



Accumulation by Dispossession: Transformative Cities in the New Global Order. Swapna Banerjee-Guha (ed.). SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, B1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area, Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044. 2010. x + 235 pp. Price: Rs 695.

This book is a collection of essays written by participants at the International Conference on 'Accumulation and Dispossession, Claims and Counter-Claims: Transformative Cities in the New Global Order' held at Mumbai in 2006. The editor of the volume, Swapna Banerjee-Guha (SBG) tells us what her main concern is: 'In the Global South, cities are getting re-modelled as "world-class" centres in order to function as nodes of circulation of global capital. The disturbing reality is that these cities are also key sites of concentration and devalorisation of disproportionately large number of poor and marginalised that takes the issue of urban restructuring to a level of universal criticality'. All the authors, two from the US, one from Austria, one from Bangladesh and six from India, share this world view in some degree and form.

This collection of articles, eclectic in style and content, forces us to examine the reality around us. To question the meanings behind the rhetoric of developing world-class modern cities in the locales of poverty and squalor. We are asked to take a second look at the development models promoted by the dominant media, narrow-minded professionals, upper-class non-government organizations (NGOs), and ultimately the politicians promoting their agenda. The details come from many locales in India and abroad. Three articles develop the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings

for the argument, and the others give case studies from Mumbai, Hyderabad Bangalore, Vienna and Dhaka.

In her introduction, SBG makes a case that there is an inherent connection between the power of international capital and happenings in our backyard. And, that the 'panacea called "privatisation" brought in by the post-modern neoliberal order is deciding who will be the winners or losers . . . The most disturbing of all is the widespread erosion of public sympathy for citizenship rights of the dispossessed'. In the following chapter, David Harvey expands on these issues and tells us that we cannot think of changing our cities unless we are somewhat clear about what kind of people we want to be and what kind of social relations we desire. He insists that the freedom to remake ourselves and our cities is one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights. Harvey also provides historical evidence from Europe and USA to show that redevelopment of large cities has always been accompanied by what he calls creative destruction, resulting in the dispossession of urban poor of any right to the city whatsoever. However, the modern scale of this destruction may be surpassing previous limits in scale, made possible by splintering of workers' movements and marginalization of their capacity to protest effectively. Saskia Sassen, in the chapter 'The global city' says this is a natural outcome of the process where globally integrated organizations require 'central places where the work of globalization gets done'. This, according to her, not only contributes to strengthening existing inequalities, but also initiates a whole series of new dynamics of inequality. There are two parallel processes taking place: concentration of a disproportionate share of corporate financial and political power in the global city and a concentration of vast numbers of the disadvantaged poor in the informal economy. This obviously results in periodic upsurges of mass conflict riding on a quieter background of seething rage. Sassen thinks that paradoxically this global interconnection at the top level also may provide space for a new kind of politics that goes beyond culture and identity. I am not as optimistic.

The rest of the chapters focus on specific cities to understand what is going on. The stories they tell seem to have many common threads that knit them together: steady increase of social and

regional imbalances, steady withdrawal of finance from 'real economies' (goods production), sneaking reduction of democratic rights (especially of the poor) accompanied by erosion of human rights principles, weakening of social networks (e.g. unions), and increasing isolation of the upper classes in gated enclaves. All this is justified by those at the top of the pile by pointing to increasing GDPs and parroting the dogma, 'if the economy does well we are all doing well'. Heinz Nissel uses statistics from Austria to point out that this need not be necessarily true, as the top 1% of all Austrians hold 36% of the money and the bottom 90% of the population only 30%. New phrases have been invented and used by the mass media to placate those harmed by actions of the powerful: 'good governance', 'responsible stakeholder politics', 'corporate social responsibility', 'ecosocial responsibility', 'empowerment', etc. Nazrul Islam and Salma Shafi from Bangladesh claim that inequality has increased in Dhaka and that the city is no longer 'the city of shared poverty. . . It is very much an unfairly structured city'. They show how recent developments have shaped the patterns of commercial development and housing location of different income groups. They state that while there has been a positive economic growth, it has not reduced environmental degradation or income equality.

The accounts on Indian cities by Solomon Benjamin (Bangalore), Umesh Varma Pakalapati (Hyderabad), Marie-Helene Zerah (Mumbai), Daryl D'Monte (Mumbai), Sharit Bhowmik (Mumbai), and SBG (Mumbai) dwell on a similar theme of how current urban development policies are making life increasingly difficult for those at the bottom of the heap. Benjamin focuses on the role of elite groups, international agencies and local business federations on the one hand and the emergence of upper-class NGOs on the other, in determining the course of development in Bangalore. He calls the latter 'Trojan horses', who use and appropriate a 'sophisticated development discourse that is deeply divisive'. They, according to him, have been successful in influencing decision making in all cities to use JNNURM funds for the benefit of the elite. He says that these actors actually distrust participatory planning, tacitly accept the dominant neoliberal ideology and co-opt the framework of 'participation'. These

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processes help in forced acquisition of land from the urban poor and encroachment of public places by the powerful elite in the name of 'public good'. Details are provided by Pakalapati for Hyderabad. Zerah details similar happenings in Mumbai, where a Vision Mumbai report prepared by the consulting firm, McKinsey, gets accepted by the Government without a political process involving the non-elite. She finds that many NGOs using environment as their *raison d'être* and others supposedly working for the poor have actually become contractors for powerful interests operating in the city. Bhowmik agrees, but says that though NGOs genuinely representing the poor do exist and their membership is several times larger, their views are not publicized by the media or considered by the authorities.

The picture painted in this collection of articles is in shades of grey, and also, somewhat grim. All the authors are known for their Marxist or left-of-centre views. The views reflected above, therefore, would be rejected as invalid by those in support of the prevailing neo-liberal order – international multilateral organizations and consultants, business and industrial federations, mandarins in the Planning Commission and the Finance Ministry, and probably the upper-class NGOs. However, the picture also contains details of suffering and disconnect on the ground. This is real and has to be taken seriously. As I write this, thousands are marching and protesting in Cairo. This outpouring of anger, though in this instance, sparked by a demand for 'democracy', is in a way predicted by a few of the authors in this book. SBG puts the blame on a universal backtracking of the welfare state and dismantling of institutional constraints upon marketization. This she claims results in intense gentrification of the urban space, closure of small-scale manufacturing and retail units, and harassment of and regulations against informal workers, hawkers and workers' associations. SBG, Harvey and Benjamin see this resulting in contestation and protest, and what has been called 'opaque politics'. Harvey and Sassen also see this as an international phenomenon, including locations in the rich world. The violent protests a couple of years ago by the dispossessed in Paris give us proof that this reading may have substance.

For those of us involved in the making of our cities, in theory and in concrete, this is a book to be read. It puts what we see around us in some theoretical perspective and also provides us with details of happenings around the country. These details provide evidence that some of the anti-poor policies and projects that we see around us may not be just the result of some local decision makers, but a part of a larger process which cannot be halted by a few individuals. This is what leaves the reader somewhat empty-handed. The authors do not really give us many clues on the way forward, on what must be done in the interregnum before the neo-liberal order runs out of steam. Though, in the end SBG does place some hope in the idea that social justice is not always and only a product of militant movements. This book is worth reading by those interested in cities with 'an underlying basis of social justice' and 'development of counter-institutions capable of reframing issues in broad terms, of mobilizing organizational and financial resources to fight for fulfilling the aims of a larger section'.

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Bamboos at TBGRI. K. C. Koshy. Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute, Palode, Thiruvananthapuram 695 562. 2010. 104 pp. Price: Rs 800/US\$ 30.

I did not know that 18 September is observed as World Bamboo Day until I came across the book *Bamboos at TBGRI*. TBGRI stands for Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute where the author, K. C. Koshy, has been the key person behind developing a 'bambusetum', a living collection of bamboos for display, education, conservation and related studies. Other bambusetum in the country can be found at Van Vigyan Kendra, Arunachal Pradesh; Indian Botanic Garden, West Bengal; Forest Research Institute, Uttarakhand, and Kerala Forest Research Institute, Kerala.



Bambusa baccifera

Acknowledging the economic and taxonomic importance of bamboo, the book briefly describes the development of bambusetum at TBGRI and provides information about 68 bamboo species and 12 hybrids developed at the institute. Many of the species have been collected from the Western Ghats, northeastern and northwestern parts of India, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, South America and Japan. Because the vegetative and reproductive phases of these fastest growing plants on earth are separated much in time, it is relevant to have a resource guide like this book for those interested in bamboo research.

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