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Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution

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Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution

David Harvey, Verso Books, London, 2012, 206 pages, ISBN: 9781844678822 (hb), US\$19.95/£9.99/Can\$18.50.

'Citizens and comrades can march together in the anti-capitalist struggle' argues David Harvey in his newest book, *Rebel Cities* (2012, p. 153). This image represents its main argument: cities are the locus of surplus value absorption and are themselves an ongoing process of value creation. As a capitalist process of value creation, cities are cleaved by class struggle. On the one side, the bourgeois who seeks conquering spaces and control through property; on the other side, a wide variety of workers who actually build cities but are confronted with different forms of exclusionary practices and dispossessions. Harvey would argue that these processes are also revolutionary seeds. The right to the city is 'a right to change and reinvent the city more after our hearts' desire' (p. 4), and this requires the achievement of 'greater democratic control over the production and use of the surplus' (p. 22). In this book, Harvey offers some theoretical analyses on potential liberating alternatives.

Harvey's main contribution to Marxism in general is to show how capital displaces crises through spacio-temporal shifts: fictitious capital-like mortgages and micro-finance and fixed assets such as infrastructure are geographical and temporal displacements which create capitalist spaces. Urbanization, he argues, has played a crucial role in the absorption of capital surpluses and has done so at ever-increasing geographical scales, but at the price of burgeoning processes of creative destruction that entail the dispossession of the urban masses of any right to the city whatsoever (p. 22). Capitalism, for Harvey, moves forward through dislocations in space and time. In order to apprehend its movements, it is necessary to, analytically, also move in space and time. The richness of the book is Harvey's capacity to move in time and thus reveal the capitalist dynamics of the city, as well as its vibrant political life and possibilities. Harvey shows how cities have been transformed by the excluding logic of capital accumulation, the privatization of everything: wealth, life quality in

general, living spaces. The emblematic example is Haussmann's planning in Paris, where entire communities were displaced in order to build the boulevards and thus engender a greater control of the centre by the bourgeois. This model, later copied by Moses in New York, has its analogies with contemporary housing displacements such as entire *favelas* in Brazil being displaced in preparation for the World Cup and the Olympic games. Also, the need to absorb a huge amount of surplus value being currently produced in China leads to a reshaping of its landscape. Dams, railways, highways and a variety of mega infrastructural constructions take place, bringing environmental problems, displacing thousands of people and enabling bourgeois appropriation of new spaces.

So what are the alternatives? The commons, or practices of 'commoning', could be one possibility. For him, this practice 'lies in the principle that the relation between the social group and that aspect of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and non-commoditized' (p. 73). The commons are at the heart for the struggle to the right to the city. Nonetheless, many of the already existing alternatives of communing are a trap, as commons can be, and usually are, privatized. That is why Harvey takes good care when dealing with the concept of commons and autonomist alternatives. Gentrification and tourism are the clearest examples. These are processes in which the creation of a common such as a cultural mode of living related to the space becomes a commodity, being replaced by a bourgeois homogeneous lifestyle. The book is full of these examples. Suburbanization, exclusionary practices, racism, health problems and environmental catastrophes all have to do with these processes and are all related to 'the laws of value determination on the world market' (p. 126).

In a situation where all aspects of human life are organized by the laws of value, 'how, then, does one organize a revolution?' (p. 140). Considering the diversity of contemporary uprisings, riots, mobilizations and institutional projects worldwide, Harvey's main inspiration comes from the South, and more specifically from the cities of Cochabamba, El Alto and La Paz, in Bolivia, where communality and labour consciousness came together to overthrow oppressive neoliberal practices in the last decade. The vision of Lefebvre that 'the traditional peasantry was disappearing and that the rural was being urbanized' (p. xv) illuminates the recent indigenous uprising in Bolivia, a country whose population is mostly indigenous. The main focus of this uprising is El Alto, a city constituted by a former rural population displaced by capitalist land concentration, in which the political conscience of the former mining workers merged in new political subjects, practices and spaces. Although denying the romantic aspect of the indigenous uprising, Harvey also points to 'the mobilization of the forces of culture and of collective memories' (p. 150) as one of the models provided by

the indigenous rebellion. He argues for a necessary 'generality' which anti-capitalist struggle has to achieve at some point – represented in the image of the citizen and the comrade marching together. For him, 'the world of citizenship and rights, within some body-politic of a higher order, is not opposed to that of class and struggle' (p. 153). That is why urban movements of all sources who demand better conditions of life and access to privatized cities and spaces can and must be incorporated in anti-capitalist strategies, being part of labour class struggle, and thus transforming it into a struggle to the right to the city.

Despite its own internal contradictions, Bolivia is nowadays a 'space of hope' – to use Harvey's own term in another book. The Andes region is one of the main sources of value in capitalist history, through extraction of metals for the world economy. That is a history of dispossession and oppression, and that is why its population has a collective memory of exploitation, and realization of nothing. The position of different spaces in relation to their position in the global chain of value is not part of Harvey's schema. To what extent the Bolivian process can inspire alternatives in cities around the world and to what extent it cannot (or what are the possibilities of equating struggles in the South and in the North) is a matter that needs better understanding. But that does not undermine Harvey's point in *Rebel Cities*, which is inspired by Lefebvre, 'the revolution in our times has to be urban – or nothing' (p. 25).

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Resolving Community Conflicts and Problems: Public Deliberation and Sustained Dialogue

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New York/Chichester, West Sussex, 2011, 384 pages, ISBN 978 0 231
15168 9, \$50/£34.50.

This edited volume examines public deliberation and sustained dialogue, highlighting the need for a 'critical perspective on practice' (p. xiii). In its