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Gender, Displacement and Urban Resilience

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Going Against the Grain

University of Dayton Human Rights Center
Social Practice of Human Rights Conference, Oct. 1-4, 2019

Gender, Displacement and Urban Resilience

Presented by:

Sinéad McGrath, *University College Dublin*

Session: Resilience

Abstract:

Informal urban areas are home to both rural-to-urban migration, and a substantial number of refugee and IDP communities across the globe, since amongst displaced persons more than half seek safety in urban areas (Global CCCM Cluster 2014). While the drivers of this migration and displacement may vary, many of the challenges which populations encounter in urban areas remain the same. Nevertheless, the potential for linking urban resilience to forced displacement is underdeveloped. Furthermore, in the context of transitions to peace, the experiences of IDPs are often considered differently to those of international refugees and asylum seekers, as the lines crossed are invisible, yet the challenges faced can be greater. While IDPs forcibly displaced by conflict thrive for invisibility in the face of persecution, they seek visibility in the face of humanitarian and other forms of protection, creating a contradiction which presents certain challenges in engaging with such populations. Furthermore, slow onset drivers of displacement such as environmental and economic hardship do not attract the same attention as conflict-related drivers, yet the adaptive challenges encountered in urban areas are often the same.

Women account for half of the world's internally displaced populations and experience conflict - which often exacerbates existing patterns of discrimination - differently to men (Brookings 2014). They also tend to have different challenges in gaining assistance, education, healthcare, property rights and in creating links to existing institutions. Stemming from research done as part of the Preparedness and Resilience to Access Urban Vulnerability (PRUV) Project, funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme, the aim of this paper is to develop sophisticated participatory tools to address the challenges to women in informal urban areas. A further aim is to discuss how feminist epistemology can apply its methodologies to urban areas in such a way that it sheds a light on experiences of internal displacement, institutional support and specifically its intersectional impact on women and girls, and highlights capacities of resilience in informal urban settlements in the context of peace and conflict research.

Bringing together the fields of IDP studies and humanitarian action in urban areas, the paper uses informal settlements in Soacha, Colombia and Nairobi in Kenya as its case studies, to explore methods that can be replicated with displaced communities in urban areas across all continents. Colombia is a highly influential case study, because its urban centres are

destinations for both IDPs (6 509 000 internally displaced persons according to IDMC 2017) and migrants, of whom 25 000 were displacement by natural disasters. In 2017, 159 000 people had been displaced due to conflict and violence in Kenya and 35 000 due to 'natural disasters' (IDMC 2018). Comparing mixed methods data gathered through the PRUV project from 2016-8, the paper argues for participatory methods in exploring complex issues such as intra-urban displacement as a consequence of violence and conflict spill-over, sustainable livelihoods, institutional support, and changing faces of displacement in urban centres.

Content of Presentation:

- Linking internal displacement to urban areas and humanitarian action
- Informal urban areas as challenges for IDPs
- Feminist approaches to forced migration research
- Feminist Methodologies for IDP populations
- Case Studies: Soacha, Colombia and Nairobi, Kenya – observations and preliminary findings from mixed methods research

Presenter information:

Sinéad McGrath is a doctoral candidate in SPIRe, University College Dublin, and an Irish Research Council Employment-Based Scholar & Lecturer in International Development at Maynooth University.