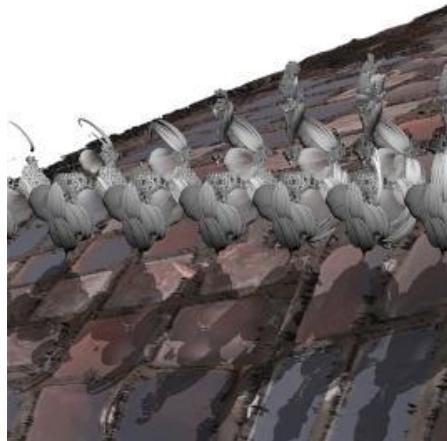


# EXPULSIONS

Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy

SASKIA SASSEN



## Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy

*Saskia Sassen*

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# Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy

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## Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy Saskia Sassen

Soaring income inequality and unemployment, expanding populations of the displaced and imprisoned, accelerating destruction of land and water bodies: today's socioeconomic and environmental dislocations cannot be fully understood in the usual terms of poverty and injustice, according to Saskia Sassen. They are more accurately understood as a type of expulsion--from professional livelihood, from living space, even from the very biosphere that makes life possible.

This hard-headed critique updates our understanding of economics for the twenty-first century, exposing a system with devastating consequences even for those who think they are not vulnerable. From finance to mining, the complex types of knowledge and technology we have come to admire are used too often in ways that produce elementary brutalities. These have evolved into predatory formations--assemblages of knowledge, interests, and outcomes that go beyond a firm's or an individual's or a government's project.

Sassen draws surprising connections to illuminate the systemic logic of these expulsions. The sophisticated knowledge that created today's financial "instruments" is paralleled by the engineering expertise that enables exploitation of the environment, and by the legal expertise that allows the world's have-nations to acquire vast stretches of territory from the have-nots. *Expulsions* lays bare the extent to which the sheer complexity of the global economy makes it hard to trace lines of responsibility for the displacements, evictions, and eradication it produces--and equally hard for those who benefit from the system to feel responsible for its depredations.

## Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy Details

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## From Reader Review Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy for online ebook

### Paul Wolinsky says

This is an extremely timely book, which, while written in a kind of academic style, is nonetheless important to consider. I say "academic style" because there are times when its author Saskia Sassen (Columbia U.) uses words like "intermediation" "systematicity" or "instrumentalities." While none of these words is completely confusing, I suppose, I think such a book would be improved if its author were to explain what she means, rather than using this complicated jargon.

On the other hand, the issues that the author takes up are so important that they practically cry out to be considered. I finished the book last night, and the final chapter, the fourth, on "Dead Land, Dead Water" was chilling and terribly evocative of the struggle that will need to be waged if we are to clear up our future, from an environmental standpoint alone.

As for her analysis of the current crisis in the financial sector, I am no expert there, but much of what she says about finance capitalism clearly shows that we live in a Gilded Age "on steroids," as Joseph Stiglitz, one of her friends, presumably at Columbia U., has also shown. The concept of events cutting across our current analytical categories is important here, because she shows that in order to conceptualize how events around the globe are related, we need to understand expulsions from country to country, from being booted out of the middle class into poverty (due, often enough to the bursting of the mortgage bubble in 2008) and for those financial mavens actually benefiting from so much misery, going from being filthy rich to being stratospherically rich, we need to enlarge our way of seeing things. Univocal explanations for these events do not serve our purposes. "Complexity" is something Sassen is always guiding us through, though it is, alas, sometimes very difficult indeed to understand Sassen's elaborations of complex financial, geopolitical, and environmental relationships, or more to the point "inter-relationships".

All in all, I recommend this book, but I recommend that it be read in combination with two other books I have recently read; "The Betrayal of the American Dream," by Barlett and Steele, and Jane Mayer's "Dark Money," which tells an extremely gruesome and brutal story of rapacious capitalism at its worst, operating under the banner of "free-market" thinking.

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### Brishen says

My real problem with this book is that it is simply a collection of random things that have happened in the past few decades in the world without anything written to tie them together at all. I can only guess that the author felt that this juxtaposition of different stories would prove to be similar enough in different ways as to prove some sort of point. The trouble is, what's the point? I get that it is interesting that environmental devastating through mining has been somewhat constant in its brutality regardless of the type of government or the type of thing being minded, but what is trying to be said here? How does this link to the long chapter on financial instrument growth? It's never explained.

I'm not looking for some grand theory to unite the different processes in the world and would probably challenge the statement of one, but at least try and explain the links and how interactions are occurring. Is the growth of corporate profit as shown in an early graph (which doesn't take into account inflation and so the axis makes it appear that they were essentially zero until 1970) something that has influenced, or was

influenced by, the increased financialization of the world, and if so how does that also flow through to land being bought and destroyed?

I also don't understand the point of throwaway lines such as "However, not everybody lost; investors such as George Soros made large profits by going against the trend." Why name the man in a book that really doesn't name that many people? I'll not even comment on bizarre suggestion that Greece was able to achieve growth through not counting those who were long term unemployed.

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### **Sara G. says**

Sarà che ho già letto diversi libri sull'economia globale e mi sono fatta un'idea piuttosto chiara delle tendenze in atto, ma ho trovato questo libro - nonostante le ottime intenzioni - di una noia mortale. Scritto con l'asettica pedanteria di una tesi di laurea, sforna dati e grafici a fondamento della tesi (assolutamente condivisibile) delle "espulsioni", senza riuscire a costruire una narrazione che vada oltre il semplice elenco di dati. Siamo ad anni luce da Naomi Klein, per dire, ma anche da Bagnai, Giacchè, Rifkin, Sartori e altri che hanno scritto saggi illuminanti sul nostro tempo, rigorosi dal punto di vista scientifico, ma anche di piacevole lettura. Ciò non toglie che possa essere utile a chi si avvicina per la prima volta a queste tematiche e abbia bisogno di dati.

Come quasi sempre accade, anche in questa analisi si ignora "l'elefante nella stanza", ovvero la sovrappopolazione mondiale, causa prima, assieme al progresso tecnologico, della perdita di potere contrattuale dei lavoratori e, di conseguenza, dello strapotere di finanza e multinazionali. Un tabù duro a morire... ma per queste tematiche vi rimando a Sartori e Rifkin.

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### **Veronica says**

Espulsioni è un testo fondamentale per provare a capire come sta evolvendo il sistema capitalistico. Attraverso un'eccellente bibliografia il libro costruisce una solida ipotesi servendo di una "cassetta degli attrezzi" decisamente utile a chi è interessato ad indagare le recenti evoluzioni dell'economia globale. Poiché le parole sono importanti, la ricerca di termini che possano dare significato ai mutamenti socioeconomici in atto, è in realtà difficoltosa e spesso insufficiente, e Saskia Sassen ha il merito di saper trovare le parole "giuste" che anticipa già dal titolo: espulsioni avvengono nelle più disparate sfere della società ad opera di formazioni predatorie che generano una "forma di accumulazione sempre più primitiva". La brutalità di tale meccanismo socioeconomico genera esclusione, rappresentando la più vistosa differenza con il capitalismo novecentesco, eppure "la complessità concorre a determinare l'invisibilità": si tratta di forze concettualmente sotterranee.

Saskia Sassen per rendere visibili tali movimenti indaga il margine sistematico, "il luogo in cui si estrinseca la dinamica chiave dell'espulsione dai diversi sistemi in gioco: l'economia, la biosfera, il sociale". C'è un sottile filetto rosso che lega questioni apparentemente lontane, che vanno dalle foreclosures seguite alla crisi dei subprime e dei CDS (credit default swaps) allo scioglimento del permafrost, dal frackling ai contadini che vengono allontanati dalle loro terre per fare posto a piantagioni di palme da olio, dai profughi alle carcerazioni.

In riferimento alle carcerazioni, si fa un inquietante collegamento con quelle perpetrate dai regimi dittatoriali e si sostiene inoltre che le popolazioni carcerarie, in particolare negli Stati Uniti e nel Regno Unito, dove si

va diffondendo la loro gestione privata, sono “sempre più simili alla versione attuale della manodopera eccedente che caratterizzò i brutali albori del capitalismo moderno”.

In questo contesto nord e sud globale subiscono, seppure in forme spesso diverse, le stesse brutalità. Nel nord si chiama austerity mentre nel sud “programmi di aggiustamento strutturale” ma il risultato è la stessa contrazione dello spazio dell’economia di un paese, che allo stesso tempo non intacca la redditività delle imprese. Inoltre tali programmi sono correttamente definiti “regimi destinati a imporre disciplina”.

Illuminante al riguardo il riferimento al caso greco:

la Grecia è soltanto un caso particolarmente semplice e accelerato di tale ristrutturazione, che in altri paesi è semplicemente più mediata e quindi più lenta.

Ciò che avviene è una sorta di “pulizia economica” per cui sistematicamente, sempre più frequentemente e in diversi punti del globo viene espulso ciò che è considerato molesto. Sassen si spinge al punto di riconoscere che non si tratta di anomalia o di una qualche crisi ma esattamente “l’attuale approfondimento sistematico dei rapporti capitalistici”.

Tra le conclusioni degne di nota emerge anche la chiamata alla correità degli stati nazione, sì in crisi d’identità ma non semplici vittime della globalizzazione, in quanto “è di fatto il ramo esecutivo del governo che si allinea sostanzialmente al capitale delle società multinazionali”.

Saskia Sassen comunque non mitizza la fase keynesiana del capitalismo, anzi la pone correttamente in prospettiva: si è trattato di un periodo in cui l’inclusione era conveniente e dunque necessaria per lo sviluppo economico.

Proprio da questi assunti nasce uno dei quesiti che restano al termine della lettura: se il periodo migliore del capitalismo è stato tale per una pura logica economica, se la sua configurazione attuale non è un’anomalia né una semplice crisi, perché non mettere in discussione il capitalismo in sé? Il secondo quesito è posto tra le righe dalla stessa autrice quando afferma la necessità di concettualizzare lo spazio degli espulsi, perché è lì che sarà possibile agire. Un compito ancora enorme anche se agevolato sicuramente da questo testo. In realtà ritengo che i due quesiti siano collegati e le risposte potrebbero essere trovate più facilmente con il soccorso di qualcuno da Treviri.

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### **Shane says**

An excellent book overall, that weaves together a massive amount of core research in how we have scaled up into an age of uncontrollable and unavoidable mining and monetisation, and how this is creating the expulsion of people from their land worldwide. Told with a strong voice and academic rigour, this book is grim but important.

A bit marred by a confusing Chapter 3, that uses too much domain-specific language to make it easy to read (from a non-expert in banking).

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### **Martin Hoogeboom says**

If you still have faith in humanity and the future of our planet: do NOT read this book. Saskia Sassen teaches us how ecological and socially unacceptable practices provide so-called dead spots on our planet. If companies appropriate large pieces of land in weakened states, the age-old living area of indigenous groups with a great bio diversity will change into a plantation full of pesticides where people work for a starvation wage. When the soil is exhausted and polluted, a dead spot remains. A global elite, global corporations, abuse and expel without compassion people, countries and nature looking for the last percent return. It is a world without democracy & mercy. It took me 2 years to read this book ( I'm not that smart:)) only to process all these shocking facts.

It gives an excellent - but at the same time frightening - insight in the work of global 'predatory' capitalism. I think it's a must-read but don't say that I haven't warned you.

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### **David says**

Recently, I have been trying to read books from the very last chapter first in order, this gives you the instant satisfaction of getting to know the points/theme/conclusions of the book. So this book gives me the instant image of Chris Hedges's inverted totalitarianism. Professor Sassen uses some interesting WHO, World Bank and IMF data to support her claim directly against the corporations. She stops short of "claiming" IMF, and World Bank are the culprits for the massive expulsions of the middle and low class from many countries. She stops short of "accusing" these so called public globalization policies are doing so much damage to many countries internal economies and the citizens' well being and social status. For example: speaking of water monopoly, she ONLY mentions Nestle as the evil company. Few of the interesting chapter are worth noted: such as global land grab by government and corporations: such as China and US are buying a lot of "lands" from other countries. And Philippines are selling a lot of their lands to foreign countries. Rare earth developments are also damaging the Earth environments. But again, the mindless consumerization are not well explained. Simply we should all know that we are killing the Earth the moment we buy or upgrade our electronic devices. Professor uses a lot of "sociological term" which seem sophisticated, but I find this technique hard to be understood by the readers. Simply, she uses fancy words. The chapter on financial securitization is nothing new. There are too many books about it. Overall, I think her chapters combined to express the wealth/poor gap has been widen due to the liberalization of our land, our government, corporations. BUT each chapters are fragmented. She tries so hard to write that liberalization IS the problem that drive us to our own demise (job loss, unemployment, etc), but she did not depict this as the recent; still this book gives readers a message that corporations, governments and globalization NWO policies are the problem..you get more fun by reading Chris Hedges'

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### **Jules says**

Incisive, original and well-founded: essential reading for those coming to grips with 2017 reality. The lens of expulsion cuts away chaff and leaves only a stark clarity. Sassen leaves no stone uncriticized in the search for an overarching pattern of late-stage capitalism. If you like Zygmunt Bauman, you'll like this book.

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### **Rhys says**

Great research and presentation of the main 'expulsions' people are experiencing - expulsion from jobs, from

homes, from land, and eventually, from the planet.

The author suggests that these more quantifiable trends are only some of the manifestations of expulsion, the greater reality remaining mainly 'subterranean'. Though the author attributes these trends to the neoliberal paradigm of 'parasitic elites' enabled by weak or complicit governments, I was a bit disappointed at times that this analysis did not plumb further into the contradictions of capitalism.

I was grateful, however, that the author refrained from a cheerful, feel-good, and hopeful ending - when the data clearly speaks for the opposite.

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### **Lisa says**

Sassens premise here is great (the movement from Keynesian to extraction economies) but I don't think this theme is really carried through the book. I thought the derivatives chapter was great!

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### **Karla Jasso says**

La figura de "la expulsión" ... quizá el término más adecuado para hablar de las brutalidades constantes que han evolucionado hacia formaciones depredadoras en la actualidad. Una lectura crítica a la desigualdad, el desempleo, la expansión de poblaciones de desplazados y encarcelamientos. La destrucción de tierra y CUERPOS DE AGUA, y las múltiples desviaciones en de la mirada hacia el otro. Todo tipo de abuso, ya no es solo eso, llego al nivel de todo lo que implica la gramática de la EXPULSIÓN... "desde el espacio vital, incluso desde la misma biosfera que hace posible la vida."

"Las expulsiones ponen de manifiesto hasta qué punto la complejidad de la economía global vuelve casi imposible el rastreo de líneas de responsabilidad, que lleguen a dar cuenta por los desplazamientos, los desalojos y la erradicación que produce."

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### **Eric Bottorff says**

I'll need to think on this book more before I really formulate a fully thought-out opinion. On the one hand, I'm bothered by the analytically vague argument at the heart of the book. And I'm equally bothered by the occasionally elementary mistakes and misleading choices and omissions when it comes to the presentation of her data. On the other hand, some part of me also thinks she is basically getting the big picture right, and that the aforementioned vagueness is actually justified and works to reshift or reframe ones thinking about global trends of the last 40 years or so.

In any case, definitely worth a read.

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### **RK-ísme says**

I finished reading *Expulsions* by Saskia Sassen over a month ago. I have procrastinated on the review for numerous reasons. Foremost, was my sense that, although the book seemed to be illuminatingly clear to me, I doubted that I had the background to really do it justice. As a result, I took a step back to learn more of Sassen's thought. I started reading her *Territory-Authority-Rights* (2006). Whereas I had flown through *Exclusions*, T-A-R is a slog, if for no other reason than every paragraph leads me onto flights of analysis of my own. I'm progressing slowly.

I have little background in reading recent sociological/economic books. My reading in these areas has been at the philosophic level. I have had little patience with the social sciences as a whole. (Sociology 101 - Big Words; Sociology 201 - Obfuscation; Sociology 301 - How to Obfuscate with Numbers)

*Expulsions* has been as a great eye opener. Sassen is discussing various, I thought unrelated, topics (changes in our world) which have increasingly troubled me over the last 30 years. *Expulsions* seems to link them.

"We are confronting a formidable problem in our global political economy: the new logics of expulsion. The past two decades have seen a sharp growth in the number of people, enterprises, and places expelled from the core social and economic orders of our time." (Introduction)

It is Sassen's thesis that our modern economy, since the 1980s, has, through the use of increasingly complex instruments, developed new and more brutal mechanisms which have resulted in these expulsions. In the course of the book she sets out some of these complexities in extreme cases for the purpose of demonstrating her point. She looks at shrinking economies, the enormous land grabs taking place in underdeveloped countries, the financialization of everything, and ongoing environmental destruction. Each of these processes is creating massive displacement through expulsions. Through the metaphor of 'expulsion' Sassen is trying to "make the invisible visible".

In our current world, following the end of the Keynesian era of economics, roughly 1980, the globalization of markets, including labour markets, has changed not only international trade but also banking, national governments and the very nature of the way national governments interact with each other and with transnational corporations.

In linking these processes, Sassen manages to make clear that what appear to be various separate phenomena are actually the various sides of a multifaceted die. Indeed, in the process of reading, I realized that other expulsions could also have been explored. (Indeed, other topics which came to mind are dealt with in T-A-R.) In particular I have been concerned with the widening democratic gap as power in Canada has been centralized around the Prime Minister. As parliamentarians have become almost totally excluded from the legislative process, citizens are being excluded from having any voice.

What is of greatest concern in all of this is that it is a vast unfolding process that will continue. The neoliberal discourse and logic that drive it have become dominant, not only in business and government, but throughout western society.

Sassen ends the book on an almost optimistic note that [the spaces of the expelled] are, potentially, the new spaces for making - making local economies, new histories, and new modes of membership." Perhaps small groups will attain this temporarily but I suspect any new village communities will eventually be swept up in the chaos that will surely follow any extended period of large numbers of displaced, unemployed, adrift people with no loyalties and no supports, living in an overcrowded, environmentally wasted world. But then, I'm just waiting for the apocalypse, never the revolution.

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### **Neil H says**

Capitalism, financial innovation, efficiency. These are the words we do not equate easily with negative connotations. But in Saskia's work, these words loom stealthily in subterranean and upwards. Pursuit of capital with financial innovation and efficiency in drawing the finite earth resources. All in the name of profits for mega companies looking at short-term goals which excludes those who are not in their corporate board, or shareholders. As enumerated, the 80s was the start of the new smaller government, attracting companies by providing tax breaks and no responsibilities towards the enlivening of the unaffected classes or the deadening of the land. It's not just a localized issue, one with its tentacles only this far. Rather a systemic religion that poisons us to only focus on the endemic and not what is a pulsing worldwide plague.

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### **Annick says**

I bought this book following two friends' suggestion. I have a particular interest in the fourth chapter as it has a direct link with my research on resource territories and waste territories. Saskia Sassen poses the question of exclusion at many levels: socio-economic, political and biospheric. The first ones are a classic if you're a reader of her books. The last one, the biospheric, is new but it reflects a new trend that will be playing a significant role in this new era. Yes the very concern will be, as architect Paulo Tavares, says, the Earth-Political since we'll be facing the by-products we have produced through our increasingly activities. I let the question of scarcity aside this is not the point of this book but the issues of contamination, toxicity, pollution, sea level rising, ice melting, permafrost thawing, and so on are the result land grabbing and intensification for industrial and agricultural uses, resource extraction, military-related degradation, waste processing. What we are producing is a venomous earth, a toxic earth which timescale goes beyond our lifetime (see Timothy Morton's *The Ecological Thought* and *Hyperobjects*). She takes interesting examples like Sumgayit (Azerbaijan), or La Oroya (Peru), Chernobyl, Fukushima, or Norilsk (Russia), Haina (Dominican Republic), or but not cited in this book, Athabasca (Canada) as dead land that are indicative of the earth transformation into a toxic earth. She also poses the question of, while not really mention the word, the urbanization of the ocean. What do I mean with the urbanization of the ocean (see Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid's *Imploding/Explosions*)? Ocean is becoming a contested landscape for many uses, first for trading, second for resource extraction, third for fisheries activities, fourth for leisure and sports, and fifth for military use. These human activities force natural systems — fishes, marine mammals, water birds, aquatic plants) to coexist with the risk of destroying the second, and causing an acidification of oceans. With these issues, a new form of migration will emerge, a population expelled from their becoming-toxic lands, losses of vegetation and wildlife (or a mutation of vegetation in highly nuclear-affected landscapes like Chernobyl or Fukushima).

This book is a very good book as an introduction of (at least the fourth chapter) ecological politics or, better, earth-political. This book should be in the library of the landscape architect whose scale, toolbox and business model are expanding with new tasks, new complexities, new challenges such as remediation of nuclear, pollution (and so on)-affected landscape.

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