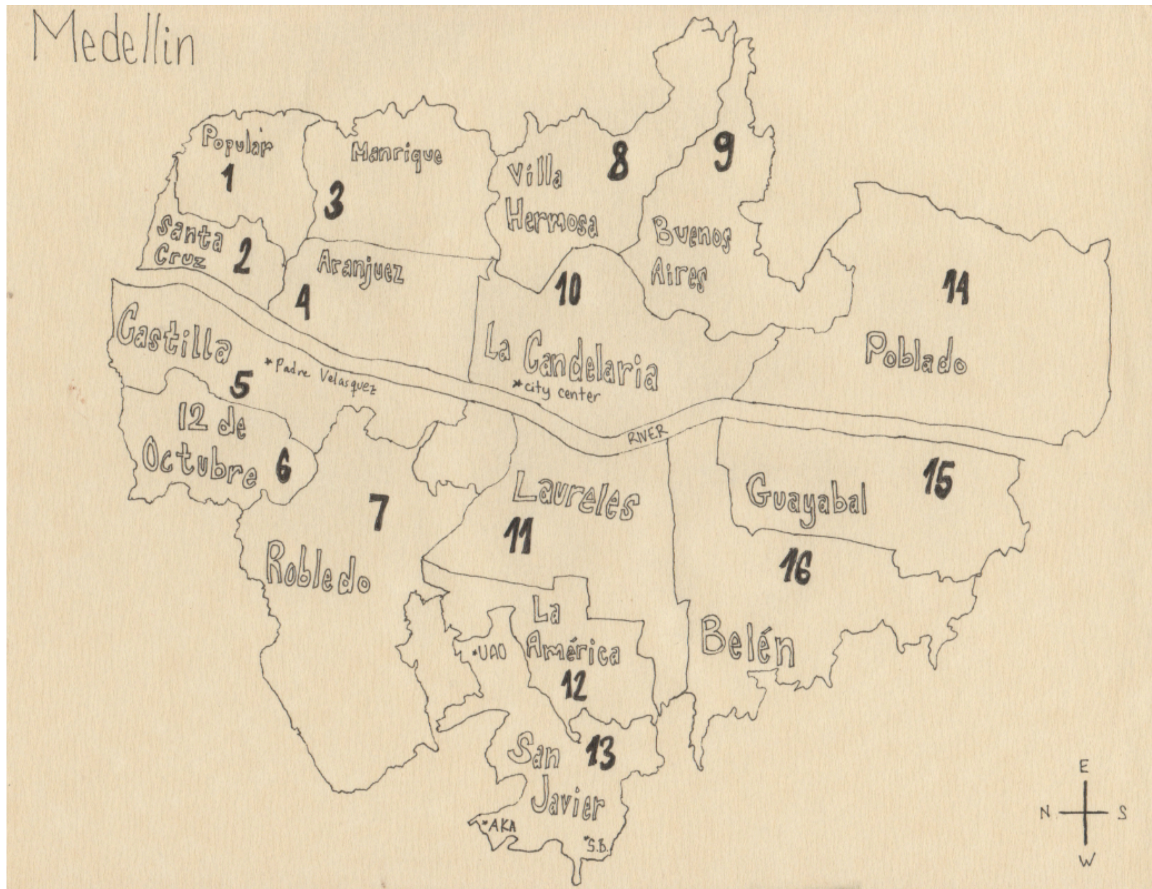
A DYSTOPIC CLIMATE FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE

PARTICIPATION & EXCLUSION IN MEDELLIN



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Introduction

Sitting on a terrace, drinking a cappuccino in a Parisian style cafe, on a winding tree lined road that opens onto a quaint park, where the drivers at the taxi stand are harmless old men, playing chess while they wait for their number to be called, it was often hard to remember that I was only a 15 minute bus ride away from Comuna 13. All it takes is to climb the hills that cradle Medellín, and the scene changes radically. Within the distance of a neighborhood I would find myself submerged in a reality where houses are built by the hands that live in them and mothers who let their children play outside risk losing them to stray bullets.

Colombian cities are fragmented. Like all cities, they are comprised of many individuals with diverging ideals, lifestyles, motives, imaginings and incomes. Medellín, Colombia's second city is comprised of individuals whose lives are shaped by violence. Structural and physical violence coupled with social exclusion serve as the building blocks to an urban environment that is irreconcilably divided. Here, each neighborhood is differentiated from the next in its *cultural stuff,* its laws and the systems for enforcing them. Though the borders between these are *invisible,* for many, surviving this city requires an in-depth understanding of them. In Medellín, as in many cities in the global South, there is a formal and an informal city, with a clear, divisive line between them. This distinction is made most visible not by the fact that houses in some sectors are made from found materials while others could blend into any modern European city, but rather by the distinct logic systems which govern each one (Van Gelder, 2010, p. 242).

The evolution of a socio-economically divisive society in Colombia, in collusion with more than half a century of internal conflict makes seeing the rippling implications of the action in the present a challenge. The complexities of the situation make us vulnerable to manipulation by a formal discourse which claims to be fostering peace. Kimberly Theidon (2009) labels Colombia a *pre-post-conflict* zone (p. 6). This is a jumbled, ambiguous term yet what to do in the space between conflict and post conflict has increasingly been on the agenda for academics and peace-building institutions in Colombia and elsewhere (Muggah & Krause, 2009; Spear, 2010). How can we refer to a country in the midst of a Transitional Justice project that paradoxically shows minimal signs of tangible transition?

Peace is not built with a declaration of 'Post-Conflict'. Further, while laws and policies for Transitional Justice may be ineffective, they are not benign. As assessed by Robert Muggah, the unintended consequences of interventions to mitigate situations of violence are seldom interrogated (2012, p. ix). With this research I argue that the present framework of Transitional Justice in Colombia creates new difficulties for responding to persistent urban violence in Medellin. As argued by Muggah (2012), Spear (2008), and Duffield (2007), among others, the impacts of systems intended to cushion a society's transition from violence to peace are manifold. Richard Wilson (2008) speaks of peace-building in terms of recovering the everyday and resuming the task of living (p. 378). I want to draw attention to the obvious fact that the *every day* is not actually paused during transitions from conflict to peace. Society, in all its varied, contradictory parts, continues grappling with *the task of living* throughout its different stages of conflict resolution. Refusing to recognize continuous violence and victimization during the imposition of transitional systems, serves to exacerbate the vulnerability of already vulnerable citizens. Conflicts in societies with fragile states frequently involve a mosaic of violent actors that defy categorization. Layers of violence take place at once as insurgents, terrorists and organized crime elements thrive through exploiting institutional weaknesses (Looney, 2006, p.15), thereby adding to chaotic insecurity.

From the literature I attempted to create a map of what a city in "pre-post conflict" would look like and so this was the starting point for my research once I arrived; What challenges are faced in this kind of environment? Who is implicated in this process, and how do they encounter one another? What violence persists despite the "transition to peace"? Soon after my arrival in Medellín, I was confronted with the fact that large groups of people in the city were victims of a crime that wasn't being addressed legally or socially. Victims of *desplazamiento forzado intra-urbano* (forced urban displacement) have been systematically excluded from the contemporary reparation process. Yet while this violence and its victims are being erased from the formal dialogue it is the fastest growing form of victimization in Medellin.

I began by creating a definition of the crime, and its social implications, and asking, why is it that the legal definition excludes its victims from participation in the legal infrastructure for reparations? I propose an elaboration on previous research on the dynamics on urban displacement in Medellín (Atehortua, 2007; Grupo de Memoria Historica, 2011), due to the fact that these investigations were carried out prior to the latest advancements in Transitional Justice, and hence do not take into account its ramifications. My research shows that the most recent changes in policy serve to further silence victims of this amplifying violence.

However, it is simultaneously my intention to draw attention to the *resilience* and capacity for *coping* and innovating that persists within vulnerable populations in conflicted societies. My research demonstrates the value and necessity of grassroots initiatives that blossom among marginalized groups. Spear (2010), justly criticizes perspectives on conflict resolution which define local, *unorthodox* efforts at peace-building and non-violence as incidental to the grander strategies executed by governments and international actors, highlighting the proven

reality that these *soft* instruments frequently serve to produce *hard* security outcomes (Spear 2010, p. 17). While the formal city remains incapable of facing or quelling ongoing urban violence, responses from elsewhere are arising. Despite the profound failings of the country's formal systems for Transitional Justice there is room for hope from outside the institutions, where initiatives and projects are being continuously born from necessity. Merely criticizing the failures of the formal system for justice in a city whose fastest growing piece is its informal settlements, would be a waste of ink in that it would erase from view huge portions of the city's participants. In his analysis of the Urban Dilemma, Robert Muggah (2012) articulates the need for further research into the role of local organizations and grassroots actors in addressing urban violence (p. viii). My research affirms the place for these external initiatives within our understanding of *pre-post-conflict* Medellín, taking into account that throughout South America, the support for *unorthodox* constructive, creative, answers to situations of conflict from the margins has grown (Bobea 2011, p. 464).

Methodology

In analyzing South Africa under Apartheid, Richard Turner urged, "I know it is difficult in this country, but we have to think more clearly than the state allows..."(Turner in Sacks 1983, p. 451). In order to see the full implications of the Colombian conflict, which, like Apartheid, began in 1948, it is necessary broaden our analysis beyond the standard discourse offered by the state which refuses to see the failings of Transitional Justice in Colombia. My methodology arose from a conviction that to see with any clarity, my research had to reflect the multi-faceted nature of Medellín, through an examination of the disparate stories that make up a city in *transition*.

As supported by recent 'action-research' in Colombia I took on a methodology that would allow me to "bring the state into the analysis" and to "leave the 'ivory tower' to acquire knowledge" (Higginbottom 2008, p. 168). My fieldwork evolved into a schizophrenic dance between the formal city and its outsider spaces. For five months I functioned between the logic of peace monitor for an international organization, and young activist operating from the margins of a divided city. In order to come to grips with the taxonomy of violence in Medellín, this research entailed a circumnavigation of the city's vastly different layers of formal and informal infrastructure.

With the affirmation of projects like Ashwin Desai's (2002) *outsider-perspective* based research into social movements in South African townships, I have built this thesis upon every-day stories. In analyzing how these *others* encounter the formal systems for peace-building, I have grappled with each system and the potentials that lie in the spaces between them. Though my research was bound to the confines of a single city, my fieldwork was mobile, moving between vastly different communities all being impacted by and responding to the *fluid* nature of ongoing violence (Nordstrom 1998, p.106).

My informants can be divided into four different categories; women displaced from Comuna 13 since 2004, grassroots and religious organizers working in the periphery, officials from within NGO and governmental institutions, and leaders from the victim community in the region[1]. Due to the variety of people and groups that I worked with, I followed in the trajectory of similar research on urban violence by incorporating a mixed methods approach (Boscher, 2008; Muggah, 2012; Riaño Alcala, 2008, among others).

Action Research & Institutional Ethnography

During my first months in Medellín, I chose to work for the MAPP/OAS whilst conducting academic fieldwork. This position served to increase my mobility between institutions from the start of my research. Being able to put on a MAPP/OAS jacket and suddenly assimilate into diverse settings gave me access to people and environments that would otherwise have been practically impossible for me to penetrate as an individual academic. One of my principal roles within the organization was as a monitor of the Justice and Peace process, forcing me to come into direct contact with individuals confessing to commanding mass paramilitary violence against civilians and the armed left. Through these hearings (*Versiones Libres*) I came to grapple with the contemporary realities of a flawed justice system in a yet to be reconciled society.

Among other inter-institutional gatherings, my work with MAPP/OAS exposed me to the monthly meetings of the non-institutional Regional Victim's Forum, which granted me immediate and direct contact with leaders of grassroots victim organizations throughout the region of Antioquia. Additionally the organization placed me in charge of assisting *Son Bata* a grassroots youth initiative from within Comuna 13. It was through participation in these different forums that I was introduced to the peace-building projects being carried out outside the bounds of the legally prescribed. Furthermore, it was through MAPP/OAS that I was introduced to the community work of a local priest, Padre Velasquez, who has spent over a decade working on demobilization efforts with young men in the city's periphery.

Once I became able to navigate the comuna independently of MAPP/OAS I came in contact with other organizers, which served to expand my research population. I became increasingly involved in the work of a grassroots activist, El AKA, and his project *Revolucion sin muertos* (Revolution Without Death). By participating in the community events he organized for local youth I gained new avenues for conducting research within the comuna. It is important to note that without the initial protection provided to me by my engagement with MAPP/OAS and my later connections to *Son Bata*, El AKA, and Padre Velasquez it would have been impossible for me to spend the amount of time in the city's slums that was necessary to conduct this research.

[1] For a preliminary list of informants please see Annex I, though it should be noted that a wider range of professionals, activists and victims were consulted and taken into account over the development of this thesis.

Interviews & Walkabouts

In addition to my work as an observer I conducted private interviews with state functionaries, NGO workers, victims of urban displacement and local community organizers and activists.

With professionals from within the state machinery or NGOs my interviews were generally based on questions prepared in advance, as these were frequently limited by time constraints. However, with the other informants my interviews took the form of conversations, built up over repeated encounters throughout my time in Medellin.

I was put in contact with women who had been displaced within the city through the *Convent of the Lauritas* in Belencito, which is located at the southernmost edge of *Comuna 13* and has hence acted as the reception center for many of the city's displaced[2]. In the case of interviewing these victims of urban displacement the process of working out where to meet was in itself a lesson in the practicalities of the fears, which frame their daily lives. My focus on gathering their Oral Histories meant that our meetings were frequently long, and that we spent a lot of time deciding together where they felt would be appropriate settings to speak intimately without interruption or concern about being overheard.

In contrast, my interviews with activists and organizers were frequently unplanned visits to their spaces, where I might spend several hours recording conversation with one particular person at a time. Following in the example of Pilar Riaño Alcala's research in Medellín, I hoped to examine the capacity of places like the streets and avenues of the city to trigger memory and imagination, to connect people to a sense of history and to reveal some of the ways by which we come to define who we are and where our sense of rootedness and belonging come from (*Riaño* Alcala 2006: 67). It was gratifying to use this approach with this last group of informants as it allowed me to grasp the positions they hold within their communities, and gave me the ability to walk throughout the slums with a sense of security that would be unachievable if I were alone.

Displaced People, Disposable Cameras

In questioning my privileged role as translator of the stories of often illiterate and marginalized Colombians into academic English, I began looking for more collaborative methods of working with my informants. This initiated the visual side of my thesis. In an attempt to grant the victims of urban displacement and the grassroots activists

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The convent welcomes victims of crimes against humanity, which displacement is considered. However, assisting victims in their integration into the formalized structures for aid is utterly uninteresting to the convent itself, which provides victims no guidelines for weaving through the city's bureaucracy but rather focuses on providing a space of spiritual and social refuge. It was interesting to note the extent of her disinterest as I realized that though these women had been attending educational and psychological workshops at the convent for years, some of them were entirely unaware of the intended function of the UAO (located literally next door) as a reception center for victims of violence.

that I worked with a greater level of control in the structuring their stories, I incorporated photographs that they took into our interviews as well as the final product of my research.

I was able to do this by giving out disposable cameras. This project was particularly confronting with the victims of urban displacement as a) many of them had never used a camera before and b) no one had ever placed such value on *their* stories and many of them found it intimidating.

For the victims of urban displacement I utilized four concrete prompts to initiate the activity. These were:

> "Home": What constitutes home for you?
>
> "Security": The things, people and places that make you feel secure.
>
> "Neighborhood": Take photos of a walk you routinely take, ie. from the metro or bus stop to your home.
>
> "Self": Enlist a family member or friend to take your portrait, wherever and however you would like.

With the organizers and activists I used a more open ended approach, encouraging them to think about home, security and their own role in their environments, as well as suggesting that they incorporate the cameras into their own projects. The photographer from *Son Bata* was one single person, while those photographs taken via *Revolucion sin muertos* were taken by several of the young boys who are regularly involved in the project.

These photographs are revealing as they create a pathway to the logic systems of my research population, and a more intimate window into their lives. In designing this side to my research I was influenced by earlier projects that explored intimate spaces in this fragmented city. For example, Duke University's (2010) project, *Medellín Mi Hogar (Medellín My Home)* which claims to be "an alternative narrating force which complicates the archival landscape of the City of Medellín ", providing audio-visual vignettes of homes in Medellin's different *barrios*. Or, Alejandra Higuita's (2010), *La casa de los otros (The Home of the Others),* a small black and white book containing illustrations of the radically different insides of different homes throughout the city. In addition to being a key into private space, the project became a way of *s*eeing what *they want me to see* rather than what *I want them to show me*. I grappled quite a bit as to how to manage these precious, and sometimes indecipherable, insights into the private lives of my informants. After the photographs were developed they served to inform later interviews with my informants and in this thesis they serve to provide an additional dimension in portraying daily life at the margins in Medellin.

Chapter Outline

I have chosen to divide my thesis in two halves or parts, each containing two chapters. A commitment to taking apart the points of encounter between the city's different fragments allowed me to see the ongoing violence in Medellín in two layers, and so I shall present the theoretical notions and my own empirical research in this

format. Part I, entitled *The Paradox of Transitional Justice Without Peace*, focuses on forced urban displacement in Medellín, utilizing individual case studies to bring to attention the erasure of this violence within formal discourse. Part II, *Responses from the Informal City* details through case studies, stories of peace-building from outside of the state and international institutions, building on theory to provide a foundation for the place for autonomous voices within Medellin.

Chapter One is divided in four sections. I start by tracing the development of civil war in Colombia through the second half of the twentieth century. In the second section I describe the processes of transitional justice that have been employed as a consequence of a formal end to the conflict and provide an assessment of these. This is intended to be a glimpse into the intentions and outcomes of a national peace-building initiative. Then I introduce Medellín, and the form of violence that is at present generating the largest number of victims within the city: forced urban displacement. Finally I position victims of contemporary violence within the formal structures for response to this violence.

Chapter Two comprises three case studies. Here I tell the stories of three women who have been displaced within Medellín since the declared disarmament of *political violence* in the city. Each woman's voice weaves into the dialogue surrounding forced urban displacement in Medellín at a different angle. These stories illustrate the continuous threads of violence in the city, the marginalized position of the underclass, social implications of repeated victimization, as well as highlighting the invisibility of victims of urban displacement in Medellin. Interwoven in the text are photographs taken by each of the women, which serve to provide body to their stories.

Chapter Three is a theoretical introduction to the second part of the thesis. Here I discuss the marginality of Comuna 13 within a broader discourse surrounding informal urban settlements, explicating theory of the 'Right to the City' (Lefebvre, 1968) and the implications of this right for the physically and socially marginalized members (Simone, 2010; Fernandes, 2007; Earle, 2011). Lastly I will directly address the potential contribution of autonomous initiatives in the dialogue surrounding peace-building in Medellin.

In Chapter Four I provide four case studies of autonomous peace-projects in the city. Section one discusses the *Regional Victim's Forum of Antioquia*; wherein mostly uneducated victims of violence and displacement have been training themselves politically, and experimenting with systems of participatory democracy to structure their meetings and develop a network of grassroots groups throughout the region. In section two I analyze the work of a Priest who is among the few people in the city who have been able to intimately penetrate the BACRIM infrastructure in Medellin. In the final section I analyze two grassroots youth movements from within Comuna 13. Each of these is comprised of activists from the comuna who are using gardening, the arts, alternative models of education and hip-hop to give young people the tools to establish "life projects" for themselves.

Part I: Violence and the Formal City

The Paradox of Transitional Justice Without Peace

Chapter 1: Visualizing A Pre-Post-Conflict City

In this chapter I will provide a historical outline of the relevant components that have led to the current impasse in Colombia's peace process. This provides the base for my argument that violence in Medellín is not only ongoing but being systematically ignored by the state. In the first section *Roots of Political Violence*, I will dismantle the political roots of the conflict, tracing the development of civil war in Colombia through the second half of the twentieth century. Here I provide an understanding of the history of violence in the country, and place this internal violence within the theoretical context used to analyze internal warfare. In the second section *The City as Battle Space* I outline the urbanization of warfare, and the infiltration of large scale violence into Colombia's second largest city, Medellin. In section three *The Historical Tone for Peace-building* I interrogate the processes of transitional justice that have been employed since 2004, with the intention of providing a glimpse into the intentions and outcomes of a national peace-building initiative. In section four, *Displacement as a Weapon of War* I will focus on the form of violence that is at present generating the largest number of victims within the city. In this section, I provide an introduction to urban displacement, and identify its specific characteristics within Medellin. Finally in the fifth section, *Encountering Ongoing Victimhood in Medellín* I position victims of contemporary violence within the formal structures for reparations.

1.1 Roots of Political Violence

Colombia has been living in a state of classifiable internal armed conflict since 1948 when the liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan was assassinated on the streets of downtown Bogota. This assassination of the charismatic left wing leader led to what is now referred to as the *Bogotazo,* an unleashing of a series of riots spanning three days and a tremendous outpouring of violence throughout the city. Beyond the small-scale implications of the assassination, national politics throughout the decades that have followed have been irrevocably shaped by the distinct precedent of annihilating any flicker of attempt to form a legitimate left wing or construct a socialist redistribution of national resources. From the initial explosion of violence in 1948, between supporters of the liberal and conservative political parties, the country has experienced only a brief moment of intermission from violence between 1958 and the proliferation of guerrilla groups throughout the 1960s. A short lived sigh of tranquility came as *La Violencia* "ended" with the two political parties agreeing to alternate in governing the country for 16 years (Marteens & Zambrano 2010, p. 192). However, this pact served to create a further radicalized left, distraught by the inefficiency and compliance of their representatives. Of the initial blossoming of the armed left, the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), the *Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional* (ELN), the *Movimiento 19 de Abril (M-19)*, and the *Ejercito Popular de Liberacion* (EPL) have most visibly survived, though the latter has since transformed itself into a political party (re-titling themselves, *Esperanza, Paz y Libertad*).

As a consequence of the proliferation of these guerrilla groups, in 1968 the congress passed legislation conferring on civil patrols the rights to weaponry which had previously been exclusive to the national armed forces (OAS 1999). Thereby the state apparatus supported the maintenance of a paramilitary structure and designated them with a powerful symbolic status within the scheme of the conflict. Most necessary for any understanding of the perpetual state of insecurity in the country is the historically reckless attitude the nation has had with regards to outsourcing the fight against the guerrilla onto the civilian population.

The bulk of this civil war has taken place in the vast country side, pushing civilians into the cities in order to escape being manipulated, abused or killed by one of the armed groups. Being the byproduct of more than half a century of violence, taxonomies of the armed groups are frequently fluid. The process of negotiating for peace in the context of Colombia has been inclusive, allowing for and nourishing many *parasitic* and *mutualistic* relationships between established governing bodies and violent organizations. In doing so, these actors have created "a dense web of interactions and tacit or explicit coalitions" (Gutierrez & Jaramillo 2004, p.18). It may seem that non-state violent actors are binary to state power, in that they "inadvertently serve to destabilize the state monopoly on violence" (Beck 2003, p. 29). However, the historical connection between the state and the paramilitary serves to blur that line.

Though attempts at disassembling and outlawing paramilitary forces were already set in place by president Virigilio Barco by the late 1980s, these initiatives have never been effectively enforced. In 1995 paramilitary leader Diego Murillo Bejaran (a.k.a. Don Berna, a.k.a Adolfo Paz) created the largest paramilitary organization Bloque Cacique Nutibara. In 1997, 18 paramilitary blocks were brought together by the extremely conservative leader, Carlos Castaño in order to form the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia, AUC) —a national umbrella network of armed civilians trained to annihilate any support for the armed left. Given support and training from the national government to fight the guerrilla in areas that might have been difficult for the military to enter otherwise, *paramilitarismo* has continued. Human rights organizations have routinely attributed seventy to eighty percent of the casualties within the Colombian civil war to the paramilitary forces (Laplante & Theidon 2007, p. 56).

The literature frequently refers to the *endemic* nature of civil war in the Colombian context—this is a violence entwined and embedded in the national imagination, a looming force governing structures for public policy, development and transitional justice. In the aptly named *Guerra Contra la Sociedad* Daniel Pecaut (1999) conceptualizes Colombian internal violence as itself *banal*, and authors such as Christopher Cramer (2006) refer to the Colombian civil war as *festering*. Maria Victoria Uribe (2004) describes terror in Colombia as a *contagious physical reality* (p. 80), a germ which spreads throughout the citizen body, causing ripples of infected consequence throughout society. In this environment, the bounds of what may be considered formally *civil war* are blurred. Cramer (2006) contends that in Colombia more people are killed in non-war violence than in the acknowledged civil war, quoting the UN Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (p. 73). This supports Pecaut's (1999) claim that violence in this way is not perceived as war and that in its banal ordinariness passes for "un-catastrophic" (p. 153). The state of "permanent emergency" (Duffield, 2007) makes for a permanently insecure environment leaving citizens vulnerable and seeking protection either from guerillas, paramilitaries, or the state.

According to Kalyvas (2003), civil wars are not binary conflicts but rather complex and ambiguous processes and that foster an apparently massive, though variable mix of identities and actions – to such a degree as to be defined by that mix [...] the widely observed ambiguity is fundamental rather than incidental to civil wars, a matter of structure rather than noise (p. 475). One could argue that this has been the case in Colombia as many individuals have slid between different groups as territorial control over a particular area has changed hands. However, in order to see the totality of where the present stands within the historical progress of this conflict it is necessary to avoid ambiguity in our descriptions and understandings of the actors involved.

To a certain degree, the violence the Colombian conflict has presently devolved into, may be classified in terms

of Mary Kaldor's (1999) theory on "new war", wherein the state's monopoly of legitimate violence is eroded from above and from below (p. 4). Rather than being an inter-state war, the case of Colombia serves to disassemble the very legitimacy conferred to the nation-state at all in the acknowledgement of the potential threat illegitimate perpetrators of violence may pose. Jabri (1996) sites "militarism" as a central force in the persistence of violent warfare claiming that "both as a value system and as institutionalized in the world military order is a constant presence which renders war not only a desirable and feasible option in times of conflict, but also a deeply-embedded continuity reinforced through dominant discursive and institutional frameworks" (p.150). With this line of thinking we're forced to deconstruct the concept of war in terms of the purpose it can serve and for whom. In Colombia's long trajectory of violence, a tendency of the state to take a military stance against its citizenry has been consistent and has certainly contributed to its own de-legitimization.

Other countries in the the region, namely Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua have all recently been or are presently experiencing prolonged civil war as a consequence of fragile, absent states (Acemoglu, Robinson & Santos, 2009, p. I). Within states that have lost a monopoly of violence, the line between war and peace is fractured as these societies have experienced a normalization of low-grade warfare into daily life. "New Military Urbanism" (Muggah 2012; Graham 2010) has increasingly infiltrated cities in societies *at peace* from Ciudad Juarez, to Nairobi or Johannesburg, wherein death-tolls parallel warzones while state infrastructures struggle to respond.

Chapter 1.2 The City as Battle Space

Nestled in the sprawling Andes, Medellín is Colombia's second largest city, with approximately 2,223,078 inhabitants according to the 2005 census. The valley region where it is located, the *Valle de Aburra,* is comprised of ten different municipalities including, C*aldas, La Estrella, Itagui, Sabaneta, Envigado, Medellín, Bello, Copacabana, Girardota* and *Barbosa*. However, 94 percent of the population in the region live within the urban limits. The city itself is formally divided into 16 *comunas (boroughs or sectors)* and at least 250 *barrios* (or neighborhoods). The peripheral comunas are frequently referred to simply by their number rather than their actual names. Hence, the word *comuna* has taken on colloquial meaning as 'slum' despite the fact that it is simply a technical term for the subdivisions of the city. The city's peripheral comunas, or slums, are where the majority of internal migrants arrive in Medellín, and they are hence also the fastest growing sectors of the city.

On a global scale, slums are marked by their difficult geology, high rates of insecurity and ineffective, widely absent state presence. The distance between the parallel structures of the formal city and its peripheral barrios creates deep structural difficulties in terms of holistic urban development and collaboration. This is seen specifically through the awkward relationships between institutional and grassroots organizations working with residents of the periphery, as well as the inherent distrust many slum residents have in formal pacification efforts (Muggah 2012, p. 56).

The systems of property ownership, legality, transit and social mobility that structure the informal city have little overlap with those in the center. Para-legal systems for law and order within Medelllin's peripheral comunas have enforced stringent measures in the city's slums, such as— forced disappearances, the collection of arbitrary taxes, and the closing of shops and public transportation (Rozema 2008, p. 441). In fact, they remain more prevalent than the formal law enforcement, Gutierrez & Jaramillo (2004) claim that in Medellín paramilitary groups (among other violent organizations) have gained legitimacy in the urban periphery, through the provision of "security" and the supposed enforcement of "good citizenship" or morality.

The urbanization of warfare in Medellín began in the 1980s with the rise in conflict between the Medellín drug cartel and the state, within the city. This was exacerbated by the infiltration of leftist militias into the north-west border of the city (Ceballos 2000, p.395). Soon the different factions were having regular confrontation amongst themselves over control of the urban territory. In this phase of the urbanization of the armed conflict the state was left out, and it is the absence of the state in that moment which led to its later aggression.

Jo Beall (2009) claims that in moments of conflict, when states are weak or unable to exercise legitimate force, urban planning and governance strategies become more and more geared towards separation and control rather than inclusivity and conviviality (p.119). This desperate attempt at pacification can be seen in the Colombian government's participation in acts of extreme violence in the name of establishing peace. At the turn of the

century the Colombian state directly implicated themselves in the military Operations *Orion* and *Mariscal* in 2002 in Medellin's Comuna 13. The actions carried out in these "operations" or raids were characterized by the use of indiscriminate violence against civilians in the name of 'freeing comuna residents from guerrilla rule' (Unidad Nacional de Fiscalias para la Justicia y la Paz, 2008, November 28 in Grupo de Memoria Historica 2011:283). The position of the state in this conflict was both weak and highly aggressive (Grupo de Memoria Historica, 2011; Amparo Sanchez, 2008). In an attempt to not only eliminate the guerrilla but to make any leftist support in the area impossible, a reign of terror was instated resulting in many murders, forced disappearances and displacements. The long-term impact of this is a deeply ingrained and powerful stigma surrounding any leftist affiliation in the community as well as a thorough lack of trust in state sanctioned security measures.

The fragility of state power in the city's outer slums has allowed the peripheral comunas to remain contested territory, with the continued violence and social instability that implies. Gotz and Simone (2009) assert that in informal settings defined by unpredictability and control over confined spaces, tensions over unclaimed spaces can lead to exaggerated and often violent claims of belonging (as cited in Robert Muggah, 2012, p. 52). The tension between the city's different layers and factions, and the contestation for space between them has created a climate that sanctions exaggerated violence in the name of security. The continuous struggle for the control of space, in combination with a widely absent state power, has resulted in Medellín being one of the most guarded yet simultaneously most insecure cities in the world (Jaramillo & Sanin, 2004, p. 19).

1.3 The Historical Tone for Peace-building: Contemporary DDR, Transitional Justice (and their shortcomings)

Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) was first introduced in Colombia in 1953 as a means to dismantle the armed left, and has since been utilized by multiple administrations as a viable path for peace-building with both sides of the conflict. It should be noted that since 1953 the process has been a means of *olvido y perdon en pro de la paz* (forgetting and forgiving towards peace) (Laplante & Theidon 2007, p. 59). As such these have not been well executed, and have repeatedly been the source of greater levels of violence rather than building blocks for national peace. The most resonant example of this is the 1984 Uribe Contract. In this process 700 combatants of the *FARC* agreed to disarm in exchange for the opportunity to construct a legitimate and recognized political party they could find representation within. However, shortly following the creation of the *Union Patriotica (UP)*, 3000 of its members were executed by the paramilitary (Laplante & Theidon 2007, p. 60). This speaks to a failure in two parts. This massacre points to a sense within society and the paramilitary[3] that irrelevant of legalities, treating any left wing organization as terrorist will be justified. Further, the particular timing of the massacre underlines the danger implementing models for transitional justice that only recognize one side of the conflict.

Yet, despite this haunting error, the same sequence of events has repeated itself in different forms throughout the Colombian government's efforts to disarm violent groups. By 1985, the then guerrilla movement *M-19* had been setting up so-called *Campamentos para la Paz y la Democracia* (camps for Peace and Democracy) in Medellin's poorer neighborhoods (Rozema 2008, p.432). Following their demobilization in 1990 many of the ex-militiamen were simply incorporated into the cartel infrastructure, and 1991 became the most violent year in the history of the city (Rozema 2008, p.432). The pattern of violence continues as it was never actually eliminated. Demobilizing one limb of the war does not serve to create peace.

At the turn of the century, former President Alvaro Uribe adopted a two-pronged approach to national peace-building. Uribe eliminated the possibility of negotiations with the guerrilla, marking a return to heightened resentment and violence toward the left. A series of operations were carried out in Medellin's Comuna 13 with the clear goal of ensuring a total elimination of any left wing politics or hopes for power within the city. State functionaries speak of two main operations while the bulk of people living in the comunas can pinpoint up to eight or nine separate military attacks on the armed left[4] within the comuna. The most well known of these are Operations *Orion* and *Mariscal* which resulted in mass disappearances, deaths, forced recruitments and a general shredding of the infrastructure of Comuna 13's outermost *barrios* in 2001-2002. As part of a truth telling process,

[3] That has been repeatedly nurtured by the state.

[4] Though the primary target was the armed left these were not precise blows, in fact they left countless civilians widowed, wounded, displaced, and terrified.

former paramilitary commander of the AUC, alias Don Berna described the operations Mariscal and Orion as a "politically motivated attempt to eliminate the guerrilla, in an effort to help the community and assist the state forces" (Medellín, Justicia y Paz, 2008, November 28th).

In 2003, promptly following attempts at violently demobilizing the guerrilla, the Colombian state initiated a DDR process, closely followed by a Transitional Justice process (2005) with the aim of demobilizing the paramilitary groups and eliminating "political warfare" from the national discourse. Former president Uribe is responsible for the first demobilization of paramilitaries in Colombia[5]. A system of Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) was designed to be rehabilitative rather than punitive. Gradually providing the AUC paramilitary umbrella-group the opportunity to disarm, stabilize and be reintroduced back into the fabric of society.

The 2005 the *Peace and Justice Law* 975 helped merge DDR and transitional justice into one legal framework, which according to Laplante and Theidon (2007), signifies a momentous break from all previous conventional demobilization strategies applied in Colombia (p. 76). This law offers a single reduced sentence of five to eight years to paramilitaries who agree to fulfill certain requirements. For victimizers these include participation in an extended, public truth telling process, *Versiones Libres,* and a handing in over of goods attained illicitly.

As a result of Law 975 approximately 55.000 paramilitaries have participated in demobilization ceremonies, handing over weapons in exchange for pardons, while commanders submit to participation in the transitional justice process. As a consequence of this process coupled with the mass elimination of the guerrilla at the turn of the century, the official decision[6] since the (2003-2005) DDR process is to classify any further violence in the city as a-political.

In 2005, Law 975 stipulated that victims should receive reparations in the form of land and property restitution, rehabilitation as well as guarantees against repetition. The most current framework for responding to victims is set in place at a national level through the Law 1448 (The New Victim's Law), which was passed on June10th, 2011 and put into effect at the commencement of 2012. This law serves to provide local governments with the means to effectively materialize the constitutional rights of victims and recognize these as such. It regulates the humanitarian aid, attention, assistance and reparation of the victims and most significantly defines who will be

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[5] This marks a shift in dialogue as until this point it had been assumed that the disarmament of the paramilitary would come only as a result of a national peace with the armed left, as the paramilitary are self-declared as an organization focused on "self-defense" against the guerrilla, in congruency with the Colombian government. For more on this see Garcia-Pena, *supra* note 17, at 66.

[6] By this I mean the decision adopted by most branches of the state, and even many of the international organizations who seek to maintain their presence in Colombia.

incorporated under this term and hence entitled to this attention. The law claims, more than half a decade into the reconciliation process, to provide concrete means through which organized victims' groups can participate in the process and receive restitution and reparations.

> Article 3: Paragraph I
> The following will be considered 'victims […] those persons who have individually or collectively suffered damages occurred from the 1st of January of 1985, as a consequence of International Human Rights violations, or serious violations of International Human Rights Norms, that have taken place within the internal armed conflict. Permanent partners, same sex partners, and immediate family members when the victim has been murdered or disappeared will also be considered (Nueva Ley de Victimas 1448, 2011)

Law 1448, prescribes a greater degree of participation in the transitional justice process from within the victim communities, instating "victim forums" at the municipal, departmental levels and finally national level. In this way the law creates concrete avenues for the voice of victims within the institutional structure in which two representatives, selected from yet to be established regional victim forums[7], will be included at the *Directive Council of the Administrative Unit of Special Attention to Land Restitution* (Article 107). Giving victims a formal stake in the decisive process over territorial control is grounds for hope that this version of the peace-building process might take new shape.

Measuring the success of a reconciliation program requires a bird's eye view over the power structures at play. A reduction in violence following a large-scale reconciliation effort is not necessarily an indicator for the success of the program in question (Rozema 2008, p. 449). Human Rights Watch claims that the demobilized were not thoroughly investigated for participation in other crimes and that the government failed to adequately interrogate demobilized individuals about AUC's external criminal network (America's Division of Human Rights Watch 2010, p. 6). Following the 2004 deal with the *Bloque Cacique Nutibara*, many demobilized paramilitary were *fairly* elected to local neighborhood organizations, and Commissions for Joint Action (Juntas de Accion Comunal de Medellín—JAC). Furthermore, drops in "paramilitary violence" could in fact simply be resulting from a problem of definition wherein successor groups comprised of unsuccessfully demobilized paramilitaries are not being recognized as such by the Colombian government but rather defined as "emerging criminal gangs/bandas criminales emergentes"—BACRIM (America's Division of Human Rights Watch 2010, p. 9). Meanwhile, both the BACRIM and the Paramilitary have used violence and terror to maintain control of local drug and arms trafficking, both have attempted to annihilate any allegiance to a powerful force other than them in the neighborhood, and most significantly both groups have targeted the same individuals, with the same

[7] These are not to be confused with the already established regional victims forums that the Regional Victims Forum of Antioquia is part of. The law ignores those platforms previously established by victims themselves and sets out to create new avenues for victim participation.

techniques and for the same reasons. At a presentation of the 2011 UN Human Rights Report for Colombia, Felipe Sanchez and Juan Carlos Monge, tactfully deferred from using the term BACRIM preferring to use the term 'post-demobilization groups', pointing to the continuation of structures for organized violence before and after Uribe's Demobilization of the paramilitary. Taking into account the motives and means of many so-called BACRIM organizations in Medellín, *neo-paramilitary* might be a more accurate description.

As ending Apartheid did not reverse the racism in South African society, in daily life, the Colombian demobilization of the paramilitary has not served to provide protection for suspected sympathizers of the left. Sadly, the aspect of the Transitional Justice program which forces ex-commanders to have a public voice, frequently serves to highlight the failure of the process in healing the nation's political divide. In court, confessing to 129 cases of multiple homicide, the ex-paramilitary commander, Raul Hazbun Mendosa was asked by a reporter.

> *From where you sit now, can you still believe it was all worth it?,* to which he responded, *Yes, in those days, given the situation the country was in, we had to fight. All the violence we are guilty of was for the good of the nation, we eliminated the threats to the nation's development.*
> (Reporter Verdad Abierta & Raul Hazbun Mendosa, Fiscalia Medellín, 2012).

As a consequence of the long-standing validation and support the paramilitary has experienced from the Colombian state, there remains a sense of pride among many of the demobilized paramilitary commanders. Further, there remains still a strong stigma bestowed upon those individuals suspected of any guerrilla or leftist affiliation. This is evidenced in the comfort shown by the ex-paramilitary commander's admission that the wide range of violence he is responsible for ought to be seen as patriotism as it was in the name of annihilating the armed left. The levels of violence still attributed to *paramilitarismo* remain high. In Medellín the most notable of these is forced urban displacement.

1.4 Displacement as a Weapon of War

In 2007 there were approximately 26 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) world wide, with Colombia, Iraq and Sudan making up 50% of that number (IDMC, 2008). The Colombian government estimate the figures of IDPs at 3,875,987 while CODHES (which includes urban displacement and displacement as a consequence of crop fumigation) estimates the figure at 5,454,766 (IDMC, 2011). The guiding Principles of Displacement as defined by the UN provide a structured outline of what ought to be understood as 'displacement', including the following;

> *Persons or groups 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 man-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border* (Introduction to Guiding Principles at paragraph 2)

As the national conflict has evolved, patterns of displacement have twisted and turned, and the cities are no longer solely sites of reception. Since the introduction of narcotics trafficking into Medellín in the 1980's there has been an acknowledged trend of urban displacement in the city, but in its early stages there was a lack of recognition and most victims dealt with the consequences alone, often concealing the reasons for their forced migration (CODHES, 2006: 7). According to the annual human rights reports produced by the *Personeria* in 2011, forced urban displacement in Medellín generates, annually, the greatest number of victims in the city, with 2210 claims (involving 8434 individuals) submitted in 2011 (Personeria Medellín, 2011: 44). The comunas with the greatest forced internal displacement index are—in order—San Javier (13), Villa Hermosa (8) and Popular (1).

The phenomenon of internal displacement has traditionally been seen as a process of exodus from rural areas, as individuals seek refuge from political violence by going to cities and Medellín has historically been a space of reception (as defined in Obregon & Stavropoulou 1998, p. 416). In fact the periphery of the city is predominantly comprised of IDPs who have already been displaced once by violence in other regions of the country such as Choco or Oriente. This violence occurs in efforts by armed groups to cement their control over a particular area. Gaining control of a region's resources, populace and politics allows armed groups strategic military advantage.

However, there is an element of displacement, which is based on a more social desire to homogenize a community in a particular capacity. According to Mary Douglas's theory "The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus we find that certain moral values are upheld and

certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion, as when the glance or touch of an adulterer is held to bring illness to his neighbors or children" (Douglas 1969, p. 3). In the case of Colombia that "dangerous contagion" referred to by Douglas is undesirable politics. Urban violent actors who instate the local rule of law in the city's comunas define the model for *good citizenship* within the *invisible borders* of their territories. For the last decade *good citizenship* in Comuna 13 has meant a politics as far removed from the armed left as possible. Those citizens who are suspected (it is by no means necessary that this suspicion be proven) of having guerrilla alliances are not only subject to stigmatization but to the real threat of violence by the ruling order which they inadvertently threaten to disrupt. Hence people with suspected leftist political alliances are seen as socially pollutant and in need of extermination. The power of this *othering* process is omni-potent, and capable of forming violent disdain in the nation's populace that will find an outlet irrelevant of actual threat. As in the witch trials, the persecution of the jews in Nazi Germany or the Tutsis in Rwanda, the persecution of the armed left in Colombia is proof that much of the justification for violence orbits around a desire to *eliminate* the enemy, and is based on flimsy suspicion.

Social stigma and the violence it manifests such can also be generated as a consequence of being suspected of being a *sapo.* This term literally means 'toad' though symbolically it is used to refer to a person who is considered a *snitch.* This categorization fits into the logic of enforced good citizenship as described by Mary Douglas (1969). Someone whose political loyalties are questionable, a person who may give information to the police or the opposition, is likely to be forcibly removed from the area. This word goes as far back as the 1950s wherein it was used to describe politically ambiguous "social agents who came from deep within the community but turned against it by pointing out some of its members for extermination [...] the *sapo* is slippery and sticky, what Mary Douglas called "slimy", inspiring rejection and hate from kith and kin" (Uribe 2004, p. 85). Uribe uses Douglas' label of the socially "slimy" to identify the politically suspect member of the community in the 1950's.

As a consequence of vehement social stigma, there is no line drawn between ideological sympathies and armament in the name of those in Colombia. The place for a political left has been de-legitimized to such an extent that "the venom governing this country's history has made for a logic in which the ideological left is worthy of the same degree of persecution that the armed left has been served" (Padre Velasquez, Interview).

Invisible borders carve up *comunas* into *barrios* which are distributed between different BACRIMs who establish and enforce the rule of law within their territories[8]. Borders are created between areas under the control of different violent groups in the *comuna*, and in order to survive residents must not only learn but obey these lines. Living

[8] As agreed upon in the research of Luz Amparo Sanchez, Martes Ines Villa and Pilar Riaño on the processes of mass displacement in the Comuna 13 at the turn of the century, the paroling of borders remains a prominent feature of the current conflict within the comuna (Sanchez, Villa and Riaño 2011, p. 95).

within this structure without taking direct part in violence or being deeply influenced by the violence of others is essentially impossible. These groups use the tactics of nation-states to maintain control over their territories—determining who has the right to live within a particular zone of control, determining and violently patrolling their borders, taxing the local economy in exchange for "protection", and sending residents into exile. Urban displacement and the strength of the impact it has within the city speaks to the power these extra-legal violent actors claim, and is a direct consequence of a genuine lack of functional state control within these zones.

The guerrilla presence in the area has been effectively extinguished, leaving in its wake a strong trail of fear and stigma around leftist sympathies. Whether or not we can describe the bulk of gang warfare as having paramilitary roots, the distinct thread visible in the stories of many of the city's victims, is a base of political suspicion.

Territorial control remains as central of a reason for displacement within the cities as it has been for decades in the rural areas. Within the national dialogue about the internal war and its impacts, displacement within the urban setting is frequently excluded due to the national definition of the actors (BACRIM) who cause it. However, in attempting to identify and analyze displacement in this context it is evident that the causes and forms of this violence remain the same in the urban as in the rural setting. Targeted violence, and displacement in particular is used as a strategy to instill terror and establish control over territory and resources in urban as well as rural settings.

If one arrives in Medellín from a part of the country that is known to have a strong guerrilla presence, this immediately creates suspicion around your own political leanings and may be cause for violent threats and eventual displacement. Of their tactics this particular form of violence in the peripheral comunas is the clearest way of reinforcing a politics, establishing what can and can't be said in the comuna. This particular point is of interest when seeing the situation in the context of a post-demobilized city, as disturbingly, the rationale remains in many cases the same as it was in the time of recognized paramilitary occupation over the territory.

Nonetheless, there are cases of displacement as a consequence of localized commonplace gang violence. Individuals and families may be forced to abandon their homes when a particular *Banda* or *Combo* decide the residence is of strategic value for typical gang activity such as drug trafficking or to instigate fear in the residents. In this case acquisition of the home of the displaced is really the cause for the act, a strategy for increasing or maintaining a violent group in power, such as, the attempted recruitment of children into armed groups. Local violent actors have young kids run deliveries for them or stand watch as bigger deals take place. As kids get older these roles become more severe—assassinations, running drug deals, housing weaponry, with heightened risks as

a consequence. With this as a threatening, imminent possibility, mothers may choose to evacuate their homes and leave their neighborhoods in order to avoid what would otherwise be impossible to prevent. It may not require crossing national borders to evade this draft system, but it results in a total abandonment of community, and the potential risk that moving ones family to another neighborhood may only increase the chances of a different gang's violence consuming the children's lives. Maintaining unquestionable and absolute loyalty to the presently active powers within the community remains an absolute necessity, which, if defied will be cause for forced removal.

In Spanish there is a verbal differentiation between "desplazamiento" and "despojo". The latter is more of a forced abandonment while the former refers to the intentional eviction of a family or individual from an area (frequently accompanied with violent threats, murder of a relative, etc.). The research show that while in while despojo can have a variety of more purely gang related causes; real displacement of civilians in Medellín is still occurring as a consequence of suspected political affiliation.

1.5 Encountering Ongoing Victimhood in Medellín

> In this city, anyone who's had a family member murdered by an armed group, thinks they're a victim of the armed conflict!
> (Martha Cecilia Gonzalez Avalos, Medellín Mayor's Office, March 2012)

Under Law 1448, victims of contemporary urban (BACRIM) violence are not recognized as victims at all, and in accordance urban internal displacement doesn't call for legal attention. This definition, and the access victims get to reparations, protection over their property and guarantees of security as a consequence isn't based on the type of crime they've suffered, but rather the time frame in which the victimization took place.

Accordingly, the law's effectiveness is being widely disputed amongst victim groups and legal functionaries throughout the country are struggling to keep up with its implications. Confronted with the reality of the conflict in Medellín and the still malleable state of protocol, certain departments of the city's municipal government have allowed for a strain of action which advocates for and cultivates a widening of the understanding of *victim.* This serves to widen the breadth of local assistance as well as room for participation (UN Human Rights Report for Colombia, 2012).

The governmental response to recent urban violence and displacement in Medellín has been judged harshly by academic and non-governmental organizations in the city and the nation. Faith in the ability of the institutions to react against violence in the civilian context is precarious given the gruesomely aggressive tactics that have been historically encouraged by the state in the area. The exasperation experienced by many state functionaries in the face of an endless number of victims in the city speaks to the ever growing gap between victims of violence within the city's slums and the support infrastructure of the formal city. Further, Martha Cecilia Gonzalez Avalos' commentary points to the narrowed down national perspective on victimhood as being dependent not on the degree of criminality and violence suffered, but rather on the alleged motives behind the victimization.

From within the victim community the reaction to the law has been full of skepticism;

> From what I've seen so far of the impact of this new law, I feel that we're being set up. They're making a system that can't possibly function, with functionaries that don't know the role they're meant to take on. We (the victims) know the law better than they do!
> (Leader from victim community at meeting with civil society organizations NGO's and a representative from the Personeria, Medellín, April 2012)

As the law is very recent, the practical ramifications and consequences of its demands on local governments have yet to be witnessed. At present in Medellín there is a fear within the victim and NGO community that state functionaries aren't prepared for the realities of what this new structure imposes upon them. Many NGO workers are experiencing an over-preparedness within the victim community that results in a victim population that is attempting to incorporate itself into a processing system that is yet to be realized.

> Since the law has been ratified not a single form submitted for the reparations promised has been concluded. The state departments intended to manage the process are under-prepared and at this point incapable of reasonably accomplishing what the law demands of them.
> (Functionary from the *Defensoria del Pueblo* at a meeting with civil society organizations NGO's and a representative from the *Personeria*)

The forms themselves are over 50 pages long, to be filled out in hard copy by hand. This gratingly slow processing is structural, not incidental. Paragraph Three of the law expressly *excludes those victims who have suffered acts as a consequence of common delinquency* (Paragraph 3, 2011: 8) from the reparation process and all that this includes. In defining who will be considered "victims" the law focuses on victimizers. In this way, a separation is created between "political actors" (paramilitary groups and guerrilla groups) and currently relevant *bandas criminals (BACRIM)* or c*ombos.* As the state is eager to claim that they have neutralized 'political violence' in Medellín, victims of contemporary violence are negated in terms of reparations. While this distinction serves a purpose at an abstract level, my research shows that in concrete terms it is little more than a marker for evasion of responsibility on behalf of the state machinery with regard to urban violence.

In this case the state-created definition of violent actors cutting through the ambiguous actuality provides the state with the capacity to measure the impact of this violence not through a victim toll but rather according to definitions created as a consequence of categorization. The unraveling of the unrealizable consequences of this in Medellín is telling of the powerful space Medellín occupies within the national spectrum. From within the mayor's office (in particular the UAO department, which receives the newly displaced), there is a consensus that a logic that categorically excludes victims of *BACRIM* and c*ombo*s cannot possibly be applied in the case of this city, as this would mean turning away the largest group of victims the city faces. Confronted with the reality of this city's conflict, and the still malleable state of protocol, certain departments of Medellin's municipal government have allowed for a strain of action which advocates for and cultivates a widening of the understanding of *victim* despite the legal definitions. This serves to widen the breadth of local assistance as well as room for participation. In outlining the regulations for the Departmental Victim's Forum[9], the mayor's office is

[9] The creation of which is formally required in every region of the country by Law 1448. Please note, this is not built upon the previously existing non-institutional forum but rather is a demand imposed by the New Victims Law which has yet to be met.

opting to ignore the legal technicalities and include those victims of "non-political" violence *considering the realities of the armed conflict in Medellín (Decreto de la Alcaldia)*.

> From within the Alcaldia of the local government there is a strong effort at local outreach toward the victim community. Our central focus is on getting the local victim population to recognize themselves as such politically and have the means to seek what is promised them within the current system.
> (Official at UAO in Belencito—Interview, Comuna 13, Medellín)

This effort is being made as the confusion created around entrance to the bureaucratic structures for justice and peace has added to the vulnerability of the city's victims, and new roadblocks to their political participation.

> There are leaders and there are *tramitadores*. At a certain point the institutions legitimized these individuals as "leaders", but in actuality, they represent no one and have no interest in exerting a real political voice.
> (UAO coordinator—Interview, Medellín, 2012).

Tramite translates literally as 'path' or 'bureaucratic route'. *Tramitadores* are those individuals who promise to guide victims along the path to humanitarian aid or reparation. They take advantage of the labyrinthine nature of the justice and reparation process and the under-education of the majority of the victim population. In exchange for providing very basic services, these *tramitadores* charge the victim population commission, which is to be paid whether or not the victim is successful in receiving financial reparations. The existence of these *fake* victim-leaders seeking financial gain from the process has served to create a layer of suspicion around victims, as well as provide them with another pitfall for victimization. The unit of the *Alcaldia* that receives victims within the city has been working different tactics to shift the disenfranchised position of victims, attempting to establish a greater dissemination of information within the comuna itself. They have instated *Unidades Moviles*[10], which actually go into the comunas and run information sessions open to the public, and have begun publishing booklets on the maneuverability of victims under the New Victims Law, 1448.

Disappointingly, this attitude is in opposition to much of what is being said within the national dialogue. There has been friction generated at a local level between departments of the municipal government, as each of these branches have different positions with regards to the role victims ought to play within the transitional justice process. Most disturbing is the reality that the failings of this transitional justice system serve to maintain a large percentage of victims in a vulnerable place by making them legally invisible.

In order to assess the successes and failures of the peace process in Medellín it is necessary to make audible the stories of victims of contemporary violence. It is only through seeing the ways in which marginalized victims

[10] Mobile Units.

interact with the frame for institutionalized peace-building that an attempt can be made to pinpoint gaps and untruths in the structure.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have provided a historical and theoretical context through which an analysis of the ongoing conflict in Medellín might be possible. I have outlined the historical basis for the contemporary conflict in Colombia, identifying the political and territorial nature of the violence. I have elaborated on the urbanization of violence in Colombia. I have also provided an overview of the formal methods used in attempts at national peace-building in the last decade. I have identified Urban Displacement as the form of violence most prevalent at present in Medellin. Lastly, I have attempted to situate the position of victims of contemporary violence within this framework of the city and the transitional justice process.

In the section that follows I will build upon this context by providing three case studies of individuals displaced within Medellín in order to encourage further examination into the continuous growth of this phenomenon and the legal definition of this violence as a-political, hence not reparation worthy.

Chapter 2: Portraits of Displacement

> Displacement never stands alone. To be a victim of internal displacement is to be a victim of multiple crimes, and hence, to suffer multiple layers of victimization as a consequence.
> (Interview Director of UAO in Belencito—Comuna 13, Medellín)

As claimed by a functionary of the UAO in *Comuna 13* (a reception center for displaced persons in Medellín) the act of displacement tends to be only one in a series of violations, which accumulate to leave their victims in deeply uncertain positions. Establishing an understanding of the place these individuals have come to occupy within the city serves to give body to the unfolding story of conflict in Medellin. As internal displacement within the city has come to be the creator of the largest number of annual victims in Medellín, showing an increase of 60 percent between 2010 and 2011 (*Personeria* Medellín, December, 2011), we must disentangle their stories enough to see the historical, social, bureaucratic and political implications of this continuous and magnifying violence.

This process is a delicate one as the impulse among the city's displaced is to hide in an effort to protect their families and themselves (CODHES, 2006, p. 7). Unlike other kinds of refugees, victims of *urban* displacement remain in close proximity with their victimizers. Participating in an interview, sharing one's story with a local organization or making it public for a memorial project requires a level of courage that cannot be over-estimated. However, the logic behind wanting to blur or erase a displacement is also strongly founded in more ubiquitous and subtle social dynamics.

As a consequence of Colombia's long history of violence there are firm social categories that have developed around the conflict. In environments of long on-going conflict, war serves as any other structure to be what Stephen Lubkemann (2008) refers to as a "socializing process", creating social categories to belong to with strong associations built up and nourished around these. In the case of Medellín, more than half a century of conflict has structured a society in which normalized social labels include; 'NGO' worker, 'victim leader', 'displaced person', 'victimizer'.

"Individuals in this situation of social isolation, or atomization, come into frequent contact with one another, but have no organized relationship with other people in pursuit of a common goal. Because their relationships with other people are so fragmented, they see society as a whole as strange and incomprehensible, as a set of disconnected pressures to which they have to submit" (Turner 1972, p. 88). Speaking about black South Africans living under apartheid, philosopher and political scientist Richard Turner identifies the dis-juncture for victims of legal and physical violence in attempting to see themselves as participants in the society they're living in. In

Medellín this dis-juncture between individual victims and the social structure at large leaves many of the city's victims isolated in silence. In combination with the associations built around victim-hood in this context, many individuals find themselves socially as well as legally dis-enfranchised.

As argued by Caroline Nordstrom (1998), precisely because-violence is embodied, it is profoundly personal (Nordstrom, 1998, p. 105). In this section I will narrate three personal stories of internal displacement in Medellín, in an attempt to see what it means socially and politically to belong to the fastest growing category of victims in Medellin. Ana Isabel's story serves to highlight the continuity of motives for violence in Medellin's Comuna 13. The violence that she and her family have suffered through has been coherent and continuous since 1992, despite the altered title of her victimizers. Sabina's story serves to gain a clearer image of the comuna itself as an environment set apart from the formal infrastructure of the city. Finally, in section three I discuss Silvia's story which serves to speak for the layers of social victimization incurred as a consequence of ongoing violence. In a literal attempt to increase the visibility of these stories, images taken by the women I worked with are interwoven throughout the text.

2.1 Political Violence Continues: Ana Isabel's Story

> It's quite simple really...my life story is the gradual massacre of my family.
> (Ana Isabel's own introduction of her life story at our first meeting)

Unlike some of the other women present, she was willing to speak factually and bluntly with me about the various moments in the last decades that have left her to outlive her loved ones alone. Hers is among the most harrowing stories I was exposed to whilst in Medellín, yet sadly speaks to the realities of many living in and out of Medellin's *Comuna* 13 in the last decades.

In 1992, her family came to the C*omuna 13* having been displaced along with many others that year, from the Oriente Antioqueño. During an influx of guerrilla militias into the region they were forced to vacate, losing control of their home and land in the process. As is often the case when an armed group establishes control over a particular region, the guerrilla sought to take hold of as much land as possible in order to establish and demonstrate their own strength and instill a heightened degree of fear and caution into the community. Many families left in this time.

> Even if you weren't directly threatened it was the only way of not getting caught in the crossfire of violence between the guerrilla and the paramilitary (Ana Isabel, Displaced).

Once in Medellín, the family established themselves in the barrio of El Salado, at the outermost periphery of *Comuna 13*. They were able to build a relatively large home and start a garden on the land surrounding the building, cultivating fruit and vegetables to sell. Ten months after leaving their former property one of Ana Isabel's brothers started returning to their land to see if it would be possible to recuperate or sell it. The militia then occupying the country house became aggressively suspicious of the young man and murdered him.

Ironically, in the *Comuna* Ana Isabel's parents became targets due to their origins and the return of her brother to this guerrilla inhabited territory. Ten months later her father was taken from the home and disappeared by a group calling themselves Unase, "a group who were from within the state infrastructure but lets say they were bad cops...paramilitaries" (Ana Isabel, Interview). Within three days her mother was also tortured and butchered to death whilst searching for her husband.

Despite this initially brutal welcome to the comuna Ana Isabel, as the oldest of the 4 siblings, took on the role of caretaker for the family and made the decision to remain in the comuna as they had built up a decent home and

income in the area. She went to the *fiscalia*[11] to file charges (which were ignored) and continued living in the area until 2002.

One 18-year-old brother was murdered, and a 16-year-old brother disappeared in 2002, in the storm of violence that poured over the comuna during the Operations Orion and Mariscal at the turn of the century.

> He leaned out the window of his bedroom and was shot by a man in uniform.
> Then after I reported the murder, they came to my home and said *'What more do you want? We've taken care of your whole family, you have to go now.'*
> (Ana Isabel, Interview, Medellín).

So in 2002 she left, and found work for herself in another part of Medellin. Ana Isabel spent 5 years living outside of the city with her daughter and then chose to return to a different sector of the *comuna* in 2007 once the paramilitary presence was officially declared neutralized with the demobilization of the AUC (paramilitary umbrella group- *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*) between 2003 and 2004 and the commencement of the transitional justice (Justicia y Paz) system in 2005. However, in 2007 when she did return to the community, she was only able to live calmly whilst she retained a low profile. She started a butcher's business, and lived comfortably for three years. In 2010 she participated in a public memorial project to commemorate victims of violence in the community. The project involved a march, which was broadcast on television, from which she was immediately identified by a local BACRIM and again threatened into displacement.

> Two men wearing motorcycle helmets knocked on my door at 9 P.M. They threatened me saying:
> *'We're here with orders to kill you. But we've already had to kill your whole family. Now we just want you to leave.*
> I asked them *'Why?'*
> *'Because your family were from Oriente. And you're always making trouble for us, placing charges and trying to involve the police. We can't have this in our community. We've already murdered everyone else in your family. Now we need you to disappear'.* So I had to leave. Leaving behind my house and the little business I had started. Everything…again.
> (Ana Isabel, Interview)

She left on the day that she was threatened, with the clothes she could carry.[12] Ana Isabel now finds herself living at the farthest reaches of the comuna, at the end of the metro-cable line, far up the slopes of the mountain. Having twice initiated businesses in her own community, she now works as a mobile street vendor and

[11] District Attorney's Office.
[12] This sentiment of having lost *everything* has been echoed to me throughout my research into displacement in the city. An overwhelmed gasp to assert that the family once had possession that were not rented but rather built and nurtured over time is consistent among every woman I interviewed who had been displaced within the city.

occasionally helps her partner (her only living family) with the construction he works on. He is the only person she includes in her photo series, choosing not to even include an image of herself as I'd requested. She took photos of him and his work, which she occasionally helps him with.

IMAGE I. Ana Isabel's partner at work. Photographer: Ana Isabel.

> I'm very proud of what we do. I've applied for reparations with the state, but thankfully I don't rely on hand outs and never have. We're survivors.
> (Ana Isabel, Interview, Medellín)

Ana Isabel is an exceedingly strong and proud woman despite the immense hardships she has lived through. It is partly her pride that is responsible for the degree of violence she has suffered. Most disturbing and telling is her indignation at the idea that any member of her family might actually have been involved with or sympathetic towards the guerrilla in some way. Of her youngest brother she says,

> They put him on a list of 'dead *guerrilleros*'! He was a 16-year-old boy! I had to fight against that. There's nothing more to do. But I've never gotten myself to just sit still.
> (Ana Isabel, Interview, Medellín)

Irrelevant of the known danger and impotence in filing charges against the paramilitary forces, the threat of the stain a relation with the armed left would have on her family forced Ana Isabel to speak out. The accepted assumption being that if her brother were connected with the guerrilla his violent slaughter would be justifiable. As a consequence Ana Isabel's response has taken form around a vehement attempt to eliminate any association with the guerrilla.

Of the women who contributed to my project, Ana Isabel was most comfortable taking photos of public spaces. Her photos are of the places where she goes to in order to sell the food she makes, playgrounds and basketball courts. However, she has managed to locate an hour early in the morning in which these spaces would be entirely devoid of any public presence. This stems from fear, fear that despite the places depicted are in her daily routine, they may still be unsafe places to be seen taking photographs.

IMAGE II. The playground where Ana frequently goes to sell the food she makes, photographer Ana Isabel.

Ana Isabel's most obvious wound is her isolation. Her clearest loss is not her property but rather her social

capital and her own capacity for community. Now, having lost every intimate relationship that she had in the *comuna*, twice, she describes herself as incapable of establishing a social environment again.

> I don't give anyone my home number to anyone anymore, not even to old friends. Sometimes I'll run into an old friend on the metro and we might chat.
> I went to a couple of these meetings for victims who have had a relative disappeared, but I became too paranoid to keep it up.
> I don’t tell anyone where I live anymore, and I haven't made any new intimate relationships since the last displacement. No one knows my full story.
> (Ana Isabel, Interview, Medellín)

The social sting of repeated victimization and displacement has stripped her of her community both physically and socially. Her surviving brother and sister have both cut off contact with her for fear of what consequences may follow them. She is the only member of her family that has taken a political stand against the violence the family has experienced, and hence she is also the only member of the family who has suffered direct displacement.

> This conflict isn't over. The structures are all exactly the same as they were ten years ago. They just call themselves by different names (Ana Isabel, Interview, Medellín).

The continuity of these stories is disturbing, and revealing of the severe consequences of a negligent transitional justice system, which encourages previously displaced individuals to return to the community from which they were expelled, without ensuring that their victimizers have actually been disarmed and removed from power in the community.

2.2 Structural Violence: Sabina's Story

As in traditional rural-urban patterns, intra-urban displacement occurs in areas of the city where generalized violence is most present, however unlike the former, displacement within the urban setting makes it generally unlikely for the displaced to find a "safer" neighborhood, within their financial means, to flee to. Furthermore, many stay close in a refusal to leave the social community they've built their homes and lives in. Sabina's case stands out in this way as she and her family have actually remained within the same sector of the *comuna* after being displaced, 15 minutes down-hill from the home her family built more than 20 years prior when they arrived in the comuna from Uraba, following a paramilitary invasion in the region.

IMAGE III. Portrait of Sabina, displaced from the Comuna 13 barrio, 20 de Julio. Photographer anonymous.

In 2004 Sabina's 22-year-old daughter was murdered on the street one afternoon as she went for a walk with a neighborhood friend. She was targeted directly with repeated shots to the head in broad daylight. In many environments the clearly plotted assassination of a beautiful young girl is the cause for a long-winded

investigation. In this case, the family has received no steps towards justice and in 2010 decided to leave their home and their neighborhood as a consequence. Her story is re-enforced by those of other victims, such as Ana Maria's who was displaced in 2008 by a BACRIM who were aware of her son's murder during the Operation Orion raids and took this as indication of the family's sympathies for the armed left.

Sabina's daughter grew up in the barrio of Comuna 13 known as 20 de Julio, and like many of those who grew up in this area, her childhood friends turned into gangsters and drug dealers. In her short life she lived through a series of separate military, guerrilla, and paramilitary occupations in the neighborhood, and hence knew participants in many of these different groups. In 2004 the violent actors grew suspicious that her lack of allegiance to any clear group was somehow an indicator that the young girl was actually a guerrilla sympathizer. This suspicion was most clearly 'confirmed' by the fact that the father of her child had been a member of an armed group in a time when the guerrilla wielded a lot of power in the comuna.

IMAGE IV. Sabina, with her grandchild visiting the Virgin at a park near their home. Photographer anonymous.

For the family this murder meant not only the loss of a life but also the loss of a home and for Sabina, this meant the role of cementing herself in the place of primary caretaker as her daughter left behind a child. In 2010, years after the murder took place, Sabina felt so much pressure from local armed actors that she had to leave in order to maintain some semblance of stability in the life of her grandchildren.

> As he gets older he asks me more and more questions about what exactly happened to his mom. There are questions I don't want to answer, and I don't want him to hear the answer from others within the neighborhood. I don't want him to grow up sucked into a cycle of violence.
> (Sabina, Interview, Medellín)

This desire to break from that cycle of violence frequently turns into a confronting impotence. This cyclical quality of passing from being victim to victimizer is perpetual for the young males of many displaced families. This transition might mean the joining of another BACRIM or the formal state-run military forces. Diana Maria, another woman displaced from *Comuna 13*, spoke despairingly of her son leaving her after their displacement to join the military explaining that they had had to leave the comuna after her son had resisted joining a local BACRIM.

This impotence is magnified in Sabina's story as she and her family only moved 15 minutes away from the site of her expulsion, accepting that anywhere within their finances would include some new danger and at least within this area she wouldn't lose her sense of community in its entirety.

> Right now the neighborhood is as is said vulgarly in these parts "caliente", It is common for people to take over homes that are unoccupied. They say 'ah no, I'll take care of it for you and pay the utility bill'. So as to make sure violent groups don't come into the house one agrees to accept that someone else will look after it... So we still have the little house there but...
> (Sabina, Interview, Medellín)

Many of the city's displaced find themselves in this curious in-between. The unoccupied properties themselves are of no interest to the victimizers, and so are left empty. In cases of rural displacement, the land itself is an asset for armed groups as it may be arable and a source of income for the group, or it may be rented or sold on to individuals or larger businesses. Unlike these scenarios, people displaced from Comuna 13 are more frequently direct and defined targets for socio-political control. Attempts at social cleansing of this kind have different repercussions than attempts for territorial control, which rely on use of the land for establishing territorial control. In this scenario, territorial control is established through the enforcement of certain socio-political norms and the removal of those who may potentially challenge these.

Hence, the physical houses themselves are often left unoccupied and available to the advances of others. The informality of property exchange in the area is such that the displaced "owner" of the home may have no real way of proving their relationship to the property legally, and hence they'll have little maneuverability if faced with individuals trying to occupy their homes. This is doubly telling both of the social-cleansing nature of the displacement as well as of the incompatibility of rules between the formal city and the periphery. It is this structural incompatibility that leaves victims of displacement so profoundly vulnerable, and the state so incapable of responding to their needs.

> A woman called to tell me she was being threatened and told to leave the barrio. I couldn't offer her anything, I told her sadly that the best thing she could do was go and find the men known to be in the gang and try to sort out the problem with them herself.
> (Administrator of UAO reception center, Interview, Medellín, 2012).

The state apparatus, embodied by the police or the legal army, is incapable of establishing a secure environment for the displaced to return to the homes they've built. Further, the city is so much a dichotomy that insecurity is persistent throughout the city's slums. Irrelevant of the individual person's antagonistic relationship with specific violent actors in the community the administration is aware that they are incapable of guaranteeing a higher level of safety in another neighborhood. It is simply taken as a starting point that the urban periphery is under the rule of a different hegemonic order than the formal city, and hence the formal security forces have no significant role to play in the securing of reasonable safety in these areas.

2.3 The Permanence of Victimhood (Silvia's Story)

> My husband built us a house. We lived there for 32 years, I raised my children there. It was a simple little house, but it was ours. (Silvia; Displaced from San Javier, La Loma in Comuna 13, Medellín)

Silvia and her five children were displaced from *San Javier, La Loma* in *Comuna 13* in 2004 when her husband disappeared, while he was out working, selling lottery tickets. According to witnesses, they took him from the street, covered his face with a hood and held him in a different barrio of the *comuna,* where his body was eventually found.

> He was a good man, he was a very serious man, in the best sense of the word. Everyone in the neighborhood knew him because he'd help out in different little ways. They took him to another neighborhood to assassinate him.
> (Silvia, Interview, Medellín)

Silvia speaks of how shocking the death of her husband was as he had had such strong relationships within the community in the *barrio*. Within 8 days a paramilitary commander came to her home and told her she and her family had to vacate their home.

> We left that day with nothing but the clothes we were wearing.
> (Silvia, Interview, Medellín)

Until this moment she had been financially and socially dependent on him, focusing her life around their home and the raising their 5 children (now grown adults, with their own children). Her own interaction with the city center was always minimal, and hence the loss of her husband (in many ways her life-line) made tangible the walled-in nature of her lifestyle.

Though Silvia's family was displaced before the paramilitary demobilization was officially completed, her story still speaks to the farcical nature of this process as her home was only dis-occupied in 2012, a full 8 years after the formal demobilization process was completed. Silvia remains paralytically frightened at the idea of returning to the neighborhood and has hence lost contact with the social network she and her husband had created over 32 years.

> You see we are victims of displacement. We are afraid because we are victims of forced displacement. Victims are afraid.
> Being displaced and poor in this city has left us all in a state of constant fear. My children had found work but they stopped going out of fear. We're all doing very badly psychologically and economically.
> (Silvia, Interview, Medellín)

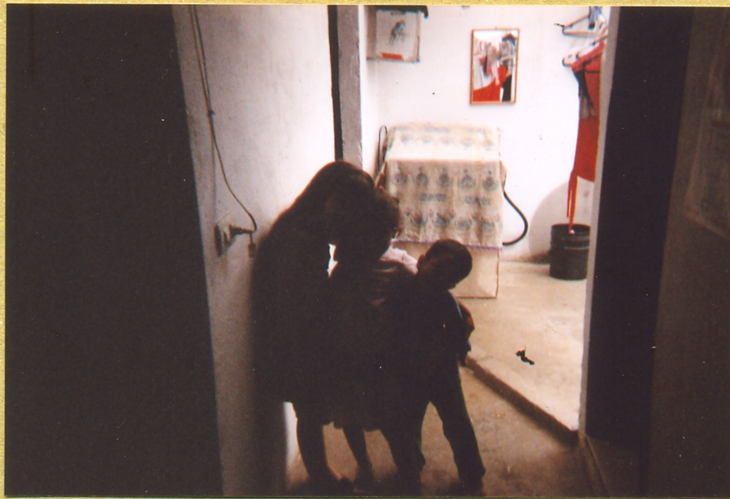

IMAGE V. Images from inside the home make up the bulk of Silvia's photo-reel. Photographers: Silvia and family.

Silvia's children attempted to forbid her from participating in the photo aspect of the project as they feared what it might mean within the community to be seen taking photographs. This is not a fear that the camera will be stolen, in fact she says that there is much less crime in her present neighborhood than in the Comuna 13. She has said to me repeatedly in interviews,

> We didn't need to go from one 'hot' neighborhood to another. Where we are now I feel safe.
> (Silvia, Interview, Medellín).

This fear surrounding the camera stems from fear that being seen actively documenting any chunk of their lives or activity in the *barrio* may cause new threats.

Silvia's perspective points to the social and personal erosion experienced once displacement occurs. Individuals loose much of the strength and security they would have previously held once forced into an eviction of property and community. This dogmatic insistence on the helpless impotence of the victim community is an opinion that is consistent throughout the society and serves to create a severe social block between individuals who have been victims of violence from any form of effective participation in the city or transitional justice structures.

In the photographs this fear and total detachment from public space is evidenced as the bulk of the photographs are taken within the home, with several views from the balcony. Unlike Ana Isabel who lost the entirety of her family structure but retained a level of mobility in the city around her, Silvia and her family have lost all sense of security outside of her immediate neighborhood, her home and family life. As addressed by Stephen Lubkemann (2008) on his study of Mozambican refugees, refugees are rendered as 'exemplary victims'-- people to whom things happen and are done, rather than agents who make things happen through their doing (p.1).

In Silvia's case it is really almost as though she believes that admitting to any level of self-empowerment will de-legitimize her displacement, and victimization. This is quite a commonly acknowledged starting point for many victims of forced displacement as they come to be seen as "exemplary victims" (Lubkeman, 2008), stripped bare and made utterly vulnerable (Agamben, 2003). Some conversations with Silvia felt as though she were reading from a script for a "victim of displacement", unwilling to yield any information outside of that role. This rings of Liisa Malkki's (1997) observation of refugees who begin to see themselves as if they ought to be utterly 'helpless' in order to confirm the authenticity of their own 'refugeeness'. Silvia's response to my prompts with regards to the camera process signal to the degree to which she is dis-enfranchised within her own life and struggling to establish room for capabilities of her own. She has been reduced to a degree of terror that leaves her entirely incapable of participating in her external environment, though she does believe that her neighborhood is a safe space for her family. In her photographs, she focused on showing the people and places that give her a sense of

security; showcasing her family and her home.

IMAGE VI. Silvia pictured with her daughter and grandchildren.

As is often the case in situations of violent conflict, the victims of recent violence in Medellín grapple with being

socially reduced or de-humanized. The fact that being a victim or displaced person becomes a permanent state rather than a moment in a life is most frightening in the ways it limits growth or development of the individual in any way.

Conclusions

In 1995, South Africa's *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* proclaimed, "it is the intention and action of the perpetrator that creates the condition of being a victim" (TRCSA, 1999, p. 58). In Colombia the intention of the perpetrator is being defined not by their actions but rather by how the state chooses to categorize armed groups in the city. Hence, the adoption of this notion into the development of the Transitional Justice process in Colombia is leaving individuals who have experienced multiple layers of victimization, *outside* the legally accepted category of "victim". According to the latest shifts in the Transitional Justice system, Law 1448 will not include victims of urban displacement due to its definition of their victimizers as "common delinquents" rather than political actors. The nature of transitional justice in environments of ongoing insecurity is such that, as sweeping categorizations of violence are made to increase the state's capacity to provide a response, the stories of many individuals are kept out of sight.

> Dozens of people are waiting for verdicts as to whether or not they will be accepted as 'victims' to receive reparations…so many that the shelters in Medellín are overflowing, and we're having to make alliances with hotels willing to provide beds. And the bad news is that most of these people will be rejected. They're mostly displaced from within the urban area…
>
> (Official at UAO in Belencito[13]—Interview in Comuna 13, Medellín)

If the law remains true to its word then Juanita is right in her prediction that the people presently occupying the city's shelters will promptly be turned away once their applications for reparation are processed. The formal status of individuals displaced since the most recent demobilization process is that they are no more than unfortunate bystanders of the city's common delinquency.

This is ironic as the social analysis of the intentions behind victimization is far more thorough. Medellín based *NGO Corporacion Region*, conducted a study on *fear in the city. The organization found* finding that across all social classes and backgrounds 'displaced people' were the most common social source of fear in Medellín (Luz Amparo Sanchez, Corporacion Region, Interview). Displaced individuals are frequently suspected of having been 'displaced for some reason', such as belonging to or sympathizing with an armed group, and as a consequence are automatically stigmatized. The reasons for victims of this violence to remain silenced are manifold. However, this research speaks to the necessity of their stories in a contemporary analysis of violence

[13] The UAO is the Unidad de Atencion y Orientacion (Unit of Attention and Orientation), this is generally the first destination entry-point for new victims of violence in the city.

and Transitional Justice in the city.

In this chapter I have provided three stories of forced displacement in Medellín that are at present being silenced by the shifting Colombian legal system and their decision to define victims according to their victimizers. Each woman's story provides new angles for re-framing the conversation around contemporary violence and victimization in Medellín as well as raising pressing questions yet to be answered by the infrastructure for formal peace-building. Who will respond to ongoing violence in Medellín ? How can survivors of violence break from disenfranchised victimhood? What avenues are there for the city's marginalized to be included within the city?

The following Part of the thesis will identify responses to these questions as they are being formulated at the grassroots level. In Chapter Three I will provide a more thorough overview of the position of the marginalized in urban settings, engaging with theory that identifies active participation in the city as a right of its inhabitants and showcasing the specific role voices from the margins can have in peace building initiatives.

In Chapter Four I will provide four case studies of autonomous projects for peace and participation from the city's margins. Section one discusses the *Regional Victim's Forum of Antioquia*; wherein mostly uneducated victims of violence and displacement have been training themselves to have a political voice. In section two I analyze the work of a Priest who has spent his career working to pacify the BACRIM infrastructure at the margins of Medellin. In the final section I analyze two grassroots youth movements from within Comuna 13, each comprised of activists from the comuna who are using gardening, the arts, alternative models of education and hip-hop to give young people the tools to establish "life projects" for themselves.

Part II: Responses from the Informal City

Resilience, Innovation and Hope for Peace-building

Chapter 3: Voices from the Informal City

In this Part of the thesis I want to look beyond the narrow relationship between the government and the citizen, in order to construct a three dimensional portrait of peace-building in Medellin. As so many cities of the global South contain a growing informal infrastructure operating parallel to the legal, written city, a perspective that foregrounds activity within the periphery is essential. To understand the operation of cities that contain more than one infrastructure for development, security and justice, it is important to seek out participant voices from outside what is visible on paper. Hence, Part II serves as a response to the demonstrated ongoing violence in Medellín, explicated in Part I. In the face of continuous urban violence and a fragile state, who is responding? In this second part I will focus on those urban actors from outside of the state infrastructure whose work in localized communities falls outside of the national agenda for peace-building.

In Chapter Three I provide a base in three parts for the study of activism within the urban periphery. In the first section I provide a frame for the realities of Comuna 13 within the spectrum of *peri-urban* environments at large. In the second section I explore the *right* of citizens to participate in developing the structures that shape their environments. In the third section I focus on the role and place of initiatives and activism from the urban periphery.

3.1 On Urban Enclaves

UN estimates claim that by 2030 the world's urban population will compose almost 60% of the totality of the global population. In 2007 Latin America's urban population was estimated at 450 million, with the prediction that it will reach 609 million by 2030 (UNFPA 2007). In 2010, Colombia's urban population comprised an estimated 75.1 percent of the total population of the country (World Bank, 2010). In cities that host extreme socio-economic inequity, the rich and the poor are generally compartmentalized physically into distinct enclaves (Koonings & Kruijt 2010, p. 57). Different class categories occupy different parts of the cities they live in, building their social and professional existence within the enclave they belong to.

With specific reference to Latin America's urban spaces, Koonings & Kruijt (2009) point to the dis-juncture between "opportunity structures for livelihood, service provision, security and overall urban planning regulation on the one hand, and the size and composition of the urban population on the other" (p. 10*)*. Cities in societies built on inequity simply do not make financial or political room for large percentages of their populations. UN-Habitat identifies slums according to five criteria: non-durable dwellings, little floor space per person, lack of access of the dwelling to piped water and sanitation, and insecure land tenure. According to da Gama Torres (2008), based on this definition, 30 per cent of the urban population in Latin America lives in slums (as cited in UN-DESA, 2008, p.17). These informal settlements at the periphery of many of the world's cities are growing and proving to be quite permanent. Under these conditions, our concept of urbanity needs to include whole territories which operate with a parallel infrastructure detached entirely from the formal city (Van Gelder, 2010). The inhabitants of these slums*, pueblos jovenes, comunas, barrios, favelas, villas miserias, or invasiones-* find themselves at the margins of Latin American cities, often resting on precarious hillsides with classifiably "bad geology" for home building (Davis, 2006, p. 122).

According to the World Bank 37.2 percent of Colombians were living below the poverty line in 2010. The formation of the country's cities is a reflection of this growing poverty rate and systemic inequity. The rural violence of the mid-twentieth century drastically accelerated the growth of Colombian cities, generating a proverbial avalanche of migration into urban centers (Melguizo, 2001, p.113). As proclaimed by Maria Uribe (2004), terror in Colombia has acted as a *physical reality* that has forced more than two million citizens to abandon their belongings and flee into urban slums amid terrible hardships (p. 80)[14]. Cities have grown in Colombia as the disenfranchised from across the nation have arrived desperate for refuge and opportunity. Hence, as the formal cities grow, so do the informal urban settlements that hug their periphery.

The realization among the city's marginal youth, that they will likely only ever play a supporting role in the formal city comes early and is reinforced consistently. Judith Butler asks, "whose lives are real? How might

[14] It seems important to note that this *terror* is not abstract but rather a consequence of armed invasion, or the threat of violent displacement (abandono forzado/despojo).

reality be remade? Those who are unreal have, in a sense, already suffered the violence of de-realization" (Butler 2004: 34). In Medellin's *Comuna 13* life is precarious. Boys and girls grow up with exceedingly low expectations of what is possible within their lifetime and what they can dream for in a city that they are inarguably at the margins of. Everything in their *habitus,* in their socialization, teaches young people in Medellin's slums that their lives will be formed and limited by violence, physically and structurally.

IMAGE VII. Nuevos Conquistadores, Comuna 13.Photographer: Johana.

> We grew up here. We lived right here through all the occupations by the different groups, all the raids, all the 'Operations'. Though we had to get used to it, I was frequently paralyzed by the sight of dismembered bodies on the way home from school.
>
> (Johana, community activist and member of Son Bata)

Before they join a gang or cross a *frontera invisible*, the young people of the *Comuna 13*'s more violent *barrios* have already been reduced to the realm of what those of us participating in the dominant system would deem 'unreal'. We don't see the corpses or hear the gunshots, and the numbers are so immense, and removed from our frame of reference, that we, from the outside, don't bother trying to understand or mourn these deaths. These lives are already marginal, irrelevant and lost before they are actually wiped out.

However, operating outside the regulated norms of the formal city structure does provide a level of freedom and autonomy within slums, which serves the needs of the civilians in addition to those of the organized violent groups. A lack of state legal enforcement allows for the realization of a “decommodified” version of basic needs commodities such as land and housing (Mayekiso, 1996, p.155, p. 165) as the barrios climb up the valley's edges. In South Africa the civic movement of the early 1980s established in the townships a powerful social movement against the practice of paying rent for access to land (Cross, 1994, p. 187). While this hasn't been organized in the same way in Colombia, no one living in Medellín's outermost barrios “buys land” or “pays rent”.

As seen in the case studies discussed previously, this peculiar privilege leaves individuals awkwardly vulnerable in their encounters with the formal city. Those who are forced into displacement from their barrios of origin have immense difficulty proving any form of ownership over their property, and struggle to insert themselves into the mainstream system that requires that they purchase land formally. Not only do they lose the community infrastructure they live in and the practical right to the homes but they lose access to an accepted right to inhabit one's own space despite financial difficulties. This freedom of property rights will be difficult if not impossible to establish in the central city or even in a new barrio without the social capital they have built in their barrios of origin.

3.2 The Right to (transform) the City

The 'right to habitation' cannot be dissociated from the 'right to participation, and it is only through a broader, strengthened legal-political arena that the terms of a new political contract of social citizenship can be drafted (Fernandes 2007, p. 27). The *Right to Inhabit* a particular space in a city's physical or political landscape must be carved out and fought for with determination. "The relationships and concerns of the typical metropolitan resident are so manifold and complex that, especially as a result of the agglomeration of so many persons with such differentiated interests, their relationships and activities intertwine with one another into a many-membered organism" (Simmel, 1976, p.13). It has been suggested by Holston (2008), Appadurai (1996) and Beall (2009) that the propinquity – physical and psychological proximity among people— found in cities intensifies the opportunity for struggle toward democratic citizenship. Rather than taking a stance which views the marginalized public as solely *structurally violated* (Farmer, 2005), this perspective locates the ways in which individual citizens and citizen-run organizations negotiate with de facto power holders in their occupation of the urban landscape.

The construct of public space remains supple and subject to divergent lines of interpretation, generally developing from a base of structured power and easily bent and twisted by different localized actors. If we follow Bourdieu's line of thought we can frame public space as a materialization of social relations, wherein different agents put forth their interests and use divergent forms of capital to assert these interests (Bourdieu 1999 in Vergara Arias 2009, p. 144). The nature of space that is public, the purpose it should serve as well as its real availability and accessibility to the public in question requires some degree of unraveling. According the UN Report on Democracy on Latin America, "full civic participation" implies "easy access to their (the public's) social, economic and cultural rights and that all these rights together constitute an indivisible and interconnected whole" (Aguillar & Taurus 2004, p. 26). While rights to practicalities like property and healthcare can be generalized and defined, social and cultural rights may be more blurred.

As argued by Purcell, the right to the city stresses the need to restructure the power relations that underlie the production of urban space, fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants (Purcell, 2002, p. 101-2). Purcell amplifies a long-standing argument that the control of urban space, or the structuring of cities, ought be within the reach of their inhabitants. Beyond the right to be 'maintained' in the city (Simone 2010, p. 59), contemporary authors (Simone, 2010; Fernandes, 2007; Earle, 2011) use Henri Lefebvre's (1968) catch phrase in its most active sense. "The Right to the City" ought to be seen as the right to play a transformative role in the urban space one is part of. Rather than setting the minimum at having *access to* health care, housing or education systems, this implies *taking part in creating* the systems one uses.

James Holston (2008) points to the inherent disjunction within the processes and practices which define

citizenship within many democracies by claiming it to be "non-cumulative, linear, or evenly distributed among citizens but always a mix of progressive and regressive elements, unbalanced, heterogeneous, and corrosive" (p. 311). The contemporary democratic arena has made for a brand of citizenship that, while being politically democratic, remains socially and practically exclusive. If we turn our attention to the cities of Latin America, we are met with an expansion of these same conditions, compounded by vast socio-economic inequality, exclusion, segregation, un-regulated violence and insecurity. There needs to be a shift in the causal association (developed through the international media) made between slums and violence (Caldeira, 2000; Muggah, 2012). In order to bring to the foreground the potentials for non-violent development that can spring from the periphery avenues for legitimized participation are needed.

3.3 Interventions from the Periphery

Vergara Arias (2009), argues that [in Medellín] "the manifest contradiction arises between the imaginations of those who practice and live the reality of the city and those who possess the faculties in order to instate imagined projects, through the hegemonic order" (p. 142). While this may be the case, the capacity to instate projects through the hegemonic order is not the only means for initiating development or change in a particular community. The Colombian government has been incapable of maintaining a monopoly of violence, and has similarly failed in maintaining a monopoly over peace-building. Johan Galtung (1969), differentiates between *negative peace* and *positive peace.* The prior simply eliminates violence while the latter seeks a constructive conclusion to the conflict and addresses the conditions that gave way to the violence in question. I argue that through peace-building initiatives from outside the state infrastructure, projects for *positive peace* are made possible in Medellín. Grassroots initiatives from the margins of the city not only serve as spaces of contestation, but they take part in the structure and development of the city.

John Walton's (1998) analysis of patterns in collective action across Eastern Europe, Africa and America from the 1970s onwards crystalizes that "the locus of all these movements is almost invariably in urban areas and structures of civil society" (p. 477). He also identifies *political and human rights action* as a trigger in creating social movements. Development and peace initiatives from above have frequently failed while social movements from below have served to shape the development of Latin American infrastructures throughout the last century. Alternatives to traditional education, civic engagement, community organizing and participation are as visible within the make-up of Latin American societies as stained histories of violence and dictatorship.

As a consequence of more than half a century of civil unrest, the present infrastructure of Medellín is built on perpetual insecurity and deep social cleavages. Hence, *participation in the city* frequently takes the form of activism against local violence, for the defense of human rights, access to reparations, and room for the marginal within the formal infrastructure. Despite, and really fueled by the harsh environment, civilians in the city's comunas have mobilized in response to the urban and structural violence which frames their options, with varying degrees of "success" and even recognition from the state infrastructure. Though greatly hemmed in by their time and place there are groups of people in Medellín designing projects for participatory alternatives at all levels, who against the odds choose to understand the disjointed nature of their particular moment in history as an "opportunity" rather than fated by "determinism" as encouraged by Paolo Freire (1992, p. 91).

John Paul Lederach's research in Colombia highlights *resilience* and coping mechanisms within urban collectives. But most clearly he focuses on the ways in which *unorthodox* initiatives are able to become pro-actively engaged in purposeful ways, helping themselves recuperate a sense of place, at-homeness, and voice (Lederach n.d., p. 10).

By constructing organizations, that nurture a constructive sense of purpose in their participants, grassroots organizations are targeting the people who are most likely to become victims or victimizers in Colombia's on-going conflict. Their provisions of new outlets and tools for empowerment among the marginalized are an indispensible element for reaching a structure of 'positive peace'.

Conclusions

Voices and movements of resilience against oppressive circumstance hold the capacity for a structural change needed to shift the cycle of violence and failed peace-building in Colombia, though they are inevitably laden with limitations. In the following segment, I present four sketches of non-institutional action within Medellín's periphery.

In the first section I discuss the work of the (original, legally unrecognized) *Regional Victim's Forum for Antioquia*, a conglomeration of grassroots victim-led organizations with support from NGOs, as well as international institutions, pooling resources in an attempt to create a shared platform for victims of the area. The forum is organized as a participative democracy, empowering victim-led movements to develop politically. Yet, Law 1448 calls for the development of Regional Victim's Forums throughout the country in such a way that doesn't acknowledge their existence.

In section two I present the perspective of Padre Velasquez, a local priest who has spent his career working with violent actors active in the city's slums. His proximity with BACRIM infrastructure makes his perspective frequently threatening for the state as he persistently points to their neglect of ongoing violence in the city.

Finally, I conclude with *Son Bata* and *Revolucion sin muertos* two grassroots organizations, each creating non-violent space in Comuna 13 and utilizing the arts to enhance the perspectives of the young people in their communities. Both organizations are at present negotiating with the state and local BACRIM's to maintain control of their position within the comuna.

Chapter 4: Avenues for Participation

We don’t know where the place for the possible lies within Colombia; we know with certainty that it does not lie within the institutions because within these there is only space for the fickle accumulation of power (Fajarado in Galvez 2003, p. 76). Many of the activists I met and worked with in my time in Medellín spoke openly of their deeply rooted distrust in established institutions within the formal city of any sort. Some, like John Byron who works at the UAO in Belencito claimed,

> I have no trust in the good intentions of this government, or the NGO system, but I understand that in order to do meaningful work in this city I need to do so (quietly) within the infrastructure that the state provides.
> (John Byron, Interview, Medellín)

Amidst this climate of skepticism and tightly enforced, violent social control, non-violent initiatives have sprung up. Collectives of civilians within Medellín's periphery have decided to establish alternative environments, promoting other priorities within their neighborhood, and doing so according to their own interests. Using art, theater, music, graffiti, participative democracy, christian values and cultivation of the earth these initiatives have forced their way into the structure of *comuna* living. Somehow, these groups are given the room they need to survive, invite strangers (like myself) into the community, have a public voice and nurture self-empowerment amongst the young people of the comuna.

I worked with two youth groups within the Comuna 13, a convent at its outskirts, a priest who works with victimizers on disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration, and a regional forum of grassroots victim initiatives centered in Medellín. Below are my versions of these stories of self-made hope.
In the first section I will discuss the Regional Victims Forum, outlining its structure and function. In the second section I will illustrate responses from within the catholic church. In the third section I will discuss the two grassroots youth initiatives presently active in Comuna 13.

4. 1 Regional Victim's Forum

> The value of the face-to-face group, hence, lies in its ability to nurture and integrate individual needs rather than, as in the case of bureaucratic schools and factories, reshaping the individual to meet the needs of the institution. Worthwhile group action not only nurtures the social nature of the self, but carries forth significant human tasks requiring the coordination of joint efforts (Benello 2005: 36).

What makes the Regional Victim's Forum of Antioquia powerful is the capacity of its members to see themselves as united, and hence willing to collaborate and compromise for one another. The forum has been in existence since 2006, founded with the aid and support of local NGOs, and the accompaniment of institutions such as the Mayor's Office of Medellín, the *Personeria*, the *MAPP/OEA* and *P.NUD* with the aims of gathering the interests and resources of the different victim collectives in the region into an articulate form. The product of this work is a round-table formed from the conglomeration of representatives from each relevant organization. The meetings of the forum take place for two or three days at a time, once a month in Medellín. From these rendezvous other workshops, assemblies and meetings arise between participants in the Forum to address issues in the different municipalities or between particular organizations or individuals, but the principal focus is on these gatherings themselves. In order to give an image of the workings of the forum I provide three vignettes of events that I was witness to in my time as a participant.

Bridging the Gaps to Truth & Justice

At a workshop for victims of forced displacement Luz-Dari, a local victim-activist in the *Oriente Antioqueño* approached me as a representative of MAPP/OEA, to ask for advice and assistance. She presented me with a greatly distressed middle-aged woman whose son was disappeared in 1998. The woman had calculated after years of research, that the paramilitary commander who has in charge of the troop that was in control in her area is currently in the Transitional *Truth and Justice* system at the nearest high-security prison. She was aware that it is within her rights to confront her victimizer and attempt to find her son's body, but completely lost as to what the steps are to turn this theoretical “right” into a reality. Using the credibility of the international organization we were able to assist in in locating her victimizer and arranging a meeting between them.

Non-governmental Guarantees of Non-Repetion

At a gathering in the conference room of a once grandiose hotel in Medellín's city-center, Angela a victim-activist from Uraba introduces to the forum a young woman who has traveled with her to Medellín and is in need of immediate medical and social attention.

> She survived the massacre of her family. She has been raped, her brother has been forcibly recruited and she needs to disappear from Uraba.

It is agreed by vote that she should stay in Medellín, a representative from a local women's NGO, offers to assist in finding medical care, a victim-activist from Medellín offers to help arrange housing for the woman and the rest of the members who reside in Medellín offer aid in the little ways available to them. Members pool their resources to provide as much information and comfort as they can to the newcomer.

Victims as Political Actors

At an inter-institutional gathering at the office of a Medellín-based NGO, the newest public speaker for the Forum interrogates the state functionary appointed to manage the organization of the newly mandated Victim's Forum for Antioquia required by Law 1448. She accuses the official of sabotaging the formation of the legal forum by refusing to take into account the evolution and development of the victim community in the city as a political entity. Demanding that he meet his obligation to effectively set up a safe and functional forum for the different victim associations to gather, she accuses the functionary of negligence in his role.

> Q. Victim Representative: There are a 150 victim organizations in Medellín. Many of the most recognized leaders in the city were not invited to the initiation of the new, legally obligatory Victim's Forum for Antioquia. How many did you invite?
>
> A. Public Official: We invited those who presented themselves to us.
>
> Q. Victim Representative: Without ever consulting the already existing forum or the department of the Mayor's Office which is currently most engaged with the victim community...How did you determine that these individuals were all actually legitimate representatives? The integrity of the forum, as well as its effectiveness depends on who comprise it.
>
> (Victim-activist interrogates state coordinator of legally recognized victims forum)

The moment speaks to the tension between victim-led initiatives and those imposed by the state. While the law might instate a forum that is based on the model provided from the grassroots, there is an inherent unwillingness to involve victim-leaders as organizers.

> *The Regional Victim's Forum for Antioquia made up of victim organizations, and social organizations from all the sub-regions of Antioquia, gathers as a social and political subject, requiring the recognition of the rights to truth, justice, integrated reparations, and guarantees of 'non-repetition' for all the victims from within the region and the country.*
>
> *(Regional Victim's Forum Agenda, 2011)*

A meeting of the forum is initiated by the distribution of the Public Political Agenda as defined in September

30th, 2011. This agenda is made up of a list of demands and recommendations to the state, following the implementation of Law 1448 also referred to as, the "New Victim's Law".

Organized in a firmly participatory structure there is a strong emphasis on the gathering of contributions from all represented parties and maintaining a space for the confrontation of interests of these different groups. It is seen as essential to give each other respect and room to proclaim what each representative finds to be relevant and necessary to bring up for discussion before the forum, whether it be an abstract idea or an immediate issue. At each meeting there is a monitor who structures the debate and keeps the agenda on track as much as is possible. When there is a matter that requires a decision on behalf of the forum it is taken to a vote in which the accompanying organizations are only allowed participation in the debate leading up to the vote, and suffrage is granted solely to the participating NGOs and victim-activists themselves. With the intention being to create an environment in which the victims speak out for themselves rather than being spoken for by national or international organizations, the structure is such that the victim-leaders are given greater room in the discussion and decision processes than the rest of the participants.

The Forum operates on two levels. For individual victims it represents a community space for political education and immediate aid as well as the comforts found in sharing stories and re-building social capital following victimization. On another lever it represents a unified platform for the articulation of united interests and demands against the state infrastructure. Recognition of victims rights, guarantees for participation and support for the victims of the armed conflict, guarantees of the protection of the lives and emotional integrity of the victims, the creation of schools that incorporate political education, thorough investigations into charges of impunity within the state institutions, the implementation of strategies for land and property restitution, symbolic reparation and support of memorial projects, and psychological support for victims in the municipalities are among the demands outlined on behalf of the forum.

It is sadly and openly acknowledged in every meeting that members of the forum are being regularly threatened with violence. Silvia Quintero, 'victim-activist' and former public speaker for the *Regional Victims Forum of Antioquia* spoke with me of her motivations for becoming and remaining involved in the forum and other activist coalitions in the city. In a private meeting in which she expressed great disillusionment with the institutions involved as well as fear for her own life as a consequence of her involvement with the forum I asked her what is the source of her enthusiasm to keep participating, to which she responded:

> If this is the situation while we're around, what would they be doing if we stop intervening?
> (Victim-leader, Interview, Medellín)

This ethos serves to maintain the forum in its lowest moments. Despite the political impotence they may feel, the

capacity to unite and articulate demands before each other and present themselves before the state infrastructure allows for the creation of a community of political activists to arise from horrendous histories of violent victimization. Further, the publications and public statements of the Forum serve as deeply informed and provocative confrontations for state functionaries who would otherwise never face the interests of the region's victims.

IMAGE VIII. Public memorial event organized by members of the Victim's Forum. Photographer: Ofelia (pictured above).

4.2 A Humanist Approach: Padre Velasquez

> Human beings are at fault in thinking that the problem of the other is solely the problem of the other and that we ourselves are not part of it (Padre Juan Velasquez, Interview, Medellín, 2012).

Another response to territorial violence in the city's slums takes a different approach: choosing to work intimately with the city's victimizers rather than just the victimized, seeing their existence as mutually dependent. As an actual resident of the communities in which he works, Padre Velasquez is able to straddle a line between civilian and institutional leader that the vast majority of activists in the city are not able to achieve. By virtue of more than a decade's work with Medellin's armed youth, Padre Velasquez has gained a unique capacity to relate to and engage with the city's victimizers and speak publicly of what he sees through this engagement.

Padre Velasquez can describe in intricate detail the machinery of the city's armed groups. According to his description in the BACRIM's there are three levels of membership; *cachorros, parches* and *cuchos* each one belonging to a different social and psychological stratus.

> *Cachorros* (12-17 years old) are looking for role models and amusement in the barrio. These are the ones who consume the most drugs, the neighborhood kids who might be hanging around waiting for their turn to take a ride on the motorcycle...
>
> *Parches* (17-24 years old) are at a stage in life in which they are asking themselves "like everyone else in Western culture does at this age, 'what will I do with my life?' They want to be productive in some way.
>
> *Cuchos* (25-40 years old) are looking to hold stable authority over the neighborhood, to maintain a feeling of self-importance in the barrio, to feel that they are heard, that they occupy a place in the world. They have symbolic power within the community, on par with the priest or the director of the school or the hospital.
>
> (Padre Velasquez, Interview, Medellín).

Padre Velasquez now works in Comuna 5, where he claims, there are at present a minimum of 41 different armed groups, with each group containing 80 – 100 young men. When asked why he believed these groups act as such a magnetic force for the slum's young men, Padre Velasquez states,

> There is a whole amalgam of reasons. The young man who belongs to a BACRIM should not be understood in a vacuum. He turns to the BACRIM because they offer him things the city and his community to do not, an economic position and a level of affection.
>
> (Padre Velasquez, Interview, Medellín)

Padre Velasquez sees *social capital* as a key draw for young men into BACRIMs. This assessment adds fuel to

prior academic assessment of gang formation internationally (Looney, 2006). In clarifying the rationale for why the gang members respond to him with trust and respect, he claims, “I give them room. I ask them questions no one asks them, which to you or I are commonplace. 'How are you? How is your mama?' No one ever engages with them on this human level”(Padre Velasquez, Interview). He calls the work he does “humanizing”. The simplicity of his approach is demonstrative of his starting point that the cause for violence in the city is formalized corruption and exclusion of the urban poor.

The work he does in the city's peripheral, violent, slums is most significantly based on finding avenues for young men presently involved in the BACRIM infrastructure to participate in some legitimate way within the formal city. He takes an entirely a-political structural perspective to the violence that surrounds him and argues instead for the forgiveness and rehabilitation of the city’s currently armed young men as they are themselves victims of a society which excludes them.

> Some years ago I presented before the mayor’s office a listing of 1600 names of young men, presently active in different armed groups who were willing to turn in their arms in exchange for employment or viable educational opportunities.
> (Padre Velasquez, Interview, Medellín)

The state ignored his proposal entirely. For the priest this was an indication of pre-meditated negligence on behalf of the state as they willingly turn their back on an opportunity to provide peripheral residents with a place in the city’s infrastructure and hence maintain the city’s violence.

He claims that the formal state infrastructure slanders the BACRIMs by arguing that they 'recruit minors' to join their ranks. According to the priest young boys try at a young age to integrate themselves into the BACRIM networks that surround them because they see that these are the ways to achieve community and power within the barrio. They decidedly want to join in on these networks not because the older BACRIM members force them to, but rather because they are astute enough to assess from an early age that the support systems of the formal city are built upon their exclusion. Hence, in order to achieve any degree of power or success within the choices visible to them, the clearest answer is to try to be accepted by those institutions that effectively control your environment, which in this case is not the legal system or the military but rather the BACRIMs.

This analysis of including both victim and victimizer as victims of circumstance has great pitfalls when applied to entire moments in history, but in surveying the position of the youngest members of violence in the city's slums the equation is set clearly not in their favor.

> These young boys have no base, so when they're not doing well they find refuge in the BACRIM. They've been kicked out of school, out of the house, out of the church, so they find refuge in the only place they can?
> (Padre Velasquez, Interview)

The priest's analysis points most clearly to the divisive line between the lower members of the BACRIM structure and those higher up. The priest is in a unique position in the city as he is integrated into state and NGO institutions by virtue of his legitimized position as a church leader, whilst simultaneously being an actual resident in the informal city. By virtue of this choice to live by the church, school and community garden which he coordinates, Padre Velasquez is an integral member of the local barrio community. As a resident, he is living around the laws governing the *comuna*, as structured by the extra-legal BACRIM agenda. As an activist, in order to execute projects he has to collaborate with and to a degree "ask permission" from those stakeholders who have the most power in the community, in this case the leaders of the BACRIM structure in the city.

> In the Barrios there has been a replacement of the totality of the state apparatus: the law, justice, promotions, the social, even the enforcement of human rights, is taken care of by the armed groups.
> (Padre Velasquez, Interview)

In developing a social project with the *parches* to try to provide the young men with more sustainable means of livelihood, Velasquez met with the top of the pyramid of violence and narco-traffic in the city to negotiate the terms of his program in such a way that he wouldn't be forcing the men into an unsafe position. The project is set to take place throughout several of the city's *comunas,* crossing many invisible borders. This will ensure the safety and cooperation of the participating *BACRIM* members (who might otherwise slaughter each other). Hence, setting this complex process in motion involves a conversation with the authorities within the structures of violence. Despite the many different BACRIM units involved this conversation involves only two men to be effective, the current commander of "*La Oficina de Envigado*" and the commander of "*Los Urabeños*". In order to work with young boys who live in war with one another in the peri-urban slums, Padre Velasquez has to conduct a single meeting with two men who reside outside of the violent infrastructure they orchestrate, in the city's wealthiest sector *El Poblado.*

He is separated from the rest of the community only as a result of the fact that he is mobile and articulate in ways that the majority of people he lives amongst to do not have the capacities to be. As a product of the time he spends intimately entwined with gang networks Padre Velasquez is able to have clear-cut and straightforward opinions regarding the nature of violence and power in the city. He is able to speak openly about the criminal organizations' practical configurations, claiming that within the organizations there is a clear awareness that nothing in their structure or logic has shifted in the last decade. Padre Velasquez says openly that that within the infrastructure of the criminal organizations themselves there is an acknowledged total continuity of control within

the city's violence before and after the demobilization process. He claims that the further up the chain he goes the more this is so.

> They'll say it simply, 'we used to be called paramilitaries and now we are called *bandas criminales*. It really makes no difference to us what name they use: the structure of our organization has survived intact.
> (Padre Velasquez, Interview)

This semantic point is essential for examining the contemporary context of violence in Medellín wherein a manipulation of discourse is succeeding in shifting the conversation on violence in Medellín in such a way that allows for a long standing situation of corruption and inequity in the city. Victims of BACRIM violence are not being treated as such because of how their victimizers are being defined. It is telling that the victimizers themselves do not consent to the state's pre and post demobilization divide.

Padre Velasquez is at present being transferred out of the city. He believes this transfer is certainly a consequence of the unsavory publicity he raised for the city in an interview he gave to the Spanish newspaper *El Pais* in April of this year. The article highlights the availability of young people willing to kill for less than three euros, quoting a former street assassin who claims young kids now barely make enough money to buy their mama some *arepas* in exchange for slaughter (de Llano, 2012). Though he attempts to remain a-political, his opposition to systemic violence and the particular vantage point he has built for himself between the city's different institutions and social classes makes him an inconvenience to the formal city, which has been trying in recent years to build a new more attractive image for itself.

4.3 Building Secure Spaces: Community Based Response in Comuna 13

Son Bata

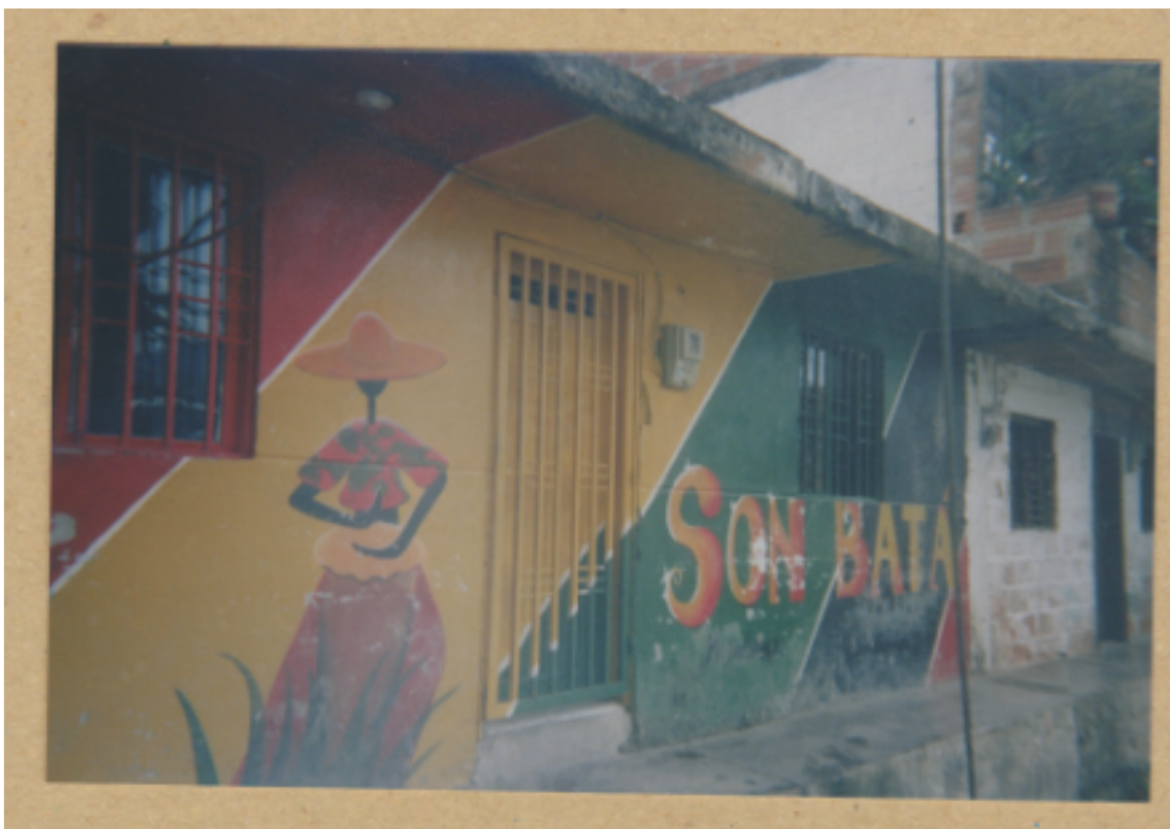

IMAGE IX. One of two Son Bata buildings presently in Comuna 13. Phographer: Johana.

> Peace wont be achieved through military operations or punitive systems, but rather through shared projects within the community.
> (John Jaime, Director Son Bata, Interview, Medellín)

In an environment of absent fathers, where the police have been essentially evacuated, and violent death and displacement frame the public space, it is extraordinary to see room made for play and collaboration *against* violence be encouraged. What is most extraordinary about these initiatives in Comuna 13 is that they have sprung from within the interests of the residents themselves, encouraging the exploration of interests in other young people in the community. Though the city has on an institutional level funded spaces for the nourishing of some of these same values within the *comuna*, the added value of groups like *Son Bata* is that they are not just addressing the needs of an external, abstract demographic, but rather they are addressing their own needs. These young people are constructing what they want for themselves in a context that barely allows for survival.

Son Bata began in 2003 as an initiative taken on by a group of young people nestled near the peak of Comuna

13's sprawling settlements, in one of the most historically violent barrios of the comuna, Nuevos Conquistadores. *Bata* is a traditional drum used in Choco, the part of Colombia with the largest Afro-Colombian population, Son refers to 'sonido' the spanish word for sound.

> We're not really *paisas*[15] you see, but we're also not completely comfortable in the climate of Choco either as most of us have spent our whole lives living in Medellin.
> (Interview with Jamitah, Son Bata, Medellín)

IMAGE X. Members of the Son Bata community. Photographer: Johana.

Struggling to situate themselves as afro-colombians within the urban periphery of a city in which they are the minority, Son Bata was named with the desire to carve out space to be heard within the city. In a small home-made home in a narrow alleyway just above where the public bus system can physically enter, a gathering place was created to come together consciously as a collective, to practice music, theatre and arts; to do anything other than participate in the war that envelops the *barrio* they live in.

15 "Paisa" is a term used within Colombia to refers to persons from Medellin.

Since 2009, the collective has taken form as a legally recognized non-profit “corporation” which receives support from the formal city. Now, in 2012, the collective has two separate buildings in the same stretch of alleyways. One remains a musical and theatrical practice space and the other has been converted into an office space and recording studio where the group host meetings, film screenings and organize their ideas into project proposals. The organization runs weekly theatre workshops with local children, utilizing Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal's teachings on how to utilize theatre in environments of oppression (Boal, 1979; Freire, 1970). One member of the collective told me that they were attempting their own “Theatre of the Oppressed”, forcing young people, faced with a reality that negates them to imagine new possibilities, work through trauma, and create environments for collaborative reflection and action (Johana, Interview, Medellín).

> We want to provide a way for young people in the neighborhood to construct real *life projects* for themselves.
> (John Jaime, Director of *Son Bata,* Interview, Medellín)

A clear-cut goal for the collective is to provide for themselves and the young people in their community a space where non-violence is a reality and other dreams can be given room to be imagined. The very idea that the young people of this area could choose what to want from their lives is revolutionary. The collective brings in experts on different subjects to give talks and workshops, on a broad range of subjects from gender politics to photography. They encourage young people to participate in the arts, finding funding for travel expenses to competitions.

This is a brand of attention many people growing up in this environment do not normally receive, as stimulation, encouragement and security that is not created or guaranteed by belonging to a violent group is practically non-existent within this context. Furthermore, the idea of giving space and importance to the process of creatively designing a *life project* for one's self is hard to sustain in an environment where illiteracy and informal labor dominate.

> When I was little I would walk around the barrio and the other barrios nearby. I'd go out by myself and just walk as far as I could go. I was too little to understand that I ought to be afraid. My strategy for survival here has been to refuse to give in to the lifestyle that is expected of me. For example, I believe there is decency in any labor, but I'm qualified to go to university and do work that inspires me, so that’s what I want to try to do. I refuse to be a maid like I refuse to be with a man who accepts a life of violence.
> (Johana, Interview, Medellín)

Johana, the longest participating female member of Son Bata, articulates with conviction her refusal to behave as is expected of a young black woman living in Comuna 13. It is this sense of refusal to accept the circumstances of the present reality, and desire to encourage others to imagine the lives they want for themselves, that is the

ethos of the collective. Both the foundation and survival of Son Bata defies expectations.

The goals of the collective have now been divided in three subdivisions; the continuation of the program for the visual, musical, and theatrical arts, the establishment of an audio-visual program, and a program for the study of afro-colombian socio-political identity. Each of these programs maintain and encourage discussion in themes of gender and Afro-colombian ethnicity from different angles. These are set to be educational programs offering certificates. The design is such that each of the three schools will offer sessions exploring a gender and racial focus. For example the audio-visual school is set to screen films, which challenge gender norms, as well as specifically targeting young women within the community. These are set to be educational programs offering certificates.

They welcome speakers who arrive as individuals (or from universities or NGOs) to conduct workshops of different kinds within the *comuna*, allowing them to utilize the respect that Son Bata wields within the community to certify a safe entry-point into the area. The respect they are given in the *barrio* is palpable. Johana or Sara, the two members I spent most of my time working alongside, always walked me to to and from the bus. With them I was accepted and welcomed into the *barrio* instantly despite how obviously out of place I actually was.

The sense of anti-violent, communality Son Bata propagates is something the BACRIM have fought hard to breakdown and control. By granting fellow young people the opportunity to reflect on themselves and become creators, *Son Bata* grants local youth the capacity to see the control they have over their particular situation. Providing an option other than a life relegated to the realm of *unreal* violence, creates the possibility of *options* and hence the possibility of a more dynamic realization of the individual and the community as a whole.

Having worked to draw kids away from violence through the arts, music and theatre, *Son Bata* are currently setting out to build a 'cultural center' which will be on 'neutral' territory. This is an intentional attempt to allow individuals who live in parts of the neighborhood controlled by opposing BACRIM factions to have a shared public space.

In this endeavor Son Bata have presented their project to the municipality in hopes of having the participatory budget system fund them. Son Bata have a long standing relationship with the formal city as they have been receiving 30% of their budget from the local participatory budget process. However, the buying of land and the building of a cultural center will require funding beyond the means of the allocated amount within the municipality and so external corporate funders will comprise the board of directors for the project once it becomes instated. This process will take the collective out of the little alleyway they've been breathing air into for

the last eight years and move them into a much bigger space designed by architects with a city budget rather than squatters with found materials.

John Jaime, the director of the collective, insists that this will not cause them to be co-opted. He says that he will not surrender the integrity of the project merely to protect the good name of city officials. However, this process of handing over the reigns and investing all the collective energy into a single project does put Son Bata in a position where their work may end up co-opted. It is difficult to maintain a position of autonomy when the funding and direction comes from the State and the Corporate sector.

Additionally, the cultural center may actually fail in establishing neutral territory; the communa's residents might simply refuse to cross the invisible borders. The grounds for this new project are in encouraging individuals from different nearby barrios to participate in the collective's workshops, however the site that has been chosen holds a strong negative connotation for many members of the community as a former paramilitary base.

> There are a lot of stories that circulate about that land. To me it almost feels haunted by all the bad things that have happened there. (Sara, Interview, Medellín)

Sara explained to me the background of the space as she pointed to the house up the hill, refusing to walk up to the building itself with me. The house; which sits prettily on a grassy hill, was formerly used by the paramilitary as a place for kidnapping, torture, murder, and the trafficking of drugs and firearms.

The organization is at present facing a moment of contention in how to adjust to their growing visibility coupled with their growing ambitions. While John Jaime started Son Bata as a hip hop group that grew into serving a social function there is now a strong feeling amonst members of the collective not to self-define as another group of black entertainers. Just as Johana refuses a life within the service-class, she is also resisting an identity based on belonging to the entertainment-class.

> I want to focus on our ethnic and political identity as black Colombians living in Medellin. I want the young people in my community to reflect on what it means to be who they are within this society.
> (Johana, interview)

This desire to imbue the creative and artistic aspects of the collective's work with racial and political questions does not really fit within the city program for development. While the Colombian state institutions have frequently supported programs that favor 'peace education' or even ethnically specific creative expression, programs which grapple with the historical racism and marginality of the country's black population don't really make up part of the public discourse.

The significance of autonomous initiatives within the comuna and the city as a whole can be impactful on the condition that they are given the room and support to flourish within this rough and discouraging framework. In

many cases this can only be achieved by allowing the project in question to be partially run by the municipal government. The survival of the organization depends on delicately dancing for support between different power holders in the comuna, in this case embodied by state institutions, and the local BACRIMs. The wider the breadth of these ambitions and the closer Son Bata gets to the institutions of the formal city, the more carefully this dance for support and legitimacy will have to be choreographed. Falling out of favor with those who control the territory in which they operate will certainly destroy the free space they have created in their barrio and the imaginations of the young people who have participated in the projects they've constructed.

Revolucion Sin Muertos (Revolution Without Death)

> One can't be coherent one hundred percent of the time. As a life project I try to keep taking action and aiming for a minimal level of coherency.

In order to understand the above statement by an activist working in Medellin's Comuna 13 we need to fill the frame of what it is El AKA is trying to do, why and where.

> *Parchera*[16], I counted the other day. I've known 80 people that have been violently murdered in my comuna.
> (El AKA, in response to my naive alarm as he called to cancel a meeting in order to attend the funeral of a friend)

This reflection from a civilian man in his mid-twenties sounds hyperbolic. But in this environment, violence and death have simply been absorbed into daily life. Having grown up in this neighborhood, it is "normal" that most of his peers have not survived into adulthood. Like Padre Velasquez, El AKA says with total certainty that above all else it is the social gain that draws young boys into the BACRIM life-style. Violent groups provide a space, a sense of purpose, of belonging and respect, in an environment that offers them none of these otherwise. It is the clarity about what it means to be a young boy in this environment that makes AKA able to play a key role in filling in the gaps for which youngsters would otherwise turn to the local BACRIM's. Thinking of his own early teens he tells me,

> I didn't even have to be asked to participate in the gang warfare. We young kids just volunteered ourselves to do whatever silly task the barrio gangsters didn't wanna take care of— looking after their guns, making drug deliveries. We wanted something to do and a little respect.
> (El Aka, Interview, Medellín)

[16] AKA's language is full of terms like *Parchera. This particular term is used to address friends. "Parche" is used in reference to a group of friends, and so Parche or Parchera can also be used to address a person from the same circle, establishing a level on intimacy.*

IMAGE XI. Pictures above are four young boys in El AKAs neighborhood, who regularly participate in ongoing workshops.

In high school he was plucked up and de-schooled from gangsterism by an older, feminist woman who was setting up a community garden in the area. She taught him how to garden and instilled in him the values of positive community action. Now AKA is a 25-year-old activist living and working in a lush, green *barrio* at the highest limits of the comuna, a 15-minute bus ride up from the San Javier metro station.

At the street level he's hung a banner announcing *Zona de Paz* (Peace Zone) over a little patch of land in front of the local bodega. He has been working in different youth projects in the community for nine years, first taking part in projects orchestrated by local NGO's before developing his own methodology for engaging with his community. Now he operates entirely without institutional support, though still within the network of social organizations that work with each other in the comuna. He participates in a range of events, from a radio talk show, to workshops on farming held by indigenous groups, to hip hop contests. But the project he focuses on with the most regularity is the work he does with the young boys in the barrio. Quite alone, he runs a program

on the weekends gathering together young boys from the neighborhood to introduce them to his two passions, gardening and hip-hop. Teaching that,

> Below these streets everyone's fighting over, lies soil. In hip hop we talk about 'the streets' but really what we need is to reconnect with the land. That's why I'm teaching the young boys to work the land.
> (El AKA, Interview, Medellín)

Further up the hillside from the *Zona de Paz* lies *the ranch,* as he lovingly refers to the land in which he farms and harvests. Together with local women, El AKA teaches the young boys to work the land and form their ideas into arguments. He gathers them together into different age groups each week, spending the early morning hours planting and harvesting and the afternoons exposing them to different perspectives and encouraging them to express themselves verbally and through hip hop.

On his role in the lives of the young children and teenagers he works with, AKA tells me,

> I often get asked, do you steal youngsters from this city's war?
> The answer, if you ever think to write that, is no. To do that, to prevent these young boys from being sucked into lives of violence, the changes here would have to be much bigger than what I can control from my garden, little lady.
> (El AKA, Interview, Medellín)

The consistent message in El AKA's different projects is one of defiance and a resistance to being confined by his circumstance. With no financial means and only the most informal infrastructure for support, El AKA succeeds at the seemingly small yet immensely significant act of creating moments in which people in the *barrio* feel comfortable being outside and gathering together.

When I ask if he is a 'pacifist' AKA tells me,

> Under pacifying acts, this government has demonstrated its truly satanic side in this neighborhood" (El AKA, Interview, Medellín).

El AKA is among the many residents of Comuna 13 who lived through the nightmare of the military operations to remove the urban militia at the turn of the century. In this context even "pacification" is imbued with the threat of violence[17].

Though he is in many ways quite politically radical, his goal is not to instill in the young boys a political dogmatism. Though his politics certainly lean towards ideas of communitarian socialism, he has repeatedly expressed to me his disdain for the guerrilla.

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[17] As is frequently the risk when governments intervene under notions of pacification in violent urban peripheries. For more on this trend see; Muggah (2012), p. 56

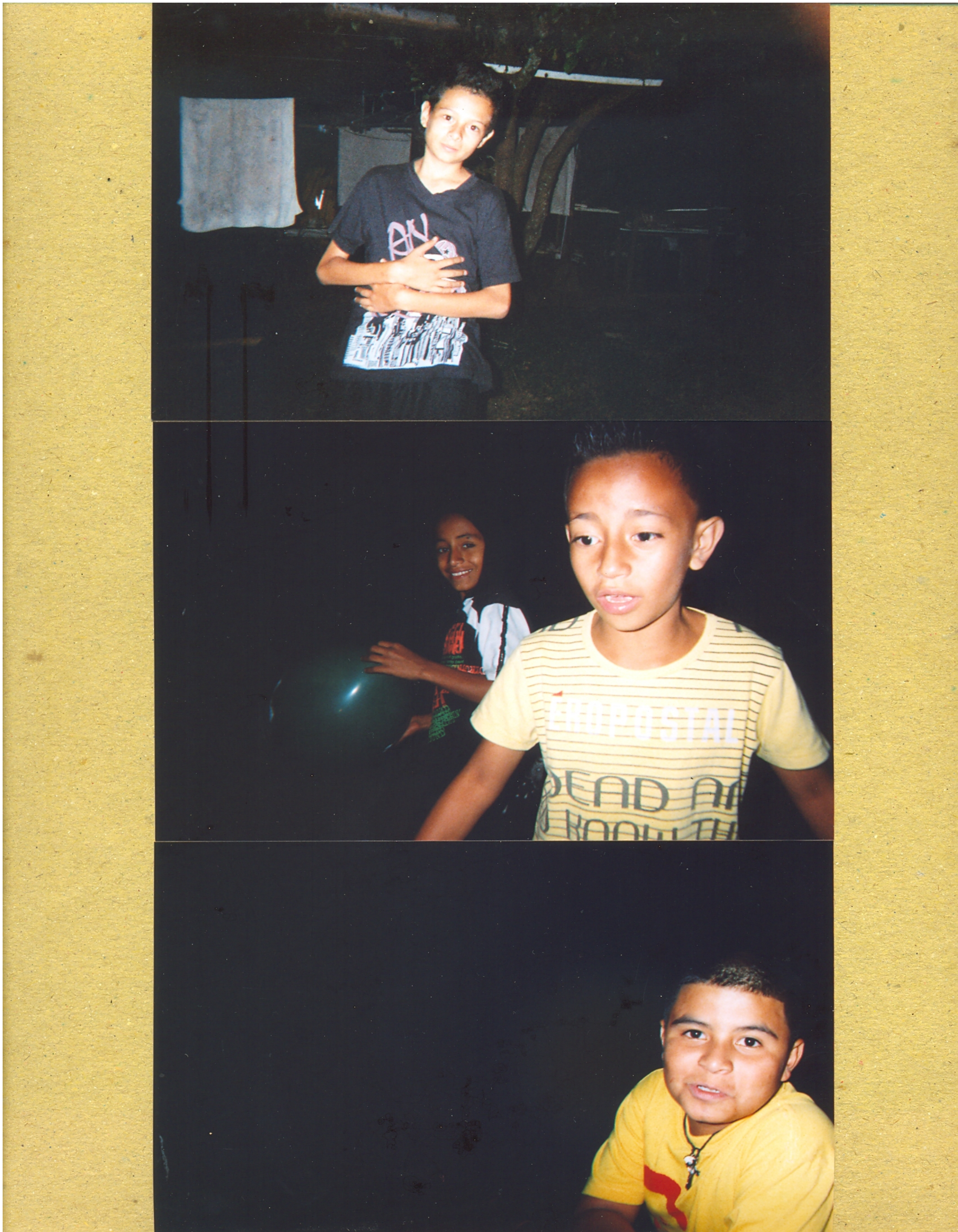

IMAGE XII. Young boys who have started a hip hop group called "Warriors of the Asphalt"

Photographer: Anonymous

> I wish I could believe in the answer the guerrilla supplies. I've seen too many lives destroyed as a consequence of this country's armed left so now what I'm fighting for is a revolution without deaths.
> (El AKA, Interview, Medellín)

AKA doesn't want the Comuna's youth to find answers to how to live in a political agenda, an institution or a BACRIM, rather, he works on providing them with the analytical tools and self confidence to choose for themselves how they to live.

> I've tried to keep my own radicalism a bit apart from the process with the young boys. These kids are so vulnerable and malleable. I want them to have the capacities to make their own decisions. I want to protect them more than anything against co-optation, I don't want them to emulate the gangsters or me.
> (El AKA, Interview, Medellín)

The point for him is to be a public voice that remembers consistently the recent violent history of the comuna, and points to the reality of continued "warfare" in which he lives. Though he argues against his role in providing a model for the kids he works with, he does say clearly,

> My work isn't about entertaining the young boys or 'keeping them busy'. This sort of work doesn't interest me at all. I'm hoping to give the young kids the foundation to act. I don't mean "act with violence", but rather to act with conviction. I want them to make their own sense of this environment and transform the current condition of fear in which we live.
> (El AKA, Interview, Medellín).

Most notably, unlike the few institutionally outreach programs in the comuna, El AKA is not interested in *stabilizing* the slum (Spear, 2010, p. 5), but rather in inciting action that isn't in response to a violent situation.

> In this comuna all of our actions are responses. There is no energy pushing people to design the situation they want for themselves, they wait for some person from the outside (whether its an ngo worker or a new BACRIM) to act, so they can simply respond to that action.
> We've been trained to wait till we hear gunshots to notice the violence we're living in.
> (El AKA, Interview, Medellín)

His attitude in the face of these circumstances is hyper-active, running on a fully "no dead time" schedule, trying to keep his dignity and "some marginal level of coherency" while focusing most of all on taking every opportunity available to him to act out an alternative as consciously and frequently as possible.

But what does it mean in tightly controlled violent territory for a man to be teaching young boys to focus on words and the earth? Though he doesn't claim to be taking people from criminal organizations he is refusing actively to contribute to the culture of fear that they generate and seek to maintain. Though he is working with children, the work of placing young people in positions of power in their own lives inevitably operates in opposition with the dominant order. Further, he makes explicit in every way he can that he's not interested in entertaining the kids.

> I know I have three little spies in the group of young kids that I work with, who give information about me to the police and armed groups from another neighborhood. 7-8 year olds.
> I ask them about the cops too though, never much interesting to find out though. Mostly stories about prostitutes at the military base...They try to foster a kind of "community police", in which they militarize young kids, give them a sense of pride and use them for information, indoctrinating them gradually.
> (El AKA, Interview, Medellín)

El AKA sees the various dimensions of the young people he works with and tries simply to instill within them the idea that they might have a choice in how to live their lives. But despite his stubborn idealism, the threats in his environment are real. The stance El AKA takes does not illicit a soft response from the violent actors present in the community, as his hyper-active attitude to social engagement makes him a constant annoyance. When the group "Los Urabeños" took control of the area earlier this year they approached El AKA.
In explaining this incident to me he said,

> Three armed men came to the garden. They surrounded me and questioned me. We had a whole question and answer session. *So, what do you do?* They said to me.
> *You're always moving around the comuna, crossing into different territories.*
> So I said, I work in the comuna, with the young people. Right now we've stopped because you've murdered a friend.
> *But you're always going down there. Why don't you enlist the young boys from that area to join one of our groups to prevent there from being so many different territories? You don't want conflict in the barrio, do you? Help us prevent that by helping recruit the young boys.*
> So I said to the man; you stand by your reasoning and I'll stand by mine.
> I respect your choice but many of my loved ones have died standing by your reasoning.
> You'll find me working with the young boys and the women on the garden here in the barrio and moving between other neighborhoods participating in different events.
>
> So then they took my photo, which then they send out to every 'combo' of theirs so they can keep track of me.
> (El AKA, Interview, Medellín)

Now, after several months of action, painting murals, organizing hip-hop shows, an ecological beauty pageant and many weekends of workshops at the garden, AKA was recently forced into displacement from his land. So what is it worth? He works at a hyper-active pace, there is a 6 foot high mural of his face on a wall in downtown Bogota, but he is being refused entry to his own neighborhood. Now as El AKA is seeking refuge in a local cultural center and planning his exit from the city, his statement that it would require much more than the work he was putting in to make a dent in this conflict rings clearer than ever.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have outlined the efforts of four different initiatives born outside of the formal infrastructure in response to ongoing violence in Medellin's periphery, each operating with their own aims and methodology. The Regional Victim's Forum provides a platform for victims in the region to gather, pooling their resources, keeping each other informed and staying on track of what the legal infrastructure is providing or failing to provide. Padre Velasquez is in a unique position in Medellín as he is one of the few highly educated, priviledged public figures that lives in the slums. Having moved between Comuna 13 and Comuna 5 his perspective on the evolution of violence in the city is noteworthy. The clarity with which he defines contemporary armed groups in the city as paramilitary-run organizations is powerfully convincing as his opinion is based on first hand sources.

In the final segment I discussed two grassroots initiatives taken up by young people in the comuna, each of which take on their own approach to peace and community building through the arts. As demonstrated they are both facing severe challenges at present, predominantly fueled by the continuation of territorial violence in the city. These initiatives have the advantage of being a constant presence. Though they run on less structure and certainly less funding than state programs, they establish physical places within the comuna itself where freedom from violence is possible. Furthermore, they don't have to maintain a political platform. Unlike many of the city's formal institutions these initiatives can generate situation-based responses.

Most significantly, unlike state or internationally funded programs, these aren't pacifying efforts. Mostly, they provide an outlet for empowerment for people who would otherwise likely be faced with the choice of a future in service industry work, unemployment or within the criminal infrastructure. It is in efforts like these that I see a flicker of hope for actual change in the city.

Conclusions

Il faut cultiver le jardin (Voltaire)

This thesis is an attempt to decipher the real implications of *pre-post conflict* in a socio-territorially divided city in Colombia. Medellín's transition to political peace is framed by high rates of violent insecurity throughout its periphery. While homicide rates have dropped and the formally recognized sources of political violence have been neutralized, the city remains host to a mosaic of continuous violence.

I staged my research within points of encounter between the disparate factions of the city that are directly impacted by ongoing violence, the marginalized, the victimized, the activist and the institutional. In doing so, I sought out the spaces of participation and exclusion in the city as it *transitions*.

Despite the formal demobilization of the AUC after 2003, the improvement of security in Medellín's communities, and the process of transitional justice in its wake, my research shows that a continuity persists in the politics that govern much of the violent control over the urban periphery. This thesis postulates that there is a growing rate of forced urban displacement in Medellín. This generally involves violent persecution in combination with an abrupt loss of property, home and community. In contrast with the alleged delinquent (non-political) nature of the *BACRIM*, due to the socialization of the armed internal conflict in Medellín, people who are most likely to become victims of this kind of violence are those who are somehow suspected of having affiliations with the armed left.

Individuals are being forced to leave their homes due to suspected alliances their families might have to the guerrilla. This is not an occurrence that ended with the demobilization of the paramilitary. In fact, as demonstrated in Chapter Two, in certain cases, victims of urban displacement that assumed it would be safe to return to their sites of exodus following the paramilitary demobilization did so only to suffer a second displacement.

At present the national *Transitional Justice* system structurally removes victims of this violence from view, by defining their victimizers as a-political *common delinquents*. The Colombian state is basing the legal taxonomy of contemporary armed actors in the city on the assumed success of their own *DDR* program. As a consequence of this flawed definition, armed groups that maintain the interests of the formerly recognized paramilitary are labeled a-political. In this way, victims of urban displacement in Medellín are eliminated from sight, as acknowledging their presence would serve to unravel the failures of the demobilization process. Physically, socially, and structurally these individuals represent one of the most marginalized non-communities in the city. This marginalization of thousands of individuals is ongoing and systematically ignored within the *Transitional*

Justice process. Despite the formal aim of Law 1448 to create new avenues for victim participation, municipal governments have taken on the project of instating victims' forums sluggishly and inefficiently. As of yet there is no demonstrably constructive impact from the law on victim participation, while it is clear that a close reading of the law will actually serve to *exclude* many of the city's victims. Until now, municipal efforts in Medellín have strongly fought against the Federal agenda, in order to make space for urban displacement in the dialogue surrounding conflict in the city. Nonetheless, the new law expressly excludes this group from its definition of 'victims'.

Whilst the state may be unwilling to face ongoing violence in the city, those living in the urban periphery are confronted with conflict constantly and hence are forced to generate solutions for *resilience* and survival. As outlined in Part II, resilience from outside of the state infrastructure has taken on the goal of empowering the victimized and fostering participation from the city's margins. Victim-led organizations are organizing coalitions amongst themselves so they may assemble and maintain an ongoing dialogue parallel to the formal infrastructure. Grassroots initiatives from victims of structural and personal violence are taking creative routes to empower the city's marginalized population personally and politically.

As demonstrated by the work of Padre Velasquez and El AKA, community organizers operating within the slums are defining *social capital* as a key to reaching young boys likely to join local *bandas criminales.* Yet even efforts with the modest aims of creating more livable social environments are limited by ongoing violence in the city. In fact, both of these men have been removed from the city since I left. In response to his persistent public statements with regards to the ongoing political violence in the city and his repeated accusations of a negligent state response, the church transferred Padre Velasquez to a rural region. And, El AKA was removed by a local BACRIM that insisted he stop the social work he was carrying out in the comuna and leave. What does it mean when an environment is incapable of incorporating dissenting voices? While both men were "community organizers", Padre Velasquez is a priest with the Catholic Church and El AKA's main focus is on education and gardening. My research shows a lack of avenues toward substantive citizenship in Medellin.

I argue that the small windows of hope for restructuring the position of the marginalized is being continuously hemmed in by violent territorial interests. The creation of livable environments and a viable civil society is an ongoing battle for victims and activists in the urban periphery. A deeply embedded stigmatization of social movements as having terrorist affiliations has narrowed the room for grassroots initiatives in Medellín. Further, the continuity of an extreme right wing that flows through the city puts these individuals at great risk for their activism.

Where then, is the path toward *positive peace* in Colombia? Pacification plans and systems for societies in transition are pre-configured for failure in the limited roles for participation that they assign civil society groups. How can Colombia re-animate, and re-normalize a vibrant civil society, one that can accept processes of dissent from the periphery and maintain an organized social movement from below? How can we frame such a re-animation as an essential feature for a decent urban environment?

I argue that the violence in Medellín will not shift through discursive tricks that maintain the present structures in tact. Renaming violent groups, co-opting grassroots initiatives and calling Colombia a *post conflict* society have little positive impact up against more than half a century of violence. The difficulties in Medellin's transition from political conflict are exacerbated by the fractured socio-territorial dynamics that divide the city. The city's marginalized youth remain likely to participate in organized violence as they are faced with barely any alternatives. Further, the incapacity of the state to acknowledge its own role in this structural and political violence allows for its perpetuation. An acknowledgement of the of failings of the present formal systems and a move towards models for peace-building that seek to empower rather than pacify the citizenry are essential.

The crossroads between transitional justice and urban violence is dense with under-researched subject areas. In societies that are experiencing an urbanization of violence, case studies of urban displacement remain conspicuously absent. Further research into the implications of this phenomenon in different contexts would serve to deepen the conversation in Medellín and elsewhere. In addition to visibility, current circumstance in Medellín begs for investigation into tangible paths for restitution for victims of urban displacement, as standard reparations for IDPs in the form of land restitution are implausible and irrelevant in this situation.

This thesis is not intended to highlight the historical negligence nor the fragility of the Colombian state's demobilization efforts, as that is a project that has been accomplished to exhaustion. But rather, I hope to highlight the manner in which the denial of ongoing political violence in Colombian cities silences its contemporary urban victims and blurs our imagery of the backdrop against which localized activism is taking place. Without a shift in the discourse victims of urban violence will continue to be brushed aside in Medellín, and initiatives from outside the formal framework will remain severely limited.

For transitional justice to succeed in the world's most insecure and divided cities, we must listen to all factions within that fragmented whole - marginalized actors, institutions and the lives of the people who make up the substance of the city.

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Annex I. Key Informants

1. Church Organizers

Padre Velasquez, Hermana Rosa, Hermana Angela

2. Governmental and Non-Governmental Functionaries

Municipal Government Officials: John Byron, Jose, Francesco, Martha, Juanita

NGO Workers: Luz Amparo Sanchez

3. Grassroots Activists:

Son Bata: Jamitah, Johana, John Jayme, Sara

Revolucion Sin Muertos: El AKA, El Perro, Jeihco

4. Regional Victims Forum:

Ofelia, Silvia, Angela

5. Victims of Forced Urban Displacement:

I conducted an initial focus group session with ten women and narrowed my key informants down to three. I met with each of these women five times during my stay in Medellin. Please note that their names have been changed for security reasons.

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