

**Accumulation by Dispossession: Transformative Cities in the New Global Order**, Swapna Banarjee-Guha (ed). Sage, 2010, 268 pages, ISBN: 978-1-4051-1179-9. £37.50 (hardback).

Accumulation by Dispossession: Transformative Cities in the New Global Order is situated within the broader perspectives of globalisation and neoliberalism and their impacts at different spatial scales, especially at the city level which is increasingly important in the new global financial order. The emerging role of developing countries in the world economy has brought their cities into the nexus of global cities such as London, New York and Tokyo. Hence the nature of the essays incorporated into this edition is a further step towards our understanding of the urban geographies of the developing world. The book is arranged as a collection of essays which begins by addressing theoretical aspects of contemporary urban transformation in developing countries. It then moves on to concentrate on empirical analysis of globalisation and neoliberalism through attention on specific cities in developing countries. Whilst coherent, the overall structure of the book might have been more appealing to scholars if it had been framed into sections of theoretical and empirical perspectives of 'accumulation by dispossession'.

Debunking some of the myths regarding the cities of developing countries - as centres of increasing homogenisation, urbanisation and high standard of living - helps us to focus more clearly on the reproduction, reconstitution and mutation of neoliberalism as an ideology, as it is now extensively and intensively practiced. In that sense this book positions cities as spaces for intense contradictions of globalisation between marginalized urban poor who make new claims to the urban spaces in the cities and the proponents of neoliberalism. The book uses David Harvey's 'The Right to the City' and his understanding of accumulation by dispossession as a point of departure. Here Harvey argues that urbanisation has played a crucial role in absorbing surplus capital from the system. Working this through the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century urbanisation of Paris, Harvey argues that this process has led to various

revolts seeking to reclaim the city lost by urban masses, yet the right to the city remains largely confined to private interests dominated by political and economic elites. Thus Harvey makes the claim that the right to the city must not only be understood as the right to the city's resources but also the right to change the city according to those who live in it and hence the voices of urban masses should also be incorporated. It is these insights that set the tone for the chapters that follow.

A perennial problem with edited volumes is the selection of essays which rarely cover all lines of argument and thus effectively act as case studies exemplifying key points in an argument or body of work. For example the essays on Vienna (Nissel) and Dhaka (Islam and Shafi) are well crafted with an emphasis on the working of globalisation in specific places and variegated outcomes. Yet the incorporation of these two cities seems hard to justify simply on the basis of their contrasting histories and socio-cultural characteristics. Accordingly the choice of cases (cities) could perhaps have been more focused on the objectives of the book which is 'accumulation by dispossession' through globalisation and trans-nationalisation of the developing economies. Moreover, ince the book is edited with a focus on developing countries and their cities, it inevitably lacks broader perspectives on empirical studies from other countries such as China and Brazil - two important developing countries, the inclusion of which - in my opinion - would have enhanced the scope of the book.

At the same time this book has an excellent collection of essays on Mumbai especially Chapter nine by Darryl D' Monte and chapter ten by Sharit. K. Bhowmik, both of which bring out why and how development programmes such as Transport Projects (D' Monte) and Housing Projects (Bhowmik) by government agencies often accentuate the problems of dispossession in metropolitan cities such as Mumbai. This exposition highlights the problematic nature of a persistent Eurocentric conception of development among most development studies scholars (Gidwani, 2002). Certainly the power and

ideology of neoliberal advocates such as international financial institutions (World Bank and IMF) continues to prevail over the voices of poor and segregated communities. One of the upshots of this is a constant emphasis on participatory planning and public consultations to include the urban poor in the decision making process. Through Solomon Benjamin's work on Bangalore (Chapter 6), this volume moves beyond this conception to argue that true participation is no easy task and could lead to political turmoil as complex and contradictory forces distort participatory planning forums and public consultations.

The final chapter on 'Revisiting Accumulation by Dispossession' by Banarjee-Guha moves the debate beyond a simple understanding of cities as contested territories of 'accumulation by dispossession', although scholars who work on the dialectics of capital will no doubt want more. Banarjee-Guha argues that increasing capital accumulation through new technologies and '*reconfigured*' modes and forms of governance affects social groups differently since each of them have distinct relationships to this new structural framework. This means that not all sections of society will actually be dispossessed - 'accumulation without dispossession' a notion contra David Harvey's 'accumulation by dispossession'. It is thus important to realise the interaction between 'civil society and political society' where certain sections of the population get special attention due to their political expediency for example CPI (M) party cadres in West Bengal, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra (Chatterjee, 2004: p. 40-41) and more recently the efforts of Mayawati government in the state of Uttar Pradesh to uplift the status of Dalits ('untouchables' or members of 'backward' castes). The marginalised urban poor assert claims to city spaces by not alienating themselves from the new forms of governance and planning but by becoming a part of that process. In this regard the book definitely leaves the debate open for students of urban geography to consider transformative cities as not only sites for valorisation and devalorisation through neoliberal globalisation but also through the actions of the urban poor who constantly fight for the right to the city.

If the key strength of this book is its theoretical framework for understanding cities through a new geography of centrality and marginality (Sassen Chapter 3 in this volume) its weakness lies in inconsistent empirical understanding of 'accumulation by dispossession' in urban centres. For example Chapter four on Vienna by Heinz Nissel fails to make the case for 'accumulation by dispossession' in the city whilst the next chapter by Nazrul Islam and Salma A. Shafi on Dhaka makes the case much clearer. As a result I would suggest that empirical analysis of the core concept still requires further examination. Nevertheless, the book does expand our theoretical understanding of 'accumulation by dispossession' at city level and as such will be most useful for scholars of urban geography and town planning in India. It should also find a wider audience with students of interested in general political economy of urban transformations in developing countries.

### **References**

Chatterjee, P. (2004) *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections of the Popular Politics in Most of the World* New York: Columbia University Press.

Gidwani, V. (2002) The Unbearable Modernity of 'Development'? Canal Irrigation and Development Planning in Western India *Progress in Planning* Vol. 58[1], p. 1-80.

### **Mohd Amir Anwar**

Department of Geography, Trinity College Dublin