

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH URBAN POVERTY

Politics of affect: clientelism, ‘the urban poor’ and street vendor politics in Paraguay

Jennifer Tucker, Department of City and Regional Planning, University of California at Berkeley

How do relational understandings of the (re)production of poverty challenge the received liberal categories of mainstream social science scholarship? My research tracks how global networks of informal and illegal trade influence local urban development in Ciudad del Este, Paraguay, where the volume of unregistered border trade once exceeded the recorded GDP of the entire nation. The border economy is structured through complex links between state actors, street vendors, small-scale traders and big-time frontier fortune hunters. Points of contact between entrepreneurs and state officials are key to making the active informal, contraband-inflected economy work.

With ethnographic evidence gathered through 12 months of on-site research, I offer the *politics of affect* as a relational alternative to liberal individualism and a de-ontological assessment of legality. I show how the liberal category of clientelism are used to assess Paraguay, and the political practices of the urban poor, as outside of modernity. Rather, I offer an alternate reading of street vendor politics by showing how they intentionally display their own vulnerabilities to incite an affective response in municipal officials in order to stave off eviction. I argue that pairing a theory of affect with Judith Butler’s notion of the “precariousness of life” helps us see these tactics as political acts. Finally, I critique liberalism’s de-ontological assumption that prioritizes following the rules over distributive justice. This approach is a wager on a politicized social becoming through a relational, affective notion of the social and personhood in lieu of a self-interested, autonomous, economistic individualism.

The Affective Ethico-politics of Slum Redevelopment, Displacement and Dispossession in Mumbai

Sapana Doshi, School of Geography and Development, University of Arizona at Tucson

Cities are critical sites for understanding the global politics of poverty and wealth accumulation. In Mumbai, city improvement and redevelopment projects have entailed the large-scale displacement and dispossession of thousands of low-income residents of informal “slum” neighborhoods. This paper discusses the affective and ethico-political dimensions of these urban projects in relation to the inequalities they engender. In particular it investigates how, why and to what extent displacement and dispossession of the urban poor incites a sense of outrage, desire or indifference towards redevelopment among differently positioned groups. In some cases, civic pride and desires for improved living result in the embrace of projects among upper and middle classes and the poor alike. In other instances, criminalizing discourses position the urban poor—especially marginalized ethno-religious minorities among them—as illegal encroachers that do not belong in the city. Here divisive notions of the deserving and undeserving poor contour the moral assessment of evictions among different groups. Recent mobilizations by slum residents and anti-displacement activists have disrupted and inverted these moral and affective registers. By exposing and critiquing collusions of state agents, developers and

financiers advancing fraudulent land grabs in the city, these movements have displaced criminalizing discourses from the urban poor towards the elite. This paper also examines the opportunities and dangers of the new moral repertoires of outrage engendered by these movements.

Managing and producing poverty in private-sector affordable housing

Emily Rosenman, Department of Geography, University of British Columbia

This paper considers the political economic production and management of poverty through the lens of private-sector affordable housing development in the US. Through a case study of a property built to house formerly-homeless people in Oakland, California, I contrast the intentions and desires of the project's developers and investors with tenants' reflections on living in the project has affected their lives. I explore these tensions through reflecting on my participation in the development of a "social impact report" for the project's investors, who have explicit social goals for their financial investments. I discuss how this reporting vehicle refracts tenants' voices through investment discourse to conform with the economic and social goals of the US affordable housing policy. Two main themes are addressed: the performance of poverty and lifestyle 'improvement' for investors who self-identify as benevolent, and the translation of mainstream anti-poverty policies into an investment vehicle. This paper is based on ethnographic research within the industry that has developed around affordable housing finance and development in the US, and engages with literature on the financialization of everyday life and critical studies of philanthropy and community development.

Battle for The Bronx: Exploring the relationship between rebuilding disinvested urban neighborhoods and gentrification

Katy Guimond, Department of Geography, University of California, Berkeley

There is little critical literature on rebuilding and reinvestment in disinvested urban neighborhoods which does not yet rise to the level of gentrification. But understanding the rebuilding process is crucial to illuminating histories of community activism and finding opportunities to intervene in the gentrification process earlier to prevent social and physical displacement. With this project, I contribute to the critical literature on the rebuilding of disinvested neighborhoods and the potential for social justice activism by using the concepts of uneven development and the rent gap to show how rebuilding is distinct from but related to gentrification. I explore this through the recent history of the South Bronx. The contradictions of state-sponsored revitalization in the South Bronx have created tendencies for the exclusion and displacement of poor and working class residents of previously disinvested neighborhoods, even as they provide affordable housing. The dominant forms of rebuilding use affordable housing programs to subsidize private (for-profit and non-profit) housing development in disinvested neighborhoods, creating complex, contradictory public-private partnerships. Like gentrification, the exclusionary effects of "revitalization" are due to processes of uneven development and the reintegration of stigmatized neighborhoods into metropolitan-wide processes. Unlike gentrification, the forces of uneven development are constrained both by the restrictions imposed by state subsidies used to finance this kind of reinvestment and legacies of

community organizing and community-controlled development that continue to create opportunities for more just redevelopment.