Understanding how Conflict-induced Displacement Shapes Human Agency and Aspirations: A Case Study in Colombia

Abstract
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1.1.   Research Problem

This research looks at the temporal dynamics between conflict-induced displacement, agency and aspiration. More specifically, it examines how those individuals and their families displaced by conflict exert agency to navigate the multiple barriers they encounter in their new place of settlement in order to pursue their aspirations. The study of how migrants and displaced populations deploy agency has received considerable attention in contemporary research (Essed, Frerks, and Schrijvers, 2004; Eastmond, 2007; Morawska, 2009; Korac, 2009; Bakewell, de Haas and Kubal, 2012; Brun, 2015; Lee, 2016; Omata, 2017). However, with the notable exceptions of Van Heelsum (2016, 2017) and Borselli and Van Meijl (2021), questions of how displacement affects people's agency and their opportunities to pursue their aspirations are still under-researched.

Drawing on contemporary academic debates on displacement, and the narratives of internally displaced people in Colombia, I develop a twofold argument: firstly, that conflict-induced displacement disrupts not only individual but also one's family and community agency and aspirations. Secondly, displaced people, exert agency to navigate the multiple negative impacts of displacement, and over time, some are able to reconstruct their lives and those of their families, and achieve their aspirations. The two aspects of my argument can be illustrated with the experiences of those who flee following conflict in Colombia, of which Myriam's narrative is just one example. She and her family were forced to leave her indigenous community after the murder and forced disappearance of several members of her family and found herself dispossessed of property and livelihood, facing poverty and exclusion in Bogotá. The time she spent creating a livelihood and the resources she needed to achieve her aspirations was spent, and for many years she saw her aspirations frustrated. However, loss and despair are not the only features of Myriam's narrative. It also illustrates the numerous ways she deployed agency to survive in the city and to refashion her life and aspirations. She was a farmer and artisan in her community of origin. In Bogotá, she is a theatre performer and continues making handicrafts to make a living and retain a connection with the place left behind. Furthermore, her narrative illustrates the importance of time in navigating the negative impacts of displacement and the ways she has been able to positively transform her life. Neither learning to overcome the material impacts of displacement nor embracing a new identity and finding her place in the city happened overnight. It took years for Myriam to positively transform her life and find ways to attain her aspirations.

More specifically, I contend that displacement entails material, spatial and temporal dispossession. Displacement dispossesses individuals, families and communities from their property and livelihoods (Loizos, 2008); "their place in the world" (Turton, 2005: 275), their "time" (Tazzioli, 2020) and their "future" (Ramsay, 2020). Although the material and spatial dimensions of dispossession have received considerable attention in contemporary displacement research (Turton, 2005; Loizos, 2008; Chatty 2010 and 2021; Adey et al., 2020), its temporal dimensions are still largely under-researched.

In the context of this research, the notion of temporal dispossession encompasses both the sense of being dispossessed of one's time (Tazzioli, 2020) and of one's future (Ramsay, 2020). Concerning the first aspect, I draw on recent scholarship which argues that displacement entails the stealing of space and time. Tazzioli's (2020) analysis of how state policies force migrants to remain on the move and undertake several journeys before reaching a destination (see also Tazzioli and Garelli, 2020), and Bhatia and Canning's (2021) analysis of how state policies keep migrants waiting while their asylum applications are being processed (see also Tyner, 2020; Meier and Donà, 2021; Yahya, 2021) are just two noteworthy examples of time dispossession. As Adey et al., (2020: 17) stress, "These repetitive journey attempts steal migrants' time and lives, delaying their futures and even their possibility to think about their futures as they remain stuck in an endless journeying" (see Tazzioli, 2020).

The sense of being dispossessed of one's future is closely related to Adey et al.'s (2020) reference to migrants being stuck in a situation in which being able to think about the future is not an option. I draw on Ramsay's (2020: 388) theorisation of the temporality of displacement to argue that "to be displaced is to live with the sense of a dispossessed future". More specifically, displacement can be understood as "an existential experience of contested temporal being, in which individuals and families cannot reconcile the contemporary circumstances of their life with their aspirations for, and sense of, the future". Overall, displacement dispossesses individuals, families, and communities of their time and of the possibility of a future in which their aspirations can be attained.

Although internally displaced people are not required to spend time complying with asylum procedures – as they have moved within their own country – they can also be dispossessed of their time and their future. In the specific context of Colombia, I posit that internally displaced individuals, families, and communities experience temporal dispossession in two interrelated ways: firstly, through the time spent submitting and waiting for the government to restore or financially compensate them for the land and property they were forced to abandon, and secondly, because of the time occupied with the day-to-day struggle to survive, with their aspirations on hold. As Ramsay (2020: 389) stresses, "Processes of dispossession not only result in social and physical dislocations as people are forced to navigate increasingly hostile economies, environments and socio-political contexts; people also find that their very ability to navigate beyond these situations and towards aspirational futures is imperilled".

I advance the discussion about the temporality of displacement further by showing that rather than a temporary 'crisis', material, spatial and temporal dispossession often become a protracted situation affecting everyday life and the attainment of aspirations. As the empirical chapters of this thesis discuss, displaced people and their families struggle for years to meet their basic needs, to overcome the sense of being out of place (Creswell,1996), to find 'their place in the world' (Turton, 2005; see also Adey et al., 2020 and Perez Murcia, 2020), and thus to regain the sense of being "part of the social fabric of life" (Korac, 2020: 91). More central to the thesis' analysis is the sheer length of time they can find their aspirations frustrated or on hold indefinitely, often spending years recovering their livelihoods and waiting to resume their aspirations.

In short, I posit that displacement disrupts the connections that individuals and families establish with the multiple places they inhabit and consequently their understanding of the past, present and future. Such disruptions influence the ways the individual exerts their agency and pursues their aspirations. Depending on where they are

living and the stage they are at in their life course, people establish a particular set of aspirations and deploy particular forms of agency to navigate the barriers encountered, so as to pursue their aspirations. Following displacement, as Myriam's narrative illustrates, they need time to decide upon a different set of aspirations and to adapt their strategies – or create new ones – to navigate the barriers to achieving them.

The analysis of the temporal forms of dispossession and how displaced individuals and families deploy different temporalities of their agency to pursue their aspirations allows us to better understand the temporal dynamics of displacement, agency and aspiration. As Tazzioli (2020: 314) points out, "Bringing in temporality in the analysis is of fundamental importance for thinking of displacement beyond forced spatial dislocation from a point A to a point B". More broadly, I argue that the analysis of the links between displacement, agency and aspiration contribute to problematising the framing of the temporality of displacement as a past disrupted by violence, a present of struggle, and an uncertain future (see Zetter, 1999, Horst and Grabska, 2015). Displacement affects the lives of individuals, families and communities in multiple ways but it does not mean that we can simply assume that all displaced people relate to their past, present and future in the same ways. A traumatic past and struggle in the present are highly significant in the experiences of people I interviewed in Colombia. In the middle of the struggle, however, they found room for agency (see Nordstrom, 1995; Brun, 2015).

To put it another way, the years of struggle displaced people often have to deal with in the process of settling in to a new place does not mean that they are unable to exert agency. Without underplaying the multiple negative impacts of displacement and the structures that can constrain or enable agency (see Bakewell, 2010), I contend that those displaced exert agency at every stage of displacement. The term 'stages of displacement' refers to what Cole (2020) denotes as pre-flight, inflight and post-flight. People may struggle to exert agency when dealing with the context of violence and human rights abuses, and during the initial process of settlement in a new place. However, as the empirical chapters discuss, they are able to understand their position and often find ways to navigate the multiple barriers they encounter to pursue their aspirations.

The argument that displaced people can exert agency at different moments of their displacement calls into question a temporal framing of displacement primarily in terms of perpetual loss, despair and crisis. As Ramsay (2020: 386-387) posits, the understanding of displacement in terms of 'crisis' creates "a distinct temporality of urgency and exceptionality" for migrants and refugees, and situates displaced people as individuals living "perpetually in crisis, indefinite indeterminacy, unable to project themselves into a certain or stable future". More broadly, as Turton (2005: 278) argues:

> [If we] treat the displaced as fundamentally flawed human beings, as lacking what it takes to be social agents and historical subjects [] as a category of 'passive victims' who exist to be assisted, managed, regimented and controlled [] it makes it more difficult for us to identify with the suffering stranger, to see him or her as an ordinary person, a person like us, and therefore as a potential neighbour in our neighbourhood.

By questioning the framing of displaced people as individuals and families perpetually living in crisis, unable to manage their lives and viewing the future without hope, this research adds to scholarship that conceptualises displacement as a transformative experience (Essed, Frerks, and Schrijvers, 2004). There is no doubt that displacement brings about a sense of loss and destitution (Chatty, 2010) and that it hurts

the body and the soul (Loizos, 2008). However, displacement can also bring about opportunities for change and emancipation (Essed, Frerks, and Schrijvers, 2004; Eastmond, 2007; Brun, 2015; Adey et al., 2020; Meier and Donà, 2021). Overall, by looking at how displaced individuals and their families experience loss and dispossession, and use their agency to rebuild their lives, this research contributes to unpacking the temporal dynamics between displacement, agency and aspiration.

Following this introduction, section 1.2 introduces the notions of displacement, agency and aspiration. Section 1.3 describes the research's aim and questions. Section 1.4 discusses the contribution the thesis makes. Section 1.5 provides a justification of the study. Section 1.6. Discusses the finding of the thesis and its contributions. The chapter concludes in section 1.7 with the thesis outline.

1.2.   Introducing the concepts of conflict-induced displacement, agency and aspiration

This research engages with three main concepts: conflict-induced displacement, agency and aspiration. This section provides an overview of how they are understood in the context of this research and integrated into the analysis.

The term 'conflict-induced displacement' (also referred to as 'displacement') here refers to "a long-term phenomenon that disrupts the lives of individuals, families and communities" (Cohen and Deng, 1998: 23) through a process of human mobility shaped primarily by violence and human rights abuses (Richmond, 1988; Van Hear, 2000). A 'displaced person' then is one who flees within (internally displaced persons, or IDPs) or across (refugees) national borders because of violence and human rights abuses. This research focuses on the experiences of those who move within national borders in Colombia. The rationale behind this decision is that much forced migration research exploring ideas of agency focuses on the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees (Bakewell, 2008; Korac, 2009; Tazzioli 2018; Bhatia and Canning, 2021; Yahya, 2021).

Drawing on Abbott's (2001) notion of a 'turning point', which requires the identification of an event that marks people's lives from one 'present' or situation to another, I argue that displacement constitutes such a turning point. As discussed above, it brings about spatial and temporal dispossession, thereby placing individuals, families, and communities in a new spatial and temporal situation. Subsequently, there is a specific place and time in their lives before displacement, namely 'there' (the place left behind) and the 'past', and a specific place and time after displacement, namely 'here' (the current settlement) and the 'present'. Although there are many events following displacement that are in the past in relation to the moment that people were interviewed for this research, the term the 'past' is used to refer to events/experiences before displacement and the 'present' to any event/experience after displacement. As discussed in the empirical chapters, life before displacement tended to be described by participants as a time when aspirations were attainable, and life afterwards as a struggle to survive and pursue one's aspirations. More broadly, the ways displaced people experience time is significantly affected by displacement. The movement from rural to urban areas, for example, alters the pace and rhythm of their everyday life (see Edensor, 2010) and the temporal horizon within which they expected to attain their aspirations.

Framing displacement as a turning point has the immediate implication that time and temporality matter for understanding experiences of displacement. 'Time' is a social construct that comes in multiple forms and manifestations (Adam, 1990). While some

people understand time as a set of routines organised according to clock and calendar time, others see it through the lens of seasons and body time, intervals and transition, or, for example, beginnings and endings (Adam, 2000). The term 'temporality' here denotes the "social and cultural conceptions and perceptions of time" which are conceived as "dynamic, multiple, and heterogenous" (Edensor, Head and Kothari, 2020: 255).

In the specific context of my research in Colombia, time and temporality are vital for understanding how protracted displacement shapes individual, family and community's agency and aspirations. As the empirical chapters discuss, those interviewed have lived in conditions of displacement for ten, twenty or even more years, and the number of years of displacement has significantly affected their opportunities to exert agency and achieve their aspirations. Although research exploring refugees' agency to pursue aspirations has received more attention in recent years, the literature tends to focus on those who have recently fled their communities of origin and their immediate aspirations while waiting for asylum (Van Heelsum, 2017) or during their initial process of settlement (Müller, 2021). In contrast, the focus in this research on situations of protracted displacement and the analysis of aspirations before and after displacement allow us to better capture how time shapes agency and opportunities to attain aspirations, and the extent to which those aspirations are transformed over time. 'Protracted displacement' here denotes an ongoing sense of being displaced for years (and even decades) without properly settling in a new place or being able to return or move somewhere else. The term protracted displacement, therefore "carries an important qualitative connotation: it is about the duration of life in exile but also, and more significantly, about the quality of such life, which is seen to deteriorate over time as solutions remain elusive" (Durieux, 2009: 60).

Despite the struggle to meet their needs and the years *waiting* to pursue their aspirations, displaced people can be conceptualised as purposive social actors (Turton, 2005; Eastmond, 2007; Korac, 2009) who, despite overarching constraints and little room to manoeuvre (Richmond, 1998; Van Hear, 2000; Bakewell 2010 and 2011), reflect on their position, make decisions and take purposive action to overcome the barriers encountered in the pursuit of their aspirations and those of their families and communities.

The conceptualisation of displaced people as social agents connects with the notion of agency. Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 970) conceptualise agency as "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations". Drawing on this definition, this research uses the term 'agency' to refer to individuals' capacity to make decisions, to take action to pursue their own interests and aspirations, and to transform the social relations in which they are immersed (see Sewell; 1992; Mainwaring, 2016).

Temporality is also a key feature of the notion of agency. Drawing on Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) three interrelated temporal dimensions of agency, which are iteration, projectivity and practical-evaluative, I introduce the notion of transformative agency to explore how displacement shapes people's agency and opportunities to achieve their aspirations. The 'iterational' dimension refers to actors' past habits and the customary behaviours that displaced people can bring from the places left behind to provide continuity to their lives in the new place (see Korac, 2009). More broadly, the iterational aspect of agency entails the actions displaced individuals and families deploy in their attempt to reproduce the social and cultural practices they bring with them from their

communities of origin. The 'projective' dimension denotes how human beings envisage themselves in the future. This dimension helps us to understand how, given a set of social constraints, displaced people can find ways in the new place to refashion their social and cultural practices, and even their labour skills, in the attempt to overcome the multiple forms of dispossession brought about by displacement and achieve their aspirations. Instead of attempting to reproduce in the present their past habits and ways of living, the projective dimension focuses on how displaced people deploy agency to envision a different future and reconfigure existing social structures according to their fears, hopes and aspirations. The 'practical–evaluative' dimension refers to how people make decisions and judgements which inform their actions regarding the 'new circumstances' of time and place in which they are immersed. This dimension of agency connects past experiences, present opportunities and constraints, and future aspirations. In other words, as Bakewell, de Haas, and Kubal (2012) argue, it reconciles agency's iterational and projective dimensions. Displacement forces people to live in unfamiliar environments and struggle for place (Adey et al., 2020). However, they can rely on their experience, practices and habits to engage with the new location, acquire new habits and skills, and utilise all of these to reinterpret their decisions and actions to pursue their aspirations.

The term 'aspiration' is used in this research to denote people's ambition within their life trajectory. Aspiration is social construction whereby someone, acting individually or as a part of a family or a community envisions themselves being or achieving something in the future. A critical aspect of aspirations, therefore, is that they are future-oriented (Appadurai, 2004), and relate to how people, based on their past and present experiences, project their future according to a particular trajectory (Hart, 2016). Drawing on Appadurai's (2004) claim that aspirations emerge from the social and cultural contexts in which individuals and communities are immersed, and Conradie and Robeyns' (2013: 562) argument that they are formed "through interactions with others", I argue that aspirations are relational and dynamic. In the specific context of this research, the idea of relational means that displaced people's aspirations are related to both the social relationships they and their families established in the communities in which they were socially and culturally embedded before displacement, and the social relationships they establish in the communities in which they live after displacement. This is a critical reason that aspirations are disrupted by displacement. The movement from one place to another not only alters the social and cultural context from which aspirations initially emerge, but also the personal, family and communal relationships that support them.

The notion of dynamic aspirations suggests that aspirations can vary over time, and be re-arranged according to the priorities that displaced people set for themselves in the specific place and time in which they are living, and the specific barriers they encounter while striving to attain these aspirations. Acknowledging that aspirations can be reconfigured in a new context (Müller, 2021) does not mean we can assume that this occurs. As the empirical chapters discuss, rather than changing their aspirations, many displaced research participants kept them on hold for years, experiencing frustration for failing to attain them.

1.3.   Aim and research questions

The overarching aim of this research is to broaden understanding of the temporal dynamics between conflict-induced displacement, agency and aspiration. Its main focus

draws on three main ideas: firstly, that displacement entails not only material but also spatial and temporal dispossession (Tazzioli, 2020; Ramsay, 2020), and the call of recent scholarship to give attention to both the spatial and temporal dynamics of displacement (Kothari, 2020; Tyner, 2020). Secondly, even when constraints prevail, displaced people can exert agency (Richmond, 1993; Van Hear, 2010; Bakewell, 2011) not only to reconstruct their lives and those of their families (Loizos, 2008; Korac, 2009; Chatty, 2010) but also to turn displacement into a positive transformative experience (Essed, Frerks, and Schrijvers, 2004; Eastmond, 2007; Brun, 2015; Meier and Donà, 2021). And thirdly, the notion of aspiration allows us to understand how people plan, hope for and imagine the future (Bryant and Knight, 2019). Displacement disrupts not only one's individual, family and community aspirations, but can also open up opportunities for new plans, hopes and visions of the future.

The thesis is framed by the question of how conflict-induced displaced people exert agency to navigate the multiple barriers they encounter in their place of settlement in order to pursue their aspirations. To address this question, it investigates three related sub-questions:

1. What do people aspire to and how do they exert agency to pursue their aspirations while living in their place of origin?
2. How do conflict-induced displacement and the living conditions of Bogotá shape the aspirations of those displaced?
3. How do displaced people deploy the multiple temporalities of agency to navigate the multiple barriers they encounter in Bogotá to pursue their aspirations?

1.4. Research Methods

The thesis' main argument is that conflict-induced displacement disrupts people's agency and aspirations but that over time, and depending on how they exert agency to navigate the multiple barriers encountered in their place of settlement, some of the displaced are able to reconstruct their lives and pursue their aspirations. I develop this twofold argument drawing on the experiences of people who have fled their place of origin and settled in Bogotá, Colombia. A qualitative approach was adopted in this study to explore the links between conflict-induced displacement, agency and aspiration. This primarily involved carrying out semi-structured interviews, and participant observation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 47 people who in the middle of conflict fled within Colombia's national borders. They did so after they and/or their family's personal integrity was threatened by illegal armed groups and, in some few cases, by regular armed forces. Most of those interviewed only fled after they became victims of human rights violations, including kidnapping, torture, and rape or after the murder or forced disappearance of relatives. Semi-structured aimed to gain a better understanding of the process of displacement and the barriers displaced people deal with to exert their agency. Furthermore, four interviews were conducted with scholars and policy makers aiming to understand the role of agency and aspiration in academia and policy agendas.

Participant observation was conducted with ten internally displaced persons who were willing to share their experiences and showed a willingness to be observed during their day-to-day routines. Based on the consideration that participant observation allows researchers to be present "in the social world of those being studied" (Boccagni and

Schrooten, 2018: 212), participants were observed in the place where they spend part of each day and interacted with others. Being able to observe the interaction of research participants helped understand how the displaced in their everyday life deploy agency to pursue their aspirations. It was useful for understanding how they negotiate their own interests, and the role of such interactions in the process of overcoming shared barriers to achieve their aspirations.

1.5. Justification

The analysis of how displaced people deploy agency to pursue their aspirations provides new insights to further advance academic debate, explicitly linking displacement, agency and aspiration, which is an area that, with some exceptions, has received less academic attention (Van Heelsum, 2017; Borselli and Van Meijl, 2021). More specifically, the analysis of how those displaced through conflict deploy agency in the attempt to achieve their aspirations has several implications for conceptualising displacement, agency, aspiration and their multiple links. Firstly, it broadens our understanding of displacement and its impacts. By looking at the material, along with the spatial and temporal aspects of displacement, we can better understand how displacement deprives individuals, families and communities of the opportunities to live one's life in the ways envisioned before displacement. Loizos (2008) suggests that those who are displaced tend to idealise the past and blame displacement for everything negative that happens subsequently; however, I argue that an analysis of how displacement disrupts aspirations is important for understanding how it affects how displaced people plan, hope and imagine the future. I also argue that focusing on agency helps to understand how, following displacement, people can rebuild their lives and achieve earlier or new aspirations. Even when their achievements fall short of their expectations, an analysis of agency allows us to better capture how displaced people navigate the multiple barriers they encounter in their new setting. As Bakewell (2008: 441) stresses, such an analysis broadens our understanding of the "many of the messy informal interactions of different communities as they move, settle and establish new places and make their way in the world (or fail to make their way)". Thirdly, analysing the aspirations of displaced people broadens our understanding of the past, the histories of those affected by displacement, and how the past influences not only their present living conditions but also their vision of the future. Aspiration in this sense provides meaning to human life, which can be conceptualised as one in which individuals deploy action to pursue their desires, involves the interaction of memory (the past), perceptions of the present, and the ability to plan, hope and shape the future (see Adam, 1990; Bryant and Knight, 2019). More broadly, how aspirations and ideas of what constitutes a meaningful life are connected make aspiration a critical concept when seeking to understand what displaced individuals, families and communities look for and how they exert agency in the process of doing so. Lastly, the analysis of the intersection between displacement, agency and aspiration helps broaden the understanding of the temporal dynamics of displacement. In other words, by exploring how displaced people exert agency to pursue their aspirations, we can better understand the moments of struggle they face rebuilding their lives, the time they spend contesting government institutions for the restoration (or compensation) of their abandoned livelihoods and land, and the time spent with their aspirations on hold. Furthermore, it

allows us to grasp how displacement alters the rhythm and pace of life and the horizon within which the achievement of aspirations is possible.

Overall, the focus on the ways displacement, agency and aspiration intersect broadens our understanding of how displacement can be experienced as a moment of terminal loss but also as an opportunity for positive change (see Essed, Frerks, and Schrijvers, 2004; Brun 2015 and 2016). As explained in the empirical chapters of this thesis, the transition from loss to opportunity is not time-sequential or one which all displaced people experience. While some spend years trying to find ways to reconstruct their lives, with their aspirations shattered or indefinitely on hold, others rebuild their lives in a relatively short time and achieve earlier or new aspirations. In short, this analysis broadens our understanding of displacement as a social process which brings about "changes in people's physical locations and as a result transform[s] economic, social, and political relationships" (Bakewell, 2011: 19). The outcome largely depends on how individuals, families and communities manage to exert agency to navigate the structures and constraints faced in the new place (see Morawska, 2009).

1.6.   Findings, contributions and conclusion

This research contributes to contemporary debate on displacement, agency and aspiration, and the analysis of the spatial and temporal connections between these concepts. Firstly, it brings the notion of aspiration into the discussion of the impacts of displacement. By showing that displacement consistently disrupts aspirations, the findings complement analytical frameworks looking at the material, spatial and temporal forms of dispossession that displacement brings about (Tazzioli, 2020; Ramsay, 2020). More specifically, the analysis shows how displacement is often experienced as a dispossession of opportunities to plan and imagine the future with a sense of hope and in a place where the individual feels socially and culturally immersed. More broadly, the discussion shows that disruption of aspiration is a critical aspect of theorising displacement and its impacts.

Moreover, this research shows that the connections between displacement, agency and aspiration are far from unidirectional. Displacement entails the loss of the livelihood needed to pursue aspirations, compels people to abandon the place where these were expected to be achieved, and disrupts the horizon of time within which they expected this to happen. Nevertheless, the research shows that displaced people deploy agency at different points of their displacement and find ways to navigate the multiple barriers they encounter to rebuild their lives and pursue their aspirations. Without underestimating the social constraints that can hinder the achievement of aspirations, this special attention to agency brings to the fore the debate on how displaced people can find room to manoeuvre even when they experience poverty, feel out of place, and see their aspirations shattered or placed on hold. More generally, by looking at how individuals and their families and communities exert agency in the pursuit of aspiration, this research contributes to debates that challenge the conceptualisation of displacement as one which can be presented only in terms of loss and dispossession, and which instead invite us to unfold its potential for positive transformation (see Eastmond, 2007; Brun 2015 and 2016; Adey et al 2020).

Furthermore, by examining aspirations in contexts of protracted displacement, the thesis also pushes the boundaries within which the concept of aspiration has been explored in forced migration research. More specifically, rather than looking at the short-

term aspirations of those waiting for asylum (Van Heelsum, 2017), this research engages with people's aspirations before and after displacement (see Borselli and Van Meijl, 2021) and analyses how they are transformed over time. In so doing, it shows that aspirations are largely relational and dynamic. Aspirations before displacement inform us about an individual's history and identity, and more generally of how they connect their past experiences with their present living conditions and aspirations for the future. More broadly, analysing the aspirations of those displaced, which by definition are future-oriented actions (Appadurai, 2004; Bryant and Knight, 2019) broadens understanding of the experience of waiting to achieve their aspirations (Bhatia and Canning, 2021; Yahya, 2021), how frustration is managed when aspirations are no longer viable, how available resources can be used to create a new set of aspirations, and how displaced people exert agency to make the achievement of aspirations possible.

Finally, the analysis of how displaced people use their agency to pursue earlier or new aspirations, how they navigate the impacts of displacement on the pace and rhythm of their live, and the time horizon within which they had planned to achieve their aspirations, contributes to further elaborate the notion of temporal dispossession (Tazzioli, 2020; Ramsay, 2020). More broadly, analysis of the temporal dynamics between displacement, agency and aspiration contributes to advancing the knowledge of the temporal dimensions of displacement (Kothari, 2020; Tyner, 2020) and provides new ideas for the design of social policies aiming to address its impacts.

1.7. Thesis outline

The research includes eight chapters. Chapter one presents the aim of the research and the interrelated research questions. It also provides a theoretical justification and contributions of the research. Chapter two provides the theoretical background to establish the discussion of how conflict-induced displaced people deploy agency to pursue their aspirations. It engages with contemporary debates on displacement, agency and aspiration, and provides a detailed analysis of how time and temporality have been conceptualised in forced migration research. Chapter three describes and justifies the research methods selected to address the research questions. Chapter four provides an overview of the contemporary conflict and displacement in Colombia and discusses the social policies implemented by the Colombian government to address its causes and consequences. Chapters five, sixth and seven discuss the empirical findings of the thesis and address its three research questions, as follows: chapter five addresses the question of what people aspired to and how they exerted agency in the attempt to achieve their aspirations when they were living in their place of origin. Chapter six addresses the question of how conflict-induced displacement and the living conditions that participants experienced after coming to Bogotá have shaped their aspirations. Chapter seven addresses the question of how the research participants deployed the multiple temporalities of agency to navigate the barriers to achieving their aspirations they encountered in Bogotá. Chapter eight discusses the conceptual implications of the findings presented in the three empirical chapters and concludes the thesis by explaining how the research questions have been addressed. It presents the study's main conclusions and contributions to theorising the spatial and temporal dynamics of displacement, agency and aspiration.

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