Precarity, Mobility and the City: Introduction to the Special Issue

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This Special Issue is a collaboration of the Durham Global Security Institute (DGSi) and the Global Policy Institute (GPI), both based at Durham University. The idea for the Special Issue developed through a workshop on *Violence, Peacebuilding and the City* held at Durham University's School of Government and International Affairs in September 2018. Following the workshop we issued an open call for contributions for the Special Issue. The issue is also made possible with the support of the Matariki network, of which Durham University is a member.

With this issue, we aim to contribute to the interdisciplinary literature on mobility and precarity in the context of Urban Studies and to investigate the ways in which mobility is governed globally. Drawing on empirically rich and theoretically grounded case studies, the articles in this issue explore ways in which global governmental processes affect mobility and, similarly, how seemingly local movements impact upon global processes. The special issue also addresses questions of temporality and rhythms of movement as they occur in precarious spaces where lives are directed, controlled, shifted and governed in both structured and contingent ways. We take a particular interest in urban spaces to explore how movement plays out, not only within, but also around, towards and away from cities. We identify three themes that run through the case studies in this issue, namely the *regulation* of mobility, the *representation* of space, and *relocations* of people.

Underpinning the diverse range of case studies and theoretical frameworks are innovative methodologies that move away from 'sedentarist' approaches and instead experiment with multisensory methods that take on the fluidity of the observed phenomena and experiences (see Sheller et al., 2006; Büscher et al., 2009). The researchers are thus responding to the request to expand the usual methods with approaches that participate in the experience of being 'on the move', while aiming to capture and to literally get/gain a sense of movement.

Such innovative research methods comprise 'walking' which is a way of experiencing politics in situ (cf. Mitchell and Kelly, 2011) and transmits politics as a sensory experience, as Opfermann's contribution in this issue illustrates. This is similar to the method of discourse analysis on the basis of museum visits and its multi-sensory inputs, as seen in Kappler's article in this issue. Such approaches allow for the possibility of 'co-experiencing' space and, whilst retaining a primarily observing function to the researcher, nevertheless include them in the ways in which space is (re-)presented, edited and curated. The use of photo-voice and photo elicitation in the contributions by Bakonyi, Bird et al., and Siddiqui et al. in this issue raises related questions about the experience of space via representations in photography, in terms of the visual gaze that the research subjects themselves provide into their everyday lives and experiences of mobility. By combining tools of deliberative

democratic processes with visual ethnography, Siddiqui et al. are also concerned with bringing about innovative solutions to the disconnect between migrants and policy makers. The research design itself serves as a tool of direct communication, encouraging a change of perspective on the sides of both policy makers and migrants. Jenss' article instead takes on Henri Lefebvre's dynamic approach of mapping temporal-spatial conditions and (rhythmic) movements of violence, disruption and acceleration. Similarly, Díaz Pabón and Palacio Ludeña examine protest movements against policies that have resulted in higher transportation costs in two different Latin American cities, making structural connections between spatial segregation, access to opportunities, and poverty reduction. The research design eschews static correlations between space and poverty in favour of highlighting the dynamic nature of inequality. The authors do this by triangulating quantitative measures of poverty and income inequality, spatial dimensions of rural-urban divides, and accessibility to public goods.

Regulating mobility

Drawing on their findings from a variety of cases from different global regions, the authors in this issue shine light on the complex linkages between mobility, precarity and the city. All contributions look into mobility, not primarily as intentional and directional movement across space, but as movement that is part of the uncertain production and performance of space. They explore the making and unmaking of (marginal) urban places as 'mobile effects' (Hetherington, 1998: 184), unpack the relations of power imbricated in them and the ways in which difference is performed through these places. While mobility is central for the production of space, we also see that movement does also not unfold in sociopolitical vacuums. Instead, the authors attest to the way in which this movement is remembered and enmeshed in the political and economic strategies of multiple actors who are embedded in distinct political economies.

The authors also shed light on a broad range of political technologies used to give spaces their particular form. The uncertain and often open-ended movement of people does not unfold undisturbed, but is filtered, directed, and controlled. Indeed, the production of space through movement is imbricated in relations of power, legal conventions, contingencies, and the arising of unintended consequences. In his analysis of the plague town, Foucault (1978) described the regulation of circulation as a key function of government through discipline and punishment. Accordingly, from the mid 18th century onwards, the regulation of circulation is dominated by a security *dispositif* to control the social body and, thus, the formation of discursive and institutional practices that organise mobility by dividing 'good' from 'bad' circulation and by maximising good circulation through means that diminish, prohibit or eliminate bad circulation (Foucault, 1978, 11 Jan: 37). In this special issue, the authors explore more recent attempts by various disciplinary powers to regulate and segregate forms of mobility that are deemed desirable or undesirable. Regulation concerns the direction of movement, the encouraging or discouraging of certain forms of mobility. Among the emphasized political technologies used to regulate circulation is the categorial differentiation of movement within and across state boundaries, within cities or between cities and the countryside. Such categorisations have policy implications that severely impact on the lives of those on the move. They also foster imaginaries of states or cities as bounded and clearly demarcated

entities, while the findings of the research papers rather emphasize how such boundaries are negotiated in everyday practices that challenge ontological notions of space and scale as well as uniform narratives of domination and submission. The authors in this special issue show that while mobility is highly regulated, evaluated, and governed, it cannot be analysed separately from the agency of those moving with that of those governing. The way mobility unfolds and produces spaces depends on the economic, political and symbolic resources that both the (im)mobile persons and the people and organisations governing mobility can muster. Those on the move employ, often simultaneously, a number of strategies and tactics to comply with, evade and resist governmental regulations.

The articles in this issue serve to sensitise readers to the various forms of regulation that range from overt policy making and political practices to more subtle types of control through the setting of socio-economic goals such as 'development', 'poverty reduction' or 'regeneration'. In their article entitled *The 'Badlands' of the 'Balkan Route': Policy and Spatial Effects on Urban Refugee Housing,* Bird et al. discuss the differentiation of 'desirable' from 'undesirable' forms of mobility and the direction and segregation of mobility of different population groups. The authors explore the policies that determine how refugees arriving in Greece and Serbia are able to find accommodation, either in formally designated and officially administered structures (camps, reception and identification centres) on the one hand, or in a variety of informal settlements and housing arrangements on the other hand. Bakonyi outlines how such informal settlements are not devoid of power and profit. In her article on *The Political Economy of Displacement: Rent Seeking, Dispossessions and Precarious Mobility in Somali Cities,* she sheds light on the multiple entanglements and power relations that enable the encroachment of market relations and foster the commodification of land and housing. Further problematising the governance of mobility, in her article on *Curating (im)mobility: Peri-urban agency in the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum*, Kappler analyses how the racist direction of labour during South Africa's apartheid regime is interpreted by a museum that engages in forms of 'insurgent citizenship' by linking past with contemporary injustices. With a view on urban regeneration processes in South Africa today, Opfermann points out in her article *Walking in Jozi: Guided Tours, Insecurity and Urban Regeneration in Inner City Johannesburg* how the mobility of a new urban middle class as well as the movement of international tourists in inner city Johannesburg are considered desirable while the presence and everyday movements of African migrants within the same spaces are perceived and treated as unwanted and threatening. Conceptualising violence as a rhythmic occurrence that is countered by social movements of protest, Jenss studies the link between violent displacements and disappearances and increased mobilities of goods (containers) and people that accompanied the expansion of the port area in a Colombian city in her article on *Disrupting the Rhythms of Violence.* Protest movements around the increase of public transport fees and the reduction of subsidies for fossil fuels in South America are the focus of Díaz Pabón and Palacio Ludeña's article on *Inequality and the Socioeconomic Dimensions of Mobility in Protests: The cases of Quito and Santiago.* The authors argue that these protests reflect more than responses to specific policies. In fact, these movements signify the fault lines of national economic growth coupled with persistent and often rising inequalities related to geographical segregation that inhibits people's access to public services, opportunities and rewards. Removing fuel subsidies and hiking transportation prices not only prohibit

accessibility through mobility, but also entrench existing patterns of segregation between resource-rich urban centres and less endowed peri-urban areas that are more affordable, yet more distant from jobs and public services.

Policies and governmental interventions are not sufficient to explain the *dis*placement and *em*placement inherent in mobility (see Agier et al., 2002). The authors in this issue unpack these movements of re-regulation and self-regulation when they investigate the socio-spatial arrangements generated by settlement practices of displaced people moving within and across state boundaries and by policy makers and organisations dealing with mobility and settlement, as we can see in the articles by Bakonyi, Bird et al., and Siddiqui et al. Opfermann explores the ambivalent performance of insecurity and authenticity in walking tours offered to tourists in neighbourhoods depicted as 'dangerous' and how these tours relate and contribute to urban regeneration processes in Johannesburg. They study how the racist government of (labour) mobility during the apartheid regime continues to shape contemporary struggles for place in South Africa, as Kappler shows. Focussing on the insurgent performances and the way mobility is 'remembered', performed and spatially inscribed by a peri-urban museum, Kappler shows how the museum generates 'spaces of agency' while creating meaning and representation and inscribing both in the geographical space. The museum remembers and choreographs South African's labour history by linking 'past' to 'present' injustices and itself becomes a political agent engaged in 'insurgent politics.'

Indeed, the violence imbricated in both mobility and dispossession (displacements, labour migration, evictions) but often also in possession/property and reconstruction (evictions, gentrification) is emphasised in several articles, in an attempt to point to spatial practices of agency as they unfold in precarious contexts. It is this very precarity that makes certain communities more vulnerable to controlled spatial politics on the one hand, whilst, on the other hand, allowing for politically and economically driven patterns of movement to emerge. Although power-holders clearly benefit from their access to political and policy instruments that direct movement, the articles equally point to the creative ways in which those affected most negatively by such measures are able to find ways of breaking through or subverting officially directed corridors and open new geopolitical spaces on their own terms. Crucially, mobility as the uncertain movement of displacement and emplacement also changes outcomes for all agents (in terms of the reshaping of spaces, reframing of territorially bound rights), rather than being dictated by distinct ends.

Representing space

Spaces are reshaped not just in physical ways by the emergence of housing, camps, signifiers of urban development and so on, but also by representation. Modes of representation take place through the exercise of power and authority, but also through resistance and dialogue. The authors in this issue analyse the way space is represented by different actors and policies and study, for example, how policies at the international, regional or urban level shape options for the settlement of migrants in Belgrade, Athens or other places alongside the so-called Balkan route (Bird et al, 2021). They investigate how space is represented and co-produced in encounters

between tourists and tour operators in Johannesburg (Opfermann, 2021), how space is choreographed in a museum at the urban periphery (Kappler, 2021) or how it is governed through policy making in Bangladesh (Siddiqui et al., 2021) or in Chile and Ecuador (Díaz Pabón and Palacio Ludeña, 2021). An important part of representation is naming. Processes of labelling, such as what is considered a 'good' or 'bad' residential area, which places are depicted as dangerous and insecure, or which places are described as overcrowded, unsuitable and in need for regeneration, are important factors in the production of urban places. This requires what Foucault called 'problematizations', thus the circulation of an 'ensemble of discursive and non discursive practices' that constitute an object of thought and make it accessible to interventions in form of moral reflection, political analysis or scientific knowledge (Foucault (le mots, 670), cit in Rabinow, 2009: 18). Policies and interventions, while engaging in problem solving and improvement, then continue to 'classify and regulate spaces and subjects around certain organising principles, rationalities of rule, governmentalities, and within regimes of knowledge and power' (Humphris et al., 2019: 1499-1500).

In this context, Bird et al. show in their article how migration policies at different levels – regional, national, and urban – contribute to the dichotomisation of formal and informal housing arrangements of migrants along the so-called Balkan route. The Balkan route itself is a label that merges multiple, hardly straightforward and often fluid routes. However, labelling the route as a 'single, unified path', thereby constituting a space on which policy makers can act upon through further classifications and ordering is met with a range of strategies people use to escape controls. This often takes the shape of opting to seek shelter and safety in informal housing arrangements and squats. While these are depicted as unsuitable and potentially dangerous, and 'camps' and reception centres are presented as proper and orderly solutions for the settlement of migrants, many of these formal settlements do not provide for minimal living standards. In the context of Somalia, Bakonyi shows how people are identified by others and self-identify as displaced only when they settle in specifically designated camps or relocation areas. With regard to urban planning processes in the port city of Chattogram in Bangladesh, Siddiqui et al. illustrate how urban migrant populations are often either overlooked or perceived as problematic by policy makers. They are either not represented at all or are labelled in entirely negative ways. In this case, rather than exploring means of resistance, the authors examine how facilitated dialogues between migrants and policy makers can lead to new insights and representations of each other's concerns. They end on an optimistic note about the capacity for deliberation to reduce precarity as a result of invisibility and instead greater inclusivity in programmes for urban development.

Moving from the level of policy making to the everyday political economy of tourism, Opfermann shows how tour operators take advantage of labelling particular urban neighbourhoods as insecure and dangerous. Tour operators play with these labels as they offer their 'local knowledge' and security networks to walk tourists through so-called no-go areas of Johannesburg's inner city. In their attempt to marketize and commodify insecurity, tour operators engage in ambiguous performances of safety and normality while drawing on their ability to provide security for people ready to consume the 'real' and 'authentic' cultural experience of an African city. Walking tours thus become part of the (self-)entrepreneurship and (self-)marketisation that

often characterize impoverished city areas and precarious lifestyles (also see Bakonyi in this issue). However, Opfermann also shows how the tour operators and companies claim city spaces and stimulate urban regeneration in line with big private investors that feed into cosmopolitan, middle class lifestyle aspirations. Cosmopolitan gentrifiers have in Johannesburg already started to lay claim to and transform inner-city neighbourhoods. The gentrification of 'dangerous' places likely leads to evictions of those inhabitants and dwellers that are currently 'displayed' as a sign of authenticity, but who are unlikely to fit within the vision of Afro-chic and 'cool' which the urban entrepreneurs promote. Indeed, in South Africa and elsewhere, gentrification not only targets the socio-spatial arrangements of neighbourhoods but also aims to promote 'subjectivities and behaviours more congruent with the neoliberal principles of the economy' (Paton, cit. in Tyler, 2015: 501).

Representation, labelling and self-labelling are thus not only political instruments but intrinsic parts of political economies following a variety of capitalist paths. Bakonyi, for instance, analyses the rent economy that undergirds different types of settlements of displaced people in four Somali cities. Differentiating between squatter settlements in central city areas, self-established camps at the cities' outskirts, and relocation areas provided by international organisations in cooperation with the municipality, she emphasizes how clientelist relations enable the emergence of a humanitarian rent economy which is, however, slowly transforming into more ordinary forms of devalorisation of land and housing. Bakonyi shows that the insertion of market forces into squatter settlements is not merely a top-down exercise, enforced upon people. Instead, squatters themselves engage in multiple practices of property-ing and commodifying land and houses (shacks), or speculate on title deeds in an attempt to improve their own living standards. In Johannesburg, Opfermann observes similar dynamics as some migrant entrepreneurs benefit from the guided walking tours by selling their pan African food, fashion and lifestyle to the tourists. However, similar to Johannesburg, the ongoing urban reconstruction of Somalia's and Somaliland's destroyed city neighbourhoods also renders inner-city neighbourhoods accessible to investors and urban re-development initiatives, contributing to the parallel processes of upgrading and expulsion well known from gentrification processes across the globe (Smith, 2002; Atkinson et al., 2005; Lees, 2012).

Kappler directs the gaze away from South Africa's city centres and tour operators and explores experiences of labour mobility and the creation of peri-urban places through racist forms of mobility governance by South Africa's apartheid regime. Her focus is, however, on contemporary forms of representation of this mobility government. She explores the way it is curated and thus interpreted and edited by the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, which itself sits on the periphery of Cape Town. Far from only engaging with the past, she argues, memory is always choreographed from the present and – while choreographing memory – the museum actively engages with contemporary spatial arrangements and the systems of difference these arrangements perpetuate. These differences are interpreted by the museum as the continuation of oppressive forms of mobility government, which, while the laws of apartheid are replaced by a neoliberal political economy and its regulations, continue to promote spatial segregation. We see how racial, class and

gender inequalities and barriers to mobility are deeply inscribed in space and indeed mirrored in contemporary (spatial) injustices.

Relocating people: Urban-rural and global-local encounters

Urbanity is of course also represented by our notions of scale and reach. The question of what constitutes the city and what differentiates cities from rural settlements, townships, extraction sites and (export-processing) zones has accompanied Urban Studies since their inception. The classical definition of permanence, size, density, and heterogeneity which the Chicago School promoted in the beginning of the last century (Wirth, 1938) is increasingly challenged. Instead, Planetary Urbanisation has become an influential paradigm in urban studies (Brenner et al 2015). It argues against the delineation of cities as 'spatially fixed, bounded and universally generalizable settlement type' (Brenner et al., 2015: 151) and instead expands on Lefebvre's original claim that urbanisation stretches far beyond cities and inserts different places into a 'planetary' urban fabric as capitalism continues to radically alter what was before differentiated into urban and rural life worlds, respectively. In line with this understanding, a number of authors in this special issue challenge the view of the city as a 'spatial container' and underlying dichotomous conceptualisations (urban/rural; metropole/periphery; North/South). Instead, they promote an engagement with planetary processes of urbanisation that bring forth a vast array of socio-spatial formations, 'new' morphological arrangements (Arboleda, 2016) and expressions of urbanism executed for example in camps (Bakonyi in this issue) or at the peri-urban intersection of city and countryside (Kappler, Díaz Pabón and Palacio Ludeña). In her article, Kappler challenges a clear distinction between city and countryside and emphasizes how movement between city and peripheries has been shaping spatial identities of difference and convergence. The question of what constitutes the urban is also central in Bakonyi's exploration of urban settlements of displaced people. She suggests with Darling (2017, p. 181) to explore them as part of an 'urban continuum'. Port cities, too, (see the articles in this issue by Jenss and Siddiqui et al.) have their own rhythmic flows of peoples and goods. Trade and tidal rhythms thus shape cities in ways distinct from land-bound mobilities, with consequences for conflicts that are not contained within well-defined urban spaces.

The authors' focus is on manifestations of the urban-precarity-mobility nexus, which is analysed in rich empirical detail. All authors, however, also emphasize how specific place-making remains embedded in and is constituted by socio-economic and political networks with much wider scalar reach. The political economy that undergirds the 'alternative' tourist industry in South Africa; the neoliberal government of precarious places in South Africa; the embedding of displaced settlements in humanitarianism, international statebuilding and (diaspora) investments, global trade, and the lengthening and deepening of global value chains bring to the fore the entanglement of different scales.

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