

Tommaso Bobbio. *Urbanisation, Citizenship and Conflict in India: Ahmedabad, 1900-2000.* London and New York: Routledge, 2015. 221 pp. \$145.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-317-51400-8.

Reviewed by Sya Kedzior

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Commissioned by Sean H. Wang (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science and Syracuse University)

A deeply contextualized account of urban growth in the twentieth century, *Urbanization, Citizenship and Conflict in India* examines the changing nature of citizenship and identity politics in the "shock city" of Ahmedabad. Tracing the city's development from industrial expansion to postindustrial transition, Tommaso Bobbio provides an account of contemporary urbanization in which the renegotiation of urban space, citizenship, and identity are closely tied to the spread and normalization of communal violence. What distinguishes Bobbio's account from other investigations of urbanization and identity politics in cities of South Asia (cf. Steve Inskeep's 2012 *Instant City*) is his attention to the significance of a rural-urban dichotomy that reflects shifting notions of citizenship and modernity. Drawing on Raymond Williams, Bobbio views the growing city as both marked apart from, and constituted through, its relationship with the rural "hinterland" (p. 27).[1] He calls for understanding patterns of urban change first as products of rural change, and for seeing the city as embedded in these wider geographical relationships. Nowhere is this approach better exemplified than in Bobbio's attention to both slums and slum dwellers as markers of this dichotomy. Slums subvert the official organization of urban space and stand as a

symbol of the limits of urban planning. Labeled as "migrants" whose "rural activities" transgress the modernizing ethos of both Gujarat and the city, slum dwellers are at once both "out of place" in the city and fundamental to its functioning as a modern metropolis (pp. 53-54). The dichotomy breaks down in the practice of everyday life in the slums, where living in the city (being urban) means "being part of networks ... between the city and its wider surrounding area" (p. 81).

In the tradition of David Harvey, Henri Lefebvre, and others, Bobbio's account centers on how the changing identity of the city itself—from colonial industrial hub through postcolonial decline to the consolidation of a nationalist postcolonial state—contributed to the renegotiation of urban citizenship and belongingness that set the stage for repeated outbreaks of collective violence.[2] Drawing on T. H. Marshall, Bobbio argues in support of a "broader meaning" of citizenship "as a principle of equality" (pp. 9-10). This view invites examination of the ways that political authority and urban development reconfigure access to different rights (e.g., right to housing, right to land tenure, right to public space) and justifies Bobbio's focus on the experiences of slum dwellers and other marginalized populations of Ahmedabad. Here, the marginalized are not without

agency--Bobbio is careful to document how their activities constitute and shape major functions of the city. But, this agency is exercised primarily in response to the state and often curtailed by the activities of the state.

The violence of the 2002 riots in Ahmedabad and the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, a right-wing Hindu nationalist party that captured power in Gujarat in 1998 and across the nation in 2014) serve as bookends for this text, whose investigation otherwise avoids providing direct accounts of these events. Bobbio's task is notably not to explain individual episodes of collective violence, but rather to "understand the broader processes that lead to the creation of a potentially violent milieu" through careful attention to the "context of relationships" that have developed in a city where violence became normalized over the past few decades (p. 4). Bobbio argues that riots and other forms of urban conflict should be seen as manifestations of long-term dynamics of social mobility and cultural change that result from the history of urban transformation, the (re-)organization of public and private spaces in the city, and the struggle for control over the city's economic and political resources. These dynamics consolidate collective identities and contribute to rising tensions between groups and between citizens and the public authority. These tensions are compounded by people's experiences of inequality and discrimination, by their struggle to find space in the city, and by their casting as incomplete citizens. Together, these experiences lay the base for periodic violent events whose continuity results in the routinization of violence as a part of everyday life in the city.

Bobbio's investigation rests on a "tri-level" analysis of planning policies and other "interventions" into urban development, official narratives of Ahmedabad's political and economic history, and oral narratives of the "daily lives" of older slum residents. These sources provide insight into efforts, on one hand, by political elites to "tame

the city" and to shape the image of the city's "façade", and, on the other hand, to see how the poor are dealt with by administrators and to understand their strategies for adapting to the urban environment (p. 12). Bobbio emphasizes the importance of examining the interplay between urban administration and slum dwellers for understanding the shifting discourses that accompany processes of urban change. Interviews with slum dwellers and others provide important commentary on broader processes and portray the "faces" through which Bobbio's careful contextualization of events takes on meaning. Yet, despite the significance he places on oral history "testimonies", they are too often relegated to the end of chapters and not integrated into the larger contextualization of the time period or theme on which they meant to elaborate. Here, they read more as counterpoints or illuminating afterthoughts, rather than key sources for his analysis.

Urbanization, Citizenship and Conflict in India is fundamentally an historical investigation into changing urban structures in Ahmedabad. The first two chapters track the growth of the city as an industrial hub of the British Empire, focusing on how patterns of settlement and segregation within the city set the stage for future marginalization. As the slum population of the city grows, political leaders begin to address the questions of who are citizens of the city, how they are incorporated into its infrastructure, and how they are accounted for in urban planning. The core of Bobbio's analysis is found in the next four chapters, as new challenges emerge following the collapse of the textile industry and the subsequent closure and relocation of mills across the city. Here, he tracks the dialectic relationship between urban planning and the popular response of slum dwellers as the urban geography of Ahmedabad is reshuffled in the face of both the decline of mills and continued population growth. Chapter 3 examines how growth of the informal sector and new lines of segregation in city housing lead to reorganization of city space around the religious

identity of its citizens. Chapter 4 investigates three early mass-mobilization events, not as isolated incidents, but rather as “moments in continuity with the overall process of [urban] transformation” (p. 87). Stressing this continuity allows him to explore “aspects of people’s struggle to find a place in the city and of the spatial transformations that resulted” from this chain of events (p. 87). Chapter 5 documents the growth and development of slums and their perception by urban authorities as both transitory and “rural,” or at least not part of the permanent urban fabric of Ahmedabad. Bobbio argues that, although slums and their residents are increasingly permanent fixtures deeply integrated into the functioning of the city, this logic of impermanence allows authorities to challenge the rights and citizenship of slum dwellers. Chapter 6 examines the “ghettoization” of the city’s Muslim population as a response to communal violence and the associated advancement of BJP religious nationalism. He argues that Hindu-Muslim conflict displaced caste politics in the city following the 1985 riots, and that this led to the creation of physical boundaries segregating populations of the city along sociocultural lines and geographically delimited spaces where municipal authorities were excluded or not active. In the final two chapters, Bobbio explores how the modernization of Ahmedabad results in increased spatial and economic discrimination against the lower class and slum dwellers. Chapter 7 argues that the glorification of the Hindu middle class, the promotion of a Gujarati work “ethos,” and the liberalization of the land market, along with rising cultural intolerance promoted by the BJP, compound the marginalization and suffering experienced by these groups. He concludes in chapter 8 by arguing that the rising megacity hides the resulting stories of poverty, migration, and struggle behind “a façade of modernisation and global aspirations” (p. 178).

While the chapters advance chronologically from the post-Maratha British revitalization of the city as the “Manchester of India” to the twenty-

first-century reenvisioning of Ahmedabad as a service-oriented modern megapolis, they read better as thematic investigations into various aspects of urban change. Staying within the chronology he sets out early in the book means that Bobbio frequently references themes across chapters and time periods (e.g., early housing preference by caste and income later shifts to housing preference by religion). While the reader appreciates this cross-referencing, at times it can feel more repetitious than useful. Novice readers of South Asian studies may find this approach appealing, as key points are consistently reinforced across the text. But, Bobbio’s account does not seem to be written for an audience unfamiliar with the history and politics of India. Despite Bobbio’s emphasis on the historico-geographical context of urban change, the book is full of uncontextualized references to significant national events (e.g., independence from British rule, Indira Gandhi’s Emergency period, Congress’s loss of power, and the election of Narendra Modi). Still, readers without this background will have no problem understanding Bobbio’s broader arguments about citizenship and identity politics. Geographers (and historical geographers in particular) should find much appeal in this text, though anyone with a geographical bent will likely find that the included maps leave much to be desired.

The key contribution of this text is found in Bobbio’s careful attention to the history of urban development and communal conflict in one of South Asia’s fastest-growing cities. Bobbio documents how urban development compounds marginalization and violence in the city, and leads to the segmentation of urban space by community, class, and caste. His attention to slum development and growth, and to the shifting place of slum dwellers in the fabric of the modernizing city, provides a powerful account of new dynamics of urban citizenship and rights to space. Bobbio documents the casting of these and other residents of Ahmedabad as incomplete citizens and illustrates how the denial of their full participation

in urban life lays the foundation for the inequality, discrimination, and periodic violence for which they often become targets. The repetition, permissibility, and brutality of collective violence provides evidence that these events no longer stand in isolation, but rather are increasingly constitutive of urban life in modern India.

Notes

[1]. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[2]. David Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973); David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* 53 (2008): 23-40; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

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