Migrants and Disempowered Cities: Opportunities and Challenges
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Two striking Characteristics of scholarship on the relationship between migrants and cities

• Generating theory and policies from the particular experiences of metropoles or gateway cities, ignoring the differing dynamics in cities of varying scale.
  ◦ We need to counter this tendency (methodological nationalism) of most of migration and policy studies.

• Urban redevelopment narratives mask growing inequalities in and between cities.
  ◦ We need to address the interrelated processes of wealth generation through urban redevelopment, increasing disparities, and migrant settlement.
Countering these tendencies

• Focusing on cities of varying size, scale, and power
  ◦ Disempowered cities (marked by decimated economies, loss of population, tax base, economic, political and cultural power).

• Developing a new analytical vocabulary
  • To capture the interdependencies between the disposessive processes and displacements underlying urban redevelopment that often remain veiled in studies on the relationships between migrants and cities
The building blocks of a new conceptual network

• *Displacement* rather than “mobility”
  ◦ Enables us to draw attention to the processes underlying migration
    - Displacement dispossession and accumulation
    - How seemingly independent processes and locations as well as institutions are ultimately connected with each other

• Emplacement – a processual concept
  ◦ “The relationship between the continuing restructuring of place within multiscalar 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”
Moving beyond Binaries

• Approaching the dynamics of migrants and those who see themselves as natives in city-making within the same analytical framework
  ◦ Addressing common conditions of precarity and displacement many urban residents are subject to
  ◦ Situating migrants as contemporaries of all other urban residents
    - (coevalness – historical conjuncture)
Utility of Focusing on Disempowered Cities

• Disempowered – in terms of access to national power, capital investments, global talent - position within global networks of power - limited resources and power

• The multiple ways migrants contribute to city-making can be more readily studied

• New insights into the different opportunities for migrant emplacement

• Fault lines of neoliberal urban redevelopment - contradictions and effects of dispossessions and displacements underlying urban regenerations become more visible

• Migrant friendly narratives of leaders
The broader context of strategies and policies of urban redevelopment

• Cities – unleashing - as engines of economy, centers of trade, investment and innovation
  ◦ Restructuring of capital - the changing configurations of state and local power
  ◦ Altering the value regimes in cities. All urban resources acquire a new value
  ◦ Migrants and refugees become assets
  ◦ attracting capital and investment to the city
    - performing the safe, open, and business friendly environment of the city (countering the city’s image as dangerous, declining and racist)
Findings – Similarities

- Migrant friendly narratives closely entangled with business (capital – foreign, multinational) friendly narratives in urban redevelopment
- No migrant-specific policies, but incentives to attract capital and investments (subsidies, tax rebates, provision of public resources to corporate capital)
- Urban development by public expenditure- contributing to corporate coffers
  - increased debt
  - fewer public services
  - increased poverty
Opportunities and Challenges

• Two contradictory developments

  1. Lack of resources and programmes for the institutionalization of (ethnic and religious) difference - opportunities for migrants, refugees and the natives to build sociabilities based on domains of commonality-local politics

    - Striking examples of migrants in local politics, in social justice movements

  2. Increased racism – migrants as the scapegoat of the effects of dispossessive dynamics of urban restructuring - failing public services, impoverishment