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Beyond displacement – Exploring the variegated social impacts of urban redevelopment

Introduction

Displacement has become one of the most dominant analytical lenses invoked to understand the impacts of urban redevelopment on local communities. There is now a rich body of work on how prevalent modes of redevelopment in many Global North cities can result in gentrification-induced displacement (Atkinson, 2000, 2004; Slater, 2009; Loretta, Shin, & López-Morales, 2015). Likewise, in many Global South cities, studies have found that rapid urbanisation has led to mass displacement induced by state-led relocation programs (Ghertner, 2014; Hsing, 2010; Rogers & Wilmsen, 2019). Indeed, displacement has become one of the most important frameworks to determine the winners and losers of urban redevelopment. However, against a backdrop of changing redevelopment approaches, there is need for alternative analytical pursuits to identify and account for the more long-term and covert impacts of urban development. In urban China for instance, there is growing evidence that not being relocated by the state can cause a series of challenges for residents who are stuck in their deteriorating neighbourhood (Shih, 2017; Wang and Wu, 2019). Furthermore, whilst there is a great number of studies focusing on the causes and processes of displacement, there is comparatively much less known about the life of residents after displacement. Yet, with displacement becoming an integral component of land based accumulation regimes (Hsing, 2010; Ghertner, 2014; Rogers & Wilmsen, 2019), exploring life after displacement ought to be a logical continuation. This piece proposes some alternative analytical pursuits in studying the social impacts of urban development that go beyond the lens of displacement and argues for the need of a post-displacement agenda. Post-displacement in this study refers to two issues. The first concerns the livelihood of residents

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Life after displacement

Simultaneously, there is still very little known about the life of residents for whom being displaced is only the start of an uncertain journey. Where do displaced residents end up moving to? How is being relocated to a different place affecting their employment and livelihood? With the complexities of urban redevelopment motivations, processes and outcomes, to solely focus on displacement may run the risk of reducing such knowledges to a lowest common denominator. To study the post-displacement life of residents requires careful consideration of context specific relocation practices and redevelopment approaches rather than adopting a 'one size fits all' framework of displacement. Different market and policy contexts as well as relocation practices can have significant bearings on the long-term post-displacement outcomes of residents as they may result in different types of problems for affected residents.

The most dominant paradigm is by far the causal relationship between gentrification and displacement (Atkinson, 2004; Slater, 2009) which takes place over a longer period of time. Yet gentrification-induced displacement differs greatly from for example large-scale state resettlement programmes whereby residents can be displaced within weeks (Hsing, 2010; Rogers & Wilmsen, 2019). Moreover, the availability and amount of compensation varies significantly. For large resettlement schemes in China, the state specially constructs new resettlement neighbourhoods for relocated residents whereas tenants gradually being priced out from their gentrifying neighbourhood receive no compensation at all. Whilst gentrification and state led resettlement programmes as well as other redevelopment

processes inevitably lead towards displacement, their underlying mechanisms may starkly differ and lead to different types of challenges for residents.

With respect gentrification-induced displacement, so far there is very little information about what happens to residents after being priced out of their neighbourhood. This is chiefly due to practical reasons. It is highly difficult to track the whereabouts of displaced residents who are gradually being priced out over a long period of time. In urban China, one population group that shares many characteristics with low-income and working class tenants identified by gentrification studies in the Global North are rural migrant tenants. Many rural migrants work in low paid jobs and have to rent properties in urban villages, which are informal settlements that offer cheap housing (Li & Wu, 2013). However, urban villages are also primary targets of state-led redevelopment (Wu, Zhang, & Webster, 2013). Unlike rural homeowners in urban villages, migrant tenants receive no compensation when their urban villages are demolished. Furthermore, such tenants are also much more at risk of being priced out of upgraded urban villages and low-cost settlements. For many displaced migrant residents, one long-term impact of displacement is to live in the fear of being displaced again (Liu, Geertman, Lin, & Oort, 2018). This psychological stress also has significant bearing on their sense of belonging. Fear of being displaced often results in migrants regarding their home in the host society as temporary (Kochan, 2016) and reduced willingness to participate in community activities and engaging with neighbours (Z. Wang, Zhang, & Wu, 2017, 2019).

In comparison, the problems faced by residents who are relocated en masse by state orchestrated resettlement programmes are different. In China, against a backdrop of rapid urbanisation, growing dependence on land to finance municipal expenditure and to stimulate economic growth, land (re)development and its associated relocation of millions of urban and

rural residents can be seen across Chinese cities (Wang and Wu, *forthcoming*). During the 90s and the millennia, urban redevelopment was often accompanied by violent clashes between the local state and residents refusing to move. Especially for elderly residents, moving away meant the loss of their social network and their way of life (L. Zhang, 2004; Wu & He, 2005). Another more major reason was because the compensation offered to residents for moving away was too low and often not enough to purchase a property elsewhere (Shih, 2010). Since then compensation for relocated residents has been improved particularly in major cities (Shih, 2010; Qian, 2015). To avoid large-scale public resistance against resettlement, the Chinese state saw it necessary to construct so-called resettlement neighbourhoods to house the millions of relocated urban and rural residents.

In most cases nowadays, residents are offered more than one property along with a set amount of cash compensation (Yunpeng Zhang, 2017; Jiang, Waley, & Gonzalez, 2018; M. Zhang, Wu, & Zhong, 2018). Compared to the early millennia, large-scale resistance and the number of forced evictions have gradually subsided in the recent decade (Shih, 2010; H. Wang, Zhu, Chen, & Swider, 2017). Yet this decline in resistance does not mean problems no longer exist. Rather, more problems started to emerge *after* residents moved to resettlement neighbourhoods. The relatively scarce literature on post-displacement life in China indicates that displacement is a major if not the most significant *trigger* of a series of wider and long-term problems. For instance, despite improved compensation, many residents complained about loss of income and limited employment opportunities (Jiang et al., 2018). This is particularly challenging for rural farmers who used to derive income from farming and renting out their properties to migrant renters. Displacement also has long term implications for the family relations of relocated residents. Zhang (2017) for instance found that disputes over how to distribute money and housing from compensation have destroyed family ties.

Rural residents also have trouble adapting to a new social life inside residential compounds which differ greatly from their formerly rural village based lifestyle (M. Zhang et al., 2018).

Figure 1 depicts a situation which shows the difficulty for relocated farmers in China to adapt to an urban lifestyle. The picture shows a row of resettlement neighbourhoods developed in Shanghai to house relocated rural farmers and the vegetable crops grown by farmers now living in these neighbourhoods. The vegetable crops are illegally grown on vacant land that has been earmarked by the local government for future developments and are regarded as an eyesore and target for removal by local authorities. My recent fieldwork indicates there are two main reasons why relocated farmers continue to grow vegetables despite being offered compensation. The first reason is because some rural households, despite being compensated, have still seen a decline in their income and thus want to earn and save some extra money by growing food for consumption and selling. The second and perhaps more major reason is because especially for more elderly rural residents, farming has become a part of their way of living. Unwilling to take part in community activities organised by resettlement neighbourhoods (e.g. calligraphy, dancing), relocated rural residents instead prefer to grow food for leisure. Such seemingly mundane neighbourhood struggles reveal how relocation was only the beginning to a long term struggle for millions of rural residents to acclimatise to urban living.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Studying post-displacement life could provide another important theoretical insight. Conceptually, the displacement lens focuses on the destruction of homes and communities, their underlying processes and reasons as well as ways to resist displacement. On the other

hand, I believe that it is also important to explore the genesis and rebuilding of homes and communities of displaced residents and how this can be facilitated. If displacement is a process of 'un-homing' (Elliott-Cooper, Hubbard, & Lees, 2019) then are displaced residents able to 'remake' their home and rebuild a sense of community and belonging? What factors can hinder or support them to adapt to their new environment? In this regard, Kleinhans and Kearns (2013:168) contend that it is important to consider what measures and support have been put in place to assist residents to adapt to their post-relocation life and what residents could do themselves to make their post-relocation life easier. They further argue that residents who already had plans to move but were unable to do so and therefore find it easier to adapt as compared to those who do not have such intentions. Inquiries could focus on how different types of compensation (e.g. monetary or housing), type of relocation (i.e. in-situ housing allocation versus moving to a far-away place) affect the ability of residents to adapt. Additionally, how might the social composition of their new residence and more mundane and every-day neighbourhood practices such as neighbourly interaction affect residents' sense of belonging and willingness to engage locally?

Left behind communities

One aspect that is under explored especially in the Global South is what happens to those who have not been displaced as part of a redevelopment scheme and continue to live in and around the area undergoing redevelopment. In this paper I refer to them as left-behind communities which includes a broad spectrum social groups who experience different impacts of redevelopment despite not being relocated. The emphasis on being 'left-behind' is to indicate that not being relocated cannot always be conflated with successfully resisting displacement in a gentrifying neighbourhood. In urban China, being left out of state-led resettlement programs can also lead to major problems. Recent research shows that

communities which located in areas undergoing redevelopment but are not being relocated, suffer from *in-situ marginalisation* (Shih, 2017; Z. Wang & Wu, 2019). In-situ marginalisation is a process whereby residents are trapped in their home and neighbourhood whilst the social and physical environment is gradually deteriorating.

Such deterioration varies geographically. In inner cities, this may affect old and physically deteriorating neighbourhoods such as traditional courtyards where residents suffer from severe overcrowding (Yina Zhang & Chen, 2014). In China's peri-urban areas, this can include the loss of local amenities but also environmental pollution (Shih, 2017). Figure 2 shows an example of a peri-urban neighbourhood suffering from in-situ marginalisation and draws from my recent research (Wang and Wu, 2019). The picture in Figure 2 was taken in neighbourhood 57, an area located in the industrial zone of one of Shanghai's new town development. The picture shows a local cinema that has been repurposed to be a small grocery shop. When the new town project was initiated, neighbourhood 57 and its surrounding areas were earmarked to become an industrial zone. Since the project's initiation, many residents who could afford it, gradually moved out of neighbourhood 57. Like many other amenities including post offices, banks and schools, the cinema was forced to close down due to the loss of its clientele. Yet more than a decade after the start of the new town project, neighbourhood 57 has not been redeveloped. It is still inhabited by around 2,000 households comprised of elderly low-income residents who have lived in the neighbourhood for many decades and migrant newcomers working in nearby factories. In addition to the loss of key amenities, residents also suffer from toxic gas emitted by nearby factories. Decade-long efforts of residents to convince the state to relocate them have been futile. With growing awareness of property and compensation rights amongst the Chinese populace and improving relocation compensation schemes, leaving pockets of areas with a

high population within a redevelopment zone untouched can be financially more viable and carry less risk for local governments.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

In-situ marginalisation thus resembles *symbolic or indirect displacement* where residents also experience a gradual change of their neighbourhood and growing sense of exclusion that ultimately lead to their physical displacement (Slater, 2009; Atkinson, 2015). Yet the key difference is that residents experiencing in-situ marginalisation are *trapped* in their deteriorating neighbourhoods, financially unable to relocate themselves, and left behind by the state. Unlike mass relocation schemes, in-situ marginalisation, particularly in remote peri-urban areas, can be much more covert and receive little public and scholarly attention. With rapid and uneven urbanisation taking place in so many cities, how many residents are trapped in declining neighbourhoods? What types of marginalisation are they suffering from? What are the dynamics of in-situ marginalisation and how does it relate to the state's accumulation strategy?

To leave residents behind can also be a strategy to gain their support. In recent years in some Guangdong cities, rural Chinese farmers are no longer relocated, with only their farmland acquired by the state. As compensation, farmers are offered additional properties for renting out and invited to collaborate with the local state in jointly redeveloping the area (Kan, 2019). The state is consciously trying to share benefits with rural landowners in an attempt to remove public resistance that would ensue from a standard relocation programme. However, the benefits of redevelopment are often unequally distributed. Farmers who are located in peripheral areas with lower land values would receive less compensation for the loss of their

farmland, thus having to endure unemployment and the loss of a stable income. Negotiating a better compensation deal without being directly relocated is in many ways harder than being relocated by the state, a process which has been gradually refined and formalised in China (Shih, 2010).

Left-behind communities could also include communities living in the vicinity of redevelopment projects. The London 2012 Olympics has for instance identified so-called 'fringe' communities living on the borders of the development areas without being subjected to relocation (Weber-Newth, 2017). Focusing on such left-behind communities, wider questions about whether living in the vicinity only has negative effects such as gentrification or whether there is the possibility to improve their living quality through new amenities and involving fringe communities to participate in the redevelopment must be posed.

Towards geographies of post-displacement

Displacement is one of the most detrimental social problems created by urban redevelopment and by no means does this paper wish to discredit its severity or tone down the importance of finding ways to resist displacement. The link between displacement and gentrification has been studied for decades (Atkinson, 2000; Slater, 2009; Loretta et al., 2015; Shin & Kim, 2016). However, there is growing evidence, especially from but not limited to the Global South, that displacement does not necessarily have to be associated with gentrification and can also be induced by other types of urban redevelopment processes (Kleinhans & Kearns, 2013; Ghertner, 2014; Wu, 2016; Rogers & Wilmsen, 2019; Meth et al., 2020). This diverse body of displacement literature suggests that the scale and space of displacement, the way residents experience day-to day displacement practices and the level of compensation can all vary greatly depending on the context specific redevelopment approaches and relocation

practices. Moreover, there is growing evidence that changing redevelopment practices in China do not all result in the displacement of communities but instead lead to other in-situ problems. Drawing from the example of China, this intervention argues for the need of a post-displacement research agenda.

Analytically, post-displacement can be deployed in two ways. Firstly, it refers to the literal meaning of post-displacement and focuses on the life of residents after being displaced. The post-displacement lens is a logical continuation of displacement and pays more attention to the wider and more long-term problems that are *triggered* by displacement. More research on the life of residents after displacement could potentially lead to novel ways of conceptualising the process of relocation and challenge the binary of forced displacement versus voluntary relocation (Kleinhans & Kearns, 2013). Recent findings from South Africa and Ethiopia for instance point towards a more complex process of relocating residents that the authors describe as 'disruptive emplacement' rather than displacement (Meth et al., 2020). The second meaning of post-displacement is to rethink displacement and move away from the somewhat predetermined idea that displacement is the worst and ultimate outcome of urban redevelopment. Instead, it critically questions whether different forms of redevelopment and relocation practices can also lead to other forms of social problems that do not easily present themselves through the analytical framework of displacement.

In this paper I used the example of in-situ marginalisation in Shanghai as refer to these residents as left behind communities which could include diverse population groups, each affected differently by urban redevelopment schemes. In-situ marginalisation (Z. Wang & Wu, 2019) in this sense, may only be a problem faced by one particular type of left-behind residents. Furthermore, focusing on alternative social consequences of urban redevelopment

can provide novel perspectives to study the role of the state during and after urban development. Under the displacement framework, the state is understood to play a leading or at least complicit role within a growth coalition in displacing residents (Wacquant, 2008; Loretta et al., 2015; Shin & Kim, 2016; Wu, 2016). However, unlike private developers, the state cannot escape its responsibility to take care of displaced residents. Research about whether and how the state governs these relocated communities could shed light on the multiple roles of the state and its challenges in rebuilding displaced communities. To what is extent is the state involved in the post-displacement life of residents and does the state play a positive or negative role? With regards to left-behind communities, how does the state decide who gets relocated and who should/can stay behind? How does the state deal with the problems experienced by left-behind communities? In urban China, the state's role and actions evolve in order to adapt to the various public challenges towards its displacement practices. Studying the social impacts of redevelopment through the lenses of left behind communities and post-displacement lives might therefore also help us recalibrate our understanding of the state-resident relationship.

Methodologically, there are many challenges involved in studying post-displacement. The difficulty of finding residents who have been displaced, especially tenants gradually priced out of gentrifying areas, is widely acknowledged (Easton, Lees, Hubbard, & Tate, 2020). Likewise, finding left-behind communities can be challenging. In relation to problems of in-situ marginalisation, the problem is much less covered by the media and less understood by the public. In the Shanghai case for instance, the neighbourhood suffering from in-situ marginalisation was no longer visible on official government maps and masterplans (Z.Wang and Wu, 2019), thus making it harder to study the extent of in-situ marginalisation. Nevertheless, there are some possibilities of collecting data for post-displacement research.

Rather than studying the places where displacement takes place, one way could be to start the enquiry in neighbourhoods receiving displaced residents instead. For instance, in urban China, resettlement neighbourhoods are the main destination for relocated residents. Resettlement neighbourhoods thus provide a unique opportunity to study the life after displacement for many different population groups. Such state-led resettlement initiatives can also be found in other countries such as the HOPE IV scheme in the US (Kleit, 2005) or state housing programmes in the Netherlands (Kleinhans & Kearns, 2013), South Africa and Ethiopia (Meth et al., 2020). However, in many cities, it may be more difficult to find areas dedicated to relocated residents. In such cases, rather than focusing on displaced residents per se, it would be more fruitful to use specific redevelopment projects as an analytical unit to identify displaced residents and left-behind communities. For example, working with local resident networks and community groups of specific redevelopment projects could help map instances of displacement and access local knowledge about the kinds of problems left-behind communities experience.

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