In his new book Dr Fabian Frenzel reflects on 'slumming' as a social practice that takes better-off visitors to areas of urban poverty. With a long history dating to the 19th century, slumming today is a significant urban tourism niche with over 1 Mio tours annually sold, taking in poor neighbourhoods and slums in the larger cities of South Africa, Rio de Janeiro and Mumbai.

Frenzel investigates this controversial past time, reflecting on the ethical debates it triggers and the moral ambiguity involved. Questioning a short hand rejection of slumming as voyeuristic, he highlights the persuasiveness of travel practices and mobilities that take relatively wealthy visitors into neighbourhoods of the poor, including volunteering, activism and research tourism.

Frenzel understands contemporary slum tourism as a social practice closely tied to attempts at managing inequality and poverty in an emergent transnational care regime. In the book, tourism is recast as a productive, and potentially rebellious force that affects urban place making and intervenes in local social conflicts. Tourism’s productivity, or valorisation, may enhance and amplify local struggles for recognition and resources, but is also prone to being captured in urban regeneration schemes and gentrification.

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