. In *Strong and Free: A Response to the War Measures Act* (1970), several authors claim that the WMA represented a use of excessive force for a minor crisis and, as such, was unnecessary. The majority were particularly critical of the government's emphasis on security rather than on the underlying social and economic grievances that may have caused the uprising. *Dissent and the State* (1989), another related study, puts forward a similar argument:

The challenge is not for the state to suppress dissent, but for the state to ameliorate the problems and conditions that cause it. Only then can a regime prove that it is attempting to accommodate the basic human needs and rights that justify its existence. Regimes that do this are [...] much more secure and legitimate than those dependent on powerful security services that control and prevent dissent (Franks, 1989:19).

Addressing the social and economic ills facing the most marginalized and alienated groups was essential if a meaningful solution to the malaises of Quebec society was to be found. The FLQ turned to political violence as a way of imposing its own vision of a more just society. At the same time, however, a non-violent struggle for national liberation and social and economic justice existed that was repressed by military occupation and the suspension of civil liberties. In actual fact, it was careful police work and not the use of repressive emergency powers that eventually solved the kidnapping cases.

## Conclusion

This exploratory article shows clearly that there is a history of violence and security peculiar to cities, a topic rarely explored from a geographical perspective. Its aim is to suggest that a geographical inquiry into the October Crisis offers a potentially new outlook on this significant moment in Canadian history. By looking beyond the political and historical aspects of the crisis and focusing on its geographical and spatial aspects, it is possible to reinterpret the crisis as an "urban" struggle transcending the nation-state.

The context of this struggle was Montreal. In the 1960s Montreal was a polarized city where Francophones and Anglophones hailed from different social backgrounds; the impoverished working-class Francophones from the east side of the city, the wealthy Anglophones from the west. Poverty was geographical, and political power ensured that it stayed this way. According to Agamben (1998), the "good life" was achieved by social exclusion. Indeed, Montreal was founded precisely on a policy of marginalizing those who were politically neutral. And so Anglophones were able to maintain their economic hegemony. Not only did they control the economy but they also wielded considerable power and influence in political circles.



By the 1960s, this traditional configuration was challenged. The swearing-in of a new government determined to modernize Quebec after decades of conservative rule and clerical influence gave hope to some of the most deprived people in the province. The government's aim was to modernize the province by introducing a variety of social and economic measures that would improve the living conditions of its citizens. The FLQ's reaction to these measures involved a particular form of political violence.

While the FLQ did not reject progress, its vision for a modern Quebec was based on a different paradigm: it used violent means to advance its own political agenda and to challenge what it perceived to be symbols of colonial and economic oppression. By 1963, there was fighting on the streets of Montreal contesting many of the symbols and spaces that the FLQ saw as instances of structural violence. This collective struggle centred on the right of a Francophone majority to a city dominated by an Anglophone minority. Years of FLQ violence culminated in the October crisis and the assassination of Pierre Laporte. During this period, the deployment of troops and the subsequent declaration of the WEA sought to address what was construed not only as an insurrection but also an attempt to intimidate the public symbolically. Hence, aspects of normal life became vulnerable to state power (Hannah, 2007), and people expressing views that were left-wing or separatist came in for special attention. For months on end, the FLQ was able to outwit the police by hiding out in the city incognito, a clear sign that the WMA contained loopholes. Millions of citizens had their civil liberties suspended, while the few kidnappers were still on the run. The WMA, instead of acting as a response to the social and economic ills that likely triggered dissent in the first place, only widened the spaces of government control.

By approaching the October Crisis from a geographical perspective, a new understanding of this event emerges. The crisis can now be interpreted as a struggle between the right to a city and spatial control. This approach also highlights the self-contradictory role of the city as a space of both liberation and disempowerment. Montreal was a locus for collective uprising as well as the site of various forms of oppression and subordination. Viewed this way, the scope of the October Crisis can be expanded beyond the traditional nation-state perspective to reveal a more nuanced relationship between modernity, violence and the city.

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## Notes

- 1 This is not to suggest that there were only two competing notions of modernity at the time. Other sectors of Quebec society were also promoting a significant socialist ideology. Research on the geography of violence shows that the conflict between the modern visions of the Liberal Party and the FLQ is the more important.



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