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along which Thatcherite 'roll-back' initially developed, but it has also found itself compelled to respond to the contradictions and challenges of social decomposition. This is most apparent in the social neo-liberalism of New Labour, which attempts to mediate from a distance the threat to domestic centres of accumulation posed by acute urban unevenness.

This book shows that each city has its own institutional peculiarities and dynamics of contention. Yet, as the editors further argue, to interrogate conjunctural complexity requires working on the political economic restructuring of translocal geographies of governance and resistance and not merely treating each instance as an isolated locality of contention as if it was explicable in its own terms.

This has repercussions for the kind of urban politics at stake. On the one hand, particularised local engagement with roll-out neo-liberalism carries with it the temptation of co-option and demobilisation. On the other hand, oppositional, counter-hegemonic and anti-systemic struggles run the risk of fatalism, awaiting the glorious day when the logic of the structural contradictions of neo-liberalism leads to its universal implosion. Put in this attenuated way, neither form of urban politics adequately contests the ideological and institutional dominance of the neo-liberal paradigm.

In practice, each particular challenge to the effects of neo-liberalism threatens to uncover its concealed foundation in the natural rights of property ownership over the social rights of welfare protection and collective provision. Contrary to some, roll-out neo-liberalism is not mutating into 'social democracy with market characteristics'. Instead, it more thoroughly privileges markets and property as the core instruments of urban prosperity and personal well-being, alongside a grudging admission that some, preferably non-state, social supports are essential for maintaining urban order, replenishing the labour pool and legitimating political authority.

Contesting Neo-liberalism is a significant landmark for those who seek to trace the disputed frontier of urban neo-liberalism. Although

sometimes obscured from view, interrelated debates are raised across this collection that call out for further study and reflection. First, is contested neo-liberalism to be understood as system, structure or conjuncture, or some 'hybrid'? Secondly, are the political temptations of partnership and oppositional mobilisation twins or antipodes? It is a great merit of the rich case study material in this book that such questions are posed with urgency and commitment.

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The City Reader, 4th edn

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The City Reader (TCR) hardly requires a formal introduction for anyone active in urban research. Similar to the highly acclaimed previous publications, this fourth edition brings together key writings on cities, whereby the individual texts are assembled into an integrated whole through a thematic organisation and extensive editorial guidance. *TCR* draws together classic pieces and more recent scholarship (in and by itself a compelling reason for a regular update), capturing the dynamism of cities and our interpretations of urban processes and city life. Unsurprisingly, the new material (11 readings) mainly deals with relatively recent research areas such as green urbanism, globalised urbanisation, sustainable urban development,

urban terrorism and the impact of information technologies on the urban fabric. In addition, there is a new epilogue that attempts to provide a more or less comprehensive literature overview of contemporary urban research, which should aid in making connections with other volumes in Routledge's excellent *Urban Reader Series* (on which more later).

What is left to say about a book that has been assessed (and praised) on numerous previous occasions? Very little, it would seem, especially since this new edition basically continues the successful line of the past. The ultimate strength of *TCR* has always been that it goes beyond a mere collection of essential texts on cities: it is a hallmark example of a good reader in that it has a meaningful structure and incisive editorial comments that help to reveal the parallels and disjunctures in the urban literature at large. As a high-quality reader, it is therefore much more than some sort of 'best of': it is a book in its own right that requires an extraordinary mastery of the research it attempts to review. As a consequence, the decisive power of *TCR* lies in the editorial guidance by Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout rather than in the readings themselves. This fourth edition continues this commendable tradition by skilfully blending the new readings into the existing structure, thus giving readers a flavour of the grand tradition of the field of urban studies.

However, although there is relatively little to say about this new edition itself, the context in which it is published has profoundly changed. Inspired by the success of the *TCR* format, Routledge has in recent years come up with a 10-volume Urban Reader Series, featuring urban disciplinary readers such as *The Urban Geography Reader* (edited by Nicholas Fyfe and Judith Kenny) and *The Urban Sociology Reader* (edited by Jan Lin and Christopher Mele) and topical urban readers such as *The Global Cities Reader* (edited by Neil Brenner and Roger Keil) and *The Cybercities Reader* (edited by Stephen Graham). The basic idea behind the series is that this provides the necessary space to include many more selections, covering specific topics introduced in much greater depth and

selections covering many additional topics beyond the general subject matter reviewed in *TCR*. The latest edition of *TCR* is hereby presented as the 'interdisciplinary anchor text' that ties together the Urban Reader Series as a whole. Although this is in principle a viable approach, I have my doubts about its success for two reasons. First, in my reading, *TCR* does not feature enough convincing (analytical) connections to the other titles. The latter is attempted in a new epilogue that provides readers with a summary of the dominant topics and approaches in contemporary urban research, but this rather unexciting overview of names, titles and disciplines does not really warrant the book's designation as an 'anchor text'. Secondly, the intrinsically good news that the other titles seem to live up to *TCR*'s quality standard, in conjunction with the fact that they are genuine stand-alone texts, may have perverse effects for the (commercial) success of *TCR*. In *The Urban Geography Reader*, for instance, there are enough seminal pieces on cities *per se* (for example, by Burgess and Harris and Ullman) to speak of a self-contained text that does not really necessitate an 'anchor text' to be successful in a classroom environment. Similar observations can be made with respect to *The Global Cities Reader*, which contains classical urban texts by the likes of Lefebvre, which help this volume to move well beyond the narrow confines of global cities research. The quality and the relative broadness of some of the other volumes in the Urban Reader Series imply that, although not intended as replacements for *TCR*, they tend to undermine this volume's unique selling position. However, in spite of the potentially baleful (commercial) consequences of this altered context, it should be stressed that *TCR* is still going strong.

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Bilbao: Basque Pathways to Globalisation

Gerardo Del Cerro Santamaria, 2007

Oxford: Elsevier

226 pp. £75.00 hardback

ISBN 978 0 08 045324 8 hardback

Bilbao has become a celebrity city in urban studies. Its Cinderella story of an ugly, industrial and violent city picked up from the ashes by the genius architecture of Frank Gehry continues to circulate widely in academic and policy circles. Remarkably, this is the first book in English to provide a comprehensive analysis of the rich and complex history of Bilbao since the 14th century to the present day. It is, therefore, a 'must read' for those lecturers and researchers using Bilbao (and/or the Basque Country) as a case study or exemplar in local economic development or urban regeneration. It is equally essential for policy-makers wanting to know more about the 'Bilbao effect', although fortunately no quick-fix recipes will be found about how to reproduce the alleged Bilbao miracle in the book.

The book is a "theoretically informed case study" (p. 3) providing a thick description of the economic and political development of Bilbao since its foundation in the 14th century, but focusing particularly on the past two decades, paying special attention to the revitalisation process started at the end of the 1980s and the arrival of the Guggenheim Museum in the 1990s. Del Cerro also provides an analysis of the current economic situation of the city, outlining trends for the future. I believe that the book would have benefited from a bit more background to the history of the formation of the Spanish state and the Basque political and fiscal autonomy. Detailed maps of the areas discussed would also have

been useful for the international readership expected to be interested in this subject.

Theoretically, the book combines a series of literatures ranging from historical macro-sociology, world systems research, economic geography and relational thinking. The book is presented as a response to those authors—the 'globalists' (Castells, Sassen, Dicken and Giddens)—who provide general theories about globalisation without actually rooting their analysis in specific contexts. Instead, Del Cerro is committed to 'locating' globalisation, explaining global phenomena through detailed analysis of actually existing processes. This approach is inspired by authors such as Abu-Lughod, Beauregard, Hirst, Thompson and Storper.

The book is successfully organised around two theoretical arguments that provide the backbone for the empirical analysis: that globalisation is nothing new and that cities go through processes of globalisation and deglobalisation; and, that the state and political and historical factors have a key role in the process of globalisation (*vis à vis* the hypothesis of the powerless nation-state).

In relation to the first argument, Del Cerro shows how, from its foundation in 1300 AD, Bilbao was linked to international trade flows—reflected, for example, in the fact that the Basque share of Europe's annual iron production during the 15th century was one-third of the total. There is also evidence to prove that Bilbao merchants were established in Flemish ports, in Bordeaux and in other ports since the mid 14th century. The city did not play, however, a fundamental economic role in the Spanish Empire as, by law, all ships to America had to depart from Cadiz or Sevilla. Instead, it provided most of the vessels. So, clearly the city of Bilbao played a key role in the first wave of pre-industrial trade globalisation. A second period of globalisation in Bilbao came with industrialisation and the export of the high-quality iron extracted from its mines. This new phase involved the penetration of foreign capital in Bilbao to run some of the mining and railway companies, although