

# Rethinking Global Urban Justice

The University of Leeds

11-13 September 2017

Name of session: Visualising the fight for home and security: revealing injustice and making change, 12th September 2017

Title of presentation: 'Un pedacito de tierra': a spatial analysis of the political agency of internally displaced persons in El Oasis, Medellín.

Forced displacement has been the unrelenting weapon of Colombia's armed conflict(s) across the last century. Millions of Colombians have fled their homes in the countryside, seeking refuge in Colombia's urban centres. Despite the signing of a historic peace deal between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), displacements continue at the hands of neo-paramilitary groups and other armed actors, placing great strain on lives and cities.

In Medellín, intra-urban displacement is also on the rise and internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain exposed to subsequent displacements, cycles of violence and prolonged mobility in the city. Here, IDPs living in informal housing are at risk of forced evictions by state authorities, as well as threats by criminal gangs who govern these same urban neighbourhoods.

However, there has been insufficient academic attention paid to how IDP's urban realities are shaped by their experiences with state authorities and criminal gangs. In fact, the theoretical debate surrounding IDPs is characterised by two major flaws. Firstly, it has become 'depoliticised' in its detachments from the political roots that both perpetuate, and fail to prevent, further displacement. Secondly, there is a significant lack in knowledge regarding IDPs' urban experiences due to the logistical 'inconveniences' they pose to researchers and development practitioners in challenging urban environments. This article aims to redress these two flaws through a spatial analysis of political agency that re-politicises IDP debate and ties this into the lived experiences of their urban environment.

Based upon semi-structured interviews with IDPS living in the informal settlement of El Oasis, Medellín, following a series of forced evictions and neighbourhood resistance, this article examines the factors that both limit and facilitate IDP's political agency in the city.

Theoretical findings reveal an oppressive urban environment in which IDPs political agency is conditioned by their experiences with regular (the state) and irregular governance actors (los combos – criminal gangs), who both shape their scope for action and define the urban landscape. Empirically, this article shows how state-led urban renovation projects and forced evictions function to perpetuate IDP's cycles of mobility and place IDPs at increased risk of violence through resettlement programmes that clash with the interests of criminal gangs.

It concludes that ending cycles of mobility and maintaining recognition as 'IDPs', are critical to the possibility of exercising political agency. Crucially, this article makes a call for more innovative approaches to IDPs in urban areas to unlock new perspectives on the city that can bring IDPs into renewed avenues of urban development debate, (re)embedded in their political realities.