

**UNITED NATIONS EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON
SUSTAINABLE CITIES, HUMAN MOBILITY
AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Population Division

Department of Economic and Social Affairs

United Nations Secretariat

New York

7-8 September 2017

Migrants in Disempowered Cities: Opportunities and Challenges

Ayse Caglar

University of Vienna

Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology

Migrants in Disempowered Cities: Opportunities and Challenges¹

Ayse Caglar

University of Vienna

Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology

I would like to start by underlining two points about the scholarship and policies on the relationship between migrants/migration and cities: 1) Except a few studies that focus on migrants' lives and social relations in cities that are not global centers of economic, political and cultural power, the scholarship and policies on the relationships between cities and their migrants mostly concentrate on urban centers of global power. It is for sure that, the 60% of the global population, which is projected to be living in cities in 2030, will not be living only in metropoles or cities of global power, thus there is need to study migrant settlement dynamics in cities of varying size and power. In fact there is already an increasing pattern of migrant/refugee settlement in cities that are neither metropoloes nor gateways. Thus there is an urgent need to rethink the settlement and the role of migrants within the processes that constitute cities with different configurations of economic, political, and cultural power. *We need to question the tendency for theorizing and driving policies from research on urban development and migrant settlement situated in urban centers of political, social, and economic power.*

2) *Urban redevelopment narratives mask growing inequalities, disparities in and between cities.* Despite policies and scholarship that portray cities as engines of development generating wealth and new forms of governance and power in ways that would benefit the vast majority of urban residents, these urban redevelopment narratives mask growing inequalities within and between cities. They fail to acknowledge the fault lines, disparities, displacements, dispossessions and contestations underlying urban restructuring, which is celebrated as "metropolitan revolution" (Katz and Bradley 2013). There is an urgent need to address the interrelated processes of wealth generation through urban redevelopment, increasing disparities, and migrant settlement.

On the basis of these fault lines of research on migrants and cities we have identified, in our forthcoming book "Migrants and City-Making: Multi-scalar Perspectives on Dispossession", we (Nina Glick Schiller and I) called for 1) a focus on the relationship between migrant dynamics and urban restructuring in cities that lack adequate economic, political and cultural power, but are nonetheless shaped over time by regional, national, supranational and global dynamics and forces. Among such cities that experience restructuring processes from within a more structurally disadvantaged position than global centers of power, we focused on disempowered cities which are marked by loss of population, loss of tax base and above all loss of economic, political and cultural power. These are cities where economies have been decimated.

2) We also called for a new analytical vocabulary that would enable us to capture how city residents (including migrants) participate in the processes and struggles that remake their cities; to approach the urban inequalities and disparities in relation to the dispossessive processes and displacements underlying wealth generation through urban restructuring; to capture the interdependencies among these processes as well as the common conditions of precarity and

¹ This brief background is based on "Migrants and City Making: Multi-scalar Perspectives on Dispossession" (Caglar and Glick Schiller, Duke University, forthcoming)

displacement, which mark the lives of many urban residents (migrant, as well as non-migrant), which are often glossed over by urban redevelopment narratives.

By using displacement as an “analytic tactics” (in the sense Sassen uses it (Sassen 2013), we try to make visible series of interrelated processes which are obscured by the concept of “mobility”. The concept of ‘mobility’ fails to draw attention to the importance of looking at the interrelations between displacement, dispossession and accumulation. In contrast to the concept of “mobility”, the concept of displacement might enable us to draw attention to the processes underlying migration and see how seemingly independent processes and locations as well as institutions are ultimately connected with each other (which remain disconnected in migration scholarship) (Mirafat 2014).

As the critical scholars of mobility underline, mobility is a slippery concept in analyzing migration and migrants’ relations to city-making. The nation-state often occupies a central role in defining and institutionalizing what counts as mobility and what kinds of mobilities are rendered invisible (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2012). Not every mobile person is designated as a “migrant” (for e.g expats) and there are many people designated as migrants who had not moved from anywhere to anywhere (for e.g the so-called third generation).

Urban redevelopment, primarily based on the restructuring of capital, involves constitutive processes of displacements and dispossessions. Thus it is important to draw attention to these processes, which are crucial for the accumulation of wealth and the revitalization of cities. The lives of increasing numbers of people around the world are becoming precarious. In cities, the displaced are becoming urban precariats (Standing 2011) – people who have never moved, but have none the less been socially dispossessed and displaced, and people who have migrated either within or across borders only to face another cycle of displacement within urban regeneration.

In our analysis of three disempowered cities (Manchester, NH, USA, Halle an der Saale, Germany and Mardin on the border of Turkey and Syria)², we explore forms and processes of dispossession and displacement and ask how, when, and with what consequences dispossessed and displaced people, both migrants and non-migrants, reconstruct their lives within these urban restructuring processes in these cities i.e. how are they emplaced within the dynamics of urban redevelopment in these disempowered cities.

Like the concept of displacement, emplacement is also central to the analytical framework we are proposing. We define emplacement as the relationship between the continuing restructuring of place within multiscale networks of power, and a person’s efforts, within the barriers and opportunities that contingencies of local place-making offer, to build a life within networks of local, national, supranational, and global interconnections (Caglar and Glick Schiller forthcoming).

It is a processual concept, which allows us to situate all residents of a city within transformations of space over time by linking, space, place, and power (Smith 2002, Massey 2005 and Harvey 2006).

Unlike the terms integration or assimilation, or discourse that targets migrants as threats to social cohesion, the concept of emplacement both invokes a sense of place-making and allows us to focus on a set of experiences *shared* by people who are generally differentiated by scholars and policy makers as either migrant or native. By speaking of emplacement we can situate migrant and non-migrant displacements within globespanning, but locally and temporally situated neoliberal processes of the destruction and reconstitution of capital.

² The three cities differ in historical trajectory and in recent population —Manchester, 110,229; Halle, (238,321); Mardin center 156,660; [greater Mardin 796,591] (US Census 2017a; City of Halle 2016; Mardin Yerelnet 2016).

However it is important to note that we do not use displacement simply as another word for mobility and emplacement simply as another way of saying integration. Displacement and emplacement are interrelated processes of the restructuring of space and social relations at particular points in time and within our analytical framework they take place as part of the accumulation of capital by multiple forms of dispossession.

This conceptual network enables us to move beyond the binary between migrant and non-migrant in approaching the dynamics of migrants and those who see themselves as natives in city-making within the same analytical framework so that we could address common conditions of precarity and displacement many urban residents are subject to. By situating migrants as contemporaries of all other urban residents, and by analyzing their practices as coeval, it becomes clear that all city inhabitants (migrant or not) build their lives configured within processes of displacement and emplacement that enabled and shaped by the power geometry at that historical conjuncture.

Utility of Focusing on Disempowered Cities

On the basis of a comparative study, we explored the emplacement of migrants in three cities: Manchester, Halle, and Mardin, which are disempowered in terms of their access to national power, capital investments, adequate global talent and their position within global networks of power. Consequently these are cities with limited resources available for their residents.

Explicating the relationship between cities and their migrants, as they become part of projects of urban transformation in disempowered cities is particularly important for migration scholars and policy makers. First, *in cities that are not global powerhouses*, the *multiple ways* migrants contribute to the multi-faceted aspects of city-making can be more readily studied. Although migrants' multiple pathways of emplacement are present in more powerful cities studying them in cities of limited power and resources might provide new insights into the different *opportunities* that emerge in these places for migrant emplacement as well as insights into the dynamics, contradictions, and effects of dispossessions and displacements underlying capital accumulation through urban restructuring. The fault lines of these processes become more visible in these disempowered cities. Furthermore, we note that local leaders and policy makers in disempowered cities often become more aware of the importance of migrants and minorities in urban redevelopment than do similar actors in more powerful cities. Second, these marginalized cities provide a good entry point to counter the methodological nationalism of most of migration and policy studies, which generate theory and policies from the particular experiences of metropoles or gateway cities ignoring the differing dynamics in cities of varying power.

Here it is important to note that the broader context of city leaders' strategies and policies of seeking accumulation by revitalizing the city is the context of neoliberal globalization. This is a context within which cities came to play prominent roles as strategic nodes of capital flow and units of governance with powers of taxation and local development. This is the context in which cities increasingly unleash themselves as engines of economy, centers of trade, investment and innovation from the federal and national state and this unleashing, related with the restructuring of capital, is part of the changing configurations of state and local power. These dynamics alter the value regimes in cities. *All urban resources acquire a new value* within the cities' competition to reach out global, regional, state, non-state and supranational institutions (and their funds) *to attract capital/investments to the city*. Different segments of city's population, places, practices, built environment, histories acquire value once they become assets for capital accumulation through urban regeneration. Faced with these challenges city leaders of disempowered cities also revisit their cities' resources. Migrants and refugees often become valorized in these processes. Because of this broader context and the importance of attracting capital and investment to the city, migration and migrant friendly narratives of

such disempowered welcoming cities are closely enmeshed with business and investment friendly narratives.

As our research showed, despite different regional histories and different institutional and discursive resources available for economic and urban development in the cities we focused on, city leaders responded to their relative disempowered situation and the challenges of restructuring of capital by embracing welcoming narratives that placed migrants/refugees as well as returnees/minorities as crucial to the economic growth and prosperity of their cities. Moreover, the revitalization of city centers and the presence of migrants/ refugees become also important to perform the safe, open, and business friendly environment of the city. This is important to attract domestic and multinational capital to the cities, which often had to fight with their negative images as racist, dangerous, shrinking or declining.

Thus the welcoming narratives in disempowered cities emerged as part of these efforts and strategies to generate wealth by attracting capital, investment and people to the city, so that they could re-empower the city by altering its regional, national and global connectedness in networks of power.

In our comparative study, we utilized a set of variables that occurs in all the cities, including each city's: trajectory of disempowerment, plans and projects for urban restructuring, references to migrants within its rebranding narratives; capital and investments attracted to the city; the degree of investment in services for migrants, and opportunities for migrant emplacement within multiscale regeneration processes. Within this comparative framework we examined variations in migrant and non-migrant processes of displacement and emplacement. Though the size of migrant/minority populations is important in different aspects of displacement and emplacement, our research demonstrated that, within urban regeneration projects and narratives, the presence and the capacity of migrants to access networks of power does not necessarily correlate with the size of the migrant population.

The following *similarities* emerged among these seemingly disparate cities: We found that while migrant friendly narratives did not develop into migrant specific policies with clear budgeting/funding, the business/investment friendly narratives developed into a plethora of programmes and incentives to attract capital and investment. These included subsidies, tax rebates, abolition of business and corporates taxes, provision of public resources (commons and treasury land) to corporate capital below market prices. Thus city regeneration in disempowered cities was shaped by a dependence on public funding, which was very weak in these cities to start with.

Although these cities attracted some corporate and private investors, and multinational investments, public revenue streams of these cities did not increase. On the contrary, all these regeneration projects left the city with even fewer resources for public services. In fact in all these cities, the city debt increased after a decade of urban regeneration.

Migrants/ refugees or the impoverished residents often became assets for the city developers to access supranational (such as EU, UNDP, UNESCO) and public funding (such as HUD) for the regeneration/renewal projects which were then channeled into rebuilding efforts that ultimately filled the coffers of developers, multinational corporations, and public-private partnerships. In three of the cities, disparities and poverty increased, dispossession and displacements intensified.

Opportunities and Challenges

These dynamics lead to two contradictory developments providing opportunities and challenges to migrant emplacement in all three cities. First, the disempoweredness of these cities ironically

provided also opportunities for migrants and refugees to find domains of commonality with the dispossessed and displaced city residents. In the context of eroded public coffers, there were no city resources invested in provisioning of migrant specific services, let alone religious/ethnic community based services. However this *lack of resources* and programmes for the institutionalization of (ethnic and religious) difference opened opportunities for migrants, refugees and the natives to build sociabilities based on domains of commonality and to be active together in local politics as well as within social justice movements. Under these conditions, domains of commonality established over differences became more visible than in more powerful, well-resourced cities.

It is noteworthy that in Germany one of the very first two black German members of Parliament (who initially arrived as a refugee) was in Halle. Manchester elected the very first Muslim citizen to a US state legislature. And the first elected Syriac Christian mayor in Turkey was in Mardin. Most importantly none of these migrants were elected on the basis of black, ethnic and or religious communitarian politics and constituencies, but on politics of social justice challenging the increasing disparities in their respective cities.

Second, in a context where the revenues decreased, public resources eroded, public services failed and disparities and debt increased, the combination of migrant friendly narratives with the business (capital – foreign, multinational) friendly narratives in urban redevelopment, *lead to increased racism*. Migrants (foreigners) are increasingly made the scapegoat of the dispossessive dynamics of capital accumulation and of draining public resources for the provision of public services to city residents.