

## Postcolonial Accumulation and the Private Security Industry

### Abstract

This paper will focus on the connections between the expansion of the private security industry (PSI) and accumulation processes – considered in a broad sense, including various forms and sites, from the establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to the privatization of infrastructures and gentrification and beautification of urban areas - in the postcolonial context.

The existing literature about postcolonial capitalism and accumulation, and particularly about “accumulation by dispossession”, tends to assume that the state is the exclusive holder of the monopoly of violence, and (mis)uses its prerogative against the people in favour of private profits. Nonetheless, evidences show that in most cases current accumulation processes are materially enforced and maintained by public/private partnerships and “assemblages of authority” in which the State, with its police and military forces, regularly and closely cooperate with Private Security Companies. More in general, the role of the latter in global governance has hugely increased in recent years, as a consequence of neoliberal policies.

The phenomenon commonly named as “privatization of security” displays a twofold character. On the one hand, PSI is increasingly involved in operations that were once under the exclusive control of the state – such as border and city patrol. On the other hand, State police and military are being ever more often employed for the sake of private interest and profit. The example of how land grabbing is managed in order to establish SEZs in many countries unquestionably demonstrate the latter.

Studies about postcolonial capitalism and, more specifically, about accumulation by dispossession, always mention the violence and extra-economic coercive means that, as Marx firstly noticed, invariably occur when resources are seized for capitalistic purposes. Yet, the very aspect of violence, while considered embedded in the processes, is typically assumed in a broad, generic sense, and almost never explored specifically among the studies whose focus is on capitalistic and labour processes.

On the other hand, among specific studies about PSI and global governance, the connection between privatization of security, neoliberal policies and global capitalist practices, is usually considered only from the normative and sociological perspectives, whereas its precise implications within the practices of accumulation remain neglected. *An effort to bring together these two perspectives – the one based on security privatization and governance, the other one focusing on accumulation by dispossession – offers a promising means of advancing analysis of present capitalistic organization.*

The paper suggests that the entanglement of private/public security in the governmental practices addressed to accumulation sites, be them cities, business districts, or SEZs, cannot be dissociated indeed from the dynamics of accumulation, and thus from the related struggles between “dispossessors” and “dispossessed”, that inform and shape these sites continuously.

In fact, when processes of accumulation occur, materializing as Special Economic Zones, business districts, exclusive commercial and residential precincts, the space is organized through the proliferation of visible and invisible borders. *The governance of such sites and borders - which means deciding, from time to time, who is fully, partially,*

*or not entitled at all to stay there, leave or walk through; and thus producing a material hierarchy of the place - then becomes a crucial issue. This confer security forces, both private and public – those who enforce the hierarchy of these discrete sites - a crucial role.*

The huge expansion of the PSI in recent years is a global phenomenon, which appears highly significant if related to neoliberal policies of accumulation and investment attraction in postcolonial countries.

In the case of India, for instance, the PSI has been growing incessantly for the past two decades - reaching the record of 15.000 companies and more than 5 million employees, which makes it the largest in the world - in parallel to the intense process of land grabbing, establishment of enclosures and SEZs, the privatization of infrastructures and gentrification in cities, pursued by indian governments and private investors together. Assuming these numbers are not a coincidence, I will give an overview of the meaningful connections they display, by exploring the role of PSI, and its link with public, State-run security, in the establishment and governance strategies of the above-mentioned accumulation practices.

I will also consider some implications arising from these “assemblages”, for the relationship between public institutions and global capital, and the concepts of sovereignty, security, and governance.

Finally, I will turn to the question whether the proliferation of PSI is to be considered only as a side-effect of postcolonial accumulation under neoliberal “regimes”, or whether it constitutes a peculiar form of accumulation, based on the incessant production of poverty and social unrest. *The phenomenon typically addressed as “dispossession” is indeed a wide one, involving a number of practices – from the destruction of livelihood, to the demolition of suburbs, from the urban war on poor and homeless, to the repression of organized struggles – which need to be managed and attended specifically.*

*Moreover, under capitalist and neoliberal regime, this range of poverty and conditions of instability seems bound to grow and self-reproduce continuously.*

*All this considered, then, does the phenomenon of dispossession today represent not only a tool and a consequence of accumulation, but also a market itself?*

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