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2019

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version (aka post-print)

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Jha, R. (2019). *Mumbai's Lifeline and Pipeline: Narratives of Accumulation, Dispossession and Resistance*. Abstract from *Frontiers of Accumulation*, Copenhagen, Denmark.

Total number of authors:
1

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Mumbai's Lifeline and Pipeline: Narratives of Accumulation, Dispossession and Resistance

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Unprecedented eviction, peripheral resettlement and simultaneous redevelopment of the urban spaces in the biggest megacity of postcolonial India – Mumbai reflect its development paradox, accumulation and dispossession processes, and rapidly transforming state, market, civil society and community relations. The vision of transforming Mumbai into a 'world-class', 'slum-free' city emerged in late 1990's whereby the macro-structural adjustment programs and liberalization of the market conjoined with the local populist politics to engender an institutional proposal for state-controlled, market-based and civil society-mediated mass clearance of slum settlements from central locations of the city, creation of gigantic substandard housing stocks in the city's peripheries and utilization of the civil society-urban poor community engagement to negotiate, coerce and co-opt the urban poor for resettlement.

In this context, this paper endeavors to ask: what kinds of juridical-administrative logics and institutional narratives foster eviction, displacement and leads to simultaneous differential subjectivities of dispossession and vulnerabilities. How the urban poor community tend to negotiate with these technologies of accumulation? And in what ways grassroots' mobilization and resistance influence these models of accumulation? Based on ethnographic engagements, this paper would argue that the narratives of illegality and informality of the state of housing for the urban poor acts as material sites for the state's formal intervention. Parastatal institutions, juridical and administrative apparatus of the state conjoin to activate the processes of dispossession and market-induced free-housing mechanisms act as a driver for unprecedented displacement and simultaneous ghettoization of urban poverty. Further, displaced and resettled urban poor experience spiral of marginalities and vulnerabilities in these resettlement colonies that reflect violations of environmental, architectural, infrastructural laws and policies. Lastly, the paper sees the scope of resistance against the systemic dispossessions in urban-poor centric grassroots initiatives, however, a critical engagement with their modalities of operation suggest that mobilization and resistance could only be locally effective, that too within the institutional limits and could not be influential at the scale of the city.