

between neoliberal policies and the escalating violence in Mexico. One of the most horrific cases was the 2014 disappearance of 43 college students from Ayotzinapa Teachers' College in Tixtla in the state of Guerrero, discussed at length in Chapter 3. Beyond the fact that the mass disappearance of 43 young men was a tragedy of Biblical proportions, it also exemplified the active collaboration between local, state and federal police, as well as the military, with organised crime, deconstructing the notion of having two sides in this war on drugs fighting each other.

One of the many consequences of the violence is the transformation of those who have lost loved ones into 'experts without credentials'. These are the parents and relatives of the disappeared and murdered who are searching for answers that government officials are unable or unwilling to give them. They are looking to have some closure, to know what happened to their loved ones, and in their extended search they become members of advocacy groups and learn about forensic techniques and other research methods. Their work is not without risk, as those in office with something to hide use their power to forcefully suppress these inquiries. However, the desire for the truth defies the risks, and investigations by family members continue with the help of journalists who literally put their lives on the line to discover the truth, as discussed in Chapter 2 of the book. According to the International Federation of Journalists, in 2019 Mexico was the deadliest country for journalists, even more so than countries at war, like Syria or Afghanistan.

*Narratives of Vulnerability* successfully uncovers many of the complexities of the drug war, contextualised by an excellent historical analysis of human rights violations that are still taking place in Mexico and Central America. But it is also a hopeful celebration of courage and solidarity and of the value and sanctity of all human lives.

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## **Mateja Celestina, *Living Displacement: The Loss and Making of Place in Colombia***

**(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. xxiii + 177, £80.00**

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Colombia has been in civil conflict for more than six decades, which has resulted in the massive internal forced displacement of peasant farmers (*campesinos*). Displacement in Colombia has been caused by the fighting between right-wing paramilitaries, left-wing guerrillas and the Colombian military: armed groups vying for economic and political power through the struggle over land. Displacement is a strategy of war, both to acquire the land for capitalist accumulation and as a form of social control.

Forced to leave their homes, lands, animals, communities and forms of subsistence, displaced farmers face enormous challenges after displacement, especially navigating state policies and resettlement programmes that do not understand or value the relationship between *campesinos'* identity, land and reconciliation. Mateja Celestina's book, *Living Displacement*, examines taken-for-granted categories and labels of 'displaced' to explain the *campesinos'* complex experiences of displacement and its relationship to place-making and land. The author urges the reader to reconceptualise displacement, which is defined as 'a process of loss and subsequent making of place' (p. 2). Based on ten months of ethnographic field work in Colombia, the book offers an intimate look at the lives of displaced *campesinos* who have resettled in two different rural hamlets in the state of Cundinamarca.

In 2011, Colombia passed the Victims and Land Restitution Law, both of which helped categorise the displaced as 'victims of the conflict' and formalised legal processes of land restitution. However, in spite of 'success' in acquiring land, for some *campesinos* their own definitions of success differed from the state's, often leading to long-term situations of loss, exclusion, stigma and poverty.

Drawing from John Agnew's conceptualisation of place (*Place and Politics*, 1987), which delves into the objective and subjective aspect of place – namely, locale, location and sense of place – the book shows how these aspects are interrelated and produce place attachment, or dis-attachment. The book highlights place attachment through displacement as a relational and ongoing, negotiated process. By showing the ways that place is constructed and deconstructed, we are given insights into non-material, emotional and collective losses, and how the disparities and tensions affect 'people's attempts at place-making' (p. 19).

The author employs an ethnographic approach to draw attention to the ways that displacement affects the day-to-day activities and practices of place-making by *campesinos'* post-displacement. In conflict settings, entering into these rural communities needs to be carefully strategised in order to traverse 'landscapes of (dis)trust' (Chapter 2). The author discusses how the communities navigated questions that tested the validity of her claims about their capacity and background. For example, she was tested on their claim that they had experience with cultivation and asked to explain how maize was grown. These tests are especially important in a war context, when people are concerned about their safety and how and why their information is being used. Ethnography allows the researcher to be innovative in their approaches to understanding lived experience. In this case, the author understood that farmers had limited time. Therefore, 'work-along' interviews were utilised, and while they were 'impossible to record' (p. 17), they allowed the researcher to talk while working in the field, which also helped build rapport. Field work in two hamlets allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the two groups and explore the heterogeneous experiences of displacement and resettlement.

Arguing for a longer time-frame analysis of the experience of displacement, the book begins with stories of life in the countryside, before farmers were forced to leave, when the presence of armed actors threatened their daily life, to emphasise how conflict, expulsion and terror 'changes the manner in which people ... sensed the place' (p. 34). Through these processes the author argues that constructions of home and place change through fear, resulting in the cognitive transformation of place.

The nine empirical chapters detail the different routes and experiences of the *campesinos* on the way to the hamlets of Esperanza and Porvenir, some spanning years and many on non-linear trajectories. The book details the process of applying for and accessing aid and land plots, which often ends up becoming more of a debt burden and a weight that forces them to stay in the hamlet. The book also critically examines the history and current categorisation of the label of *desplazado* (displaced) in Colombia as a political and social identity. The state classifies and defines who is displaced as part of a politics of recognition, and how the displaced self-identify affects their sense of place and belonging. Further, by examining life in the hamlets, the book explores conceptions of community amongst the displaced and between the hosts, arguing that there is not a homogenous experience of displacement, which means that there will be challenges to solidarity. Due to a lack of state resources, planning, funding and accountability, tensions arise because of struggles over the prioritisation of the displaced over historically poor non-displaced groups.

By highlighting the ongoing process of place-making and loss, the book demonstrates that it is not enough to solely give *campesinos* land without ongoing and long-term accompaniment and resources. Solutions have not included or prioritised the real needs of displaced *campesinos* to return to the land. For example, the quality of soil, climate, location and landscape are critical to production, and production is vital to the process of place-making for *campesinos*. However, even interviews with administrators of land programmes reveal the failures of the land restitution programmes to factor in these needs. The book ends by discussing the ways that the past – conflict and fear – continue to live in the memories of the displaced, affecting their place-making and their attempts to overcome states of protracted displacement.

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## **Helen Gyger, *Improvised Cities: Architecture, Urbanization, and Innovation in Peru***

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Hardly any country in Spanish-speaking America has been so inspirational for architects and social scientists interested in squatter settlements as Peru (the other key example being Portuguese-speaking Brazil and its well-known *favelas*). Like many other Latin American states, Peru experienced a rapid expansion in *barriadas* (the local name for shanty towns) from early in the twentieth century,