

Eviction

Eviction can be defined as a collective, forced expulsion of individuals who do not possess recognised rights to the plots they are occupying. The use of violence, whether physical or symbolic, is generally part of the procedure: evicted individuals are most often removed by force, or summarily required to leave their place of residence. Although the word is generally used to refer to forced removal in areas of a city, it is also used in operations for removing street sellers. Thus eviction can be understood as forced removal of citizens who have settled on a plot of land where their tenure is contested by the public authorities.

The notion of eviction appears in the colonial context. The French term *déguerpissement* (and the procedure) was used in the colonial setting in Dakar (eviction of the shanty town in the Medina quarter in Dakar with back-up from the military, towards the dunes of Pikine, where no services were available). The method has since been used by numerous Third-World administrations. (Dorier-Apprill, 2001: 75). The historian C. Coquery-Vidrovitch defines *déguerpissement* or eviction as "the authoritarian and forceful expulsion from precarious and non-legalised quarters", and she underlines the extent to which this type of operation contributed to dispossessing African citizens of their rights to urban land, both in the colonial period and afterwards (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2006: 1103). The word eviction is frequently used today in urban, social and political geography studies, where it is generally associated with the "massive expulsion of occupants of informal quarters or shanty towns" (Dorier-Apprill, 2001, p.75). Another definition, in contrast, stresses the illegal character of the occupation of ground space, from the point of view of the public authorities: "This term is the opposite of invasion. It refers to the expulsion by public forces of all inhabitants in a quarter that is occupied illegally. Expelled individuals may be rehoused or resettled elsewhere, generally in a less central *«location»*, and often without any facilities" (Wackermann, 2005, p.100).

Evictions today occur above all in the setting of rehabilitation operations in city centres, and in enhancement strategies in certain metropolises in the *«South.»* Despite the alternatives proposed and the recommendations of international bodies, eviction is still a frequently used method for neoliberal political agents aiming to "clean up" cities in the South by removing citizens considered to be "undesirable" to the city fringes.

There are generally three stages: first the decision to evict on the basis of different registers of action (mainly hygiene, enhancement, large urban projects, and poverty-reduction) with varying levels of information to the citizens concerned. Secondly there is the possible determination of compensation, on the basis of various criteria. Thirdly, in some cases, the offer of a resettlement or re-housing location. At each stage, the question of the legitimacy of the procedure can be raised: what right is there to evict? Is it really possible to compensate for the loss of a place, and more generally of access to centrality? How can the different citizens concerned be fairly compensated? What will happen to those who are not catered for in the resettlement procedures?

Given the complexity of the interplay of the different protagonists, and their diverging interests (citizens, NGOs, municipalities, property speculators, international funding), eviction is more often viewed as unjust and violent expulsion than as an operation enabling better management of land. Indeed, in these interventions that aim to respond to capitalist urban norms, the central issue is the right to the city of the most underprivileged groups.

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