Geographisches Kolloquium

Wintersemester 2026/2027

Dienstag 24. 11. 2026 | 16–18 Uhr | H6 (Geo I)

The Missing People of State-Subsidized Housing: Lived Experiences of Non-Occupancy and Secondary Residential Mobility

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Since the turn of the millennium, large-scale housing has experienced a renaissance in several African countries. Linked to the MDGs and the infamous slogan "Cities Without Slums" of Cities Alliance, countries such as Ethiopia, Morocco, and South Africa declared "a war against shacks", using the words of a former South African Housing Minister. New housing projects at the cities' peripheries are therefore deemed to absorb an urban population that is assumed to be too poor to access housing on the formal market. As such, many new housing projects are designed as de facto resettlement destinations for urban citizens inhabiting rather central shantytowns, informal settlements, or other shack dwellings. However, empirical evidence shows that many eligible citizens do not live inside their allocated housing units. They either sold them or rented them out. An empirical gap remains concerning the rationales and lived experiences behind such non-occupancy and secondary residential mobility: Why do they leave, and where do they go? Comparing evidence from 101 narrative interviews with non-occupants in three African capital regions – Addis Ababa, Gauteng, and Rabat/Salé – my presentation zooms in on the housing pathways after displacement and relocation. Rejecting a simplistic reading of non-occupancy as a result of downward-raiding and gentrification, I argue that non-occupancy and secondary residential mobility can be understood as demand-driven practices related to coping with, resisting, and adapting to the shortcomings of supply-driven housing policy. They represent restricted but mindful and people-led reconfigurations of standardized policy, reflecting both the people's own agency and severe policy constraints in terms of affordability, uniformity and displacement.

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