

## Editorial

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### Displaced Urbanism

Moving and settling are a dominant theme of our times. Some 272 million people, or 3.5 percent of the global population, now live outside the country of their birth—a figure that has doubled since 2000 (UN DESA, 2019). While some leave to pursue new opportunities, others seek sanctuary, or simply to survive. An increase in conflict and wars over the past twenty years has forcibly displaced more than 100 million (UNHCR, 2022), mainly in countries in the Global South—a trend that will only be compounded by climate and environmental challenges. Of those thus forced to move, many are internally displaced within their own country's borders: some 53.2 million people at the end of 2021 (IDMC, 2021).

Displacement is increasingly protracted: displaced people tend to stay displaced for many years; in refugee camp settings, it is an average of 19 years. In addition, many move to cities and displacement is increasingly urban. The United Nations estimates that approximately 60 to 80 percent of internally displaced people currently reside in urban settlements (IDP, 2021). Covid-19 has intensified all these processes.

Based on first-hand experience and secondary research presenting case studies from India, Nigeria, China, and Thailand, this interdisciplinary volume brings together granular and empirical work by anthropologists, architects, and spatial practitioners, to illuminate the social phenomenon of “Displaced Urbanism.” The writers share an understanding of migration as a phenomenon resulting variously from individual choice, external compulsion, and political planning, amid competing forces of geopolitics, nationhood, and demand for labor. Against this background, the case studies illuminate the pros and cons of traditional approaches to urban displacement and offer an opportunity to explore alternatives. Each study focuses on a community negotiating the inequalities arising from the intersection of global migration and urban marginalization, and suggests nuanced solutions that are fairer, financially and environmentally sustainable, and community-oriented.

Reflecting on research carried out in India, **Sonika Gupta, Madhura Balasubramaniam and Ranbir Lal** detail experiences of urban displacement there within the stateless Tibetan exile community. Drawing on a comparative analysis of settlements in McLeodganj and Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh, and Ka Tilla in New Delhi, the authors map the various strategies that the exiles adopt in the face of eviction orders from local Indian municipal authorities.

**Ali Cheshmehzangi and Tong Zou** delve into discussions about China's floating population of the city, explore a case study, and reflect on the challenges faced by the new type of urban displaced people, through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings highlight the vulnerability of such populations, with multiple impacts on their jobs, social life, access to services, and mobility.

In the Nigerian context, **Fabienne Hoelzel** studies the water provision of Otumara, an informal community in Lagos. The paper's analysis is grounded in the observation of everyday practices and makes recommendations for practical, normative approaches to urban planning.

Drawing insights from participatory observation and repeated field visits, **Koen De Wandeler and Chatsiri Thanmarom** present a case study from Bangkok, Thailand, of a *soi* (side-street) neighborhood branching off the main Phahonyothin Road. The authors trace the emergence of the neighborhood from the late 1890s onwards and link its successive waves of “colonization” to broader urban trends and developments. The authors discuss two recent interventions in particular: the construction of a “boutique” apartment building in 1988, and the conversion in 2007 of former educational and home-industry buildings into a small-scale residential development that caters to the *soi*'s lower-income residents.

Each paper presented in this collection is unique in its context, content, and conclusions. Conjointly, they meditate on the urgent issue of urban displacement, in relation to identity, sustainability, and spatial justice.

**Gihan Karunaratne**  
**Guest Editor**

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