# Place and displacement: Out-of-place processes in low-income communities in Shanghai and Caracas

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ABSTRACT

Understanding that the concepts of place and displacement are intrinsically interconnected, this paper explores cases of displacement *out of the public space within their neighbourhood* of two low-income communities in Shanghai and Caracas. Empirical case-study investigations were carried out in Caracas and Shanghai with a qualitative approach. The data collection techniques were on-site observations and in-depth interviews with residents, supplemented by spatial analysis for contextualisation. The interview data and field notes were coded by identifying the main themes emerging from the participants' accounts. These demonstrated their complex relationship with place, their strong ties and a sense of place mediated by community and family bonds. Simultaneously, the data unveiled the fundamental externalities which have negatively impacted people's relationships with their public spaces, leading to exclusion. These externalities are criminal violence (not prevented or acted by the state) in the case of Caracas and government-led urban renewal interventions in Shanghai. Residents have been ultimately displaced *out of the public space within their neighbourhood*. The contribution of this paper focuses on assessing how criminal violence and urban renewal act as displacement drivers by discussing the residents' experiences of *place* and underpinning the complex role of *space* in this process. It argues that the loss of public spaces can be instrumental in generating further displacement since they are a valuable infrastructure for community building and everyday life socialisation. The paper concludes by arguing that this displacement process is a form of slow violence, reinforced by the action and non-action of institutions, as low-income communities continue being forced out of their places.

## 1. Introduction

According to the Global Report on Internal Displacement (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022), 2020 has observed 40.5 million new displacements. Environmental disasters and violence were the primary drivers (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2021). However, other multiple factors like development and extreme political and economic crises also promote an unprecedented scale and speed of people moving across the globe (Asian Development Bank, 2020; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022; UNHCR, 2020). The Global Risks Report has identified *social cohesion erosion* and *livelihood crises* among the highest-impact long-term global risks (World Economic Forum, 2021). China and Venezuela are examples of low-income communities forced to flow for better life chances and reduce family poverty.

Venezuela has an estimated population of 28 million (The World Bank, 2022). Despite a history of being an immigration-receptive country and rural-to-urban migration to cities, around 6 million people have emigrated to Venezuela since 2014 - one of the biggest refugee crises in the past decade (Human Rights Watch, 2021; International Organization for Migration, 2022). On another note, China has a long history of internal displacement processes, often due to natural disasters (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022), urbanisation and national modernisation. With a growing population of 1.4 billion people (The World Bank, 2022), movement within the country has been a constant, particularly since the post-reform period of 1978. China has displaced significant numbers of people associated with urbanisation (Hamnett, 2020; Shih, 2016; Shin, 2016; Yeh et al., 2011), yet data is not publicly available (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022).

This paper explores the cases of Shanghai and Caracas, which have historically suffered internal displacement on different levels. First, both cases have seen movement from rural to urban areas, followed by

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displacement from the inner-city to *planned peripheries* (China) or *barrios* (Caracas). These processes are widely discussed in academic literature (Brenner et al., 2012; Cernea, 1999; Smith, 1979). However, residents of these cities have also experienced a less studied third displacement process: *out of the public space within their neighbourhood*, which involves a step further where residents are displaced out of their public spaces within their local areas by drivers such as criminal violence in the case of Caracas and urban renewal processes in the case of Shanghai.

Although very different in nature, the focus on urban renewal and criminal violence as drivers of displacement lies in the emotional and social effect these had on the residents deeply affected by them. Urban renewal in China has been a phenomenon affecting its people in the past few decades. China's modernisation project and political economy are based on a reterritorialisation project – (Yang and Li, 2013) with a "socialist political economy with Chinese Characteristics" under the PRC leadership (CCCPC, 2016). This territorialisation implies the redesign of the society and the traditional organiser of social relations in China - the communities (Fei, 1992), which have been an object of severe change in the last decades via accelerated urbanisation. Recently, the Chinese state has been moderating the pace of urban growth, and the 13th plan is setting a new type of urbanisation and enforcing a 'people-oriented development' (CCCPC, 2016).

Similarly, criminal violence in Venezuela, and most specifically in Caracas, has in recent decades been a continuing phenomenon impacting people. With extremely high murder rates (56.33 deaths per 100,000 people in 2021), Venezuela positions itself as the third most dangerous country in the world (World Population Review, 2021). Caracas saw a murder rate of 77.9 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants in 2021 (Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, 2021). Despite these numbers having reduced in 2023 by around 25 % due to "the reduction of disorganized criminal activities and the growing concentration and monopolization of violence by powerful criminal organizations [that are now] focusing on specific niches of criminal opportunities" and by the "the notable emigration of young people and the loss of opportunities for crime.", Venezuela and Caracas still remain very dangerous places. The barrios in Caracas are no exception (Quintana Vigiola, 2020), and criminal violence deeply affects its residents and their use of their public spaces.

Underpinning these drivers lie institutional actors, specifically the government and criminal gangs. According to Winton (2011), criminal gangs can be considered institutions due to their rise above a weak State in using violence and legitimising their role in society. This relates to the understanding of an institution as "a contingent process of social relations (…) that presents itself as absolute laws of life regulation (…) which human beings observe and obey".

The main contribution of this paper focuses on this last level of *displacement out of the public space within their neighbourhood* by assessing the role of *space* through the communities' experience and how criminal violence and urban renewal act as displacement drivers. It also highlights how this displacement is a process of *slow violence* which the government, with their actions – and lack of action – promotes and perpetuates.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. On place and displacement, and public space

The concept of place underpins the concept of displacement. *Place* is linked to the core idea that it is a *space with meaning* (Cresswell, 2004; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). *Space* is often regarded as a framework of geometric relationships or cartesian dimensions, and geographically as a self-contained bounded locale as defined by Plato and Aristotle (Agnew, 2011). Until Descartes, Newton, Leibnitz and Kant, *place* was subordinated to *space* (Casey, 2009). A more recent approach shifted this to emphasise that "spaces have areas and volumes. Places have space within them" (Cresswell, 2012: 133), highlighting the physical and tangible quality of *spaces* and how those are a constituent of *places*. In this context, John Agnew (1987) outlined three aspects of place as meaningful: 1. location (objectively defined by GPS coordinates), 2. locale (as the physical setting for social relations) and 3. sense of place (as the subjective emotional attachment of people to place). However, Relph's (1 976) notion of place challenges these ideas as:

> "the basic meaning of place, its essence, does not therefore come from locations, nor from the trivial functions that place serve, nor from the community it occupies it, nor from superficial or mundane experiences…The essence of place lies in the large unselfconscious intentionality that defines place as profound centres of human existence"
>
> (Relph, 1976: 43)

Phenomenology and the acknowledgement that to be human is to be 'in place' are at the heart of the concept above (Cresswell, 2004). Contemporary debates are shifting the relation between space and place, and both concepts are questioned based on the idea that the world itself is increasingly *placeless* (Agnew, 2011; Agnew & Livingstone, 2011). Massey (1991) emphasised a dynamic notion of place, arguing that a sense of place does not need to be attached to *roots*, and the flow and flux of global movement (*routes*) do not need to generate anxiety. Yet, this notion of a *global sense of place* can be challenged when speaking of forced movement and involuntary choices or undesired change. This discussion is also present in the emerging area of *psychology of place*, which is based on the assumption that individuals strive for a *sense of belonging* to a place. Therefore, having a place is fundamental to one's sense of security and identity (Leighton 1959 as in cited by Fullilove, 1996: 1520). This understanding builds on existing knowledge from environmental psychology (and others) like the work of Proshansky et al. (1983) on place identity and Altman and Low (1992) on place attachment. For example, "basic to all conceptions of self is the view of it as a complex psychological structure characterised by both enduring properties over time and space, and others that are far less stable and given to change" and the level to which the structures of the self are defined by stability or flexibility is still a controversial issue debated in the multiple disciplines and areas of study (Proshansky et al., 1983: 58). Questions of space, time and change are addressed here, with further reflections on movement and stillness that seem to pair with ideas of stability and flexibility, order and disorder. *Psychology of place* essentially explores the unrest that follows the rift of person-place relationships and proposes that disturbances in place relationships lead to psychological distress (Fullilove, 1996). In short, the environmental unit for psychological studies is thus *place*, which represents the near and intimate segment of the environment (Fullilove, 1996), which can be disrupted and disruptive. In this vein, psychosocial processes occur in which communities share experiences, emotions and feelings towards their space and place. These psychosocial processes are central to the discussion presented in this paper.

Looking at its counterpart, one of the main definitions of *displacement* asserts that it is,

> "the movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters"
>
> (International Organization for Migration, 2019: 55)

In this vein, traditional ideas of displacement are usually linked to debates on forced migration, refugees and humanitarian politics (Betts et al., 2017; Newman & Van Selm, 2003), also recently found in climate justice (Berchin et al., 2017; Wilmsen & Webber, 2015), and firmly placed in theories of gentrification and uneven geographical development (Smith, 1982). The latter are particularly relevant for this paper as both case studies, Caracas and Shanghai, are clear examples of the often

unintended displacement processes induced by the state through development and renewal, primarily related to state-led evictions historically considered a necessity towards modernity (Paton & Cooper, 2016; Shin & Kim, 2016).

Directly linked with displacement, discourses of gentrification have recently diverged into optimistic (Freeman, 2006; Freeman and Braconi, 2004; Smith and Butler, 2007; Duany, 2001 as cited in Newman & Wyly, 2006) and pessimistic views of the process, particularly when impacting the urban poor and low-income groups (Davidson, 2008; Newman & Wyly, 2006). Gentrification, as "the class dimensions of neighbourhood change" (Slater et al., 2004: 1144) has also been debated in relation to other processes like urban renewal. However, despite the efforts to differentiate one from the other, the inevitability of gentrification and displacement arising as a consequence of these continues to emerge in the literature (Marcuse, 1985; Marcuse, 1986; Smith, 1996; Smith & Williams, 1986). It is worth noting that research done by Shaw and Hagemans (2015) demonstrates that the absence of physical displacement is not sufficient to ameliorate gentrification's negative impacts, and attention must also be given to the nature of local social and economic structures and governance. So, *space* (as *location* and *locale*) was not determinant in securing success pointing to the need to understand further the complex nature of displacement.

Particularly in the case of China, the notion of gentrification-induced displacement is reinforced by the work of Zhang and He (2018) through the lens of 'accumulation by dispossession' and recent state-led financialisation. Hyra (2012) discusses it as a result of classic urban renewal's preservation strategy, which in China is led by class resulting in higher concentrations of poverty in the suburbs or a return to dilapidated centres, as also found by this research in Shanghai. Urban renewal is thus a spatially-led change. Other Latin-American insights join the urban renewal-related displacement debate when Jones (2015), who focuses on Mexico, speaks of a "sense of emptiness that seems to be intentional" (373) linked to the urban renewal of spaces that are not used as "gentrification is entangled with representations of culture" (373). This is particularly relevant and tightly linked to debates on the sense of 'loss' and 'emptiness', 'exclusion', and, particularly, public spaces, which have been identified as vulnerable in gentrification processes and renewal (Shaw & Hagemans, 2015). These debates are central to the discussion of place and everyday life, and where *space* still has a predominant role in practice, policy and planning.

The concepts of *place*, and, thus, *displacement* go beyond physicality and the imperative of *space*: i.e., displacement as an *out-of-place* process. However, the idea of displacement as being *out-of-place* is not new. Said (1999) wrote deeply about it in *Out of Place* as a self-conscious response to his own displacement. Yet, he repeatedly entwined accounts of being *out of place* while physically dislocated and when located. Therefore, dimensions for displacement go beyond *space* and ideas of *location* and *locale*, pointing to a complex psychological structure of individuals and processes (Fullilove, 1996). Moreover, it can be applied to the collective dimensions: i.e., community and the public, and their respective spatial units, the *neighbourhood* and *public space* as urban psychosocial processes, which are the objects of study for this paper.

Relatedly, authors such as Portelli (2020) and Davidson (2009) highlight the social aspects of displacement, emphasising community displacement when people stay in the same location. Davidson (2009) asserts that gentrification – and displacement – literature focuses on the physical space – but it goes beyond that, as people have "the right to stay put" (Hartman 1984, 2002, Mitchell, 2003, and Imbroscio, 2004 cited in Newman & Wyly, 2006). However, the fact that people do not move does not mean they are not displaced. They are displaced when social relations are affected as they affect the place. As Davidson (2008) states,

"an obvious absence of direct displacement cannot be interpreted as a lack of displacement altogether. This stated, it must be recognised that other aspects of displacement are more difficult to identify, measure and conceptualise"

(Davidson, 2008: 2401)

Davidson (2008) defines this process as 'symbolic dislocation.' Atkinson (2015) also focuses on this concept alongside 'symbolic violence,' which occurs when senses of loss and 'un-homing' arise due to neighbourhood change and shifting social networks. Along the same lines, Portelli (2020) discusses displacement as a 'political event', arguing that displacing people contributes to breaking community practices that could be identified as autonomous from or resistant to the norms of the state. In his case, residents were not physically displaced, but due to radical change in their built environment, streets that were intensely used stopped being utilised after the morphological (and subsequent) social change in their neighbourhood. The loss of usage ultimately led to the loss of "social and political capital that held the community together, and that allowed its members to resist collectively to institutions that treated them as second-class citizens" (Portelli, 2020: 344). In short, loss of *place*. Davidson and Lees (2010) reinforce this discovery stating that displacement understood purely as spatial dislocation tells us very little about why it matters, and a different understanding of space is required to underpin an understanding of displacement. Both concepts of *place* and *displacement* seem to be challenged in the academic debate by their respective explanations as pure abstractions of location and locale.

Finally, Kolovou Kouri et al. (2021) describe gentrification-induced displacement as spatial violence through an institutionalised practice inscribed in policies and masterplans – particularly in authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, Elliott-Cooper et al. (2019) argue that displacement is generally a form of violence, which also aligns with the symbolic violence highlighted by Atkinson (2015). Pain (2019) promotes the same understanding in her study of the closing of a factory in an industry-focused town in the UK, where she discusses displacement as a slow state-perpetuated violence that is traumatic as the violence or its threat is often still present. In her analysis, she draws on the concept of slow violence by Nixon (2011). In her case study, the slow violence has been enhanced by selling public housing, the lack of investment in infrastructure and public services, and changes in the welfare system. Also, the closure of the coal mine changed people's belonging, lifestyle and purpose. Tyner (2020) also draws on the concept of slow violence when discussing the temporality of displacement, calling for scholars to pay attention to both the spatial and temporal elements of this phenomenon.

The debate above aligns with parallel findings asserting that disruption in place relationships often leads to distress, which tends to occur in less-resourced communities since individuals in precarious life situations that experience social alienation "need the security of close-knit networks in a bounded community" (Fried, 2000). Thus, low-income communities are particularly vulnerable to the *place* dimensions of *identity* rifts (*place attachment*), which are linked to images, functions and social relationships in *space* (location and locale) and to issues of power and resistance with institutional actors.

In short, *place* and *displacement* debates in multiple disciplines and study areas reveal the convergence of findings, challenges and concepts to be addressed and further investigated to understand how the negative effects of displacement can be mitigated in planning and policy. A step further integrates a less studied connection of displacement and place: i. e., *public space* and its relevance for low-income communities, which this paper on dual geographies explores.

"From civic, leisure or simply functional spaces with an important but to some extent discrete part to play in cities and urban life, public spaces have become urban policy tools of a much wider and pervasive significance"

(Carmona, 2015: 373)

Public space is an interface between public, private, and community interests (Zukin, 1996), and in their more traditional role functions as a source of amenities and connecting tissue between the private spaces of

the city. It is also fundamental in renewal and regeneration projects (Corbett, 2004; Merrifield, 1996), as well as in building community in both formal (Francis et al., 2012) and informal settlements (Calderon & Hernández-García, 2019). The concept of *public* space goes beyond its physical openness or accessibility, as *publicness* is linked to people's perception of being able to actively use those spaces (De Magalhães, 2010; Dovey & Pafka, 2020). Therefore, public space can impact residents' experiences of place by producing alienation or rootedness (Hummon, 1992), and has a powerful role in urban transformation, public trust and civic life of cities (Degros et al., 2013) since it is the meeting point between the state and civil society. Public space is thus of paramount value as a policy and planning instrument.

To conclude, displacement definitions are complex and have been the object of discussion and further argumentations as "there are many displacements struggle to be made visible" (Adey et al., 2020: 6), which this paper addresses by looking at place, displacement and public space through two diverse case studies. In short, being *displaced* means being *out of place*, implying notions of motion, disruption, and essentially unwanted change that surpasses the objective physicality of *space*. In this vein, this paper's argument is based on the understanding that displacement processes do not necessarily involve people moving from their area (physical space), but that they can undoubtedly happen without changing geographical coordinates calling for the need to understand the complexity and diversity of factors that can lead out-of-place (displacement) processes.

Within this theoretical context of place, displacement, public space and slow violence, this article aims to answer the following guiding questions developed for this paper: 1) how do criminal violence and urban renewal act as drivers that displace low-income communities out of the public space within their neighbourhood? and 2) how is this displacement process reinforced by institutions as a form of slow violence?

In sum, one of this article's contributions is the integration of the concepts of place, displacement and slow violence in different geographies through the outlook of *low-income communities* and *public space*. Equally, these have been found to be vulnerable to displacement in the literature, which this paper confirms. Understanding that displacement can occur *in place* through a process of slow violence, this paper solidifies recent literature findings and discusses this process in the contexts of Caracas and Shanghai. Slow violence, in this case, is institutionally led through action and non-action. Thus, it aligns with new directions of research on displacement and place, and integrates dispersed debates within the wider literature of urban studies.

The article continues by presenting the methodological framework adopted to investigate these case studies, followed by the findings. The latter focus on the participant's relation to their place and the displacement experienced within it. Finally, the *out of the public space within their neighbourhood* displacement drivers, namely institutions, are further discussed in the conclusion, along with the argument that these displacement processes are a form of violence themselves.

## 3. Materials and methods

*After being introduced, we – a Venezuelan academic working in Australia and a Portuguese academic working in London – met over coffee to discuss our research. One was working on place-making in informal settlements, and the other was on urban renewal processes in Shanghai. While conversing about our studies, we soon realised that these very different places and contexts also embedded striking similarities regarding the experiences and feelings of these places' residents. These two low-income populations were deeply attached to their places and violently*

*displaced from their public spaces. This paper presents a formal analysis of these shared experiences.*

Empirical case-study investigations in Caracas and Shanghai inform this paper. These are part of wider research projects respectively.[1] The Shanghai case was part of a collective research project that looked at urbanisation's impact on low-income communities and sustainability in China; and the Caracas case was part of an individual research project that studied place and place-making processes and the territorial implications of criminality and religiosity in the barrios. Both cases are low-income areas, with balanced age and gender profiles, which explored the bond of the community with their places and identified dynamics, factors and actors of urban change. Qualitative methods were favoured through the application of ethnographic methods, and primary fieldwork was conducted between 2009 and 2012, including on-site observations and in-depth interviews.

In total, 38 interviews were carried out in Caracas and 40 in Shanghai, with both female and male residents ranging from 16 to 65 years old. The participant recruitment in Caracas was purposeful and through a snowball technique, where initial key community members were identified and approached to be interviewed and to recommend other participants relevant to the research. The interviews were unstructured, with only three guiding themes: public spaces, religiosity, and meanings of the space. Participants were asked: "Tell me about (the topics mentioned)." The interviews carried out in Shanghai were semi-structured, and some participants were interviewed more than once, with guiding questions surrounding the topics of community and urban renewal, housing and public spaces, and meanings of space. The sample followed a purposeful and convenience sample technique, where relevant community members were identified and approached, and were equally accessible.

For Caracas, the interviews were audio-recorded to guarantee the accuracy of the data. These were transcribed and uploaded into NVivo for the analysis process. For Shanghai, the interview scripts were made on-site during the interviews by a research assistant (transcribing live) and from notes taken by the author as an interviewer to validate the data quality. Both data sets were interpreted through qualitative content analysis. Interviews and field notes were coded by themes arising from the participants' accounts. The standardisation of the data analysis for the purposes of this paper comprised the identification and application of shared codes focusing on the participants' perspectives on their place and its constituents, as well as the displacement processes and drivers they experienced. Participants' quotes identified in this paper as CA# for the residents of Caracas and SH# for the residents of Shanghai. Spatial analysis was used to contextualise and complement the prior by mapping the transformation of public spaces and their use. This approach provided a visual and more graspable understanding of the physical implications of these institutionally driven displacement processes. For this study, the analysed unit and scale of *place* is the *neighbourhood* (spatial), *the low-income* (economic) and the *community* (social), further focusing on *public space* and residents' everyday life experiences, uses and perceptions of *place*.

The Caracas case study focuses on Petare, the second-largest barrio compound in Latin America, located on the city's eastern hills. The two main selection criteria were: 1) the areas had to be considered informal settlements, and 2) the researcher had to be acquainted with a community member for safe access. Following these criteria, Julián Blanco (40 Ha), El Nazareno (65 Ha) and La Dolorita (90 Ha) were the three specific barrios investigated within the compound. They also shared an interconnected history and construction of place processes.

The Shanghai case study focuses on Inner-Shanghai – Duolun Rd, located in the Hongkou District and within the Shanyinlu Historic and

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Cultural Conservation Area, Sichuanbeilu *Jiedao* (sub-district). Duolun Rd covers about 23 Ha and holds several meaningful historical and cultural heritage places within the community, mainly from the early 1900s. Home to low-income residents, it is an area dominated by public rental housing that exemplifies Shanghai's inner-city density and spatial decay due to poor maintenance, which has been undergoing urban renewal since 1998 to reconstruct Duolun Road into "a street of famous cultural persons". This process was slow and resisted, which led to an incremental displacement that residents have endured for decades. Public spaces were redesigned first, and the vegetable market removed (from 2012 until 2015), and only recently some of the sub-communities of Duolun Rd were fully demolished and relocated.

### 3.1. Case studies' context

Venezuela and China have both experienced internal displacement. Caracas and Shanghai have received people from different domestic areas. In both cases, people from rural areas were being pushed into the cities due to several global and local dynamics, including rural industrialisation that led to a widening rural-urban income gap, increased rural poverty and shortage of arable land in rural areas. Therefore, farmers and their families were forced to seek employment in cities, which along with education and access to services, comprised the main pull factor.

Both cities have also seen a second level of internal displacement within urban areas from the city to barrios (Caracas) or the peripheries (Shanghai). Eviction policies in line with a global approach to dealing with squatter areas, the governments' inability to provide adequate housing supply – Caracas's case – or the changes in land policy – as in the case of Shanghai – and the incapacity of the poor to access the private housing market, led people to find themselves accessible land and affordable housing, as in the case of other cities globally. When the barrios in the Caracas case study began developing, Venezuela was in the process of changing from a dictatorship to a democracy, which led to waves of eviction policies and clientelism that both displaced and enabled people to squat and develop their informal housing. In the past three decades, the country has experienced a shift to *socialism* that has "adopted and implemented a series of laws, policies and practices, which have restricted the democratic space, weakened public institutions, and affected the independence of the judiciary" (Human Rights Council, 2019: 14). Within this context, the relationships between the government and people have varied. In waves of clientelism, communities were empowered to demand resources and help (mostly linked to corruption in the shape of electoral votes). Nowadays, communities are *empowered* as long as they follow and align with the government's political agendas, which in reality leads to communities being powerless under its mandates. In Caracas, the poor tended to squat on the land not valued by the market, such as the escarpments of the city, leading to the origin of informal settlements called barrios in Venezuela.

In Shanghai, China's political economy and modernisation through urban renewal context presented in the introduction has materialised along low-income people generally locating in 'urban villages' (chengzhongcun) or dilapidated (semi-informal) neighbourhoods in the centre and were then further displaced to the peripheries due to urban renewal processes. In the last decades, Chinese cities observed a relentless interplay between an unfixed physical dimension (demolition and expansion) and public sphere (relocation and migration). Feelings of discontent and powerlessness are transversal in communities (Feuchtwang et al., 2015). Socio-spatial relations were not being sustained in the long term, and public trust has been declining.

Despite the distinctively different contexts and drivers of displacement out of the public space – discussed below –, the comparison between these two diverse case studies shares the focus on low-income communities and, most importantly, the communities' experiences of place, displacement and slow violence.

## 4. Results: place and displacement within the neighbourhood out of the public space

The different displacement stories and histories of Caracas' and Shanghai's residents are directly linked to their connection to place. Sense of place becomes a foundational process that leads to understanding people's feelings and experiences of displacement, especially when unable to use their public spaces. Thus, this section presents first the empirical findings regarding the experience of place as a joint discussion of both case studies discussing matters of place attachment, sense of belonging and sense of community and the emotions, feelings and meanings of these places. Then, Section 4.2 focuses on the processes related to the *displacement out of the public space within their neighbourhood* under the lens of experiencing and resistance to urban renewal in Shanghai and criminal violence in Caracas.

### 4.1. Sense of place in Duolun Rd and Petare

Throughout the processes of displacement that residents in Shanghai's derelict neighbourhoods and Caracas' barrios experienced, leading them to those places in which they currently live, people have found a connection to other neighbours, and their families have grown. They have become attached to their place leading to a sense of belonging. These spaces became places through the different psychosocial processes of a sense of community and everyday life practices, thus turning into *meaningful locations* (Agnew, 1987).

> CA1: I needed my Julián Blanco! Because there is where my people are, the ones I know, the ones that have grown old with me, and that's it! (…) My daughters grew up there; they scratched their knees, all those things.

In Caracas' barrios, the connection between the sense of place and sense of community becomes evident. Sense of place is built over time and is closely linked to the people who compose that community. When CA1 expresses the deep sentiment about growing old with her people, she refers to the people who moved in at the same time as her to the barrio, that generation that squatted and settled in this place after being displaced from her areas of origin. She is also referring to their children and grandchildren. Sense of place is linked to relational rootedness.

Duolun Rd's case is similar to Caracas' regarding residents' connection to their place. Residents are happy to live in Duolun, although housing conditions have severely deteriorated. It is an old neighbourhood, and residents' sense of community and relationships with neighbours and family contribute to a strong sense of belonging and place.

> SH1: I like this place and don't want to move. I love this kind of old architecture. I have a sense of belonging here.
> SH2: I belong here, yes! I know all my neighbours – they help me. My parents lived here already, I started this shop, and I live upstairs.

These strong ties to place and the community originate not only due to the length of residency in the area and its generational quality, but in the case of Duolun, it also relates to the fact that they often went to the same schools and originated from the same *danwei*. A *danwei* is a work unit which is a specific form of social organization in Chinese cities that means people lived and worked in the same place, and that was a key source of identity for urban residents – of community and a sense of belonging (Bray, 2005). However, this strong connection to the place does not span all residents. New migrants have no sense of belonging to Duolun, and interactions between old and new residents are scarce, mainly due to the fast population change. The effect of migrants in Caracas' barrios is quite different. As these areas were initially built throughout the influx of migrants, residents are open to new people arriving and gradually connect with them, even supporting them in times of need. Community relationships are one relevant aspect of

barrios, and despite having diverse nationalities and building in acknowledged dangerous places, barrio residents are supportive in adversity and help each other. The community stays together, and neighbours cooperate, as can be seen in CA7's quote in Section 4.3.

At the same time, criminal violence in Caracas' barrios is a driving factor that negatively affects people's sense of community and place.

> CA3: (…) we all want to leave, no? (…) Leave and live better! (…) Because if, if we talk about 10, 15 years ago, this here was (…) wonderful, because there weren't these many problems as we have now, such high delinquency (…)

Criminal violence and the relationship with thugs become another factor that mediates people's use of space, forming another level of displacement: *out of the barrio*. As CA3 highlighted, *people* want to flee the barrio in search of better opportunities, meaning a place with less violence. Violence is the displacing influence that negatively affects residents' sense of place.

In the case of Doulon Rd, market forces and the urban renewal processes are also negatively affecting residents and creating a disguised displacement process. Despite the strong attachment to their place, some residents want to move due to the precarious physical conditions of the area. The urban renewal process and the market offers do not allow them to remain in their place in better sanitary conditions, so some residents feel the need to move to access better housing.

> SH4: I belong to this *xiaoqu*, yes. I do. Our identity is old and traditional, and I feel safe here. This place is more important to me than my place of birth as I have lived here for many years. But I want to move, I want to live in a better house – here we don't have a private toilet, and that is not good.

This disguised displacement is not easily identifiable as it might be assessed as people wanting better opportunities and taking them when presented. However, people are displaced when they feel they have to move from where *they belong* because it is the only opportunity they have to access better conditions. In this case, urban renewal processes displace residents as the area improvements are happening but have not addressed residents' needs and increased prices for liveable conditions. In both Caracas and Shanghai, external forces (urban renewal and criminal violence) make people feel forced to leave their place. Consequently, these forces become drivers of violence, creating unseen but real harm to the residents of the areas.

Nonetheless, not all residents share the feelings described above. Other types of narratives are found in residents of Doulon Rd as the idea of relocation into the periphery brings other concerns:

> SH5: I dislike the conditions here, so I want to move. But I still want to live in the centre! So, if the government wants me to move, I will not sign the contract.

For most (particularly the old), the fundamental problem of resettling lies in accessing public facilities like hospitals, vegetable markets, and green spaces to exercise, and the loss of socialisation with the previous community and family members unless they choose the same residential resettlement. Residents are very aware that working-age family members will have to commute long distances to their jobs. Thus, many choose to move back to the city and rent affordable rooms.

These different displacement forces, namely criminal violence and urban renewal affect the relationship between the residents and their place. For those residents who do not want to move regardless of the challenges, these drivers also directly affect the relationship between people and their public spaces, thus leading to a displacement process within the neighbourhood. This displacement happens in Caracas and Shanghai '*out of the public space*'.

## 4.2. Displacement within the neighbourhood – 'out of the public space' in Duolun Rd

Shanghai ranks first in China and 5th in the world in terms of population (ca. 28.5 million in 2022) (Shanghai Municipal People's Government, 2022; United Nations, 2019). The city is expected to grow to 50 million by 2050 due to the recent accelerated urbanisation and economic growth. Therefore, the pressure for planning is strong, often translating into further densification and population redistribution within the greater metropolitan area. Building an open and compact city model remains an objective for the new Shanghai masterplan 2035. Urban renewal remains instrumental in achieving this objective and pursuing a national modernisation. However, this goal is largely accomplished by demolition and relocation processes, which lead to population substitution, not redistribution, as the newly built densities become occupied by upper-income populations and facilities and public spaces follow these new needs and lifestyles. Modernisation and densification are achieved through the urban renewal of low-income neighbourhoods like Duolun. These compose the driver of the third level of displacement: *out of public space*.

Duolun is an old and significant community that is seen as a representative of the city's spatial history as stated in a Shanghainese saying: "Shanghai, a city's spatial history can be seen in Duolun, a little street". Yet, the community is actually subdivided into three sub-groups or smaller communities (*xiaoqu*) – Liulin, Yong'An and Duolun - with different spatial patterns that are brought together by two main axes corresponding to vibrant commercial streets. These are Duolun Rd and Hengbang Rd, which link the community to the broader neighbourhood and city structure. Due to its strong cultural meaning, Duolun was the first street to be transformed following Shanghai's urban renewal ambitions, and by 2006 it was already experiencing change as new shops catering for tourists and the Shanghai Expo in 2010 appeared. Tourists would not venture to Hengbang Rd, and for a while, it had a metal gate that clearly separated it from Duolun Rd. At that time, Hengbang was still a lively local street with shops serving the neighbourhood and hosting a daily vegetable market. This open-air market supported the livelihood of the low-income residents, particularly as it was affordable and provided better quality fresh food, as stated by one of the residents (SH8): "I normally buy food in the vegetable market in Duolun." Also, some vendors were residents themselves. This street (as previously Duolun) was also a meaningful gathering place for the community as it was actively used to meet with friends and family while shopping and in restaurants as often these shop owners lived in the same building or nearby (SH2).

> SH6: Duolun Road is neither fish nor fowl. It looks like a cultural road, but actually, it is just a 'face work'. (…) I run a small shop, and I live upstairs, and the road in front of my house has been rebuilt three times in the past 3 years, but the area of the repairs just ended in front of my house, which means it just contributes to the 'face work' excluding the inside of Duolun Road (of the community).
> SH5: It is a fake cultural and business street, (…) the residents here are not willing to go there and there are not enough facilities for them.
> SH7: Duolun has no culture… it is a rude street. Once, an officer came here to visit Duolun Road - where it had been cleaned very carefully many times, but he refused to go into the community to see the environment there. Facadism!

According to residents, Duolun Rd has been renewed focusing on creating a new image for the city and catering for tourists and not for them. The renewal has been by and large an operation of 'face cleaning or facadism.' This process was not an effort to improve the neighbourhood and its smaller streets and buildings, as stated by SH7 by highlighting how in an official visit, the officer refused to go and look at the conditions beyond the main road. Smaller streets in the area remained

run down and lacking essential repairs and infrastructure renewal. Residents also felt the changes they needed in the main streets were not happening: e.g. enhancing public facilities, mainly for the elderly. The new shops and cafes were targeting tourists and business newcomers. By 2006, the street of Duolun was thus redesigned and improved, historic buildings were repaired, and new shops appeared. These also aimed to be of a cultural nature, but they were seen by residents as "fake" or "for tourists", not as real or authentic as the longstanding and meaningful history of the area, which many of them have been part of as they have lived there for two or three generations was disappearing. Hengbang Street renovation followed, but this was a slower process as the community in Liulin resisted immediate resettlement and petitioned the municipal government for repairs and improvement of their housing conditions, which were granted and completed in 2012. This allowed the residents to keep their homes and living environments, and the open-air market and local shops continued. After this date, together with the gate that separated the two streets - Duolun and Hengbang Rd, the street vegetable market was incrementally removed until its complete disappearance in 2015 (Fig. 1), which resonates with Nixon's (2011) concept of *slow violence*.

The new image and function of the renewed public spaces in Duolun may not be intended to displace residents on purpose. Ultimately, these spaces are still part of the community, often supporting other types of activities and attracting new people and lifestyles. However, due to residents' experiences of losing the vegetable market and Duolun's tourist-led new shops and cafes, residents feel they do not *identify* with these spaces and *cannot use* or *afford them, thus being displaced*. The inaccessibility in purposeful function and meaning becomes the displacing factor, which describes a long-term new form of displacement – *out-of-public space*. At present, both the repaired Liulin and the south part of Duolun *xiaoqus* have been completely demolished, giving space to a large car park waiting for a new development to start.

### 4.3. Displacement within the neighbourhood – 'out of the public space' in Petare

Caracas is ranked as one of the most dangerous cities in the world (Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, 2021; World Population Review, 2022). Residents of this city are affected daily by criminal violence; *barrios* are no exception. Criminal violence is an important, parallel, ongoing activity that co-exists with people's everyday lives, thus having a significant impact on barrio dynamics. While only a small number of community members engage in these activities, they affect everyone's lives.

Criminal violence, gangs and residents' fear compose the driver of the third level of displacement in barrios: *out of public space*. The fear generated by criminal violence has influenced people's use of and relation to their urban space. Criminal gangs impose their power over the space by using it for different activities ranging from drug dealing, usage, and shootouts to hanging out or playing on the basketball courts.

CA1: These spaces should be for sports! But no one really uses them… The boys (*gang members*) [use them] without a problem! [but no one else, unless] if they accept you, you're ok and happy; if they don't accept you, you're screwed.

Gang members continuously use and appropriate spaces such as basketball courts for their different activities, thus, unofficially deciding who uses that space and when. Power relationships between gangs and the rest of the community become evident and unidirectional; *power* is determined by gang members being the enforcers of criminal violence, including murder. This appropriation leads to the unlawful privatisation and institutionalisation of the space, displacing other residents from accessing and using it. Criminal gangs are thus institutions that lead communities to submit to their regulations or be displaced.

The process of privatisation and displacement out of the public space also extends to streets and pedestrian pathways. Although gang members do not prohibit other residents from using the spaces, people impose on themselves this self-limitation because of fear. Shootouts are common and the main fear factor. Regardless shootouts are usually between gangs from different barrios or gangs and the police, all residents are directly and indirectly affected by them. Being surrounded by or enduring criminal violence in barrios seems unavoidable for residents.

CA2: and then here they seem to be practising all the time… the ones who shoot! (…) and one of those crazy bullets can land on anyone, because you never know! (…) lately there have been many thugs around. They are killing each other! I mean, the gangs! (…) The other day (…) a shooting started and that was [*body language expressing*: chaos!] … they injured a nice kid (…) we heard they injured a lady in the convenience store, and another woman started running and also got injured, and another guy got killed…

The perception of safety and the rationalisation of the urban space usage become a deciding factor in how non-delinquent community members relate to the urban space leading people to categorise spaces as safe or unsafe according to whether the gangs are using them at the time. This also leads people to perceive that they do not have enough open



**Fig. 1.** Left: hand drawing overlay on Google map image of incremental disappearance in Duolun Road – no scale/Right: photograph of the open-air vegetable market. Source: author.

public spaces, not due to the lack of availability but due to the perceived inaccessibility. Residents are displaced from their public spaces. Regardless this institutionalised violence being very real, the underpinning displacement process relates to Nixon's (2011) slow violence, as residents have gradually withdrawn from their places.

CA7: [discussing the difference from one street to the other] Yes, you can feel it! I mean… in the Main Street of El Nazareno I can arrive at 3, 4 am. Well, with a bit of fear. However, through the street down there, I wouldn't even come at 9 pm! (…) I… almost found myself in the middle of a shootout. And we were ok because (…) we entered a [neighbour's] house. That's why I fear that street (…) that street… is dead to me [original: *le hice la cruz*!] I'd rather go through El Nazareno [the main road].

This displacement process affects everyday life decisions and extends to small cultural events such as local Catholic processions. An example is the San Judas Tadeo procession held on the 28th of October – the day of San Judas – in the area El Tanque, located in Julián Blanco. The procession has been organised between the community leaders and the Church since 1976 and has had a set route since. Despite criminal violence always being present in the barrio, residents highlight that since 2008 it has intensified, creating further impacts on the community. Fig. 2 depicts in yellow the chapel of San Judas, where the procession starts and ends. In yellow and green, the procession path is delineated, reflecting the shortening of the procession since 2008.

The change in the procession path was an adjustment decided by the community in fear of potential unannounced shootouts happening in the area. Another change introduced in 2008 was starting the procession at 6 pm (traditionally, the start was 8 pm) to ensure people could be home by 9 pm. The latter time is when the community expressed that most violent activities could start.

CA8: … after we left after the San Judas mass, there was a shootout (…) Thank God you guys had already left! They came to let us know [that the shootout was about to start] and we left in a hurry! We closed the chapel and left! (…) Yes, they (*the gang members*) respected that (the procession had finished)! (…) Thank God we didn't leave so late! That's why we were cautious (and changed the time)!

The previous quotes demonstrate that the community's understanding of how and when violent activities, such as shootouts, take place is quite accurate. At the same time, this quote also indicates the bonds and ties between community members, that even before shootouts, community members are alerted so they can go home to a safe space. Despite demonstrating the positive of community members looking after each other, this dynamic also puts in evidence the process of displacement out of the public space. People must stop their activities to protect themselves from and give way to criminal gangs, whose members may not always displace other residents on purpose. Ultimately, these delinquents are part of the community and often care for some community members. However, due to the fear people experience by having criminal gang members using the public spaces, residents feel they cannot use them, thus being displaced. The latent danger of a shootout becomes the displacing factor.

## 5. Conclusions

The residents of Petare in Caracas and Duolun Rd in Shanghai have experienced continuing displacement on different levels throughout their lives. These initial displacement processes led to residents finding their place and creating new bonds, attachments, and sense of community due to long-standing location. Residents also assigned profound meanings to their public spaces during this process, hence these becoming significant places. Public spaces are valuable infrastructures for community building and everyday life socialisation (Carmona, 2015; Francis et al., 2012). Therefore, they can be instrumental in consolidating residents' sense of place and community, and are particularly vulnerable to processes of urban change, which can rift *place attachment*. It is important to clarify that disruptions to place need not to cause displacement as per Massey (1991)'s notion of dynamic place. In this context, an essential difference is the condition of low-income communities and their inherent vulnerabilities (Fried, 2000), and the increased risk of displacement when speaking of forced movement and undesired change. This is linked to issues of power and resistance and, in our cases, to actions through time and public space at the neighbourhood scale. These processes were identified in Petare and Duolun, leading to the main findings discussed in this paper: *displacement out of the public space within their neighbourhood*.

Considering Agnew's (1987) three-part definition of place highlighting the relevance of the location, locale and sense of place, we argue that the low-income communities in Shanghai and Caracas have experienced different forms of displacement (of *location* and *locale*) that have led to a loss of *sense of place*. Municipal urban renewal policies and the broader state's modernisation project have enforced further displacement in Shanghai. To implement a new image and society project, the government has redesigned public spaces and slowly taken away the community's vegetable market, a vital everyday life infrastructure for getting affordable fresh food and socialising, thus eroding a meaningful public space underpinning residents' sense of place in the neighbourhood. This phenomenon aligns with the slow violence cases and



**Fig. 2.** Left: hand drawing overlay on Google map image of violence-driven changes to the San Judas Tadeo procession path – no scale/Right: of the area with the water tank at the centre. Source: author.

theoretical approach discussed in the previous sections.

In Caracas, the displacement within the neighbourhoods is equally driven by institutions: criminal gangs and violence within the community and the government's complicity, ineffective crime-combatting measures or lack of action. Criminal violence in Latin America is institutionalised as it is part of the social order sustained by social institutions, in which criminal gangs are embedded in an interrelated way in a *permanent* system (Martín-Baró, 1999; Zúñiga Núñez, 2014). Therefore, criminal gangs and violence in Caracas are institutions. They are established normative structures within the Venezuelan society, which, in the case of barrios, enforce their power to use the public spaces at their convenience, resulting in the displacement of the other barrio residents. Again, this process is also a reflection of the slow violence endured by residents.

In both cases, these low-income communities expressed experiencing similar impacts on their neighbourhoods. Public spaces are paramount for communities and can also define how displacement is experienced (Hummon, 1992), clearly expressed in the residents' discontent, sense of loss, exclusion, and being *out of place*. Crime, and the unwanted removal of the market and image change are disruptors to place attachment that generate these feelings of loss; they are also disruptors to creating bonds, sense of community and sense of place (Low, 1992). The displacement *out of the public space within their neighbourhoods* directly relates to recent findings and understandings of displacement as non-physical and non-cartesian processes (Atkinson, 2015; Davidson & Lees, 2010; Shaw & Hagemans, 2015) and the value of time. We need further inquiry to understand the role of time in displacement and place (Tyner, 2020).

In our case studies, these disruptors and feelings of loss are ultimately created by the institutions mentioned above: the government and criminal gangs, leading to the conclusion that these are, therefore, perpetrators of violence and confirming Elliott-Cooper et al. (2019)'s assertion that *displacement is a form of violence*. It also reinforces the discussion of community, with the main difference that in our case studies, the primary cause for displacement was a clear change in the activities occurring in the public space. These activities activated the displacement process as an act of slow violence, which sustains the underlying complexity of the diversity of factors that can drive out-of-place (displacement) processes and their instrumentality for institutions and power.

In conclusion, despite the different locational, political, economic and social contexts, the low-income residents of these diverse areas in Shanghai and Caracas have experienced similar feelings and, thus, processes of place and displacement in time. In both cases, displacement is mainly driven by rifts in *place* initiated by changes in *public space*, which are led by institutions, power and political influences, both through direct action in the case of Shanghai and by lack of action in the case of Caracas. Governments' approaches to the issues at hand are ineffective, to say the least, as they create further displacement of these low-income populations that may be deemed vulnerable, which planning and policy can aid. These displacement processes are a form of slow violence as communities continue to be forced out of their place, therefore confirming how discontinuities of place keep being a framework for considering the long-lasting duration of forced displacement.

This article has answered the two overarching guiding questions: 1) how do criminal violence and urban renewal act as drivers that displace low-income communities out of the public space within their neighbourhood? and 2) how is this displacement process reinforced by institutions as a form of slow violence? However, much has happened since the empirical data was collected over a decade ago. In Shanghai, Liulin xiaoqu has been demolished, and Duolun xiaoqu has been partially dismantled. They are precisely the areas corresponding to the south and east parts of Hengbang Rd. These sub-communities have now been entirely displaced. Conversations with some participants in 2022 provided insights that in Caracas, established residents still have a profound sense of place with their barrio at the same time continuing to be displaced by criminal violence. However, a slight decrease in

criminality figures since then has been due to forced migration (Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, 2019; Observatorio Venezolano de Violencia, 2021). Venezuelan people have been further displaced from Caracas' barrios due to macroeconomic and political influences: people need to migrate to other countries when possible, to look for better opportunities for their families – people are leaving the barrios once again. The UN named this: Venezuela is among the top five countries driving the world's current refugee crisis (Bahar & Dooley, 2019; International Organization for Migration, 2022). Governments have continued to be the perpetrators of violence by displacing people.

The ongoing changes in the past decade open the possibility and need to follow up on what has happened in more detail with these communities and understand their lived experiences of place and displacement. Nevertheless, the lessons from the data collected and, thus, from this paper are still valid as they portray long-standing and long-lasting worldwide human processes: place, displacement and violence, and the role of institutions in enabling or hindering them.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Gabriela Quintana Vigiola:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Paula Morais:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

## Declaration of competing interest

None.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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