

**DWELLERS OF MEMORY: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF PLACE,  
MEMORY AND VIOLENCE IN MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA**

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Anthropology and Sociology

We accept this thesis as conforming  
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Date June 16/2000

## Abstract

This dissertation documents the memories of Medellín's city dwellers and explores how people in violent urban contexts make sense of violence and deal with its presence in their lives. This study is defined as an anthropology of *remembering*; it is an ethnographic observation of the practices of remembering and forgetting and how these practices shape and are shaped by the lived experience of violence. The dissertation is built on extensive fieldwork in the Colombian city of Medellín with a cross section of women, youth and community leaders.

The thesis argues that when the uncertainty and paradox created by widespread forms of violence threaten to destroy the social and material worlds of Colombian city dwellers, memory becomes a strategic tool for human and cultural survival. The creation of an oral history of death and the dead, the presence of a local social knowledge that assists city dwellers in their safe circulation in and through the city, and the maintenance of practices of place making are examples of how city dwellers deal with the devastating effects of violence in their lives. The thesis develops a place-based exploration of memory and violence and approaches place as a physical, sensory, social and imaginative experience that maintains a sense of continuity between the past and the every day life of Medellín's city dwellers. The two connecting concepts that ground the analysis of the relationship between people, memory and violence are those of "sense of place" and "communities of memory."

The dimensions of human agency, cultural survival and human suffering are central to the exploration of memory, place and violence developed in this thesis. From this perspective, the thesis takes to task anthropological works on violence that emphasize the routinization of terror and fear for those who live amidst widespread violence. The thesis discusses the multiple ways in which memory is disputed in Colombia and the risks posed by a local reading of violence as intrinsic to the history of the country. It concludes that when individuals are faced with realities such as life and death, the familiar faces of the actors of violence and the weakening of the social and ethical fabric of their communities, they do not stand in definite positions and cannot be defined in simple terms such as victims and perpetrators. Thus, it can be recognized that although violence plays a central role in the Medellin city dwellers processes of identity formation, it does not exhaust these possibilities.

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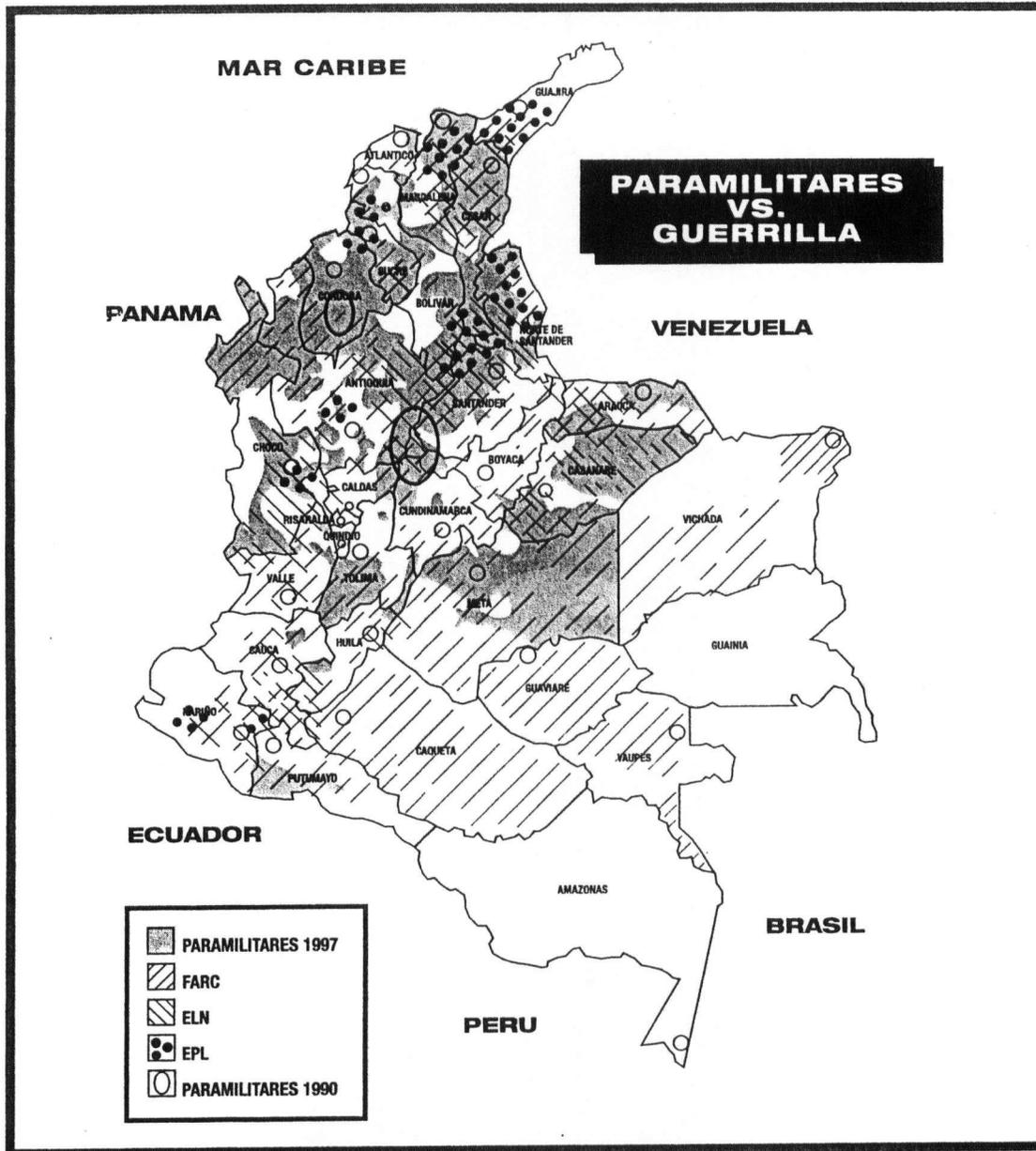
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# Map # 1 Colombia in South America

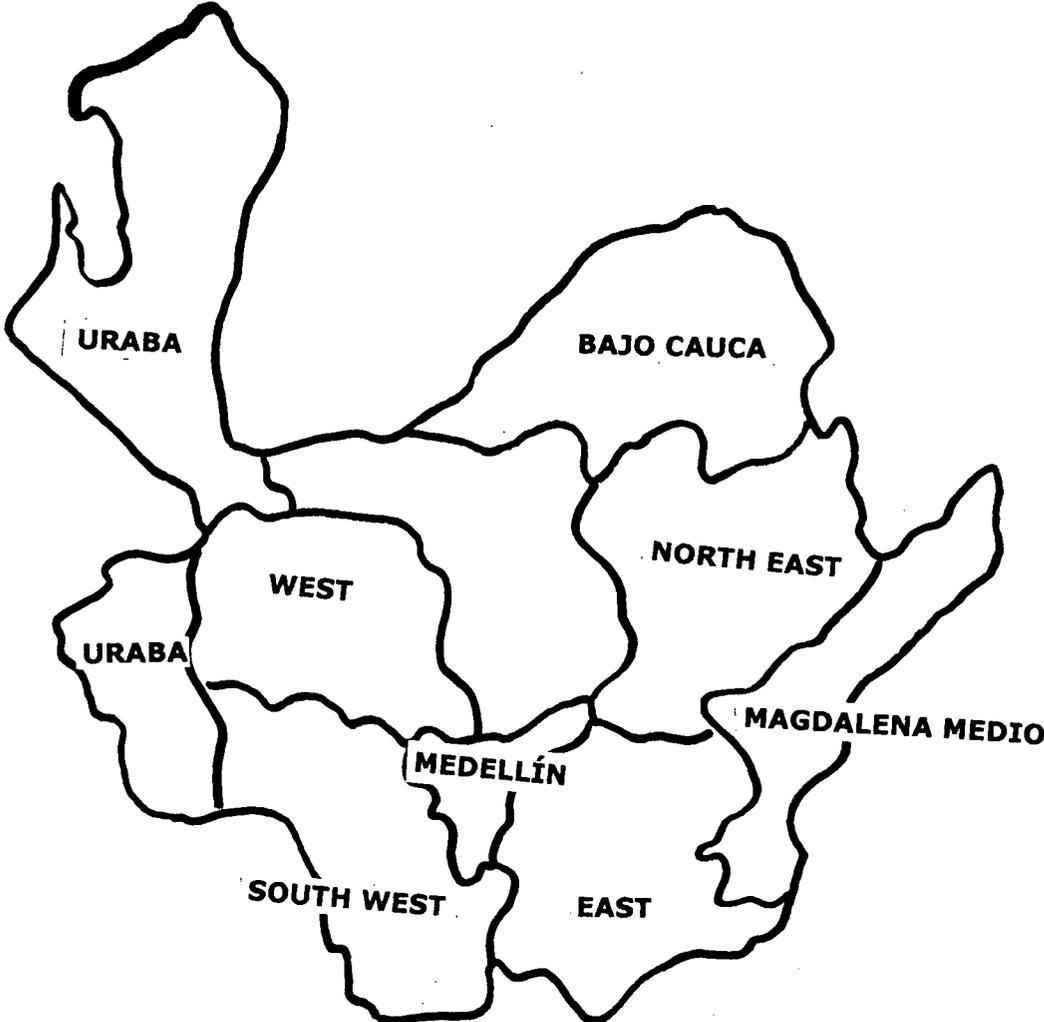


# Map # 2 The Guerrilla and the Paramilitary in Colombia



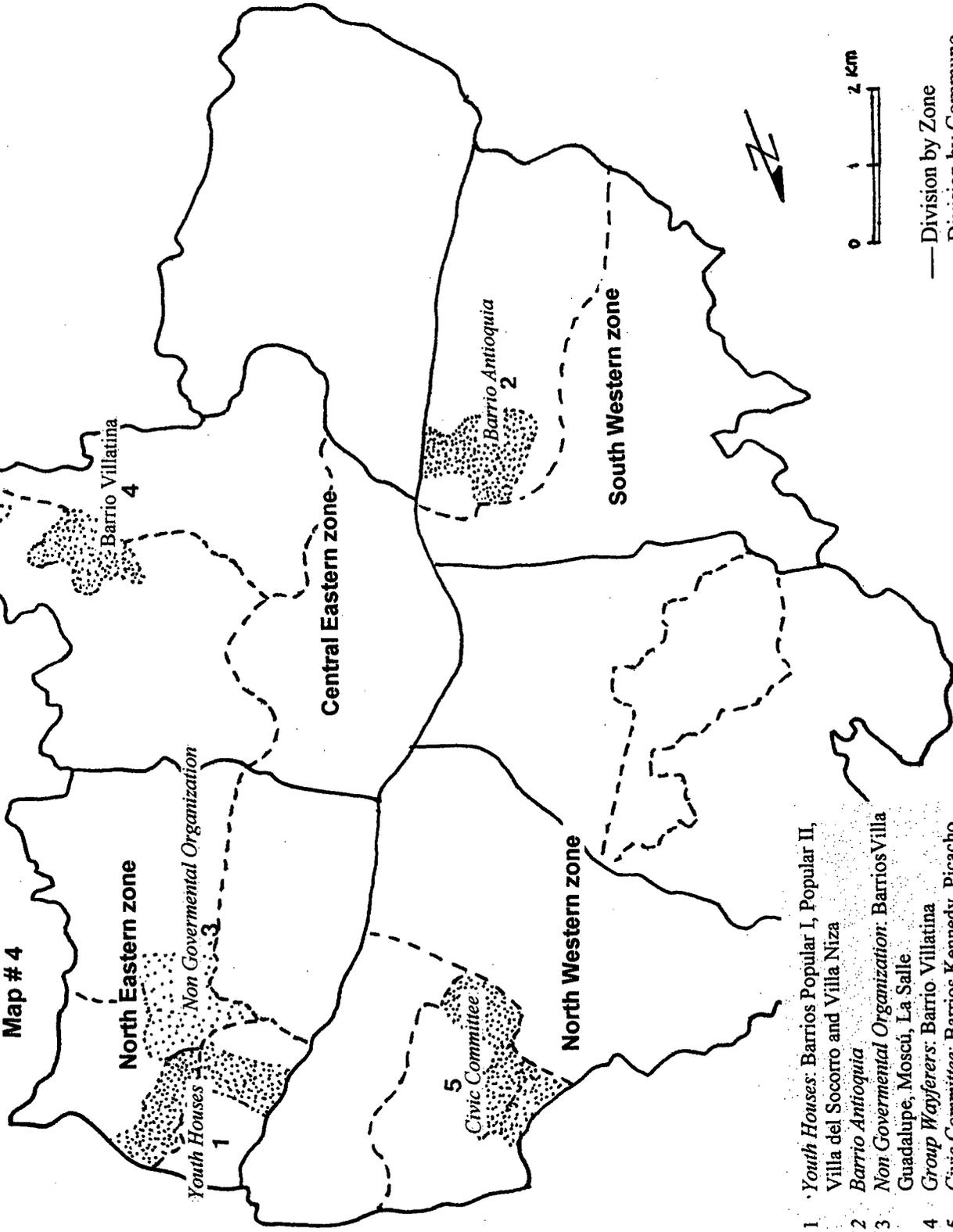
Source: Revista Cambio 16 # 233, December 1997:29

**Map # 3 Department of Antioquia, Medellín**



# Medellín by Zones and Communes: Areas of Fieldwork

Map # 4



- 1 Youth Houses: Barrios Popular I, Popular II, Villa del Socorro and Villa Niza
- 2 Barrio Antioquia
- 3 Non Governmental Organization: Barrios Villa Guadalupe, Moscu, La Salle
- 4 Group Wayfarers: Barrio Villatina
- 5 Civic Committee: Barrios Kennedy, Picacho, Picachito, Mirador

— Division by Zone  
 --- Division by Commune  
 ... Division by area of fieldwork:

## Acknowledgements

*Many* supported me in mapping this work and to each one of you *thank you*. To Francisco Ibañez-Carrasco, “memory-companion” during the Ph.D., *gracias and gracias* for your inspiring criticisms and careful reading of each chapter. To Dean Brown for your amazing work with the translations. I received insightful comments, encouragement and much support from Dorothy Kidd, Yvonne Riaño, Garth Manning, Barry Wright, and Ann Macklem who read several chapters of the thesis. Sebastian Gil-Riaño took on many tasks and with the freshness of life provided valuable comments and editorial corrections. To my committee members Blanca Muratorio, Julie Cruikshank, and Brian Elliott special thanks for you support, enthusiasm and very relevant comments.

In Medellín, I am indebted to the workers at Corporación Región for providing me with intellectual challenge and great help. Thanks to Ruben Fernández, Marta Villa and Ana Maria Jaramillo for the many hours of debate and their support. Juan Fernando, Fulvia, La Mona, Vicky and Javier were very important for my fieldwork. To Jorge Garcia in Corporación Presencia Colombo Suiza for his assistance in barrio Antioquia. To Alfredo Ghiso who shared the “methodological passion” with me. Augusto, Rogelio, Wilson, Adriana, Alvaro, Cesar, Milton, Arlex, and Arlen provided important support taking me in walkabouts and spending many hours exchanging ideas and stories. To Sebastian and Diana, friends and research assistants from whom I learned and got so much.

To my parents Jaime and Ceci for their generosity and unconditional help, *gracias mil!*, to my sister Jeannette who kept newspapers clippings and helped greatly with transcriptions and many other tasks, and to my sister Yvonne whose support is always

present although she is so far away. I am grateful to Barry for keeping my days meaningful and filled with sounds of hammering, and to Ketcheka for getting me out of my desk to play chase in the park. To my children Andrea, Raphaelle, Gabriel and Sebastian for understanding my absences and for their kind interest and support. To Eva Veres for some much needed computer support.

The research for this thesis was made possible by the financial support received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the International Development Research Centre and the many expenses assumed by Corporación Región during my fieldwork.

*To Sebastian .. in Vancouver*  
*To Sebastian .. in Medellín*

## Chapter One

### Introduction: An Anthropology of Remembering

I begin with an image that is imprinted in my memory. A church filled with more than five hundred people and with around three thousand more on the streets. In the early hours of the morning of May 19th, 1997, five heavily armed men dressed in black invaded the apartment of Mario and Elsa, two Colombian social researchers and environmentalists. The bursts of bullets killed Mario, Elsa, and Don Carlos (Elsa's father) and left Elsa's mother seriously injured. Ivan, their two-year-old son was the only one left untouched by the bullets. At the church, Francisco an eleven-year-old boy, reminded us that Ivan survived only because his mother hid him in a closet. What he said afterwards, I can not forget: "I would like to live all my life in a closet so I do not have to see *that*."

Francisco's words challenge us to think about the future for Colombian children and the ways we should remember these friends who were known for their happiness, love for life, peace and environmental work. Francisco's words compelled me to write this dissertation, as does the memory of Mario Calderón and Elsa Alvarado, Julian Vargas, Milton, Hernán Henao, Jaime Garzón, and Kelly Lozano. This deeply scarring incident, one among many in the every day life of Colombia, inspires two central questions: What practices of memory are necessary if we are to face the present challenges in a country like Colombia? What are the types of social research that would be sensitive to Francisco's statement?

## Aim and Focus

In its broadest terms my thesis is concerned with the cultural dimensions of violence. I documented and explored the memories of Medellín's<sup>1</sup> city dwellers searching for clues that might explain how people make sense of violence and deal with its presence in their everyday lives. My work is best defined as an *anthropology of remembering*; it is an ethnographic observation of how people remember and forget and how they actualize memories in daily life. Memory is the methodological tool I used to explore the multiple dimensions of violence in the city of Medellín; it is what drives me to write this thesis. The focus of the ethnographic observation and the interpretative task is on the *memory practices* of Medellín's city dwellers.

Memory, furthermore, triggers the central argument of this thesis: memory becomes a strategic tool for human and cultural survival when the uncertainty and paradox created by violence threatens to destroy the social worlds of Colombian city dwellers. Remembering and forgetting are cultural practices that help to maintain a degree of coherence and control in their lives. More specifically, memory represents a bridging practice that can activate a sense of "togetherness" and a tool for making sense of the presence of everyday violence. To develop this argument, I weave my ethnographic exploration around the concept of place as a physical, sensorial, social and imaginative realm.

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<sup>1</sup> Medellín is the second largest city of the country and Capital of the Department of Antioquia. See Map #1 and #3.

## Colombia: at the Crossroads

During the fifteen months of my fieldwork, between September 1996 and December 1997, Colombians witnessed several critical national events. Fifteen hundred women from towns and cities across the country joined a march to Mutatá, a town in the Colombian region of Urabá, (See Map # 3) entitled “women on the peaceful route for the resolution of conflicts.” In Mutatá, they reaffirmed their commitment to peace and democratization initiatives and proclaimed that in their condition as women “we refuse to birth any more sons or daughters for the war.”<sup>2</sup> Two hundred thousand peasants participated in marches and protests against government policies for the eradication of illicit crops, and children gathered to formulate their vision of a Colombia in peace while appointing children-peace-agents for every region of the country.

A heated debate about contributions from the drug cartel towards the financing of president Ernesto Samper’s political campaign marked the political life of the country. While the calls for the president’s resignation spread, several political, government and social personalities had to report to the national prosecutor’s office and respond to their alleged links with the narcotraffic. There was social unrest and widespread social protests were observed throughout the entire year. A national general strike was led by the major unions, and uprisings in fifteen jails protested the overcrowded and dehumanizing conditions. Meanwhile teachers, peasants, truckers, electric and port workers, the judicial

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<sup>2</sup> This was one of the central slogans of their march and is quoted in the document “*Las mujeres frente al conflicto armado del país.*” This document contains these women’s stance on the armed conflict in the country and their resolutions towards an agenda for the peaceful resolution of the conflicts (Ramírez, 1997).

sector and government employees participated in a variety of protests and strikes (Arango, 1997; Restrepo, 1998).

Internationally, relations with United States were tense and Colombia was “de-certified”<sup>3</sup> for a second time with the argument that it had failed to co-operate on the war on drugs (Tickner, 1998). Organizations like the European Economic Union, the Organization of American States, the United Nations, and the European Parliament were highly critical of the human rights situation in the country and demanded immediate action to prevent sanctions against Colombia.

Meanwhile, the two largest guerrilla organizations, the FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces) and the ELN (National Liberation Army) continued to expand their territorial influence and power. Many rural populations suffered prolonged guerrilla attacks, and the electrical infrastructure and oil pipelines were sabotaged. In contrast to the repeated military defeats of the Colombian army by the guerrillas, the right wing paramilitary organizations experienced an unprecedented growth. The two largest paramilitary groups joined to form a national organization, the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* [Colombian United Self-Defenses] with the goal of strengthening their military power and political recognition. The paramilitary made multiple threats and attacks against human rights workers and social leaders and against civilians and the populations of whole towns who were labelled as “guerrilla collaborators.” While spreading terror, they became responsible for 60% of the more than a hundred massacres that took place in

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<sup>3</sup> Since 1986, the United States has adopted the drug certification process by which they rate other countries “co-operation” with the “war on drugs.” Colombia was first de-certified in 1996 (Tickner, 1998). The consequences of a “de-certification” are political and can also be economic. In 1997, for example, the United States considered minor economic sanctions against Colombia and directed its sanctions against the Executive powers of the country. In this year, United States revoked president Samper’s United States visa.

1997, and for approximately 75% of the internal displacement. In three years 300,000 Colombians were forcibly displaced from their homes (Arango, 1997; Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, 1998; Restrepo, 1997).

In contrast with the widespread violence and attesting to a history of civilian resilience and resistance, 1997 was a crucial year in the consolidation of national civilian initiatives for peace and democratization. On October 26, ten million Colombians joined the "Citizen's Mandate for Peace, Life and Freedom" by including an additional ballot with their vote during departmental and municipal elections. Through this ballot, they called out to all the armed actors for a peaceful resolution to the conflicts, a respect for human rights, a stop to the enrolment of minors in the war, and an end to the killings, kidnappings, disappearances, attacks and displacement of the civil population (Restrepo, 1997; 1998).<sup>4</sup>

Colombia is one of the many countries with an armed conflict that claims the lives of thousands of civilians every year and a record of violence that places it as one of the most violent countries among contemporary societies (Palacios, 1997).<sup>5</sup> The death of Mario, Elsa and Carlos made them part of the ten people who die daily for political reasons and of the 26,000 homicides committed every year (Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, 1998). Mario and Elsa were also part of the more than ten million Colombians searching and calling for peace in innovative and far-ranging initiatives.

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<sup>4</sup> The numbers of victims speak of the magnitude of the problem: 1,260 people were kidnapped in 1997; 2,340 have disappeared in the last two decades, and one million five hundred thousand have been forcibly displaced in the last ten years (El tiempo, November 4, 1997; Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> The second most violent country in the Americas is Brazil, but the statistics are far from Colombia's with 24 homicides per 100.000. The reported rate for Canada is 2.6 per 100.000 and for United States is eight homicides per 100.000 (Carrión, 1995).

The characteristics of the Colombian conflict defy any simple reading. Colombia has experienced different phases and types of violence since the beginning of the 20th century. The armed conflict between the guerrillas and the army has roots in the early 60s when the FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces) and the ELN (National Liberation Army) emerged. Today, the FARC is the oldest guerrilla group on the continent, and between 10,000 to 12,000 individuals are active members of these two guerrilla organizations that have a presence in more than 60% of the national territory (Palacios, 1997)<sup>6</sup> (See map # 2).

In the 1980s, Colombia became one of the main stages for the world drug trade. The landscape of violence became further complicated when the drug cartels promoted terrorist actions and killings as a means of defending themselves from extradition and of strengthening their power. The accumulation of money and power by the drug cartels of Medellin and Cali (Department of Valle, see Map #1) instigated other forms of social violence including bomb attacks, the assassination of judges, politicians, journalists, social leaders, kidnapping and territorial gang violence (Rodriguez, 1999). In the 1980s, the paramilitary organizations consolidated their power in the countryside with support from wealthy landowners and the drug cartels. Today these organizations have expanded throughout the country, having an army of more than 5,000 members. Both the guerrillas and the paramilitary finance some of their operations with drug money. The Colombian army plays many roles in this violence, having one of the worst records in human rights abuses and a proven collaboration with paramilitary violence. By 1999, the United States

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<sup>6</sup> The FARC formed in the mid-50s and is the largest and most powerful guerrilla group in the country. The FARC was formed in response to the offensive launched by the military government against the Communist led enclaves of smallholders. The ELN was founded in the 1960s and was inspired by the Cuban revolution. It is the second largest guerrilla group (Bergquist, Peñaranda and Sánchez, 1992).

had increased its military presence in Colombia to a point in which the country became the fourth largest recipient of foreign military aid after Israel, Egypt and Jordan (Rodriguez, 1999). United States military aid is supposedly to combat the narcotics trade, but it has also being used to fight guerrillas.

In the city of Medellin, there are two main local armed actors. There are the militias that originally emerged as a form of urban guerrilla and the youth gangs that became trapped in the spiral of violence in the 1980s when the drug cartel used them as hired assassins and for several other activities. Both militias and gangs have a territorial presence in the barrios of Medellín and fight over the control of territories.

In what follows, I introduce the guiding ideas in a framework for examining the cultural dimensions of violence through a study of the memory practices of Medellín's city dwellers.

## **Memory, Place and Violence: a Framework**

### **Memory as a Cultural Practice**

This section discusses my approach to memory as a *cultural practice*; a form and system of action that relate to a domain of knowledge and a locus of experience.<sup>7</sup>

Memory constitutes a culturally mediated material practice rather than a natural process (Antz e and Lambek, 1996; Seremetakis, 1994). This approach to memory is phenomenological : a) it places memory practices in the realm of experience; memories

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<sup>7</sup> Foucault (1984) describes *practice* as different systems of action insofar as they are inhabited by thought. The definition of memory as a practice involves forms of action, a locus of experience and a domain of knowledge.

are produced “out of experience, and in turn, reshape it” (Antze and Lambek, 1996:xii), and b) it recognizes that memories are activated by embodied acts, the material world and the sensing of places. Bodies and places animate each other and are intimately intertwined with memory (Casey, 1995; Seremetakis, 1994).

I have turned to the memory practices of Medellin’s city dwellers in order to approach violence from the point of lived experience and from its cultural dimensions. The relationship between memory and identity is at the centre of this exploration. Memories have the power to trigger mechanisms and processes of recognition that allow the individual and the collective to give meaning and purpose to their lives and affirm their identities (Lowenthal, 1985; Montoya, 1996). This link between memory and identity is examined in this dissertation through three connected ideas about the place of memory in our daily lives: a) memory provides a bridge between the past, present and future, and between the individual and the collective; b) memory constitutes a situated distance, a distance that distinguishes memory from the immediacy of direct experience; and c) memories are located in places, they are placed experiences. The following two sub-sections discuss the first two ideas. The discussion of memory as a placed experienced is integrated in the section on place.

### ***Bridges***

The image of memory as a *bridging practice* illustrates the role of memory practices in triggering associations and relationships. A first relationship is with the past. Acts of remembering start in the present and situate the individual by going back in time and re-visiting the past. The relationship established indicates re-creation, shaping and re-

imagining of the past for the purposes of the present rather than a mere preservation of the past (Lowenthal, 1985; Passerini, 1992). All acts of remembering, consequently, involve a selective process and a “claim” or a set of individuals’ claims about the past (Connerton, 1989). This human ability to make claims about the past provides a source of meaning for our lives and a means through which we render our lives meaningful. Practices of remembering and forgetting are socially and culturally mediated, consequently, our acts of memory affirm or deny something in regards to our processes of identity construction. Through the practices of remembering and forgetting we circle back in time to re-visit the past and through these same practices we look towards the future and combine a sense of the past to future possibilities (Perlman, 1988).

The relationship between the individual and the collective is a second association triggered by the practices of memory, a relation by which we learn of the *personal and collective character* of memory practices (Lowenthal, 1985). Acts of remembering and forgetting are an intrinsic part of our personal and private lives. Our individual memories, however, are continuously re-enacted and collectivized through the sharing of memories. As social and cultural beings, we share memories with each other to confirm recollections, establish a sense of continuity and social identity. This allows us to stress that “memory is neither a cultural given nor an individual creation but something between the two” (Teski and Climo, 1995).

Acts of memory-sharing have different functions attached to a group’s need to mobilize collective memories that sustain their identity as a group (Connerton, 1989), and the construction of collective images through which individuals perceive themselves as a collective. It is through this interplay between the individual and the collective that a

sense of continuity with the past and with others and a sense of discontinuity (such as in mourning) in relation with others is established (Lambek, 1996). In the construction of a sense of the collective, the individual subject and his/her experiences and memories are crucial in providing ways to construct and narrate a collective experience and identity (Lambek, 1996).

Memories are produced under specific cultural, embodied and discursive practices. The practices of remembering and forgetting are mediated by social relations and by specific institutional forms and discursive practices. A number of questions pertaining to this relationship are raised by this thesis: a) In situations of widespread violence, what are the types of claims that are made through the individual and collective memory practices of city dwellers? b) What are the institutional and discursive realms in which memory is produced, and most importantly, disputed?

These questions suggest a third association between the past, the present and the future. It refers to the role of the practices of memory to act as *an awareness tool* for the individual. Remembering, Perlman argues, “keeps things alive; it is a ‘saving’ awareness. It is in memory that the faces of human culture must first be saved” (1988:133). In this dissertation I examine how memory has become a bridging practice that allows city dwellers to restore some sense to their lives and re-create survival strategies. This description of the character of memory points to its functional character in our every day lives, in the present and in envisioning the future, and to its disputed nature as a social practice that permeates society. Memory, rather than a force that generates narrative, mythic or visual consensus, is the place in which power relations are enacted (Sánchez, 1999), a place from which groups make claims about their past in order to locate

themselves in the present, and envision themselves in the future. Memory is a plural, heterogeneous, conflictive and disputed terrain manipulated by diverse groups and interests (Riaño, 1997). In Colombia, memory is a dynamic and powerful force in every day life, in the struggles of a variety of indigenous and civic social movements, in the dynamics of violence, and in the work of human rights and democratic initiatives. The memory of past violences is a fundamental ingredient in the present violence, but on the other hand, the memory of resistance and traditional cultural practices inform the struggles of several social movements. Memory in the country is a contested terrain (Sánchez, 1999; Riaño, 1997).<sup>8</sup>

The role of memory practices as awareness tool has been discussed by Luisa Passerini (1992) to argue that, in times of extreme endurance, terror and totalitarianism, memory can become a physical and cultural survival tool. This illustrates the role of memory practices to act as a bridge between life and death, between physical survival and social reconstruction. Passerini reflects on how memory can save lives in conditions of terror and oppression. However, she also reflects on how the memory that might have helped us in physical survival may not be enough to assist us when we assume the tasks of the present, the task of remembering past horrors and of engaging in society's reconstruction. To remember past images of horror and destruction is crucial to prevent

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<sup>8</sup> The uses and, as Todorov (1997) proposes, abuses of memory in everyday life reveal the attempts by individuals and groups to make sense of who they are and of the means they use for identity construction and social status definition. It also reveals the attempts of regimes and institutions to control social memories and to silence entire areas of memory production (Cohen, 1994). Memory, Todorov warns us, is threatened by a multitude of forces such as the attempts of totalitarian regimes to erase and silence the memories of entire groups, the function of over exposure to information in consumer and democratic societies, the inability of social groups to detach themselves from a past of pains and horror and their making of memory into a cult.

future catastrophe and by the same route, to remember destruction “is a way of serving the powers of memory and imagination themselves” (Perlman, 1988:6).

I find my location in this thesis whenever I engage in the act of remembering Francisco’s words. This act of remembering, like the many acts of remembering of Medellin’s city dwellers, reveals my own struggles to make sense of the past and at the same time to find in Francisco’s words, the force and sense of duty to remember and write. The linkage of memory as an awareness illustrates the possibility memory holds to give meaning to our lives (Passerini, 1992) and to function as a force that compels us to act. Memory emerges as a means of connection that links different peoples, generations, times, places and memories.

### *Distances*

Lambek (1996) argues for the need to distinguish memory from the immediacy of direct experience. Remembering implies a subject who locates herself/himself at a distance, “the view of there from over here, of situated distance” (Lambek, 1996:242).<sup>9</sup> This idea of memory as a *situated distance* or perspective is the second aspect that advances my discussion on the relationship between memory and identity. Memory begins when experience moves into the past (Antz e and Lambek, 1996); the remembering act is experiential, however, because “mnemonic processes are intertwined with the

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<sup>9</sup> This view of memory as a situated and embodied distance includes those embodied and situated memory practices that Connerton defines as “social-habit-memory” (Connerton, 1989:36). The body has a learnt capacity, a bodily social memory, to reproduce a certain performance, to follow its codes and rules. This notion of social habit, according to Connerton, includes a knowledge and a remembering in the hands and in the body.

sensory order in such a manner as to render each perception a re-perception” (Seremetakis, 1994:9). The practices of remembering and forgetting transform one kind of experience (the event lived) into a different kind of experience (the remembering act) (Casey, 1987). In this thesis, I look at how individuals locate and position themselves in and during their remembering acts and how this re-situating transforms their past experiences into meaningful memories that assist them in making sense of their daily lives.

To speak of memory as a situated distance implies that there is a sentient body that constructs this distance (sensorially, emotionally and physically) and that memory acts as a sense organ (Seremetakis, 1994; Stoller, 1995). Memory is activated by embodied acts and by a sentient body in motion and the body is culturally consumed and constructed through memories (Casey, 1995). Smell, sight, taste, sound, and motion all act as triggers in activating embodied memories (Feld, 1995; Stoller, 1995). The body is not simply a material and “objective” entity, but rather a phenomenal body, a lived body that is socially constituted and culturally shaped (Casey, 1987; Connerton, 1988). Through this connection with the senses, experience and the body underscore the fluidity and permeability of memory. Passerini (1999) describes memory as having “a texture” in which an intervention at any point will always have repercussions on other points.

In this dissertation, I approach and examine the memory practices of city dwellers taking acute consideration of both memory’s “sensing” capacity and “situational” potency. The relationship of these subjects with the surrounding environment of the city (natural, physical, social, imagined) is crucial, and consequently attention to memory as an experienced, situated and sensed practice is fundamental.

## Places

Places have a distinct potency in enabling us to situate our acts of remembering. This relationship between memories and places lies at the core of the processes of individual and collective identity formation. This section examines the association between memory and places in order to introduce the last aspect in my discussion of the links between memory and identity. I have stressed that memory acts are produced in the realm of experience and that the sentient body is the central agent and subject of our remembering processes. Experience and embodied remembering also imply the taking of distance by a subject who locates himself/herself in the act of remembering. Embodiment and distance, however, are not just about taking a point of view; they also require one *to be in a place*, a place from which the individual who remembers is situated :

As embodied existence opens onto place, indeed *takes place in place* and nowhere else, so our memory of what we experience in place is likewise place-specific: it is bound to place as to its own basis. (Casey, 1987: 182) (His emphasis)

Casey's approach to place is critical of a dominant Western tradition that focuses on the temporal aspects of remembering and that reduces "places" to metrically determinate dimensions.<sup>10</sup> Cultural geographers have challenged these reductionisms while noticing the pervasiveness of a space and time framework in the natural, social and human sciences (Buttimer, 1980; Pred, 1983; Riaño Y, 1998). As a result of this geometrical approach, place became equated with space (as a physical container or a site) and as a

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<sup>10</sup> Casey (1987, 1995) traces this reductionism and disregard for place back to the XVIIth century when space, and place along with it, became geometrized under the influence of Descartes and Newton who saw space in terms of length, breadth and width co-ordinates.

matter of a relative position (Buttimer, 1980; Casey, 1987). The view of place that is relevant to my ethnographic task is linked with embodied experience and sensorial perception, and was present in the classical art of memory, an art based on the systematic inventory of memory places (Nora, 1992).<sup>11</sup> Yates (1966) has noted how in the classic Greek art of memory and later in Aristotle's reflections on memory, "place" was attached to a primary order of experience: "Perhaps [place] is the first of all things, since all existing things are either in place or not without place."<sup>12</sup> The sensing and knowing of place requires the individual "to be in a place" and consequently to be in a position to perceive it (Casey, 1995:18). A crucial aspect of this understanding of place is Aristotle's view of the distinct "potencies" that places hold (Casey, 1987; 1995; Perlman, 1988).

One of these central "potencies" is the ability places have in situating our remembering and memorial life. Casey poses the question: "how can place, plain old place, be so powerful in matters of memory?" (1988:197) and answers this by highlighting the distinct power of places in shaping our lived experience and particularly, in eliciting remembering,

I shall accord to place a position of renewed respect by specifying its power to direct and stabilize us, to memorialize and identify us, to tell us who and what we are in terms of *where we are* (as well as where we are *not*) (Casey, 1993: 22)

Buttimer reflects on the many dimensions of meaning attached to places (symbolic, emotional, cultural, political, and biological), and finds place potential in the link between personal and cultural identity and place identity: "Loss of home or 'losing one's

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<sup>11</sup> The remembering of the order of places served as an aid to memory and was further reinforced by the recollection of images, place images, that represented things remembered (Perlman, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> This is known as the Archytan Axiom and is cited by Simplicius in *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*. I am quoting this statement as it appeared in Casey (1995:47).

place' may often trigger an identity crisis" (Buttimer, 1980:167). As I carried out my fieldwork I came to sense the power many places held in eliciting remembering and in triggering meaningful associations and experiences for Medellin city dwellers. This dissertation explores this relationship between people, memory and places, and it challenges current reductionisms and associations of the notion of place with physical space, geographical sites or traditional localities.

The processes of de-territorialization and the growing conditions of exile, displacement and uprootedness for many in the world have been discussed in the literature on violence and on displacement and globalization (Appadurai, 1988; Gupta and Fergusson, 1997; Malkki, 1995; 1997).<sup>13</sup> These two bodies of work have made an important contribution in challenging territorialized notions of culture, towards re-thinking the relationships between the local and the global in plural ways (e.g. virtual, electronic, diaspora, etc) and in understanding how place and identity are reconstructed in the lives of those who have been uprooted. However, the stress on mobility and displacement has erroneously been associated with the 'disappearance of the local' in the processes of identity construction (Cruces, 1997). In a similar vein, some problematic associations have been made between displacement and placelessness, or between the destruction of social and spatial referents (either due to globalization, displacement or violence) and societal transit into a condition of "non-places" in which places lose meaning and potency (Augé, 1992; Montoya, 1996). Places are not mere physical

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<sup>13</sup> Chapter six discusses the literature on place, deterritorialization and globalization. Literature exploring the links between people and place can be found in a variety of fields that include studies on nationalism and nation formation (Anderson, 1992; Guha, 1983; Gupta, 1997; Fergusson, 1997; Radcliffe and Westwood, 1996), on local and regional landscapes, and on local knowledge and nature (Descola and Páisson, 1996).

containers, they are containers of lived experience and memories, and in this sense, sensual and mnemonic. Amidst disorientation (and material chaos), uprootedness and displacement, places-- as lived, remembered and imagined realms-- appear to provide a sense of continuity and coherence to Medellin's city dwellers.

In Medellin, I observed how multiple forms of violence threatened fundamental aspects of the everyday life through the destruction of material and physical places, the imposition of new boundaries and barriers, and the displacement of people from their homes or from the places where they gather and socialize. Violence threatens the very basis of the experience of being in place by forcing individuals into situations in which they encounter themselves "out of place" or disoriented: a situation that occurs with the destruction of felt landmarks within the city they inhabit, the loss of lives and of their ways of relating with each other. But it was also at this interstice between memory, place and violence, that I re-discovered the power of places. Places continued to elicit remembering and to give meaning to everyday life; they also continue to exist as remembered and symbolic places even when the physical landmarks have disappeared. In this thesis, I challenge current understandings and approaches to violence and place that disregard the placed nature of our experiences and memories.

## **Violence**

My concern with the cultural dimensions of violence shaped my ethnographic focus on the lived experience of Medellin city dwellers. My focus is not on one form of violence -- political, domestic or drug related -- but on the ways that multiple forms of violence impact the daily life of city dwellers and their plural and transcendent

responses: resistance, resilience, grief, pain, humour, irony (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1996). My approach to violence links up with a growing body of anthropological work known as “ethnographies of violence.” This body of work examines questions about the formative, performative and phenomenological dimensions of violence, and poses fundamental questions about human nature and the meaning of humanity in the face of a worldwide spread of violent conflicts and systemic terror (Jenkins, 1998; Robben and Nordstrom, 1995). Pointing to the absence of the experiential and subjective dimensions in most analyses on violence, these authors place their ethnographies and the ethnographer in the context of violence. Their approach takes distance from essentialist and singular understandings of violence that neglect to see how violence enters into the most fundamental features of people’s lives. Although my work builds on these criticisms, it articulates a critique about the positioning of these anthropologists who define their anthropological task as one of a witness-emissary (I develop this idea in Chapter two). My work builds on three central premises, which provide the framework for the analysis I develop in this dissertation:

- First, violence and the ways it is experienced in daily life can not be reduced to the spaces of death and destruction; it needs to be analyzed in the human and socio-cultural dimensions of living and reconstruction (Robben and Nordstrom, 1995, Warren, 1993). The focus of my fieldwork is in the examination of the “lived experience” of violence, on the ways people go about their daily lives and on their creative and strategic responses (Nordstrom, 1995).
- Second, violence is a socially and culturally constructed manifestation of complex and plural dimensions of human existence. Questions about violence, therefore, need

to move away from functionalist understandings of violence as a feature of human behaviour and societies, and place violence in the realm of human agency and culture (Aretxaga, 1997; Jenkins, 1998; Feldman, 1995).

- Third, violence is a contested and multidimensional field where competing paradigms, ideologies, ethics, memories and forms of power intersect and are negotiated. It is necessary to analyze the plurality and complexity of the forms of violence and to recognize the conflicting interests and divisions within social groups and societies (Stern, 1991; Rivera-Cusicanqui, 1993).

These premises are the basis of my exploration of the cultural dimensions of violence through a study of the memory practices of Medellín's city dwellers. I highlight the notion of agency to stress that independent of the "spread," "extent," "regularity" or "intensity" of violence, human beings (as subjects vested with agency) make sense out of experiences that are profoundly dehumanizing and denigrating, and are able to re-create the flow of everyday experience (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1996). From this perspective of human agency, my work confronts the literature on anthropology and violence that applies concepts such as "cultures of terror" and "fear" to describe the experience of Latin American populations (Taussig, 1992; Green, 1995).

In approaching violence as a lived experience, I strive to understand how individuals and collectives accommodate their strategies and cultural practices when faced with the ambiguity and uncertainties of their living conditions (Warren, 1993). I try to understand the referential forces that shape their every day lives (Scheper-Hughes, 1992). These questions place the individual at the centre of the reflection and assist me in challenging binary or bipolar characterizations of those who are involved or affected by

the violent conflicts as either victims or aggressors. I stress the complex and shifting subject positions when individuals are faced with the realities of death, destruction, pain, and terror and approach human agency and cultural activity as contradictory and continuously shifting (Guha 1983; Prakash, 1994).

The transformation, reorganization or at times “disappearance” of daily life because of violence also brings a reorganization of the sensorial worlds and new ways through which individuals struggle to give meaning to their lives. In this regard, I am concerned with the transformations taking place in the perception and universe of meanings of the city dwellers: how are the city dwellers of Medellin representing and constructing meaning out of their experiences of displacement, terror and suffering? (Warren, 1993) This interrogation about the sensorial worlds and violence is also linked to the field of knowledge, to the ways people reflect and transform their experience into a local knowledge. I examine the knowledge practices of the city dwellers in their daily life and explore the practices, experiences, and emotions that become vehicles of knowledge and cultural survival (Battaglia, 1995).

This dissertation draws from a body of work on “violence” by Colombian scholars. This body of scholarship known locally as *violentología* [violentology] has made a significant contribution to the historical analysis of contemporary violence and towards addressing the regional diversity, the systems of social cohesion, and the spatial and socio cultural expressions of the violent conflicts in the country (González, 1993; 1994; Jimeno, 1993; Sánchez, 1992). The work of “violentologists” analyzes the structural, political and institutional mediations of the violent conflict in Colombia. In

particular, this body of work generates a type of scholarship that connects to national socio-political debates on violence and peace, human rights and pacific co-existence (Comisión de Estudios, 1987; Palacios, 1997; Zambrano, 1994).<sup>14</sup> Although a concern about the relationship between culture and violence has been present in this scholarship, there have been very few ethnographic studies conducted on the lived experience of violence and little reflection on the cultural dimensions of violence (Blair, 1998). There is a growing call to conduct this kind of study (Roldán and Jimeno, 1996).

This dissertation deals with the memory practices through which the experience of violence is re-created, and not directly with violence itself; furthermore, it throws light on the relationship between memories, violence and the formation and re-configuration of cultural identities. It is intended as a contribution to the Colombian dialogue on violence and culture, and to a wider international discussion within anthropology and other disciplines, on human agency and the interplay of culture and memory in violent conflicts.

## **Outlines**

The remaining chapters of the thesis present the research methodology and ethnographic findings. Chapter two describes my approach to the task of studying the

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<sup>14</sup> Colombian academics in fields as varied as political science, history, sociology, communications and anthropology have been actively involved in the thinking and reflection of social policies and alternatives for peace and democratisation since the late 1950s. There have been two government sponsored Commissions of violence (the first one in the 1960s and the second in 1987) that have carried out extensive consultation and research on the dynamics and causes of violence in the country.

memory practices of Medellín's city dwellers and the methodological framework that supported my research. In this chapter I introduce the social groups I worked with and the specific research methods and instruments applied during my fieldwork. The use of methods that incorporate verbal and visual art forms is discussed within a description of the dynamics that took place when I applied these methods in the memory workshops and group sessions I conducted. The chapter discusses the use of group and interactive methodologies for the study of memory and violence, the dialogic potential of tools such as memory workshops, and the premises that guided my positioning as an anthropologist in the field. I make my ethical stance and subject positioning in regards to the study of violence and on issues of ethnographic authority and voice clear. My central argument is that the problematics of anthropological authority, voice and gaze need to be faced at the level of *praxis*, attending to the practices of doing research and the contributions that the research can make to the social processes we study.

Chapter three introduces a historical overview of Colombia and Medellín through the lens of the history of one *barrio* (neighbourhood) in Medellín. This chapter provides a general outlook of the dynamics of social conflict, violence, history and culture in Colombia and the key historical changes that have taken place in the last seventy-five years. The history of the *barrio* is followed as a means of outlining significant events on a local, regional, national and international level, and of highlighting how local histories and processes unveil wider social trends and can provide the clues necessary for understanding macro social processes.

Chapters four to seven present and discuss my ethnographic findings. The two connecting concepts that ground the analysis of the relationship between people, memory

and violence are the formation of a “sense of place” and of “communities of memory” among Medellin city dwellers. These chapters develop these two concepts. Chapter four focuses on an ethnographic account of the cultural practices by which places are rendered meaningful in Medellin. It looks at how places are constructed and vested with significance by Medellin’s city dwellers. The chapter describes practices of place making such as place naming, imagining, landmarking, and dwelling. The chapter stresses the powerful, sensual and rich relationships between people, memories and places and argues about the significance of a sense of place in the daily life of Medellin’s city dwellers. It discusses the ways that violence has marked and re-inscribed places with new meanings and the ways that city dwellers struggle to invest these places with significance. The chapter locates place as a central axis of the ethnographic analysis and highlights the potential of studying the relationships between people and places as a way of understanding the complexity of the cultural dynamics and transformations taking place in communities impacted by widespread forms of violence.

Chapter five discusses the concept of communities of memory through the description of unique types of oral narratives and memory practices organized around death and the dead. It argues that in Medellin death and the dead have an oral history. The chapter describes the narrative forms of this oral history, the ways that death is remembered as an event, and some of the genres of this local history. The discussion on agency and human suffering and the ways memory prompts city dwellers to action is advanced in this chapter. I emphasize that the oral history of death has a place in the daily life of Medellin’s city dwellers by documenting the magnitude of human losses, and

providing outlets for the community to explore emotions, come together, and restore a sense of dignity.

Chapter six addresses the practices of territoriality and use of the space by Medellín's city dwellers as a way to further explore the relationship between people, memory and violences. The practices of territoriality and circulation in and through the city are described here as practices of place making that are continuously re-defined by the uncertainty and unpredictability of the violent social context. The chapter describes the territorial transformations taking place in Medellín, the walking and travelling practices in the city, and the ways an implicit local knowledge guides city dwellers and assists them in the creation of geographical distinctions for a safer circulation and use of social spaces. The chapter advances the discussion on place, deterritorialization and global processes while engaging in an examination of the relationship between territory, social groups and cultural identities. More specifically, it discusses how youth involved in the violent conflict construct a sense of otherness through practices of territoriality.

Chapter seven examines the modes by which Medellín's urban dwellers constitute themselves as subjects of their actions. The discussion in this chapter is carried out as an ethical interrogation and reviews some of the cultural referents under which Medellín's city dwellers constitute themselves as subjects. Figures such as the martyr and the amazons are discussed to illustrate local cultural constructions. The chapter also discusses some of the local cultural constructions of otherness, and the ways that city dwellers position themselves as subjects in their remembering acts, in their movement and circulation through the city. Throughout the chapter I highlight the contested and shifting

subject positions of Medellin's city dwellers and the dilemmas they encounter in facing experiences of death, terror, and survival.

## Chapter Two

### Methodological Memories

My fieldwork took place in the city of Medellin between September 1996 and December 1997.<sup>1</sup> I carried out the fieldwork with the support of a local non-governmental organization named Corporación Región. Región provided me with office space, a stimulating environment for debate, and a vital source of information about the social and cultural dynamics of the city of Medellin and the national context.<sup>2</sup> Through Corporación Región I established the relations and contacts that allowed me to progress in my fieldwork. My fieldwork took me across the city of Medellin through the North Eastern, Central Eastern, and South Western zones of the city (see Map # 4), and through schools, homes, non-governmental organizations, and community organizations.

I worked with a large and diverse number of residents of Medellin, taking as a focus for my research *youth, women and community leaders*. The analytical focus of my work was the *memory practices* of these residents of Medellin. This chapter describes the

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<sup>1</sup> I carried out research in the cities of Bogota and Medellin with the purpose of establishing comparisons among the two largest Colombian cities. By the time I finished my fieldwork and began organizing the information, I realized the daunting task waiting for me in terms of organizing the extensive fieldwork material, the hundreds of hours taped, discussions and interviews, and the research documentation. My committee members pointed this out to me, and to my despair I abandoned rich and suggestive field material, and focused my dissertation on the city of Medellin. The material I collected in Medellin was more extensive and in-depth, and certainly, this material can provide valuable insights and be extrapolated to other realities and research settings.

<sup>2</sup> Corporación Región develops educational, communications, research and organizing projects in Antioquia. The organization works in the areas of human rights, justice and conflict resolution, urban policies, and social and cultural research. I met several Región workers between 1983-1986 when I worked with the Centre of Social Research and Popular Education (CINEP) in Bogotá and was conducting participatory research on popular culture and communication practices in Medellin. During the time I spent in Región, their research unit was working on a project about political culture and conflict in Medellin. The dialogue and exchange with the three researchers of this unit has inspired many of my reflections.

methodological approach that supported my research on memory, violence and place. It discusses the ways I positioned myself as an anthropologist going back home to carry out research on memory and violence, and afterwards as an ethnographer coming back “home” to write a dissertation.

In the introduction of this dissertation I describe my work as an anthropology of remembering. I studied the remembering and forgetting practices of Medellin residents with the aim of drawing conclusions about the ways city dwellers make sense of their daily life in a society deeply affected by multiple forms of violence. Memory, in this regard, was at the centre of my ethnographic exploration, but it also indicates the methodological approach I took in exploring the cultural dynamics of violence. The relationship that informs my research and methodological approach is that of memory and cultural identity : how remembering and forgetting are the sustaining practices of an individual’s sense of belonging to a group, community or nation, of his/her uniqueness and differences.

Remembering and forgetting are not passive acts of purely psychological or natural essence; they are mediated by human activity. Remembering and forgetting are activities in which all human beings engage. This engagement with the past, from the present, is part and parcel of the creation of our sense of who we are, of our identities. It is through the ways that we remember and forget that we construct ourselves as individuals and as members of a collectivity. I argue here that the study of the memory practices of Medellin city dwellers provides a significant body of material with which to examine the cultural dynamics of violence. This argument explains my methodological choice of taking as a unit of analysis the memory practices of Medellin city dwellers.

The idea and decision to engage in an anthropology of remembering was also informed by my past field experiences.<sup>3</sup> Since I began planning my research, it was clear to me that I did not want to study violence by engaging in an ethnography of violence. I did not try to explain the causes of the violent conflict in Colombia or try to deconstruct it. I did not ask questions about violence or cultural identity, but about what people remembered as key events, images, dates, individuals or stories of their everyday life. My expectation was that the way memories were evoked and constructed would suggest how violence impacts their everyday lives. A syntax of memory would provide significant clues to examine how violence is [or is not] reshaping their ways of defining themselves as members of collectivities, as inhabitants of a barrio, a city and a nation.

The topic of violence poses acute ethical problems for my fieldwork and my writing. I struggle with various issues in order to: a) challenge a voyeuristic stance with respect to violence; b) avoid the exoticizing of violence in Colombia and the peoples who suffer it for the consumption of a (mostly academic) North American audience; and c) continue to be responsible and accountable to the people I worked with in Colombia. I have a clear personal standpoint about the “ugliness” and “dirtiness” of war and violence, about the social and emotional impact it has on our lives. The senselessness and terror of

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<sup>3</sup> My previous field research in Colombia had explored questions about cultural identity, social movements and popular cultures. My MA thesis on the sources of cultural identity among street youth, provided rich material for exploring youth subcultures as expressions of both cultural resistance and cultural complicity with dominant and mass mediated culture. In the 1990s, I recognized a serious gap between my research focus and methods and the dynamics of social conflict and violence in the country. In the 1990s the “same” youth I had been studying, became key agents in the violence that spread through the country as members of the gangs of hired assassins and militias. I drafted my dissertation research plan while questioning my own “ability” to perceive the shifts taking place in the country, and my own research politics of representation and location. A similar questioning has been taking place regionally by anthropologists who witnessed how those who had been subjects of their studies on cultural renovation, resistance and identity were at the very centre of the violence that was taking place in countries such as Peru (Rivera-Cusicanqui, 1990).

the many wars that affect Colombia do not call for any heroic or romantic epics. I expand on this consideration in this chapter with the help of the concept of *praxis*. Through the lens of praxis, I explore issues of the subject position of the anthropologist. I specifically interrogate the resolutions to the issues of social responsibility, power and voice in relation to the subjects and the realities studied, and in relation to the academic community and the writing audiences.

### **The “Field”**

This is an ethnography of how people remembered when they came together during a memory workshop or group interview and how memories were brought forward in the various everyday situations I observed. In Medellin, I worked with people from three different local areas of the city and with groups like public school teachers and youth workers who live and work across the entire city. My research field, in its broadest term, was the city of Medellin. The field, however, did not encompass the city in its geographical totality or as an abstract social construction, but rather as a place *lived* in by the subjects. I considered the mediation of the individuals’ singularities: their place of residence, social class, generation and gender, their social activities and affiliations. As I took into consideration the diverse elements that shape the lived experience of the individuals in the city, the geographical and symbolic borders of the city would change according to the subject and the ways they used and inhabited the city. Accordingly, “the field” was in some cases concretely located in sites such as a barrio’s block, while in others, “the field” included the city as a whole. In other cases, the field could not be

spatially located but it referred to a specific social group or a time period. In summary, my field was the city of Medellin as lived in and remembered by its residents.

Through out this dissertation, I use the term *city dwellers* as a way to name those who live, use and sense the city for their daily activities. Dwelling, as formulated by Keith Basso (1997:106), “assigns importance to the forms of consciousness with which individuals perceive and apprehend the geographical space. More precisely, dwelling is said to consist of the multiple ‘lived relations’ that people maintain with places, for it is solely by virtue of these relationships that spaces acquire meanings.” The qualifying concept I have used to define the subjects of my research is that of *dwelling*. Dwelling as a human action, stresses the embodied presence of city dwellers in the environment of the city and the ways they inhabit and use it.

## **Actors and sites**

I approached the individuals, groups and communities who became the subjects of this study through the community workers and researchers of Corporación Región. Once Región’s workers were informed of my goals and research plan, they approached me and suggested possibilities of doing memory workshops<sup>4</sup> and group sessions. Some of the research interactions lasted the time of a workshop (from four hours to a day or two) while others took me into an in-depth and intense interaction over several months. In all of these scenarios, my method was ethnographic.

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<sup>4</sup> The *memory workshops* as a research strategy are discussed at length later in this chapter. I use the term to encompass a gathering in which a group of participants interact and engage in remembering through the use of verbal and visual art forms. Workshops lasted from four hours to one-two days. I also refer to *group sessions* to describe group meetings that took place after the intensive workshop and that lasted two or three hours. The methods used in these sessions were the same as in the workshops but they were more informal.

I focussed on youth, women and community leaders because according to regional researchers (Martín-Barbero, 1998; Wills, 1999) they are key actors in the landscape of social movements and critical social issues in Colombia. My research addressed the intersections of gender, generation and social roles in the cultural dynamics of violence and the focus on these groups contributed to this exploration. Jesús Martín-Barbero (1998) highlights how in the last two decades in Colombia, new social actors have mapped out new forms of political action, of “living together” and of inhabiting the city. Martín-Barbero points out that the vigorous presence of women, youth, and civic movements challenged a ‘supposedly’ national history when they reclaimed their right to their memory and self-representation.

In the following section, I describe the individuals, groups and communities I worked with and the type of work carried out with them.

**Youth Houses.** The youth houses [*casas juveniles*] originated as a project of the first Presidential Office of Medellín. In 1990, the youth houses began providing social, economic and cultural programs for youth at risk and involved in violent actions. The youth unit of Region showed interest in applying the design and process I followed in the memory workshops to the task of systematizing their community work with the youth houses. I participated in and facilitated some of the sessions they organized, and also conducted an extended memory workshop with members of four of these youth houses. Three of the youth who participated in this workshop led me on walkabouts of the zone and shared several informal sessions and reflections on the cultural and social dynamics

and history of the zone.<sup>5</sup> The participants during the sessions with the youth houses consisted of men and women whose ages ranged from sixteen to the late twenties.

**Convivamos.** I carried out a memory workshop with the workers and volunteers of Convivamos, a local non-governmental organization of the North Eastern zone.<sup>6</sup> For the organization, the workshop was an opportunity to look back on their work and their memories as residents of this zone. One of the workers in this organization led me on two walkabouts through the zone.

The four youth houses and the NGO are located in the **North eastern zone** of Medellin (See Map #4). This zone is located north-east of the downtown sector of the city. It is made of four communes and fifty-five barrios. The settlement process of the barrios of the North Eastern zone occurred predominately during the 1970s and 1980s through illegal urbanization and invasion [squatter settlements] by mainly rural immigrants. There is also some private development within the zone. Geographically, the zone's most distinctive feature is its location in the foothills and its steep topography. The zone houses nearly twenty five per cent (25%) of the poorest population of the city. Currently, several new squatter settlements of internally displaced people have been located in high risk areas of this zone (Naranjo, 1992; Secretaría de Bienestar Social, 1996).

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<sup>5</sup> Medellin is divided into six urban zones and sixteen communes. A zone includes an area of several barrios from various social and economic levels. A *commune* is a division of the zone that includes barrios of similar social and economic levels (Diagnóstico Social de Medellin, 1996). Map #3 shows these divisions.

<sup>6</sup> Residents of this zone, particularly of the barrios of Villa del Socorro, Moscu and La Salle founded this non-governmental organization. The organization promotes community organizing with youth, women, children and co-operative, health and peace initiatives in the zone.

**Barrio Antioquia.** Corporación Región joined another local non governmental organization, *Corporación Presencia Colombo-Suiza* in a project to construct a “barrio’s history” in barrio Antioquia (see Map # 4). Corporación Presencia was supporting the peace process among this barrio’s gangs and promoted training, educational and employment initiatives. I assumed the responsibility of carrying out this project of the barrio’s history. Given barrio Antioquia’s tense climate when we began the project, it was decided to work separately with five groups in the community – a youth group, two groups of women from the barrio’s training centre, the community organization, and a group of ex-gang members. With each one of these groups, we worked towards recovering memories of significant experiences and events in the barrio and the city. Each group created a “memory product” that was presented in a final session in which all of the groups and many other community residents met and shared their memories and findings concerning the history of the barrio. I transcribed the stories collected during the memory sessions and organized them chronologically and thematically into a booklet of anecdotes [*anecdotario*] that was left with the community. Two members of the youth group became my research assistants.<sup>7</sup>

**Youth Group “Wayfarers.”** This youth group from the Central Eastern zone of Medellín approached me with the idea of conducting memory workshops that would allow them to look at their history and decide their future as a group. Approximately

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<sup>7</sup> My research assistants were Diana, a mother in her thirties and Sebastian a young man in his early twenties. Diana and Sebastian were both very knowledgeable about the barrio’s social dynamics and recognized as neutral individuals and social leaders. They helped me collect specific historical information about the barrio and map the various social groups and gangs through the history of the barrio. They both carried out formal and informal, individual and group interviews. Sebastian also drafted several maps of the barrio locating the places of gathering and meeting of the various social groups (see Maps # 5 and 6).

fifteen youth participated in the memory sessions. I carried out two group sessions and one memory workshop with them.

The **Central eastern zone** is located east of the city's downtown area. It is divided into three communes, and has a total of forty five barrios (see map # 4). The settlement process of these barrios took place mainly during the 1970s and 1980s by illegal urbanization and squatter settlements. During the 1920s and 30s some barrios were settled by private development. Geographically the distinctive element of this zone is its location at the foothills and its steep topography (Naranjo, 1992). In the late 1990s, mostly internally displaced people have founded new squatter settlements in the zone. I carried out three extended walkabouts in this zone led by a local youth leader and attended activities organized by the youth groups and community organizations of the zone.

I also carried out memory workshops and group sessions with three other groups of city dwellers. I met with a group of twenty seven **youth workers** from governmental and non governmental organizations of Medellin and its metropolitan area and I carried out a workshop for thirty **high school teachers** from Medellin's metropolitan area. In both cases, participants were eager to assist and were interested in learning about the use of memory methods and tools that would enrich their work. I also participated in a workshop on "political action" with the members of a **civic committee** of the North western zone of Medellin (see Map # 4). They asked me to facilitate one component of their workshop in which they remembered their past experiences with political activism.

In each one of the research interactions there was a “trade-off.” The individuals would agree to work with me generally because there was an outcome, a process and a reflection that would contribute to their activities. Overall, my invitation to work with memory was received positively in the local and national context.<sup>8</sup> I heard from many individuals and groups that “memory” was a crucial topic for them as it framed much of Colombia’s political and cultural life. The intents of the armed actors and dominant forces to control or erase the memory of specific groups (e.g. internally displaced people) indicated the risks posed to these people’s knowledge of the past and the disputed nature of the practices of memory in Colombia. The right to memory has also emerged as a vital means for the cultural and social revival of indigenous groups,<sup>9</sup> Afro-Colombians, and internally displaced people. Furthermore, human right groups addressed forgetting, suppression and the lack of avenues for *elaborar los duelos* [collective mourning] as central components of the crisis of human rights in the country (Fundación Manuel Cepeda, 1998).

The politics of *compromise and negotiation* were crucial in defining how I went about doing the research. I went to the field with the assumption that my research should be useful and contribute to the communities and research subjects. The model of action research, with which I had past experience, was not applicable in this context because the main purpose and direction of my research was mostly driven by the demands of a Ph.D.

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<sup>8</sup> I carried out several workshops with many other organizations, community groups, universities and the National Anthropology Institute. The stress of these workshops was on the methodological component.

<sup>9</sup> Joanne Rappaport (1994) documents how the Cumbales Indians in Colombia resorted to their topographic memory and their historical knowledge to generate a successful political strategy in their land claims.

dissertation.<sup>10</sup> My approach to the dilemma of the social “use” and contribution of my research to the subject and communities was resolved at the methodological and research level in the pragmatics of *how* I did research.

The workshops were designed to ensure that by the end of the sessions participants would have knowledge of how to apply some of the methods used. I also insisted that they use or take the workshop products - maps, albums, booklets, and the transcriptions of the sessions. I spent many hours discussing the kind of workshop that could be more useful to them. As part of my preparation for each workshop and group process, I did walkabouts in the zones, became familiar with the group’s history or interests, carried out participant observation of activities, events and daily routines, and collected documentation.

## **The Research Methods and Instruments**

Like sailing, gardening, politics and poetry, law and ethnography are crafts of place: they work by the light of local knowledge - *Clifford Geertz. Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology.*

I worked with a variety of verbal and visual forms that allowed me to explore the multiple embodied and sensory dimensions of the practices of remembering and forgetting and the ways that memories are actualized in everyday life. I relied on a combination of methods inspired by the work of oral historians and researchers of the verbal and visual arts. Ruth Finnegan (1992) uses the term verbal arts to include verbal

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<sup>10</sup> My research integrated several elements that characterize a participatory action research process (e.g. the combination of social investigation, educational work and action), but it could not be defined as such because participants did not have control over the overall process of the research and the research problem was not identified by the community (Hall, 1981; Tandom, 1997).

expressions such as folktales, proverbs, legends, riddles, songs and poems, and verbal processes such as naming or rhetoric. The definition "verbal arts" stresses the aesthetic feature of these forms which Finnegan also characterizes as verbal artistry. In my work, I stressed the *performance* aspects of these forms in the acts of remembering and the *embodiment* of these expressions. I included the "visual arts" to describe plastic and visual expressions such as drawings, photographs (from the viewpoint of an image that is framed by an individual) and quilts. I used these forms to elicit remembering. On other occasions, I observed and recorded how these forms were used in the social interactions of the city dwellers.

The application of these methods within a study concerned with memory and lived experience linked my reflection and methodological exploration with the theoretical contributions of an anthropology of the senses (Seremetakis, 1994; Stoller, 1995). Such literature informed my work and my understanding of how mnemonic processes are intertwined with the sensory order in such a manner as to render each perception a re-perception. That is to say, memories are stored in "everyday items that create and sustain our relationship to the historical as sensory dimension" (Seremetakis, 1994:9). In my fieldwork, I attended to many senses that allowed me to consider the embodied and placed dimensions of the memory practices and the interplay of tactile, sonic and visual senses in the lived experience of Medellin's city dwellers (Feld, 1996; Stoller, 1995).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The link between the senses and historical interpretation is highlighted by Seremetakis (1994). The senses act as witnesses or record keepers of the material experience and constitute a collective medium of communication. Consequently, Seremetakis defines memory as "a distinct meta-sense that transports, bridges and crosses all the other senses. Yet memory is internal to each sense, and the senses are as divisible and indivisible from each other as each memory is separable and intertwined with others" (Seremetakis, 1994:9)

Two research instruments, memory workshops and walkabouts, were the central pillars of my ethnographic work and participant observation.

### **Walkabouts**

As my research alternated between geographical, social and mnemonic fields, I carried out several extended walkabouts with the purpose of locating myself in the city environment. The walkabouts were one of my main ethnographic tools for exploring the sensorial dimensions of walking and travelling in the city, for understanding the restrictions of circulation in and through the city and the local constructions of place and landscape. The walkabouts also located me within the specific environments and social dynamics of the city of Medellín. The walkabouts were in and through specific areas of Medellín and I was always led by residents who took me to the places and through the circulation routes that they considered significant in their own experience and for the local communities. We walked, for example, through streets, alleys and trails that were part of their daily circulation routes, we visited and heard stories of the places they considered significant within their lived experiences or that had local historical significance, and we recognized those landmarks in the landscape and soundscape that evoked stories, memories, or specific events for the guides.

It was during walkabouts through various sectors of the city of Medellín that I came to recognize the mnemonic and sensorial power that places hold and began to document the prolific relationships between people and places. In Medellín, stories dwell in parks, bars and corner stores; they circulate through streets and avenues and are organized in reference to key mnemonic landmarks such as billboards, buildings, ravines or hills. I learnt in these walkabouts how memories are bound to place, and how they

dwell in natural and urban landscapes, in local site and chronological referents and in sensorial and biographical environments. It is also within place and territorial references, that Medellín's city dwellers can best describe the tangible presence of violence in their lives. It is in the immediacy of the "here" or in the not so far "there," that I learnt about the places and stories of death, the marks of violence on material structures and physical bodies, and about the areas of prohibited circulation. Violence dwells and circulates in the street, the block or people's homes, operating as a displacing and segregating force.

These walkabouts were crucial for my apprehension and recognition of the geographic and spatial organization of these areas and, very importantly, of the acoustic, historical and visual environment in which the memories of city dwellers were set. They became a major tool for recognizing the geographic and social dynamics of an area in the city, for contextualizing the stories and memories I heard during the memory workshops, and for reflecting upon the relationship between memory, place and violence. In chapter four, five and six I describe in detail some of these walkabouts and provide examples of the relationships and experiences of place that were highlighted by these walkabouts. In total I carried out ten walkabouts, three of them in the central eastern zone, two in the north eastern zone, three in barrio Antioquia and its neighbouring areas, and two across the city of Medellín.

### **The Memory Workshops**

*Stillness* is the moment when the buried, the discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen. It is the moment of exit from the historical dust. *Nadia Seremetakis – The Memory of the Senses.*

The “memory workshop” consisted of a group session in which participants engaged in a series of interactive activities. Each individual participated in telling stories and evoking memories, in the elaboration of maps, photo albums, or visual biographies, and in the discussion and reflection on their past memories and the “politics” of remembering. They did so in interaction with others, sharing for example popular music that evoked crucial personal or group experiences, sharing memories attached to their personal objects, or their critical reflections about the history of their community.<sup>12</sup> The remembering of significant life events in the city of Medellin in a group context triggered a multitude of actions: silence, laughter, sadness, awe, bodily reactions like dance, crying and engaged discussions. In general an individual story became a trigger of many other stories and of an active sensorial and emotional exchange. Each story deepened individual and group reflections and brought back forgotten memories or other experiences lived by the participants and with this a collective conversation emerged. Memories that emerged from the “historical dust” became the centre of a lively group exchange and of the ways each group re-created their individual and collective memories (García-Canclini, Castellanos and Rosas, 1996; Seremetakis, 1994).

I used the “memory workshop” as a spatial and temporal context in which a variety of forms from the verbal and visual arts were applied. In total, I carried out twelve memory workshops and thirty group sessions in which approximately three hundred people participated and hundreds of hours were taped. When the individuals came together for a workshop, they temporarily established a network of relationships and circulated meanings. The use of a variety of verbal and visual forms activated a lively

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<sup>12</sup> Most of the workshops lasted a day and some were overnight sessions. In some cases, the workshop was divided in two or three session of three/four hours each.

exchange of story telling and performance, and created a shared sensorial environment. In this section, I outline some of the key elements that define the workshop as *an ethnographic realm* and as a spatial and temporal context that *can activate a dialogical and reflexive interaction* among participants.<sup>13</sup>

Group and interactive methodologies such as the workshops are not common among anthropologists and consequently there has not been much reflection on the use of these methods. More specifically, the workshop as *a realm of research interaction* and as a *social event* has rarely been an object of anthropological reflection.<sup>14</sup> From my viewpoint, this lack of reflection is paradoxical given that ethnography requires much interaction and participation in group situations. I start from the characterization of the workshop as an object of empirical, intellectual and social attention.

I begin by describing a scene from a workshop. It is June 23, 1997. In a place known as “Chaquiro,” twenty-three people have gathered into a room of a building that as its roof has the bridge used by residents, cars, buses, motorbikes and trucks to circulate in the North Eastern zone of Medellin. The noise of the traffic, mixed with the din of the children’s voices and the musical background of several radios, creates an acoustic environment for the memory workshop that is taking place “under the bridge.” The group of people gathered here is composed of men and women who live in the area and who

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<sup>13</sup> As with any other research method, the dialogical and reflective potential of the memory workshop is mediated by the social and cultural context and by the researcher’s knowledge, skills and ability to use and apply the method. In the workshop, facilitation skills and knowledge of group dynamics are required for the individual who takes on the facilitation role. Additionally, listening and observing are highly demanding tasks given the group set up. My experience as a facilitator (of workshops, meetings, seminars) during the past seventeen years assisted me in assuming the role of facilitator and observer. My past experience and knowledge of popular education, anti-racism, action-research, and interactive facilitation methods helped me greatly.

<sup>14</sup> The characterization of the memory workshop I develop here is inspired by: García-Canclini and Rosas (1996); Ghiso (1997); Ibañez (1986); Reguillo (1996), and Riaño-Alcalá (1999).

work or volunteer with a local non governmental organization. After locating the places that are vested with personal meaning and experiences on a large map of the zone, we work towards creating a visual biography that traces “the life” of their work in the zone. There are eight pieces of flipchart paper taped to the walls. I invite the participants to visualize and illustrate on the paper their memory of an event, image, date or person that has been significant to them. Each participant stands in front of the sheets of paper and works in the elaboration of drawings or the writing of words or symbols that evoke their memory. The voices and laughs of some mix with the silence of others. Blanca, does not join the group but takes a piece of flipchart paper and goes to a table. She draws something at the table and once she has finished she keeps her piece of paper facing down so the others cannot see its contents. When asked to show her work, she refuses and announces that “it is a surprise.” When everyone has finished, each participant tells about the memory behind his or her image or words. We hear about the “week for peace,” sports events, the killing of friends and relatives, their group retreats, and their encounters with the militias and the gangs. There are memories of an influential priest who was part of the Liberation Theology movement, of hikes to the majestic hills, and of the creeks and slopes of the area. The group is very engaged and as participants remember they burst into laughter, ahas! oh yeses!! and sudden silences. A history full of anecdotes, places, names, reflections, warm memories and sad memories begins to be crafted collectively. After ten participants have spoken, Blanca stands up and walks to the front of the room with her flipchart paper and waits for our full attention and eye contact. While keeping eye contact with the rest of the group, she flips her paper around with a big smile on her face and silently shows her drawing of two faces. Under these faces the

words “founders” and “leaders” are written. At that moment, Blanca remembers the two individuals who were “great charismatic leaders” but “unfortunately do not exist any more ... they were wonderful.”

During these moments, the group’s silence, smiles, secrecy, and Blanca’s performance and narrative emphasis evoked a shared collective memory from this group. This was a dialogic moment in which the dialogue taking place was between the participants who knew the story rather than with the researcher. This vignette of the workshop under the bridge reminds us that when individuals remember within a group situation (a family, group of friends, as members of a society or fraternity, or in a workshop) other practices take place: negotiation, censorship, silences, disagreements. At the same time, the participants’ bodies, emotions, and performances are brought together to temporarily form a “community of praxis” (Reguillo, 1996; Lave and Wenger, 1991). Although Blanca’s narrative was brief, it contained a story known to all of them and understood only by those familiar with it. Furthermore, the story’s emotional charge can only be understood by taking into account what her memories communicate: the absence of one of the leaders because he was killed and the group’s collective forgetting of the conflict that divided these two leaders. This exchange illustrates the type of spatial and group interactions and emotional responses that can take place during a memory workshop.

The memory workshop constitutes a *process of production* because there is a “learning by doing” and by the creation of tangible results (e.g. there are products such as the visual biography on the wall, or the quilts or photo albums). There is also a *production of knowledge* when narratives are exchanged, view points are shared, meaning

is negotiated and interpretative consensus is reached. Like any other process of knowledge making, the knowledge produced during a workshop is situated and relational.

The workshop is thus temporally and spatially located in a *here* and a *now*. It is mediated by the meeting space and length of the session during which the individuals informally agree to constitute themselves as a temporary *group*. This temporary group is constituted by subjects who are variously motivated to participate and who locate themselves in different degrees of emotional and social distance in relationship to the group and what happens in the workshop. During the workshop, there is a *relational dynamic* taking place between all of the participants with multiple possibilities: between participants sitting besides each other, or across from each other, amongst the group as a whole, between the small groups, with the researcher, etc. The relational dynamic and the formation of a temporary “we” includes the researcher who from her multiple roles and subject locations -- facilitator, observer, interviewer, time keeper -- becomes a point of reference for controlling time, organizing the use of the space (where the tables and chairs go), formulating questions and making decisions. In this ethnographic realm, the researcher-facilitator does not escape the exercise of a social authority. The ethnographic authority is constructed through the researcher’s role as a point of reference and control.

I argue that the workshop activates a dialogic exchange through the processes of production (people learn and remember by doing) and because of the decentered and multiple relationships that emerge among the subjects. The various possibilities for *dialogue* in a workshop are mediated, as in any other research interaction, by the power and the authority vested in each individual (social roles and hierarchies) and to the researcher. A network of relations between participants is temporary created in the

workshop and participants in the workshop create a *community of exchange and praxis* while they circulate narratives and stories.

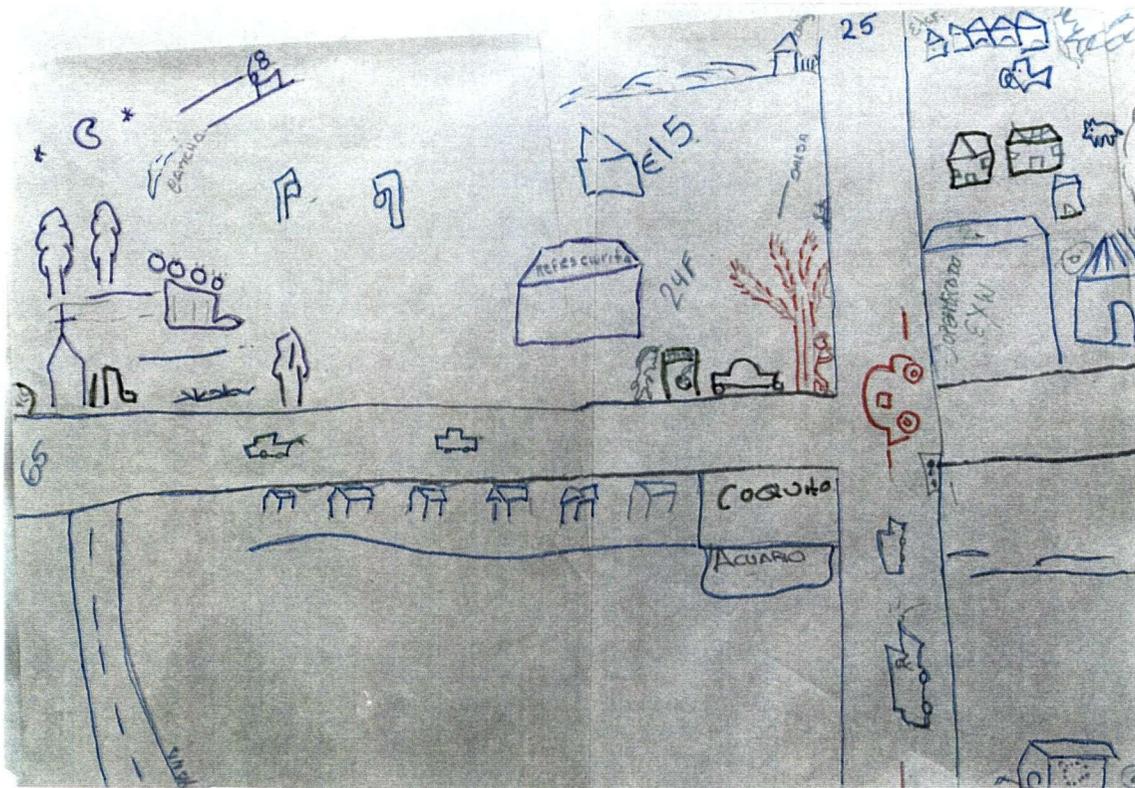
Blanca's interaction with the group illustrates how a story can become a trigger for listening, the re-activating of memories and the construction of a group consensus, for the expression of disagreement or the enactment of specific discourses. The "collective conversation" that emerges during the workshop includes debates, moments of tension, negotiation and disagreement, shared emotions and forms of interaction that are characteristic of everyday social relations. The group dynamics surpass the controlled research interaction that might characterize a one-to-one interview or a survey. The memory workshop is situated in the realm of social and human interaction and constitutes a *social event* that can be subject of observation.

### ***Methods applied during the workshop***

Specifically the oral history and verbal and visual forms included in the workshop were:

**Mental maps.** Individuals would initiate the drawing of a mental map by locating a local landmark (e.g. a statue, a street intersection, a plaza or a river) that was recognized by everyone in the group. This landmark was taken as a point of reference to draw a mental map that placed individual and group landmarks in the city environment as well as places that were vested with mnemonic meaning. The location of these places and the stories told by each individual came to illustrate the group's mental map of an area of the city or of the city as a whole. Although a degree of consensus could be reached about some of the key landmarks and their location, the exercise of the mental maps always

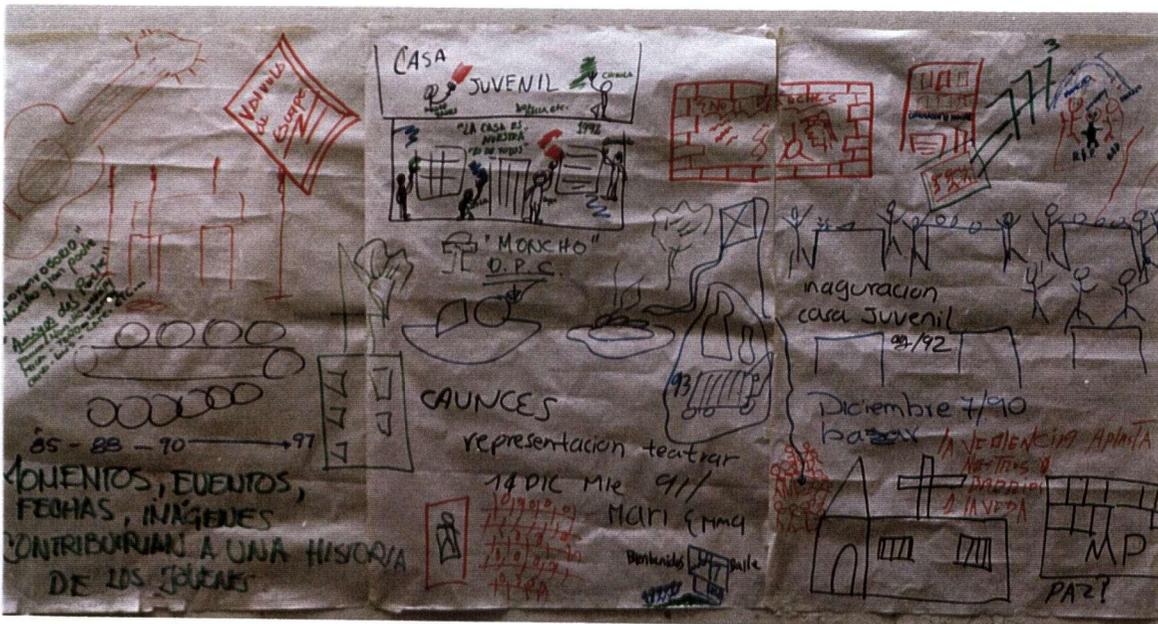
involved discussion and negotiation regarding the location or significance of specific landmarks and places and often sparked verbal or visual disagreements. The mental map captured the images and symbols that the individuals have of their environment, their spatial and sensorial location and their various perceptions of the surrounding (Lynch, 1960). The pioneer work of Lynch (1960) on the mental images of the city illustrated that when individuals move in their daily surroundings, they also use their capacity to symbolize. By engaging all their senses, experiences and memories, they elaborate their self-image of the space surrounding them. With this material, each individual constructs her own “invisible city,” a mental blue print of place.



**Figure 1** Sample of a mental map  
Elaborated by a group of women in Barrio Antioquia

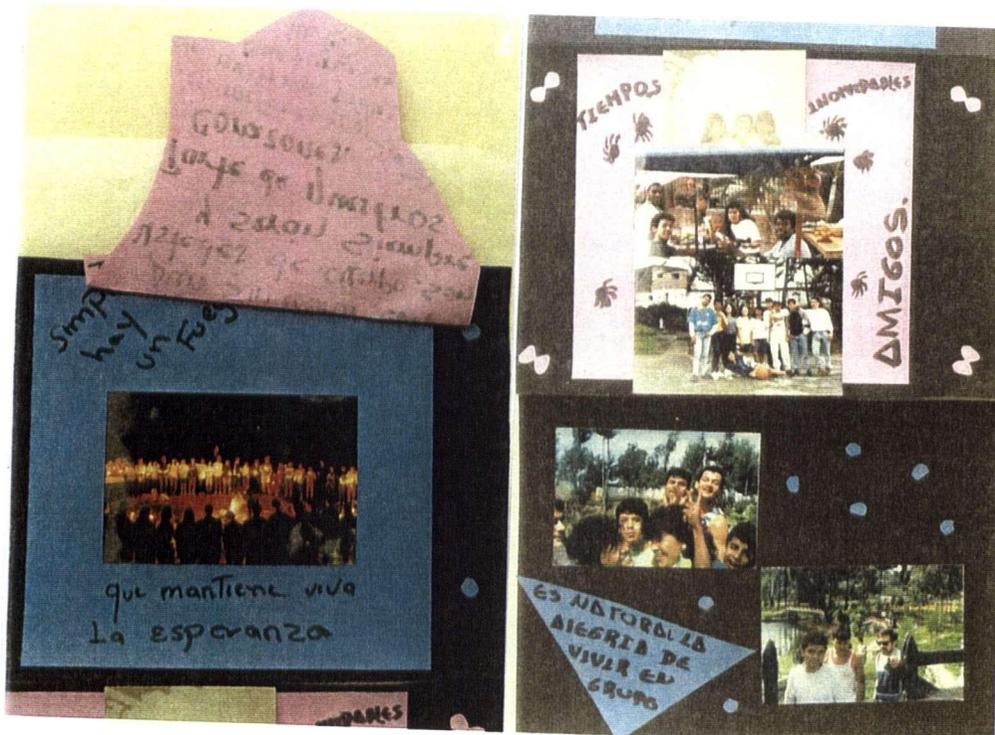
I used the mental maps as a mnemonic tool by which individuals located their significant memories of the city and/or identify the places that were meaningful in terms of their memories and lived experience. In the process of adding individuals' places and memories, the map became a group map and a visual representation that included individual and group images of the city or community mapped.

**Visual biographies:** It consists of the tracing of a chart, graphic or image that represents “the life” of a particular phenomenon (e.g. violence, the youth houses), or a period in the life of a community (e.g. the 1990s). The visual biographies list key events and include the traces and images from the past that capture each individual’s sense of history of, for example, their group, barrio or city (Slim and Thompson, 1995). To carry out a visual biography, I placed several pieces of blank flipchart paper on the walls. Participants were invited to draw, write or symbolize on the papers the key events, individuals, dates or moments that they considered significant in the life of a phenomenon or period.



**Figure 2** Sample of a visual biography  
Elaborated by youth from the North Eastern zone (Youth Houses)

**Story-based interviews.** The story-based interview is structured around telling and listening to stories with questions and interactions that are designed to assist individuals in remembering and telling their stories. This type of interviewing stresses the interactive nature of the interview exchange<sup>15</sup> and their framing within the communication patterns of those interviewed (e.g. the consideration of gender, ethnic and generational differences in story telling) (Minister, 1991). During the workshops, individuals would interview each other and later shared with the group the stories they heard and told.



**Figure 3** Sample of a photo album  
Memory workshop with youth, barrio Popular II, North Eastern zone

<sup>15</sup> Feminist oral historians argue that to fully explore the possibilities of the oral history interview, a methodological shift is needed from “information gathering, where the focus is on the right questions, to interaction, where the focus is on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject’s viewpoint” (Anderson and Jack, 1991:23).

**Mnemonic artefacts and photographs.** Personal and familiar objects and photographs were brought to the workshops to be shared with others and to create products such as photo albums. The intent was to explore the artefacts as memory forms (Seremetakis, 1994), the ways individuals re-construct their past and their cultural beliefs through the meaning and stories these objects convey, and the role of these objects in providing a sense of continuity in the individual's life (Radley, 1990). In looking at photographs, individuals engaged in "acts of recognition of the past" while the photographs offered them multiple possibilities to explore relationships between the past and the present (Holland, 1991).

**Sound recordings.** I used music, particularly songs, as a mnemonic device to invite story telling and remembering. Sometimes participants would bring music to the workshop that had the power of bringing back memories. In other cases, I put together a tape with songs that, based on the specific generational, social and cultural make up of the group, could trigger remembering. I used popular music and I also invited participants to remember the sounds and noises that accompanied their memories of the past. This constituted a way to recognize the acoustic environment of the city dwellers and to further explore the sensorial grounds of their memory practices. A recognition of the sound and acoustic environment as constitutive of the ways individuals inhabit their environment and preserve memories guided me to include the acoustic dimension in an exploration of memory practices (Feld, 1996).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Authors such as Feld (1996) and Stoller (1995) stress the multisensory character of perceptual experience. They are critical of Western concepts of landscape, and anthropological and geographic works on place that are dominated by visualism and neglect the embodied, tactile and sonic dimensions shaping a sense of place. Ethnographically, popular music occupies a central place in the daily life of Medellin's city dwellers. Music acts as a twenty-four hour acoustic environment and background, as locus of interaction

**Memory quilts.** Individuals were asked to remember a significant event in their lives and to do so by creating a mnemonic image with paper cut outs that were placed on a paper square that constituted the backing of their image. They engaged in the visual representation of the event thinking of it as a live painting: colours, mood, smells, textures, rhythm and forms. After each individual had created an image, they placed it in any point within the quilt and shared their memories. By the end of their story-telling there was a collective quilt that formed a type of collective story.



**Figure 4** Sample of a Memory Quilt  
Elaborated by youth workers from Medellín

The collective story and visual image were created as a result of the multiple relationships taking place among the individual squares, the stories they evoked, and the

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and social exchanges. The lyrics and rhythm of songs constitute a link between feelings, lived experiences and ways of reflecting about the past.

patterns that emerged as images touched and related to each other (the individual images relate with the others vertically, horizontally, by contrast, by sharing a common border, by the diagonal movement, and as a whole). The contrasts and patterns created by the colours, shapes, textures and distance gave uniqueness and richness of the sensorial memories to the visual expression.<sup>17</sup>

One of my concerns during the memory workshops was that they should respond to the premise that memory practices are multi sensorial and that the research methods applied should include the following elements: a) *Performative*: the inscription of memory in the bodies, senses and performances of the individuals and in their emotions (Connerton, 1989); b) *Oral*: the ways memories are anchored in collective representations and contained in oral narratives, social practices and in the material world of artefacts; c) *Communicative*: the acting of memory as a semantic code that organizes the discourses about the past (Jewsiewicki, 1990); and d) *Active*: how memory can constitute a trigger to action, a mode of socio-cultural action (Rowe and Schelling, 1991). The inclusion of a variety of methods ensured that each one of these dimensions was addressed during the workshop.

Each one of these research methods was used in the context of the group interaction that took place during the memory workshops and group sessions. The specific art or visual form did not solely determine the impact and consequences of using each one of these methods. The impact was also related to the use of each method within

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<sup>17</sup> I learned of this technique in a workshop with the Oral History Centre of Boston (Cohen, 1983). A further reading of literature on African-American quilts provided me with a vision of the quilt as a collective art form that has been referred to as the visual equivalent of jazz. Like in a jazz composition, quilt making encourages improvisation, off beat patterns in design and validates the uniqueness of each individual's expression while creating a collective product rich in colour, forms, and contrasting patterns (Dyer-Bennem, 1994). Several photographs of the memory quilts are included through out the dissertation.

a memory workshop in which specific group dynamics took place and a sequence of activities was followed. In what follows I introduce a reflection of the uses of these type of methods for a research on the memory practices of city dwellers.

## **Reflections on Research as Praxis**

Humanistic holism is the essential fiction of ethnography.  
*Kamala Visweswaran – Fictions of Feminist Ethnography.*

The research methods I applied constituted a substantial part of my research praxis but they did not encompass it entirely. In this section, I take a reflexive stance and look at the consequences of my methodological approach while locating the discussion of the methods in the larger context of my research praxis. I do not discuss the methods as isolated tools, abstractions or context free methods (Schratz and Walker, 1995).

The ethnography carried and the methods applied were *non-neutral interventions*. Like any other research intervention, the research methods were framed by the power differentials between researcher and the research subjects. I began my research with the premise that there is not a single truth to be revealed and grasped through the researcher's skills, reliability of methods, or through methodological operations that produce "truth confessions", statistical systematicity, or scientific rigor and accuracy (Riaño, 1999). My research praxis sprang from a recognition that during any research interaction, the researcher establishes multiple locations and relations with the research subjects that may

include betrayal, complicity, manipulation and the building of social relationships that surpass the researcher-subject relationship (Visweswaran, 1994).

*Methodological approach.* The criterion of the reliability and feasibility of my methods was established in relationship to a broader methodological approach. My research methodology was built upon and evaluated in response to the following concerns: a) that the research methods should recognize the plural ways in which individuals and groups construct meaning; b) that the methodological approach should be sensitive to the diversity, fragmentarity and de-centering of the cultural and social dynamics taking place in a city like Medellin; and c) that the research methods should recognize and question the researcher's ethnographic authority and the privilege of academic knowledge and reflection (Jackson, 1996). The choice of locating my research praxis within wider social links concerned with the contribution of the research to the research subjects and to other debates outside the strictly academic circle responded to these methodological premises. My research methodology succeeded in creating a variety of social links that are explained through out this chapter.

*Dialogical possibilities.* The ethnographic set up and the group and interactive process in the methods I used brought me as a researcher and subject into dialogue with others, and furthermore, it brought the individual participants into dialogue with other participants. I have characterized this process as one of knowledge production and generation of meanings. I do not take for granted that the "mixing" of the three methodological elements -- ethnographic, group and interactive -- mechanically produced a dialogical and "reliable" process; however, I argue that these methods contain such a potential. The combination of individual story telling with the creation of collective

products (a map, a quilt), and the participants' reflections made ongoing dialogue, reflection and exchange in the groups possible. For the purpose of my research about how individuals make sense and meaning of their present lives in a violent context, the process and methods applied allowed me to document processes of meaning generation.

*Group biases.* The "bias" of these methods is their group and "public" nature. Methods like mental maps or visual biographies are produced collectively and therefore leave out several aspects of the individual experience. At the same time, however, they express a group perception and product that is constructed through an interactive process. The degree of "intimacy" that a method like the interview may provide between the researcher and the subjects of the research is not achieved in a group format. The result was that I did not hear certain types of stories (that would only be told in the "privacy" of one on one interaction) and that some stories were re-created and performed for a group audience. The advantage of group interaction is that it creates a shared social realm and that the interactions taking place among the individuals are characteristic of everyday interactions. Different degrees of intimacy were achieved between the participants, and the participants were influenced by the specific circumstances of their remembering together and the dynamics established among participants and with the researcher-facilitator. Moments of reflection and shared intimacy emerged through the recognition of shared emotions and pains when the larger group broke down in smaller groups or in couples through the sharing of personal and group stories that had not been heard before, or when the group moved into a reflective stage and discussed the memories that had been evoked. What was produced as a group represented a collectively negotiated product that did not necessarily imply or require consensus.

The next section introduces a reflection on how I position myself in relation to the topic studied. This is another key element for evaluating my methodological approach.

## **Situating the anthropologist**

In this section, I examine how I position myself as an ethnographer who writes about memory and violence, and how I face the challenges and responsibilities of studying a topic in which I have as much personal as professional interest. “Being in the field” presented me with a unique mix of challenges and considerations. I “returned home” for my fieldwork, but I returned “transformed” by my exposure to “other” cultures, ways of living, residence in another country and the privilege of not having lived the last decade of violence in Colombia directly. The country I returned to had been radically transformed by the erratic and devastating effects of a social and political conflict that was expressed in a multitude of forms of violence. My past research, as well as my community and educational experiences in Colombia, placed me in a privileged position when re-acquainting myself with my previous research community, when establishing research and community contacts, and when I arguably had to locate myself as a cultural “insider.”<sup>18</sup> I had previously done research in Medellin and knew many

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<sup>18</sup> Reflections on the problematics of the anthropologist’s identity and reception across diverse audiences have begun to address the specific issues and ethical dilemmas faced by anthropologists of non-dominant groups. Kirin Narayan (1993) argues against the fixity of a distinction between “native” and “non-native” anthropologist, while Abu-Lughod (1991) speaks of the “halfie anthropologist.” While these elaborations may begin to address issues of voice and subject position, they do not properly confront the pervasive colonial legacy in Anthropology. I did my anthropology BA in Colombia and practised the discipline there for seven years. The Anthropology departments in Colombia, like anywhere else, struggled with the same issues and colonial legacies. My training was rooted in this legacy. My reference to a cultural “insider” is certainly one I problematize. It was evident that the time passed, my social distance, and the obvious transformations that any culture undergoes in the time span of a decade required me to engage in a concerted effort to understand the dynamics of cultural identity and the social, political and cultural transformations that had taken place in Medellin.

people there. This background made my work easier and at the same time brought forward another set of expectations. For friends, acquaintances, researchers and others who knew me, the excitement of having me “back” and staying to do some research was accompanied by their expectations of what I had to offer. Having accessed graduate studies, research, and work experiences in Canada, they expected I could offer new insights and knowledge, particularly in the area of research about violence. It was clear to me that the prospect of offering this through a future written product -- in a different language, in a dissertation format and three years down the road -- was too intangible and at best useful for only a few. Instead, I tried to respond to these expectations within my fieldwork and research methodology by ensuring that the research and my methodology had some practical use for the groups I worked with. The work and reflections of Colombian anthropologists such as Hernán Henao who explored the possibilities of a research that “connects the university to the ‘real’ world” and for building skills within broader sectors of the population helped me in this task.<sup>19</sup>

Issues of power and voice have been located at the centre of the anthropological discussion of what it means “to be in the field,” and what constitutes the ethical responsibilities of an anthropologist who researches and writes about violence. Antonious Robben and Carolyn Nordstrom (1995) discuss these issues in the most recent and comprehensive collection on the ethnographies of violence. The authors underscore the complexities and contradictions of researching and writing about a topic like violence

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<sup>19</sup> Hernán Henao devoted his twenty-five years of anthropological work to practice an anthropology that promoted dialogue and that “assists social agents in confrontation, in imagining future settings” (Interview with Joanne Rappaport, 1990:59). Hernán, a professor at the Anthropology Department of the University of Antioquia and director of the University’s Institute of Regional Studies (INER) was assassinated at point blank range in his office by three hooded individuals on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1999.

that is “essentially contested.” Writing about violence, they argue, requires an anthropological stance that “gives voice to the puzzling contradictions of lives perturbed by violence” (1995:10). Aware of the criticisms formulated by authors such as Gayatri Spivak (1988) on the colonial legacy that this positioning entails, these authors recognize the mediation of their Western academic power and authority in their research and in “speaking for others.” Robben and Nordstrom acknowledge the uncomfortable contradictions of their theoretical developments and search for a resolution at the textual level. Through their writing, they aim to make “the voice of the perpetrators and victims audible” while they see their duty as one of writing against repression and injustice (Bourgois, 1995; Robben and Nordstrom, 1995:12; Schepher-Hughes, 1995).

To become aware of the Western location and biases that one may bring into the field only partially problematizes the colonial legacy embedded in the ethnographic work. Absent from this positioning is the interrogation about how this legacy is carried in our actions, gaze, bodies and anthropological stance and in our fieldwork practices and social realms in which any research practices are located. I argue that the questioning of the anthropological endeavour has to be fully addressed “in the field” to inquire about our gaze, methods, alliances and to specifically problematize our ethnographies so that they do not become pornographies of violence.<sup>20</sup> During my fieldwork, I was aware of these dilemmas and the risky and pleasurable temptations for an anthropological gaze to delve into sensationalist and voyeuristic accounts of violence. This explains my shifting away

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<sup>20</sup> Daniel (1996) discusses these contradictions when he refers to the vulnerability of accounts of violence to taking on a prurient form. Daniel poses this question in regards to the writing of an anthropography of violence. I stress the importance of taking this type of questioning to the field to inquire specifically, about our ethnographic gaze.

from a focus on “seeing violence” and my own questioning about the legitimacy of the anthropologists, who like war journalists, follow the paths of blood and destruction. Instead, I followed the circuits and routes of memory to explore the multitude of active subject positions that those affected or in the middle of violence may take.<sup>21</sup>

### **Praxis, alliances and methods**

I return now to the concept of *praxis*<sup>22</sup> in order to emphasize the ways I partially resolved the ethical and methodological dilemmas I faced in my fieldwork and later in my writing. In the fieldwork, my primary consideration was that my research strategies should encourage direct dialogue and an exploration of knowledge as an “intersubjective process of sharing experience, comparing notes, exchanging ideas, and finding common ground.” (Jackson, 1996:9). This consideration required an awareness of the ways I did my research: what relations I established, what decisions I made, which alliances I sought. It also required a continuous interrogation of my position in the field and the recognition of my location as a social subject and as a researcher. Consequently, I came to locate the research process in the field of experience and praxis. I understood that in this field there is not one central position from which to speak or locate the research

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<sup>21</sup> Subaltern studies approach to issues of agency informs my analysis of the ways city dwellers, as social and cultural subjects, may position themselves in regard to violence. These authors have looked at issues of autonomy (political and cultural) and the subaltern subject stressing the heterogeneity and historical role of the subjects in actions of resistance. Their search is humanistic in nature, but through this process, they have found that their search for a “subject-agent” frequently underscored contradictory issues such as the failure of subaltern agency. Emerging from their work is an approach that de-essentializes resistance, culture and the subject (Guha 1983; Prakash 1994).

<sup>22</sup> I follow here Patti Lather’s (1991:172) definition of praxis as “a dialectical tension, the interactive, reciprocal shaping of theory and practice which I see at the center of an emancipatory social science.” Otner (1984), Escobar (1994) and Lather stress the need for anthropologists and social science researchers to locate their work at the juncture between method, theory and political stance.

subjects and the researchers, but that there are diverse ways to participate, meet, and locate ourselves. Research subjects and researchers are always peripherally located.<sup>23</sup> As a researcher I did not stand simply outside, in the centre or above in my relationship with the research subjects. I understood that I could be situated anywhere in our relationships: peripherally, horizontally, some times at the centre and other times outside the field of inquiry (Jackson, 1996).

It was clear to me that if I was going to be accountable and going to recognize my *ethical and social responsibility* and the local impact of my research intervention, my research had to be socially and culturally useful in the local context. This included the contribution that the research could make to the research subjects and the research links with other debates and actions that take place outside the strict academic realm. In Medellin, this included my participation in the interdisciplinary discussions that were taking place about a strategic plan for the city of Medellin. It also included the agenda for national and municipal policies for a peaceful resolution to the social conflicts, and in the creation of alternatives to respond to the spread of violence. In retrospect, this is one aspect in which my methodological approach had a “catalytic validity” fostering and energizing participants towards reflection and action, and my participation in larger social debates (Lather, 1991).

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<sup>23</sup> The concept of peripheral participation arises from critical and constructivist theories of education. In speaking of a peripheral participation it is recognized that there are multiple and diverse ways to participate and meet, “multiple, varied, more-or-less engaged and inclusive ways of being located in the field of participation defined by a community” and that any of these modes are more central or ideal for the process of research (Lave and Wenger, 1991:36). The concept of peripheral participation describes the individual’s location in the world and the changing locations and perspectives in which the individual’s learning, the formation of identities and the forms of membership take place.

One fundamental aspect in this reflective examination of social responsibility in the fieldwork is the consideration of the implications of our research interventions for the subjects themselves, the implication of asking the subjects to tell stories. Olujic voices her concern about the implications of asking social actors, in a war context, to tell their stories (Olujic, 1995). In my view this issue is not restricted to the field of violence but has to do with any instance of research in which we interact with other human beings and ask them to share stories, life experiences and feelings. As a researcher, one has to recognize that any research interaction will have repercussions in the human, social and emotional realm of the research subjects including oneself.<sup>24</sup> This does not imply that we need to place ourselves in therapeutic or missionary positions. It requires that we continuously interrogate our research interactions from an ethical and social perspective and that researchers assume the social responsibility of conducting research.

During my research I realized that when I invited individuals to come together in a memory workshop, what happened in the room was not just a “research” interaction or a successful dialogic moment of data gathering or story telling. Remembering as a group and the emotions arose indicated that a process of individual and social nature was taking place. As a researcher, this required me to assume a social responsibility that went beyond ethical guidelines of what is deemed “good” and “socially relevant” research. I faced the task of how to interact with the manifestations of pain and grief, and the expressions of anger and despair that emerged in the workshop. For me, the key to

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<sup>24</sup> In contrast, this is an issue that is largely absent, “forgotten,” in methodological and reflective discussions about anthropological research methods and the fieldwork experience. Mary Douglas (1986) has addressed how institutionalized forgetting is intrinsic to the history of “science” and in the practices of many social disciplines that historically re-discover ideas and forget them with the specific purpose of maintaining a kind of institution (and power).

reflecting about this emotional ground was found in the social context of the memory workshop and its potential to trigger a creative process of finding meaning to the memories shared. The important aspect in terms of the process of the memory workshop was that the group and the researcher created a space of listening, respect and trust where mourning, reflection and meaningful sharing were possible. During my fieldwork, I was fully aware of the effects and reactions that a remembering session might provoke for the participants (including the possibility of “negative” or uncontrollable emotional reactions or the eruption of conflict). To ensure safety and a climate of social and cultural respect, I always made decisions about the workshops (who, where, and how) in consultation with local leaders, the groups themselves and the non-governmental organizations. We ensured that those invited to the workshop had some common ties and that there was a level of trust and respect among them. My own expertise in facilitation was also important as the conducting of these sessions required a knowledge of group dynamics, conflict resolution and tools for facilitation and communication.<sup>25</sup>

When a group collectively explores its past through the sharing of stories, the practices of memory cover a continuum between description, sensorial experience and analytical reflection. This allows the individual to construct meaning and to strengthen ties of social bonding and identification. Generally, the telling of a story worked to revitalize the memories of other stories that upon being heard evoked even more

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<sup>25</sup> I gave significant thought to this issue because I recognize that there are multiple elements and risks in using memory workshops in a violent social context. I extensively discussed this issue with the staff at Corporación Región and other organizations to ensure that I was sensitive to the possible effects of remembering in the participants. In most cases, I had a community worker with me during the workshop. At the beginning of the workshop I asked the group to come up with some basic agreements that would ensure a safe participation. In each workshop, time was allocated for reflecting upon what was heard and what had happened during the session.

memories and activated reflective processes. This process of “chain-remembering” slowly wove singular individual memories into a discernible fabric of memories and reflective narratives. In the time and space bounded environment of a group session, a kind of narrative consensus was slowly negotiated as to what had been lived and its impact. At the same time many debates and disagreements arose, and different and contradictory versions emerged. This constituted a process of negotiation that is at the core of how collective memories are shared by groups of people. Since not all the participants have lived through the same experiences, remembering helps to inform about others and reveal facets of experience and relations that are not known or that others are not aware of. These moments of negotiation and consensus make the re-construction and re-signification of experience and the elaboration of meaning possible.<sup>26</sup>

### **On Active neutrality**

In March of 1997, I wrote in my fieldwork journal: “in the end who is the one ‘tracing back the steps?’ It seems that more than anyone else *I am* the one doing it by having ‘come back’ to places, people, groups, landscapes and stories that also dwell in me and that crossed so many years of my life.” The fieldwork and writing of this dissertation have meant a personal and social exploration of my own labyrinth of

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<sup>26</sup> This topic was often addressed during the memory workshops. An interesting avenue of reflection was the consideration of these processes as contributing to individual and group explorations of the emotions and practices that stand in the way of individuals assuming control over their memories, and as an activating process of individual and social mourning. This reflection was discussed with interest in the workshops I carried “outside my research field” with human right workers, internally displaced people, and non governmental organizations.

memories. Fieldwork and writing stand as memory practices by which I have shaped my knowledge (Ibañez, 1999).

Neither violence nor memory stand for me as something external to my social world, consciousness and historical being (Feldman, 1995). On the contrary, violence is something too tangible not only for what I learned during my research, but also in my personal world. I carry with me a rage and pain arising from the destruction taking place in Colombia, and a sense of loss for those friends, relatives, co-workers, and intellectuals who have been lost to violence. This emotional fabric covers my fieldwork and my writing and my practices of memory.

My research methods and writing account for my choice to focus my research on city dwellers. In taking as an unit of analysis the practices of memory of Medellín's city dwellers, I searched into a domain of every day life: the lives city dwellers live and the lives they remember having lived. Undoubtedly, this search for meaning and memory places my inquiry in a humanistic field. While writing, I have struggled with questions about how to reconstruct the "cultural depth" and lifeworlds of Medellín's city dwellers, and how to convey the lack of coherence and senselessness without dehumanizing the subjects themselves (Feldman, 1995). Undoubtedly, ambiguity and contradiction dwell in my own positioning and in my writing,

.. the prurience of violence has leaked in. How else could the average reader living in an antiseptic even if not an uncaring world, have an inkling of the foul scent that he or she has been spared? (Daniel, 1996:5).

I have made several decisions to include or to not include specific information and to carry out particular lines of reflection and analysis. As the movement and spread of violence in Colombia further haunts the few certainties I used to have, I have become

cynical of the “utility” [or lack of] that claims an anthropological duty of “writing against terror” (Taussig, 1992; Green, 1995). I value the potential of writing to educate or bring awareness about what is taking place in some parts of the world, but the terror and violence and most important the suffering and cultural reconstruction of those who live amidst violence require more effective and pragmatic responses. These responses, in my opinion, do not belong in a text or in academic halls and conferences, but rather in the social worlds that we as researchers, citizens or research subjects share.

In writing this dissertation I have carried out an exercise of ethnographic interpretation and assumed full responsibility and authorship for my line of interpretation. My ethnography and writing do not claim to “speak for” others, nor I am concerned with locating myself as “speaking from” the other’s point of view. I assume responsibility for the way I carried out my fieldwork, for my personal *non-neutral* stance on the topic of my dissertation,<sup>27</sup> and for the decisions I made about the stories told here and the story and argument I weave throughout these pages.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Neutrality” in Colombia is a contested term. I use the reference to a non-neutral stance to describe my individual position against the violent resolution of conflicts and the suffering it causes. However, as a Colombian, I share with many others a position as “active neutral.” The spread of violence has made civilians targets of killing, internal displacement and other forms of violence. Civilians and social organizations have adopted a position of “active neutrality” to stress their non involvement with the war. The Native Indian governors of the region of Uraba were the first ones to propose this strategy in 1994 and were followed by several indigenous, peasant and civic organizations in the rest of the country. By 1997, non governmental organizations and most of the unions and grassroots organizations, academics and entire communities across the country have positioned themselves as neutral but “active.” Active neutrality means the practice of neutrality and the refusal of civilians to engage with any of the armed actors and their *active* commitment with peace initiatives. The armed actors, however, have not respected this. In the last two years numerous social leaders, prominent academics, and human rights workers have been killed (or disappeared) particularly, but not only, by the paramilitary, who argue that the figure of the active neutrality is a mask to hide loyalties to other actors such as the guerrilla.

<sup>28</sup> I follow here Begoña Aretxaga (1997) reflection on her politics of location and writing on issues of gender and political violence.

## **Some practical considerations**

I discussed with several of those involved in my fieldwork the implications of using the real names of the city areas and groups I worked with. They did not see the advantages or utility of changing the names and did not consider that the use of real names would bring about problems of confidentiality or safety. In this dissertation, I use the real names of places and groups. In the case of the individuals, first names are included. In some cases, the first name is the real one and in others, because the individual has asked me not to include his or her name, I use a pseudonym.

The field material quoted in this dissertation comes from fieldwork notes, taped material or from my memory. When the material used is taped, the type of session, location, and date are included in square brackets. Direct quotations from tapes are numbered according to the chapter and the order they appear in the text. Lists of workshops and quotations are included in the appendix to facilitate the location of the material quoted.

Transcription of the taped material and translation from Spanish to English posed several difficulties. The group nature of the sessions I conducted created a rich environment that facilitated remembering. This same aspect, however, became the major difficulty for transcribing these sessions. Often, the moments of heightened group interaction and remembering implied that several individuals would be speaking at once or that parallel conversations were taking place. Because there were several interactions taking place among participants, it was difficult at times to follow the flow of their stories or to contextualize them. I listened to the tapes several times until I was able to hear and

place in context some of the conversations and stories. My journal and memory helped greatly. Furthermore, giving transcripts back to some of the groups was extremely helpful. They corrected them, contextualize the stories for me, and sometimes complemented stories or specific information.

Finnegan (1992) stresses the challenges faced in transcription and translations because of the lack of equivalence between a spoken and performed language and a written one. These differences, Finnegan highlights, are mediated by culture and by our own assumptions about the relation between written words and performance. This was an issue of serious concern for me and one further complicated by the unique speech used by several of the youth who participated in the workshops. This youth language introduces lexical transformations, changes the semantics of words, and is filled with images that have little resemblance with written syntax.<sup>29</sup> In the process of transcription some of the richness of the orality and performance, the relational group context, and the uniqueness of the group language have been lost. I have tried to keep some of this richness by including a number of conventions within the format of the transcription:

- Body movements, gestures and emotional responses are described in brackets within the quotation when they were of descriptive and of contextual value.
- Interjections, comments or questions from others when someone was telling a story are also included within brackets in the text.
- Speech pauses and hesitations are announced by the use of three dots.
- The doubling or tripling of letters express the lengthening of sounds. Capital letters indicate loud speech and letters in bold indicate words that were

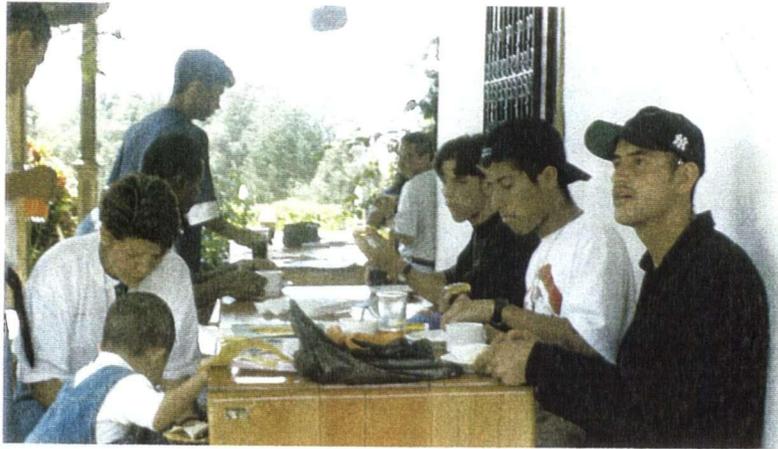
stretched out by the speakers. Three dots within square brackets indicate that a part of the narration was not included in the text (Finnegan, 1992; Shrezer quoted by Finnegan).

These issues were further complicated when I faced the task of translation. A personal friend who is bi-lingual in English and Spanish and has an in-depth knowledge of the colloquial and spoken language and translation experience supported me in this task. Although my preference was to do a translation that kept the poetics, richness and performative aspect of the speaker, I accepted that those not familiar with the social context and the language would have difficulties understanding it. I settled for a translation that tried to convey the meaning of the speaker's ideas and whenever possible captures the poetics and uniqueness of the speech. When we could not find an English expression that accurately conveys the meaning of the Spanish word or phrase, I have kept the original in Spanish and provide an explanation in brackets. As well, a glossary of Spanish terms is included.

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<sup>29</sup> Chapter five expands the description of these youth's language.

**Figure 5** Visual record of memory workshops and group sessions



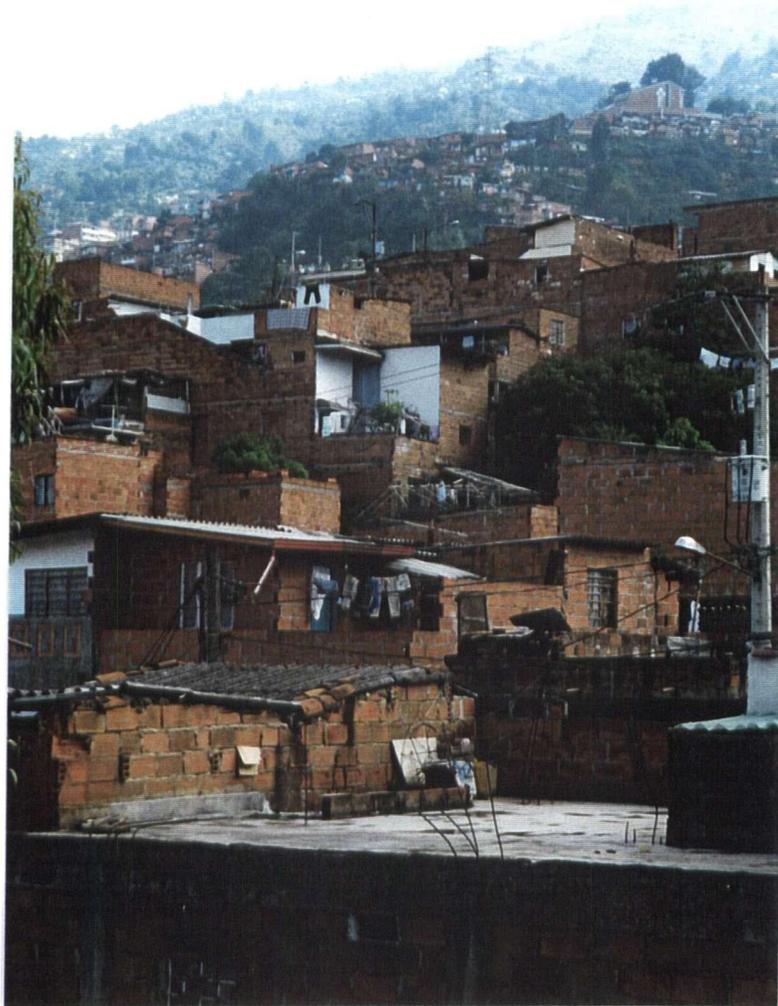


Figure 6 North Eastern zone, barrio Villa del Socorro



Figure 7 Barrio Antioquia. *Sancocho* soup block party

## Chapter Three

### The History of Barrio Antioquia is the History of Colombia: Local Histories in a National Light.

Now dead the great patron of hired assassins, my poor Alex was left without work. It was then that I met him. And so national events are tied to personal events, and the poor, vulgar lives of the humble woven with those of the great. *Fernando Vallejo – La Virgen de los Sicarios.*

“Colombian violence began in Barrio Antioquia,”<sup>1</sup> asserted *Don Luis*, a community leader of Barrio Antioquia, soon after I met him and explained my research work. A few days later, when we talked at the site of the barrio’s *Junta de Acción Comunal* [Community Action Board], he repeated this affirmation and further asserted that “the history of Barrio Antioquia *is* the history of the country.”<sup>2</sup> I was often reminded of his words when listening to local stories about events that had taken place in the barrio and Medellin or while conducting bibliographic research on the historical and sociological trends of the region. Don Luis’ statements about the origin of violence and the barrio’s history establish a locational viewpoint for exploring the relationships between local events, and national and global historical trends. This chapter advances this task by examining how the history of barrio Antioquia illuminates broader city and

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<sup>1</sup> Here and throughout the dissertation, expressions within quotations marks are recited from my memory, fieldwork notes or from taped material. When the material used is taped, the source, date and occasion are included in square brackets.

<sup>2</sup> I met Don Luis in May of 1997 when I first came to Barrio Antioquia. Don Luis, a man in his fifties and a resident of the barrio, was involved with *Probapaz*, the organization created to co-ordinate the peace pact among youth gangs in the barrio and to organize educational, recreational and community programs with children and youth. Earlier in 1997, Don Luis had made a presentation in a university symposium about the peace process in Barrio Antioquia. For organizing the presentation, he interviewed two long time residents and leaders of the barrio. Soon after we met, he summarized his work on the barrio’s history and stressed his conclusion on the roots of violence and the importance of the barrio’s history.

regional historical trends. It highlights the links between local processes and regional and global processes, and the potential of local histories to unveil and describe wider social, historical and cultural processes (Escobar, 1997; Gupta and Fergusson, 1997).

Historian David Cohen (1995) has drawn attention to how significant and alternative practices of history production lie outside the academic guild of historians and anthropologists, resting instead within those social and cultural worlds that the academics study. Cohen argues that any practice of history production needs to recognize its inscription in these broader social fields and that the methods and tools of the historian/anthropologist are a piece of this broader historical practice. In this chapter, I approach the historical task inspired by this view. For this task I rely on the various practices of history production, cultural accounts from the residents of barrio Antioquia,<sup>3</sup> and on my ethnographic observations of their practices of remembering and forgetting. Oral and written sources are brought together and include: a) the stories remembered by barrio Antioquia's residents during the several workshops, group sessions and informal encounters that took place during my fieldwork, b) ethnographic notes and observations, c) the various video, drama and performances produced by individuals and groups of the community, and d) the written documentation and literature on regional history.

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<sup>3</sup> This was particularly relevant to the situation in which I came to do research in barrio Antioquia as part of an inter-institutional initiative supported by the community association to re-construct the barrio's history through a community process. As explained in Chapter two, the products and outcomes of this process went beyond the project, resulting in, for example, the production of three amateur videos by the youth group, the dramatization of several parts of the "anecdotes book" during the *Calles de Cultura* celebration and the use of the anecdotes book by the schools or by residents who took on the task of writing a history of the barrio. The practices of the community's history production includes the writing of stories from the barrio by residents for a municipal contest on the barrio's history, videos produced by a local organization to which several residents of the barrio belong, the events organized within the community's annual celebration for peace "*calles de cultura*" (e.g. story telling sessions, historical dramas) and the informal story telling sessions that can happen anywhere and anytime in the barrio's bars, corner stores, and streets or during barrio member's visits to one another. This material has been extremely useful for my research.

The events narrated here are sometimes reconstructed from stories told by various inhabitants of the barrio. Other times they are narrated as they were remembered by one individual or as described by the person who actually experienced them. Throughout the text, the first time the name of one of the story tellers/narrators is introduced, a brief reference to this individual is included in a footnote.

### **Clouds of Smoke: The Thirties**

On June 24 of 1935, *Ivan*, his father and most of his neighbours rushed towards the bushes at the southeast end of barrio Antioquia.<sup>4</sup> An airplane that had crashed and caught on fire laid on the grass, and clouds of smoke surrounded the area. While marvelling at the immense flames, Ivan heard mention of *Carlos Gardel*. During the following days, the smoke remained in the air while rumours about what had happened spread like the voracious fire did that same day. Some said that Gardel, the renowned Argentinean Tango singer, was shot as his airplane left Medellin and another was attempting to land. The airplanes crashed, and the rumour went that *Gardel* escaped alive. Others recalled just one airplane and never heard of shootings or of *Gardel* being alive, but they all continue to remember the event to this date. The death of Carlos Gardel on the barrio's grounds has marked several generations of the barrio's people, shaping their musical tastes and desire to fly and providing an iconic referent to reinforce a sense of belonging to "the barrio" where Gardel died.

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<sup>4</sup> When Ivan's family arrived in the early 1930s, there were only twelve houses in barrio Antioquia. Ivan was born in the barrio and has lived there all his 65 years. He has witnessed the key events that have taken place there and proudly says today that his family is among the founders of the barrio. Ivan told this story during a group interview with his two cousins that took place in August 16, 1997.

In the 1930s, the *paisas*<sup>5</sup> revered *Gardel* and the tango rhythm he immortalized. Tango was heard throughout the city: in the bars of the commercial and train station area, in working class barrios, in corner stores or the homes of artisans, bohemians and large numbers of new immigrants from rural areas. Gardel's upbringing as a poor child in the *arrabales*<sup>6</sup> of Argentina, his struggle to make a career as a singer and his success and acceptance across social classes became a source of inspiration for the masses of rural migrants and poor women and men who were struggling to survive in the city of Medellin (Savigliano, 1995). Through tango music, the unique *lunfardo*<sup>7</sup> language and the tango figure of the *malevo*<sup>8</sup> became cultural models that were appropriated and recreated as linguistic and cultural styles of the popular classes. They were incorporated into local figures such as the *guapo*,<sup>9</sup> and provided cultural models, survival strategies and "street smarts" for those who, like the new immigrants of the Argentinean's

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<sup>5</sup> The expression used in Colombia to refer to the people from the Antioquia and Caldas coffee growing regions is "*paisas*." The city of Medellin is located in the department of Antioquia [see Map # 3]

<sup>6</sup> After 1870, large waves of new immigrants from Europe—mostly Italy—and from the Argentinean countryside began to arrive in the port of Buenos Aires. They congregated on the outskirts of the city that were denominated as the *arrabal* or *orillas* of Buenos Aires (Taylor, 1976).

<sup>7</sup> The name is taken from *los lunfardos*: professional thieves. The vocabulary and linguistic use of *lunfardo* combined words from various immigrants groups but mostly from the Italian language.

<sup>8</sup> *El malevo* is described by Salazar as a *varón*, "the authentic worthy man" who does not get intimidated by anything, acts by his own laws and is not a *soplón* [telltale] (Salazar et al., 1996:204). The *malevo* refers to a style of doing things, it is the voice of a cultural image of the great real "man" who shows profound attachment to his territory and a disregard of authority (Reyes, 1996; Villa, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> In Colombia, the figure of the *guapo* had rural origins in the mining fields and later in the city slum quarters. They are described by Reyes as aggressors, and bullies, and as men proud of their ability to challenge everything and risk their lives in suicidal fights with knives, daggers and machetes that were used as swords in an original and complex kind of fencing (Reyes, 1996). Later in the cities, this attitude was reinforced by the musical background of the tango music that "interprets its uprooting and loneliness in the city" (Villa, 1991:178).

*arrabales*, were experiencing uprootedness, exclusion and loneliness in a hostile city that mostly ignored them (Reyes, 1996; Villa, 1991).

## Origins

Barrio Antioquia was officially incorporated into the urban perimeter of Medellín in the years before Gardel's accident. Human settlement, however, had already begun during the mid 1910s. Families coming from the rural areas of the department of Antioquia's *Suroeste* [South West] (See map # 3) and from various parts of Medellín settled in these lands where large *fincas* [countryside residences that may have both recreational and farm uses with cattle or agricultural use] were progressively divided into small parcels. The newcomers exchanged their chickens, pigs, eggs, *chécheres* [household "knick-knacks," lumber, junk] and labour for a lot of land. They made a living collecting cowpats and *amasando barro* [kneading mud/clay] amidst the clouds of mosquitoes that inhabited the muddy area.

Since these early years, many other peasants left the rural areas, attracted by the economic prosperity of Medellín, a city that by the 1910s had become an important industrial and commercial centre.<sup>10</sup> Medellín was the hub of vibrant commercial and industrial activity and the epicentre of the economic activity of Western Colombia and the coffee-growing region. Although marked by economic growth and prosperity, the spirit of the city was very much that of an isolated rural town (Archila, 1991). Another

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<sup>10</sup> These were the years during which the first textile, pop, shoemaking and match making industries were created. A generation of miners, merchants and landowners migrated to the city. Between 1912-1918 close to 14,000 people arrived in Medellín which had less than 40,000 inhabitants at the beginning of that period (Salazar y Jaramillo, 1994).

factor contributing to this isolation, was the unique geography of Medellin - a city surrounded by mountains and subtropical jungle. Because of the city's economic and demographic growth, city administrators worked towards overcoming the geographical barriers that separated the region from the rest of the country. This was made possible in the 1920s with the establishment of railway routes and the initiation of work on a road towards the ocean.

Work, manual labour, family values, religiosity and a belief in the superiority of the *Antioqueño* people were the guiding values of the *paisa* culture fostered by the regional elites (Reyes, 1996).<sup>11</sup> These values were expressed in a pragmatics of living that bragged of the antioqueños' initiative, honesty, ability to do business, and think of efficient ways to obtain money "to not only fulfil your needs and ambitions but receive full social gratification" (Arango-Jaramillo, Mario, 1988:18). The value of manual labour and of individual effort were adopted within the popular culture, and combined with a devotion to the Catholic religion and the family as the key social institutions that regulated social life. The strength of the regional culture was rooted in a myth of the white racial purity of the "Antioqueño race"<sup>12</sup> but the assumed homogeneity of the

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<sup>11</sup> Maria Teresa Uribe (1990) has documented the origins of the political project of Antioqueño elites at the beginning of the XIXth century. This project was grounded in three equally important pillars: the economic (the establishment of a regional, national and international gold and food trading network), the political and the cultural. The expansion of the trading network was supported by a strategy of frontier colonization. Uribe argues that a central feature of this process of territorialization were the dynamics of inclusion-exclusion promoted by the regional elites. This was expressed not only in the exclusion of all those not considered white, Catholic or with the proper moral values and social attitudes (such as prostitutes, tramps, destitute and delinquent individuals) but had a geospatial referent that will be manifested in the formation of very diverse territorialities. The exclusions and differentiation created as a consequence, Uribe argues, are the roots of many of the current violent and conflictive expressions.

<sup>12</sup> The social and cultural construction of the *paisas* as a race is the result of an eclectic use of regional history, folklore, economics and psychology. It claims the distinctiveness of the Antioqueño people and their superiority due to a supposedly white racial purity and their great economic smarts. This myth emerges with the colonizing enterprise taken by the Antioqueño people in the beginning of the century and the establishment of strong mining and commercial activities (Wade, 1986).

Antioqueño culture has been severed in the 1930s by the significant presence of the Antioqueño Blacks, who emigrated from the Uraba region (see Map # 3), and by the general ethnic mixing that has been taking place since the Colonial times. These mixed roots, however, were denied by a “white” elite that had promoted the myth of their superior culture as one where Blacks, indigenous people and mestizos did not have a place (Reyes, 1996).

By the 1930s, barrio Antioquia was one of the city’s barrios receiving artisans, working class families, and immigrants. The growing waves of immigration became visible in Medellin and began to impact its social and economic life. In the span of two decades, Medellin’s population doubled and its developed area increased in size by eight times (Reyes, 1996). The living conditions for working class families and the poor became very difficult, and due to the scarcity of housing, Antioqueño’s families which were the largest in the country at the time (with an average 6.6 members) had to live in crowded one or two bedrooms houses (Archila, 1991). Working class housing was developed in new neighbourhoods, mostly in the northwest part of the city and, meanwhile, “the tendency of the elites was to move to a distance, to delimit their territory, to not mix and to differentiate themselves from the rest of the population” (Reyes, 1996:13). A collective mentality of stigmatizing the poor and the “different” took root and began to be materialized in the sharp geographical differentiation and social divisions of the city along class lines (Salazar et al., 1996).

In these years, the textile industry strengthened, and large textile conglomerates emerged. Barrio Antioquia not only housed some of the textile workers, it also became

the centre of a traditional industry in which many people of the barrio worked at producing undergarments “*Medias Cristal*”.

## **A War of Colours and Horrors: The Fifties**

A priest without a head wandered in the *manga*<sup>13</sup> *de la Palma*. In the early 50s, the inhabitants of barrio Antioquia walked in and out of the barrio through this field but avoided it at night when the scary headless priest might appear amidst the sound of bells. Their fears, however, were not just about the roaming priest-ghost but of the limp bodies that appeared hanging from the trees. By then, there were more than a thousand dwellings in barrio Antioquia. Poor artisans and workers inhabited the barrio which was mostly Liberal by political affiliation and had proudly received a visit from the national party leader, Jorge Eliecer Gaitán, and many other Liberal leaders. In barrio Antioquia’s history, however, it was the arrival of the *Matias* family, six brothers of conservative political affiliation who came from the rural town of Fredonia<sup>14</sup>, that brought “home” the instability, violence and death that the rest of the country was experiencing in those years.

These were the years of Colombia’s non-declared civil war, known as *La violencia*, -- a civil war that claimed the lives of two hundred thousand Colombians and affected extensive areas of the country. The civil war was waged seemingly between two fighting parties over the control of the government; however, the real problems at stake were social conflicts and economic issues surrounding the struggle for land and resources, the emergence of new elites, the control of the lower social classes, the

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<sup>13</sup> A natural strip of grass and trees within the city.

<sup>14</sup> Located in the south west of the Department of Antioquia and a conservative stronghold.

regional diversity and the search for social mobility (Le Grand, 1994; Roldan, 1992; Bergquist, 1992; Pecaut, 1997a). *La violencia*, spanned the years between 1946 and 1965 with its most critical period between 1948<sup>15</sup> and 1953.<sup>16</sup>

Don Arturo<sup>17</sup> remembers that on a Sunday afternoon, a young woman wearing a red dress was in her living room visiting with her boyfriend. The sight of her red dress was reason enough for the conservative *Matias* brothers to come into her living room and undress her. On another day, a man was killed because he was cleaning a car with a red rag. The *señaladores*, those who would report on who was a liberal, and the *aplanchadores*, those who would beat the liberals up with the flat side of a machete (*planazos*), roamed the streets of barrio Antioquia like the *pájaros*<sup>18</sup> [birds] who roamed the streets of towns and cities. Fear made most of the people remain at home or take off any time they saw a member of the *Matias* family. In barrio Antioquia, as in the rest of the country, *La violencia* had some of its most vicious manifestations in bloody

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<sup>15</sup> When the liberal grassroots leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan was assassinated in Bogota prompting a large scale social revolt.

<sup>16</sup> The most acute expressions of this civil war took place in the countryside and in regions such as the Andean coffee growing region, the surrounding areas of the river Magdalena (a key fluvial channel of communication for the country), and the prairies of the south eastern region of the country.

<sup>17</sup> Don Arturo is seventy-four years old and came to live in the barrio in the 1960s. He told this story based on the stories he heard about *La Violencia* when he engaged in the task of writing a history of the barrio. Don Arturo has been involved in the barrio's community association for many years and has been the president of the association several times. With the assistance of one of his daughters (who took notes and typed the manuscript), Don Arturo wrote a history of the barrio that was submitted to a municipal contest in 1989. His history begins in the 1910s and concludes with the events that took place in the barrio during the 1950s. An important part of this history is the list of individuals from Barrio Antioquia who have gained recognition as politicians, professionals, athletes.

<sup>18</sup> The *pájaros* were in charge of death in the urban areas during *la violencia*. They were generally sponsored by political figures and had the complicity of the authorities. They received monetary rewards according to the importance of the victims. Victims generally received announcements of their death in printed cards (Sánchez, 1992).

symbols of death and torture and in a war of colours and horrors. Red was the colour that identified the Liberal movement, and blue was the Conservative colour. Violent responses to the sight of red or blue became part of what Colombian journalist Arturo Alape refers to as the writing of terror. A sign, a colour, an artefact were enough to provoke the torture of victim's bodies and to stage a scene of terror that left a profound and hurtful mark in the memory of Colombians (Sánchez, 1992).<sup>19</sup>

Fabiola and Ofelia<sup>20</sup> were under ten years old when they learned that the *Matias*, armed with machetes, were coming to attack their house. Their family pushed each other up as they struggled to climb a wall and fit through an opening leading them out of the house. They were then able to escape by climbing onto another wall and jumping to a *solar* [a patio inside a house]. On another occasion, the two girls stayed up all night, knocking on doors and warning neighbours to be ready because "the *chusma*<sup>21</sup> was coming." During *La violencia* barrio Antioquia's people "suffered a lot, as did Medellín and the country" (Don Arturo). Ivan, Fabiola and many others from their generation remember witnessing the beatings and deaths of people,

3.1. Ivan: I don't know why people... or they're very new, or I don't know why they don't remember... One had to see people one admires so much, so *sana* [clean-living], be killed one by one and this makes one remember this [the violence] a lot. It was a tremendous violence, a political violence, not like the present one which has no reason. [I/BA/16-08-97]

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<sup>19</sup> Sánchez describes the scene of murder that characterized *la violencia*. The practice of torture was common and so was the staging of this terror in front of children, neighbours and families. The symbology of terror exercised on victims' bodies included atrocities such as mutilation, sexual violation, the desecration of victims' corpses, the description of killings according to the cuts inflicted on the bodies of the victims (e.g. the *flannel* "T-shirt" cut).

<sup>20</sup> Fabiola and Ofelia are cousins of Ivan. They are also in their 60s and were both born in the barrio and have lived in the same house all their lives. Fabiola participated in several of the memory workshops and group sessions during my fieldwork.

<sup>21</sup> Popular expression used to refer to those of Conservative affiliation. It means the mob.

[[French historian Daniel Pecaú (1997) argues that the memory of *la violencia* represents a national referent that has legitimated actions of revenge and hatred. Pecaú indicates that this memory of violence lacks a socially recognized form and tends to be expressed as a set of inarticulated individual narratives where violence is represented as a powerful force that destroys everything in its surroundings. This is in part due, he argues, to the regional and chronological diversity of this civil war, but it is also related to the collective experience of war in Colombia. Violence, in this experience, has been represented as an intrinsic thread and component of the national history.<sup>22</sup> According to this reading, the present violence can be seen simply as a continuation of the past violence.

In barrio Antioquia, however, the fighting and terrorizing among neighbours stopped when decree 517 of 1951 declared the barrio as the red light district of Medellín. As Fabiola says “*el decreto sacó La violencia*” [the decree kicked *La Violencia* out of the barrio].

## **Red Lights in the Barrio: The “Tolerant” Years**

Most did not remember the name of the mayor. Although they did recall the precise municipal decree number and year: decree 517 of 1951, September 22. Decree “517” declared barrio Antioquia as the red-light district of Medellín. For Don Luis, this decree is the root of Colombian violence, a violence that he argues was created by the

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<sup>22</sup> An interpretation of *La violencia* that the Colombian elites are interested in maintaining as it hides the traces of the violent strategies that were systematically promoted by a part of the local elites (Pecaú, 1987:490).

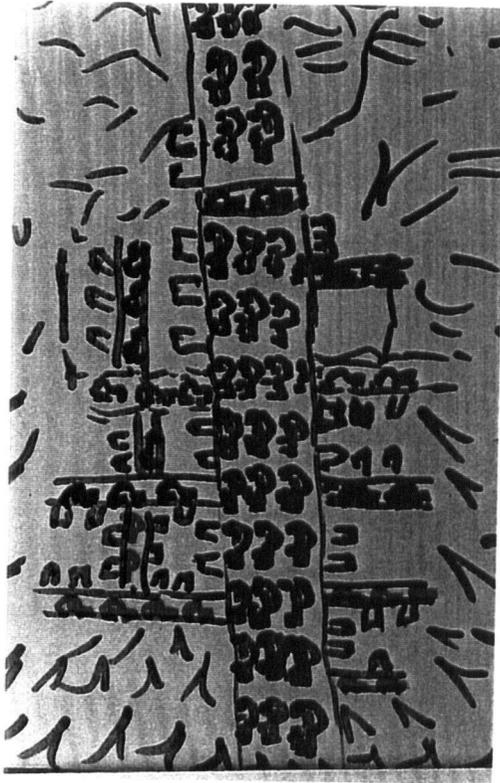
State. For Doña Amparo,<sup>23</sup> the decree is the original moment when the barrio began to rot, and for Doña Debora,<sup>24</sup> the violence that the barrio lives today is the legacy of the violence lived under decree 517. Barrio Antioquia, poor and distant from the city's downtown and with only one entry point, was the site chosen by the mayor, with the support of the local elites and the city's bishop, for keeping the "undesirables" (prostitutes, homosexuals, drug addicts and alcoholics, thieves, Blacks, and recently arrived poor immigrants) segregated from the rest of the city (Salazar, 1996). The moral overtones of this resolution illustrate the urban planning and industrialization strategies, founded in ambiguous Catholic norms of sexual and moral behaviour, the control of the working class' free time and the regulation of city space, sponsored by Antioquia's elite (Jaramillo, 1994).<sup>25</sup> After the decree was declared, Fabiola and Ofelia didn't look through their windows to see whether the Matias brothers were coming but rather to observe the first night of the decree.

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<sup>23</sup> Doña Amparo was born in the barrio and is a proud grandmother of ten grandchildren. She was eight years old when the decree was declared. During the time of the decree six bars surrounded her house, and she would see her block filled with cars every night.

<sup>24</sup> Doña Debora was a school principal of one of the barrio's elementary schools for many years. Born in the barrio, Debora was sent to boarding school during this period and would come to the barrio only on the weekends. Her father was one of the leaders in the community's opposition that struggled against this decree. Doña Deborah passed away in 1998.

<sup>25</sup> The main industry of the region was the textile industry where young women formed the majority of the work-force. The local elites established that higher productivity could be reached by means of a paternalistic discipline derived from a local interpretation of Catholic morals and norms. Thus, "purity" and virginity became an explicit prerequisite for employment and married women, single mothers or women of "looser morals" were not employable in factories (Farnsworth-Alvear, 1994). The other important element for the disciplining of the working class was the control of their free time, which was particularly focused around the workers use of the downtown area of *Guayaquil* as a centre for drinking and socializing (Jaramillo, 1994).



3.2 Fabiola:<sup>26</sup> So, the first night they turned off all the street lights in the barrio. Why? Family houses, the three or four of them, had yellow light bulbs. All the rest had red ones. The barrio men who could go outside to *noveliar* [snoop around] said that you couldn't even stick a pin between all the cars jammed into the streets, all the people from Medellin who'd come to enjoy the first night in the new red light district. This left a big impact on all of us. They let us peek out the window a minute to see how it looked, and there was no room to stick a pin, just cars and cars. This was etched on our minds ... [MW-TC/BA/27-07-97]

**Figure 8** The first night of the decree 517

Trucks packed with prostitutes from all over the city arrived day after day. Most of the sexual workers were picked up in *Guayaquil*, a “city within the city,” located in the city centre: the centre of commercial activity but also a place of looser morals where day and night were accompanied by the sounds and voices emerging from lively bars and other places of entertainment.<sup>27</sup> For that year Barrio Antioquia became the only place in the

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<sup>26</sup> Fabiola told this story to describe her quilt image that visualizes the first night of the barrio as a red light district and as one of the most significant events of her life in the barrio. She presented this image during a memory workshop with participants of the Training Centre.

<sup>27</sup> With the location of the train station in *Guayaquil* in 1929, this part of the city became a commercial centre as well as the first area that the new immigrants had contact with. The place was packed with stores, warehouses, corner stores, hardware stores and crockery shops. The area was dubbed “dry port” and the night life boomed in cafes, bars, boarding houses and motels. In contrast with the rest of the city, morality was loose and underground culture thrived (Reyes, 1996).

city where bars could be kept open with music playing for twenty-four hours a day. The first day of the decree thirty houses were converted into *prostibulos* [brothels]; forty five days later there were two hundred and fifteen (Cano, 1987). The barrio's residents were expected to sell their properties or give up their leases and move somewhere else in the city. Many left, but many others decided to stay and fight by organizing meetings, marches and protests led by women in mourning attires carrying the statue of the virgin. They were supported by the city's newspaper, *El Colombiano*, the barrio's priest and by some politicians. Barrio Antioquia made headlines in local newspapers for months. Life changed for those who stayed. Schools closed and became prophylactic centres for the sexual workers. Children either had to travel a long distance to attend school or be placed in boarding schools. At home, they were allowed little playing time outside and were forbidden from going out after five p.m. From their windows, they witnessed the cars, the drunkards, the fights and the shiny red lights that had taken over their barrio.

Meanwhile, as if dealing with a civil war at home was not enough, a battalion of the Colombian army joined the Allies to fight in the Korean War. Colombians learned about the ongoing civil war in distant Korea and the threat of Communism. As a result, Barrio Antioquia was informally renamed "Korea" because "everything was about fighting" and because it encapsulated a threat that, much like Communism, challenged the moral basis of the dominant society. Two years later, when most of the business and prostitutes had left,<sup>28</sup> political and social pressure influenced the termination of the decree, but the barrio and the city continued to live with its legacy as the delinquency and

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<sup>28</sup> From a business point of view, the red light district did not succeed because its location far from the city centre did not attract the needed flow of people to keep the businesses running.

the underground economy remained in the barrio and the city. Rather than segregating prostitution to the periphery, the official decree had the effect of adding another prostitution zone and causing the deterioration of the existing ones (Jaramillo, 1994). In these years, Barrio Antioquia's stigma as a dangerous place of "evils" and "undesirable" people became firmly established in the collective mentality of the residents of Medellin and the country. This stigma has been kept alive by the media and rumour.<sup>29</sup>

When most of the new bars and brothels shut down, many of those who had come with the decree decided to make the barrio their permanent home. Among them was a large group of Black families and many Black women from the Uraba region of Antioquia. They worked as live-in domestic workers during the week, and then they would come to the barrio on weekends to enjoy the all-Black parties that were celebrated in several parts of the barrio. Another legacy of the "tolerant years," as some of the barrio's people refer to this period, is the introduction of drug selling activities in the barrio. Barrio Antioquia became the city's *plaza de mercado* [market], the central supplier of psychoactive drugs for the municipal area and the city of Medellin.

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<sup>29</sup> This stigma has been useful in further the stereotype Colombians have in North American. Eddy, Sabogal and Walden, American journalists, reproduced such a perception: "...Barrio Antioquia, unquestionably Medellin's most dangerous zone. Declared a red-light district several decades ago and located next to the old airport, Barrio Antioquia harbours prostitutes of both sexes and people dispossessed of any values. The perpetrators of the most shocking crimes in Medellin, come almost always, from Barrio Antioquia, and it was largely émigrés from this slum who served in the vicious "Cocaine Wars" experienced by both Miami and New York city between 1979 and 1982. Together with the district of Itagui in southern Medellin, Barrio Antioquia is the easy recruiting ground of paid killers. Customers interested in a *trabajito* –a little job- can stop, literally, at any corner and recruit an assassin." (Eddy, Sabogal and Walden, 1988: 29-30)

## Languages of Concealment: The Sixties

Wearing colourful flowery shirts, baggy green, purple or red trousers of “18 centimetre wide boots and 70 centimetre wide knees,” and a long key chain hanging from their waist down to their knees and then going up and back to their pants’ pocket, the *camajanes* openly smoked marihuana, loved Cuban singers such as Celia Cruz, Daniel Santos and the orchestra, “*La Sonora Matancera*,” and knew tango lyrics and many *lunfardo* words off by heart.<sup>30</sup> These were the *camajanes*, a group of young men that developed a unique male style in Medellin during the 1950s and 1960s that was “characterized by the extravagant use of clothing” (Filipo 1983 quoted in Villa 1991). The *camajanes* were often seen in *Bar Medellin* and *Bar Baliska* of Barrio Antioquia or in their houses listening to music, sharing marihuana cigarettes and talking in a unique language that mixed tango lyrics and English words and was rich in metaphors, lexical transformations and euphemistic resources (Villa, 1991).<sup>31</sup>

This group was distinguished by their ways of communicating i.e. their speech, their mannerisms and their dress style; furthermore, the *camajanes* transformed their unique style into a cultural response against exclusion and into a linguistic code that allowed for a protected communication. Their language has been referred to as a language of concealment: a way of communicating secretly through the use of signs,

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<sup>30</sup> The stories about the *Camajanes* were told to my research assistant, Sebastian, by Don Ruman who came to live in the barrio in the mid fifties and is the owner of one of the barrio’s bars, and by Don Andres, the owner of one the barrio’s pharmacy and long time resident of the barrio.

<sup>31</sup> English words were incorporated and changed in their meaning or in their writing or pronunciation (e.g. *bisnes* for business). Lexical transformations occurred by addition e.g. *yo-landa* to refer to *yo* (“I”); by permutation e.g. *teus* for *usted* (“you”) and by substitution e.g. *Metrallo* for Medellin. Euphemistic resources were used through the manipulation of similar sounds to give different meanings e.g. *mafo* for *mafioso*, the use of diminutives or superlatives to change the meaning of a word and the use of expressions that reinforce the exclusive belonging to a linguistic community (Villa, 1991).

gestures and words that are senseless or meaningless to others (Villa, 1991). Tango lyrics and the underground culture of lower social classes was passed on to this group while they grew up in a marginalized barrio that transpired with these rhythms. The *camajan*'s use of English words was learned and incorporated through a process of familiarization with North American culture. This familiarization was acquired as a result of a growing number of the barrio's people travelling to the United States.<sup>32</sup> By the 1970s, the *camajan* style had faded but many of their communicative resources and linguistic constructions were re-created and transformed into new styles such as with the *jipies* [hippies] and later with the *traquetos*, those who travelled to the United States as a contact person for opening and locating markets for cocaine trafficking.<sup>33</sup>

Barrio Antioquia's establishment as the drug market of Medellin was strengthened in the 1960s when the use of marihuana increased and the influence of changing cultural norms spread among local and national youth of all social classes. During these years, Antioquia was the region that expelled the most peasants from its rural areas (Oquist, 1980), and its once lively industry faced an economic recession due to the failure of the model of import substitution industrialization.<sup>34</sup> The city of Medellin

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<sup>32</sup> Travel to the United States began in the barrio with the *galofardos* [refined, highly skilled thieves]. Barrio Antioquia's people have travelled to the United States since the early sixties to practice their skills as thieves and pick pockets "because in the barrio there were very good thieves, this is not good to say, but there were excellent thieves" (Don Andres, the pharmacist).

<sup>33</sup> The naming of these intermediaries as *traquetos* is an example of the use and transformation of English words. The English root word is "to track," and here the verb is transformed into a noun that names a person in charge of tracking down possible clients and markets; furthermore, the sound of the word is similar to the sound made by firearms like the sub-machine gun and the G3 rifle when they are being loaded. The word is also used as a verb "*traquetear*" to mean move, stir, shake (Villa 1991; Castañeda and Henao, 1996).

<sup>34</sup> This model evaluated the "historical deterioration of the terms of trade against primary good from the countries of the periphery." The model recommended the strengthening of national industries to manufacture goods that were previously imported. (Escobar, 1995:80-81)

was experiencing major physical, demographic and cultural transformations. Between the 1960s and 1970s, 50% of all new inhabitants in Medellin were living in illegal settlements that had spread over the foothills of the mountains. The city had exhausted its physical capacity to expand because of the geographical conditions, and subsequently people were settling into new barrios in high-risk areas lacking basic public services and facilities. The crisis in these years was not just limited to the traditional economy and unemployment, it was also an urban crisis, seeing as the city had more than tripled its population in less than two decades.<sup>35</sup> While the city's new inhabitants had to find for themselves the solution to sparse housing in illegal settlements, city authorities were finding it very difficult to plan urban interventions. Slowly, the limits of the urban perimeter were changed to include the new settlements, and basic needs of the barrios such as water, electricity, or elementary schools began to be addressed.

One event that marked a profound change in a region traditionally dominated by the morals of a conservative and Catholic ruling elite was the hosting in 1971 of the Ancón rock festival: a local version of the Woodstock festival that attracted tens of thousands of young people from all over the country to Ancón park located near Medellin. During three days, marihuana and other psychoactive drugs were actively consumed by youth who were defying some of the dominant social values,<sup>36</sup> and challenging mainstream culture's double morality concerning sex, religion and ethics. For the youth who attended the festival, smoking marihuana was a recent and trendy

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<sup>35</sup> In 1951, Medellin had 358.189 inhabitants; in 1964, 772.887 and in 1973, 1,071.252. (Jaramillo, Ceballos and Villa, 1998)

<sup>36</sup> In the 1960s, Medellin registered a sharp increase in the consumption of psychoactive drugs such as barbituric drugs, marihuana, cocaine, morphine, and heroine (Salazar, 1997).

discovery. At that point, however, barrio Antioquia's people already had a history of smoking marihuana that dated back to the 1940s and 1950s -- when it was seen as a vice of bandits and the underworld (Strong, 1995). Many of barrio Antioquia's people did not attend the Ancón festival to dance, sing or smoke but to take advantage of the opportunity to openly sell marihuana.

On a regional level, the United States' intervention in national affairs was strongly felt during these years when the fear of more "Cuban revolutions" strengthened the cold war mentality and the developmentalist approach that dominated the US political, social and cultural agenda in Latin America. As part of their "social" strategy, the USA engaged in the Alliance for Progress program that promoted development programs in the areas of social housing, technology diffusion and community development by sending Peace Corps to poor, isolated areas. In Medellin, the site chosen for the developmentalist actions of the Peace Corps was barrio Antioquia. The presence of the Peace Corps was received with mixed emotions in Barrio Antioquia and throughout the country. While some welcomed their involvement in establishing a "social residence," controlling the rats and diseases in the barrio, and organizing sports events and health campaigns, others were suspicious of their mission and saw their presence as the "undercover infiltration of anti-drugs organisms such as the DEA and CIA" (Don Ruman). Arango and Child (1984) have also questioned the motives of the Peace Corps. They argue that the presence of the Peace Corps in several areas of the country led to the expansion of marihuana consumption, the facilitation of contacts between the North American drug traffickers and the local ones, and the learning of new ways in which cocaine could be refined and utilized. In these years, the connection of the barrio's people

with the local drug economy and with drug trafficking in United States was solidified. The presence of the Peace Corps and the consolidation of the drug economy in the barrio are events that further illuminate some of the regional and international trends taking place during these years. From a political economy and world system perspective (Nash, 1994) the events that took place during the 1960s in Barrio Antioquia serve as an example of the ties between a local, marginalized community and a powerful “underground” global market. In sum, we can highlight how local events and economies interact with regional and global trends.

## ***La Blanca***

*Los Mejías*, a family of five brothers, are remembered in barrio Antioquia as the pioneers in the “business” and “dealings” with the United States. They grew up very poor in the barrio and went on to become very rich, but never forgot their “origins.” Their business with “*la blanca*” -- cocaine -- bloomed after a few trips to the USA.<sup>37</sup> Upon their return to the barrio, they were often seen driving fancy new cars and wearing expensive and spectacular clothing. They moved to *El Poblado*, a traditional upper class neighbourhood that underwent a profound transformation during the 70s and the 80s when it became the residence of many drug traffickers. The loyalty of the *Mejías* to the barrio nevertheless remained intact, and they were frequently seen hanging out in the bar “*El Baliska*” doing their business, drinking, and helping anyone in need. According to their *camajan* and *malevo* influences, they combined their ability to take risks, to fight

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<sup>37</sup> Locally, the expression used to refer to United States is “la USA.”

and evade the authorities with a spirit of social delinquency that emphasized the protection of the poor as a key duty (Jaramillo, 1994). Sebastian, my research assistant, remembers that they were “famous” in the barrio “.. because of their humanitarianism and charity and besides because they made sure the barrio was respected.” The New Years eve tradition was to collect money, buy a pig for the block, kill it and roast it in an open fire lit in the middle of the street while people drank and danced. The Mejías provided the pigs for those in need and helped anyone who needed it. Doña Ruth<sup>38</sup> recalls that the Mejías got into the business through the feared *Matias* [the Conservative brothers] who had the political connections and knowledge of government bureaucracy to establish relations and links with the United States’ drug cartels. Similar family and barrio links would allow many other local and national emerging drug lords to establish themselves.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1970s – 1980s, the barrio represented a key realm for community activity and for the construction of social networks of communication, solidarity, self-help and exchange (Riaño, Y. 1996).<sup>40</sup> A sense of community had developed for the masses of urban poor who could not find meaningful or inclusive links with a city that continued to exclude them (Riaño Y, 1998, 1998a; Riaño, P, 1990). It was precisely these informal social networks, constructed from units, such as the block, the extended family and/or

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<sup>38</sup> Doña Ruth’s parents were also one of the first families to arrive in the barrio. Doña Ruth was born in the barrio and has maintained a close contact with many people because of her sewing services.

<sup>39</sup> There has been a close alliance between narcotrafficking and politics. While traditional structures like the family and neighbourhood provide the network of loyalty and committed labour needed for the trafficking, the political alliances provide the links and open the doors required to move the drug without getting caught.

<sup>40</sup> The barrio as a socio cultural unit has been documented for many communities in Latin America. See Arturo (1994); Martín-Barbero (1993); Riaño (1991; 1991a); Vargas (1985).

groups of childhood friends, that the local drug lords would appropriate to build their network of support and labour.

By the end of the 1970s, thirty regional textile industries were facing their worst financial crisis while Medellín's unemployment rate increased at a faster pace than in the rest of the country. This is the moment when a drug economy based on the traffic of cocaine took hold (Salazar and Jaramillo, 1994). The drug industry took root in the regional smuggling traditions that date back to the nineteenth century mining activities and the commercialization of gold and that have continued until today through the smuggling of cigarettes, liquor and stereos from the United States and Panama, and since the early 70s with the trafficking of marihuana (Betancourt and García, 1994). Barrio Antioquia's proximity to the city airport provided a strategic site for smuggling and trafficking. Doña Debora, the principal of one of the elementary schools, could not "believe her eyes" when she saw an army truck being filled with some pressed marihuana found in her school yard. She wasn't sure how the marihuana got there, although there were rumours that someone threw it there [from an airplane] in anticipation of a search.

By the mid 1970s, the cocaine industry was booming and Colombians had established themselves in Miami and Queens, New York. On both the local and the national level, these years saw the widespread influence of Marxist theories and leftist politics on social movements, the working class, students and the organization of the barrio's grassroots groups and activities. Although many barrios in the communes<sup>41</sup> of

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<sup>41</sup> Medellín is divided in six urban zones and sixteen communes [see Map # 4]. A zone includes an area of several barrios from various social and economic levels. A *commune* is a division of the zone that includes barrios of similar social and economic levels (Diagnóstico Social de Medellín, 1996).

Medellin became actively involved in leftist politics and received the radical influence of the Theology of Liberation movement, barrio Antioquia was never affected by these influences. These organizations, in a paradoxical similarity with the Antioqueño elite, avoided places that were associated with the underground world or the “lumpen,” seeing them as unable to develop a class-consciousness.

## **Travellers to the “USA”: The Seventies**

Griselda Blanco, formerly a prostitute, went to the United States as one of the many pick pockets who left the barrio to try to make it up North. Griselda, a friend of the *Mejias*, established herself in Queens and later moved to Miami. By 1979, she was the best-known cocaine smuggler in the United States. Various known as the “Godmother”, “Black Widow” or the “the Coca queen,” she headed a strong organization of cocaine trafficking (Gugliotta and Leen, 1989). Her success was achieved by operating her organization like a family<sup>42</sup> and through the establishment of a network of widows and women in general who travel from Colombia to the States carrying cocaine in their custom designed underwear.<sup>43</sup> The 1970s are when the boom of the mules<sup>44</sup> began and today many in the barrio affirm that there has been at least one mule from each street of

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<sup>42</sup> Griselda became known for her “ruthless violent practices” and was compared with “Ma” Barker, an American gangster of the depression era who ran what was literally an organized crime family. The U.S Federal judge who condemned Griselda and her first three sons to long terms of imprisonment said: “If there ever was a case, other than the ‘Ma’ Barker case, that truly has demonstrated what a mother’s influence ought not to be, it’s this one. [...] This is the most incredible thing I have ever seen.” (Eddy, Sabogal and Walden, 1988:61)

<sup>43</sup> A line designed by Griselda to carry a kilo or two of cocaine in secret pockets.

<sup>44</sup> “Mules” are those who individually transport small quantities of drugs.

the barrio. Others go further, convincingly affirming that since those years “almost half of the barrio” travelled to the United States.

Doña Amparo, Fabiola, Ofelia and Doña Ruth, all of them grandmothers today, grew up with Griselda. They all remember how they were offered such an opportunity:

3.3 Doña Amparo: They looked for their mules to do the trip for them. They made so much money, and those who wanted to could stay there... so easy because nobody searched them, and so many people went. I never did because my mother wouldn't allow me, else I would've gone and I'd have a little savings now. Even after I married they came back... they would say “Go, and we'll pay you so much per trip.” So people would go... A man came once and said “I know you're in bad shape, why don't you go?” and I was really tempted. [I/BA/20-10-97]

It was not just the living, however, who were coming back from the “USA”. During the 70s, barrio Antioquia's people gathered at the doors of houses in an attempt to see bodies in coffins been brought back from the States. It was then that the “tradition of bringing back the *muertos*,” those killed in United States, began. *Gabriela*, the first *muerta* to be brought back, was dressed in an ivory colour dress made with elaborate and expensive handmade laces and matching silk ivory shoes. Women, men and children gathered around her coffin to admire her beauty and the sumptuousness of her dress and coffin. *Pestañas*, Griselda Blanco's second or third husband, was the second one, and after him many more were to follow, particularly during the time of the “cocaine wars” in the USA (1970-82) and as the traffic of mules increased.

The strong cultural influence that the narcotraffic was to have on the culture began to show across the city. Contact with the United States intensified people's attraction to show off gold accessories, cars, metal and other items of conspicuous consumerism. The functioning within an organizational structure of the local mafia was deeply rooted in the *Antioqueño* culture. Paradoxically, the flow of money promoted a

return to old rural values and behaviours that were becoming extinct. Ownership of property in the rural areas, the devotion for the image of the virgin Maria, a passion for horses, and the value of the spoken word were some of the emerging manifestations that exemplified this return (Arango, 1988). Those who succeeded in the USA renovated their houses in the barrio by adding more floors, installing windows and aluminium fences and doors, decorating the front of their houses with shiny stones and marble, colouring their walls and furniture with pastels colours, and adding white-ribbed columns and fountains. Gigantic radios, and later ghetto blasters, and gold-plated ornaments became central decorative pieces. Those who went to live in El Poblado, the *patrones*, were also transforming their residences and opening a furniture and antique market that had traditionally served a small clientelé,

Their houses were decorated with generous Buddhas, Chinese china, marble statues, Louis XV furniture, phosphorescent paintings, gold faucets, things that the refined tastes classified as *loberias* [of bad taste, camp]. The luxurious cars mixed with horses for public exhibition, the ranchera and *carrilera* [a type of Country music] music played in exclusive places; and the knives yielded to fire guns. (Salazar, 1997:135)

## A Troubling Image of Youth

Sebastian remembers *Salomé* as a warrior, “a true warrior woman ... a woman of three balls.” While growing up in the 60’s, *Salomé* became a well recognized and respected *apartamentera* [house thief working in a semi-organized gang] in the barrio. She was a member of the gang called *El Secre*, a group of skilled *apartamenteros*. This gang was one of nine groups of *apartamenteros* active in the barrio during the late 70’s and early 80’s (see Map # 5). They professed an ethic of respect for the barrio and its

people, and did their “business” outside of the barrio. The barrio was the place where they grew up together and the place where they felt a sense of belonging. There was an implicit agreement to keep their delinquent activities outside of the barrio’s boundaries and to never make a target of a neighbour. As the groups grew in numbers, their illicit activities attracted the police to the barrio. In the *Callejón del oeste* [the alley of the Wild West] and other alleys, barrio Antioquia’s neighbours would witness from terraces and windows the *apartamenteros* movements on the streets from sidewalk to street, or from roof top to roof top.

Continuing the tradition of previous generations, the *apartamenteros* hung out in bars and streets. Like everyone else in the barrio, they were actively involved in the *fiestas*, weekend celebrations or special celebrations, that since the 1940s bring the barrio together in bars, streets and *heladerias* [ice cream parlour]. Marta, Marcela and La Flaca,<sup>45</sup> teenagers in the 1980s, were partying at a place known as *La Virgencita* when a fight broke out between the three young women and the girlfriends of *El Tata* and *El Secre*. Having “demonstrated their *verraquera* [toughness, lack of fear] during the fight,” Marta and her friends were invited to join them. With the *apartamenteros*, they developed the observation and communication skills necessary to distract house residents and carry out “clean” robberies. Because the *apartamenteros* began having deeper conflicts with each other and with gangs from other barrios and because the opportunities to work for the drug economy increased, the *muchachas* [the girls] accepted the

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<sup>45</sup> Marta, Marcela and La Flaca told this story to her childhood friend Diana, my research assistant. They are in their early thirties and have returned to live in the barrio after a long absence in United States.

“invitation” to travel to the USA. Diana, my research assistant, recalls what happened then,

3.4 .... *Se calentaron* [they got all worked up], and because they were so *verracas* [tough] after all they'd been through [it was suggested] that if they wanted to, they [the traffickers] would send the *muchachas* “all packaged up”, and then they would take care of themselves once there.

By then, the wars of the *apartamenteros* had begun, and shootings, chases and revenge killings became common. *El Monus* was an *apartamentero* whom many wanted to kill but they were unable to because he was too fast and skilled with guns. Luz Elena<sup>46</sup> witnessed many of those events, and recalls that the only way they were able to kill him was from the back. Diana recalls the “war” of *Marion* and *La Tata* that, in one weekend, left eleven bullet-ridden dead.

By the 1980s, Medellin's drug lords were well established, and their business was booming. Soon enough, however, they needed backup from the local informal networks. The barrio, as a socio-cultural unit and hub of lively relationships of *vecindad* (friendship and kinship), would become the ideal source and pillar to build a vast base of support for the drug cartels. Young people, harshly hit by unemployment,<sup>47</sup> were attracted to these activities, and their informal organization into *galladas* became a functional structure within the complex network and organizational functioning of the drug economy. A

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<sup>46</sup> Luz Elena came to live in barrio Antioquia with her son Sebastian and her father in 1975. She lived close to the hang out and hiding place of the *apartamenteros*. Luz Elena participated in several of the memory workshops and today is an active community leader.

<sup>47</sup> This generation of youth was facing the effects of a regional industrial and economic crisis, a more competitive labor market and a lack of economic opportunities that made the unemployment rate grow at a faster pace than anywhere else in the country.

generational shift took place, and since then violence in Colombia became associated with youth.<sup>48</sup>

The drug cartel also appropriated the strong ties between youth and neighbours who lived in the same block and barrio. For marginalized youth, participation in the drug economy represented a unique opportunity for social and economic mobility. Youth gangs and criminal activities became an attractive option that promised money and prestige. In a period of less than five years (1985-1990), there were reports of the existence of one hundred and fifty barrio gangs through out Medellin, thirty percent of which had direct ties to the cartel (Salazar and Jaramillo, 1994).<sup>49</sup> The presence of the cocaine business triggered youth involvement in criminal activities, specially as *sicarios* [hired assassins]. Youth responses, however, went beyond their involvement with the drug cartel. Many of these gangs, lacking contacts or “professionalism,” directed their activities to kidnapping, car thefts, the assault of commercial institutions or offering their “killing” services to anyone.

Across the city, in poor, middle and upper class neighbourhoods, men and women, young and old joined the networks of the drug economy, and followed the

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<sup>48</sup> This shift in the figure of the typical violent subject to someone with a young face is explained by Carlos Mario Ortiz (1991) as originating within two types of organizations. The first of these groups were guerrilla-type groups who used violence for political or “revolutionary” purposes, and second were the narcotraffic organizations that recruited youth. Youth found both types of organizations highly attractive because of the opportunity they offered to learn how to use fire arms and to receive military training –in the case of the guerrilla- and because of the possibility of obtaining access to money and changing their economic status.

<sup>49</sup> These gangs were not evenly distributed. Thus in the North eastern zone, one of Medellin’s poorest and most populated, there were 87 gangs while in the South western zone where barrio Antioquia is located there were only six gangs documented by the army and police. The small numbers of gangs in this zone corresponds with the mixed residential, industrial and mostly middle class origins of the barrios located in this zone. The real number of gangs was probably higher because many went unregistered (Salazar and Jaramillo, 1994).

directions of bosses, which for first time, were from a poor social class origin. The legend of Pablo Escobar who grew up poor in Envigado, half an hour away from barrio Antioquia, spread across the city, the country and the world. *Don Pablo*, like the Mejías, never forgot his origins and his loyalty to his people. He generously gave money, and built social housing projects, and sport facilities for the people who remember and revere him to this day. *La Quica*, *Popeye* and *La Chirusa*, some of *Don Pablo*'s chief deputies, visited Barrio Antioquia often to do business, social exchanges or temporarily hire a *pelao* [a kid] to run some errands or deal with some unfinished business.

By the mid 1980s, the inhabitants of Barrio Antioquia could differentiate the gangs of *apartamenteros* from the more established and "higher flying" gangs of *El Coco* y *El Baliska* who had links with the *oficinas*<sup>50</sup> of the drug cartel. The organized drug cartel needed "cleanness;" often local petty crime, excessive drug consumption and activities such as begging were seen as an interference to their activities. The *pelaos* who wanted to join them would "show their seriousness" (by not committing petty crime and by keeping drug-consumption under control) while gangs like *Los Chinos* in barrio Antioquia, a gang of small bandits and *ladronzuelos* [unsophisticated thieves] were dismissed and became victims of "social cleansing" enterprises.<sup>51</sup>

Haunted by dreams of money, the symbolism of firearms, the rhythms of a "fast life" and the attractions of conspicuous consumerism, barrio Antioquia's youth, like thousands of others across the city, made killing, violence and territorial control a daily

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<sup>50</sup> The *oficinas* were formed by organized gangs who became the intermediaries for the bosses demand of services.

<sup>51</sup> The social cleansing enterprises were carried out by vigilante squads who took it upon themselves to 'clean up' the barrios affected by the stealing, drug consumption and violent acts of the youth gangs of muggers.

activity. As many youth became *sicarios* or involved in other related actions, violence and death became hallmarks of the landscape. The killing of high profile politicians from the left and the right, of judges, ministers and many political activists proliferated in the country, and with those killings, the image of the *sicario* came to be associated with that of a young man. This image of a young male, dispossessed of ideological affinities and privately paid to eliminate someone, illustrated the shift that was taking place in the country. Private justice and revenge became accepted and legitimized means of dealing with conflicts at any level of society. At the same time, the credibility of the formal system of state justice was further eroded. The *sicario* became an institution driven by a market of supply and demand used not only by the drug cartels but also by business people who feared kidnapping, cattle and ranch owners facing economic risks, threatened politicians and military officers. These groups were the intellectual agents who maintained an open market for young men demanding “professionalism” and precision in their activities<sup>52</sup> (Ortiz, 1991).

During the first years of the 1990s what was happening with the youth gangs in barrio Antioquia was not much different from what was happening in the barrios of the North Eastern and Central Eastern communes or in neighbouring barrios, such as Santa Fe and the municipality of Envigado. The stereotyping and stigmatization of youth took root with the increased involvement of youth in violent activities. In the national and

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<sup>52</sup> There are close resemblances between the process that maintained the *pajaros* during the violence of the 50's and the *sicarios*. In both instances, there were actors who had political or economic interests in exterminating their enemies and who provided intellectual justification for such actions by pointing to the indisputable inadequacies of the justice system. In both cases, justice and revenge became a matter of individual or private resolution. (Ortiz, 1991) Ortiz points out how this form of violence was also used by cattle ranchers from the regions of Cauca, Cordoba and Sucre to exterminate or intimidate peasants and indigenous people who were organizing themselves to fight for their rights.

regional mentality, the North Eastern commune became a “nest of *sicarios*,” and the image of a young person became equated with violent behaviour. For youth in barrio Antioquia, experiencing stigmatization and exclusion as residents of barrio Antioquia was nothing new; however, the focus was now on their generation. The effects of this new wave of stigmatization were felt in terms of fewer jobs and educational opportunities and a generalized negative attitude towards youth. The experiences of stereotyping and exclusion for these youth, on the other hand, worked as a boomerang, further contributing to the spread of youth violence (Ortiz 1991).

In the race for money and recognition, death statistics and victim profiles changed dramatically on a local and national level. The victims of homicide were now mostly young men. Statistically, 90% of homicide victims were men and 85% were between 13-38 years old. In cities like Cali, Bogota and Barranquilla, the trend of violence followed the same pattern of a substantial increase in the death rate by firearms and the concentration of victims in a particular group (Camacho and Guzman, 1990). By 1985, homicide became the first cause of death in the country, a trend that remains until today. Colombia had become one of the most violent countries worldwide, reaching an average of 77 homicides per 100,000 people per year. By 1991, the city of Medellin was showing a much bleaker picture reaching a rate of 381 homicides per 100,000 people (Región, 1999).

## **Busy Streets**

The streets were the hub of life in the 1980s. Local street characters like the *loco Azula* walked the entire barrio collecting food leftovers. *Alicia la galletera* [*Alicia, the*

*cookie seller*] dressed in colourful clothing with costume fantasy jewellery on her hands, neck and ears sold her cookies on the streets to amused children who followed her around. Children could be spotted on the airport runways throwing rocks at the departing airplanes, searching for leftover airplane food, tracking kites or running full speed as the airport van chased them off the grounds. At night a horse with a headless rider was said to drag a set of heavy chains and his ghostly trotting was heard inside the houses. Amid the sounds of lively conversations, Salsa music and dancing filled the night life of the barrio. A woman dressed in transparent white and high heels tapped on the streets until she reached the light post by *Doña Chinca's* house and vanished exactly at midnight. The parades of the Virgin del Carmen, Easter processions, and Halloween and Christmas celebrations were all collective events that brought everyone together on the streets. *Chun*, the leader of *Los Chunes* gang, watchfully walked those streets, and the rumour went that if he wore a black jacket it meant that there was "*chulo fijo*" [announced death].

*Chun* was the last to die in a family of three brothers.<sup>53</sup> The first to die was *Pina*, the youngest, then *Pepón*, the middle one. After the death of his youngest brother, *Chun* was taken over by hate and a thirst for revenge. In late 1989, the *Chunes* joined many other gangs in a new and very lucrative business sponsored by the drug Cartel: the killing of police officers. The death of the three brothers is linked with their involvement in this activity. *Chun's* gang is further remembered in barrio Antioquia as the first one that crossed the ethical boundary always respected by those before them, namely, the barrio, its celebrations and its people were off limits. With the *Chunes* presence, the barrio became a more likely scene of horror. The *Chunes* would alternate between jobs outside

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<sup>53</sup> I collected many of "Chun's stories" particularly from young men and women. The events described here are a composite of several of these stories.

the barrio and jobs inside the barrio that involved stealing, robbing, killing and the use of rape as a vicious weapon for threatening their enemies or settling accounts.

Until 1989, the Medellin drug cartel had enjoyed several years of relative freedom and tolerance as a result of their contact and direct penetration into all sectors of society: government, politics, religion, entertainment, army and the police. Their revengeful acts against judges, ministers and politicians and the killing of very high profile politicians, however, finally brought an energetic response by the national government and regional authorities. In August 1989, the government started the strongest offensive ever taken against the drug cartel. The drug cartel responded with terrorist actions: powerful car bombs that destroyed buildings and killed hundreds of people, assassinations of judges, high-ranking politicians, and kidnappings.

In Antioquia, the Army started an offensive against the gangs of *sicarios* as a way of weakening the social base of the drug cartel. For this purpose they legitimized all kind of actions that were mostly carried out by death squads<sup>54</sup>: disappearances, torture, massacres, collective searches. In the month of June 1990 alone, there were one hundred and fifty youth killed in twenty different massacres. In turn, the drug cartel responded by

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<sup>54</sup> The commission for the study of violence defines death squads as arising and developing: "as either a replacement or an extension, through arms and violence, of the government entities in charge of administering justice and maintaining public order [...]. These bands direct their acts of extermination against political movements and parties, opposition leaders, union members, and sectors presumed to be sympathetic to the guerrillas. They also targeted the marginal sectors of society, which supposedly breed forms of delinquency that the squads try to eradicate with cleanup operations in the large cities." (Commission, 1992:268) There is a realm of "legality" to their actions by the National Defence law 48 of 1968 that permitted the army to organize and provide arms to groups of civilians called "self-defence" units. At the end of the 1970s, death squads appeared in the city. Salazar and Jaramillo describe three kinds of death squads. A parapolicial squad that was focussed on the elimination of thieves, bandits and kidnappers; a mafia squad that was devoted to the killing of judges, police, witnesses and people who interfered in their activities and a third one known as "Association for the defence of Medellin" that defined themselves as administering punishment "with an armed hand" to criminals and government workers that do not fulfil their duties.

killing police officers. By June of 1990, one hundred and sixty police officers had been assassinated in the city and the number continued to increase (Revista Semana #426, 1990). The young people of barrio Antioquia remember 1991 and 1992 as years of confrontation with the police and as the years when the CAI –a small police office placed in the barrio- was bombed several times. Similar actions were taking place elsewhere in the city and in all the other major cities of the country.

Medellin, it was finally admitted by the government and political forces, was at war. The first six months of 1990 are remembered by the city dwellers as the worst in their history. Bombs, killings, kidnappings and insecurity spread over the city. The situation of crisis was addressed by the national government through the creation of the *Consejería Presidencial de Medellin*, an office that was in charge of advising the president on matters of conflict, peace and social programming for Medellin, and on how to channel national and international funds for the development of infrastructural works in Medellin's poorest areas and the generation of economic and employment opportunities for youth (El Espectador, June 2, 1991). Nationally, these were also very difficult years. The country had seen some of the worse violence, this time characterized by the terrorist actions of the drug cartel meant to exert national pressure against the approval of the extradition law. They created a climate of generalized terror through the kidnapping of politicians and journalists, and the explosion of powerful bombs in airplanes, high-rises, shopping centres and streets. These years, however, showed a striking contrast between violence and peace with the emergence of a democratic and participatory movement that drafted a new constitution. The new constitution declared Colombia a "pluricultural" country, and increased the participation of civil society in the

political decision-making processes. In 1991 a constitutional assembly convened<sup>55</sup> with a broad representation from all political, ethnic and social sectors of the society.

Many Colombians thought that the worst of the violent tensions were over in 1993 when Pablo Escobar was gunned down and the government began to destroy and weaken the operations of the large Medellin and Cali drug cartels. But like the repercussions of decree 517 in Barrio Antioquia, the sequels of this period created other effects. When work with the *oficinas* of the drug cartel was reduced, many of the local gangs turned to their territories to seek opportunities for recognition and money. The control of territories in Barrio Antioquia, and in other parts of the city became a key resource for these youth. The epoch of the big war between the drug cartels and the government was temporarily over, but the period of the local wars had begun. With this change, our task of taking the local history as a way of illuminating regional and national history is challenged because the connections are no longer clear and, at times, the events seem to highlight the further disenfranchisement and fragmentation of this community. In the pages that follow I outline some of those connections and dynamics of fragmentation and multiplication of violences that would come to characterize the 1990s. These years brought important democratic and social initiatives, but they were also the years in which Colombia, entered into a dramatic polarization of the conflict and an erratic fragmentation of the landscape of violence.

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<sup>55</sup> The 1991 constitution is a foundational document that prioritizes pluralism and inclusion (to insist on the inclusion of indigenous communities as well as Afro-Colombians) and provides new channels of political inclusion (Rodriguez, 1999; Tickner, 1998).

## Local Wars

“Assassins! Brothers of Cain! Demented!!, Stubborn!!” screamed Padre Alejandro, his face turning very red, during the 200 funerals he headed in the barrio’s parish between 1992 and 1993,

3.5 Padre Alejandro: Six gangs of *muchachos* [kids, lads] dedicated to killing, mugging, robbery and to committing the stupidest of crimes. The ease of criminality spread throughout the barrio and invaded the mentality of the young. They killed here and there, robbed and attacked, and all this grew to a peak of tremendous violence, in ‘92 and ‘93, very frightening: there were so many dead, more than 200 youth killed in the barrio. The bodies would appear morning and night. The boys would form gangs that couldn’t tolerate the sight of each other, it was a struggle that created so much pain, so much violence, and put so many dead into the cemeteries. [I/BA/ 23-09-97]

Padre Alejandro recalls that most of these youth were between 14 and 18 years old, “none of 40 and four in between 23 and 30.” With the disappearance of *Los Chunes* in the late 80s, three other gangs emerged. They continued to be active as hired assassins in the transportation of cars, motorbikes and in kidnapping activities. These more “professional” activities were combined with an exercise of control of territories, the robbery of food and beer trucks that circulated in their territory and the administration of a tax to the local stores. These three gangs joined together to fight the gang of *El Coco* that had a more established relation to the local mafia. The “war” among these groups would leave many dead, and after a period of three years these gangs were almost extinct.

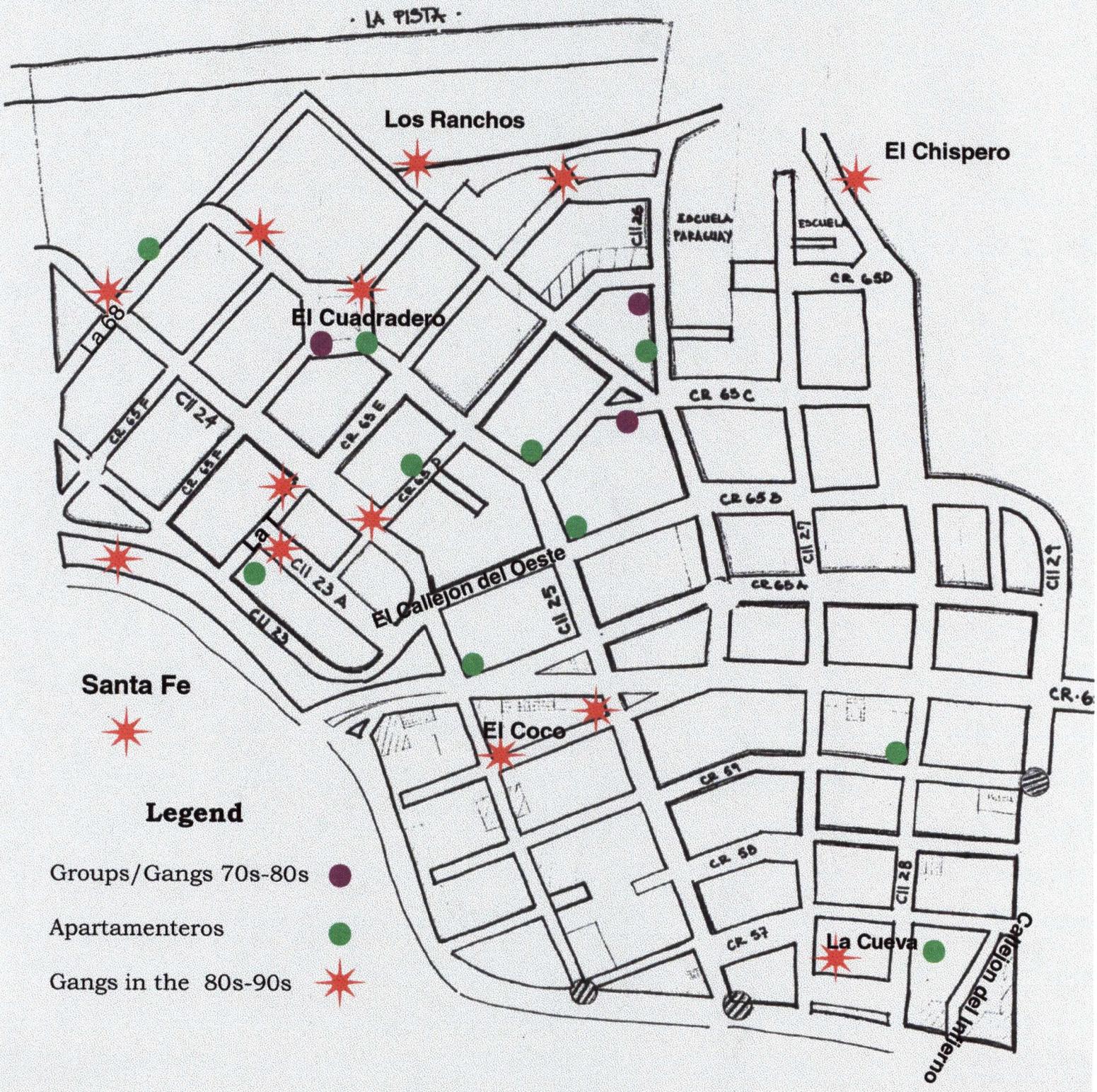
By 1992, however, there were six gangs: *El Coco*, *el Chispero*, *La 24*, *La Cueva*, *Los Calvos* and *Santa Fé*. These six gangs engaged in a complex and changing web of friendships, alliances, distances, enemies and conflicts that challenged many of the implicit ethical and physical boundaries of safety within the barrio. *Los Calvos* made an alliance with *El Coco* to fight *El Chispero* gang. Although the two gangs had not been in

conflict with each other before, friendships changed overnight when the chain of moving loyalties and rumours was unleashed. *La Cueva* had a distant friendship with *La 24* and had a declared conflict with *El Coco*. *La Cueva* and *El Chispero* joined to fight against *el Coco*. And then, there were those from *Santa Fe*, from the neighbouring barrio. *Santa Fe* initially had a close relationship with *la Cueva* but ended up fighting with them later. Omar, Alberto, Aldemar and Sebastian each belonged to a different youth gang in those days. Today, as they reflect on the wars and the conflicts, they are short of explanations about its origins (see Map #5).

By 1993, the barrio was facing the worst wave of violence it had ever experienced. It was a time that Milton, the leader of one of the youth gangs described as “high pressure, diarrhea”, the time of the war between six gangs for the monopoly and control of the barrio. The figure of the *guapo* had lost much of his definition as a skilled fighter, and as a resourceful and sharp thief with a style of clothing that marked its difference. The image of the Rambo warrior inspired these youths who were fascinated by firearms and who embraced the logic and pleasures of war as a leading value and clothing as a sign of status (Ortiz 1991). The local territory was enough for these groups to prove their ability and sharp skills to fight, use firearms and hide, and the changing conflicts provided them with the stage necessary to demonstrate the “*verraquera*” that would grant them local recognition, particularly from women.

At night youth with large jackets would patrol barrio Antioquia while during the day, the transactions, the wait for the business opportunity, the shootouts and the rumours went on. The actors of violence in barrio Antioquia multiplied at the same time that they appeared and disappeared overnight. Hate, revenge, desire for recognition, the settling of

# Barrio Antioquia: Groups, *Apartamenteros* and Gangs. 1970-1997 (Map 5)



accounts, disloyalties and the manipulation of stronger outside forces overlapped and triggered endless small wars, making futile any attempt of making sense of the origins of the local “wars” and the reasons why they continued.

Everyday life was constantly disrupted by violent events. Cesar<sup>56</sup> was thirteen in 1993. He was at home alone, feeling lazy as he hung out on the balcony. Suddenly, he saw his house fill with more than a hundred people who had been watching a soccer game in the park. They were seeking refuge from the shooting that had erupted in the soccer field. An astonished Cesar witnessed how the two bathrooms, the area underneath the beds, the closets and the kitchen filled with scared people. During the hour they stayed, fear turned into laughter as they shared jokes and stories. When the sounds of shooting stopped, they left and thanked Cesar.

In order to go to school, Sebastian, who lived four blocks away from the high school, had to walk more than twenty. He avoided walking through a sector controlled by the gang of *El Coco*, which was at war with the gang of *La 24*, a gang Sebastian was identified with just because he lived in the sector they controlled. With the increased frequency of shootings and deaths in the street, the night life in the bars and the time spent wandering and partying came to an end as did a tradition of *rumba* and celebration that had always been at the very heart of Barrio Antioquia.

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<sup>56</sup> Cesar is 16 and a member of the youth group “Juenfu” of Barrio Antioquia. He shared this story with the group during the elaboration of the mental map of the barrio in June, 1997. Cesar was a very active participant in the memory workshops and sessions and one of the close collaborators who accompanied me in several walkabouts, visits and photograph taking sessions.

The multiplication of violence and the spread and diversification of the armed actors were also taking place nationally. Since the end of the 80s, the proliferation and growth of armed actors involved in what has been called the macro-violences challenged any attempt at reading the Colombian conflict in dualistic terms or as a conflict triggered by a single aspect such as politics, ethnicity, religion, poverty or class. The guerrilla groups, particularly the FARC and the ELN, demonstrated a steady growth in the number of combatants, controlled territories and subversive actions. The power of the various cartels involved in the drug trafficking business remained unchallenged and the right-wing paramilitary groups attested an unprecedented expansion throughout the national landscape (Salazar, 1993). Locally, the urban militias gained a strong presence in more than sixty barrios of Medellin and the death squads continued with their clean up campaigns directed mainly at youth associated with either the guerrilla, the consumption of drugs or the perpetration of crime (Commission for the Study of Violence, 1992).

## **Pigs for Peace**

The collective memory of Barrio Antioquia says that on December 31 of 1993, Eduardo Roldan, *el patrón*, gave a pig and a bottle of *aguardiente* to each one of the six gangs in conflict and that peace was made.<sup>57</sup> The *patrón* asked the gangs to stop the war that had taken the lives of more than two hundred young people in less than a year. Although institutions, leaders, the barrio's priest and people from the community were involved in making the peace process possible, the event is remembered as a roast pig

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<sup>57</sup> I heard this version of the peace process from many residents of barrio Antioquia including community leaders, some of the youth involved in the conflict, and women.

and aguardiente affair with the *patrón*. Anderson, an ex-gang member remembers that day,

3.6 So one December they said there was going to be a peace and I didn't believe it. I honestly didn't believe it because this was very big. Or they killed you or ... So then they were giving out roast pig and everybody was so happy, that December, what a party ... eating roast pig. [ ... ] For me that was the best moment of my life, that Christmas, for me it was like being born all over again.  
[MW-JAC/BA /10-06-97]

The gangs agreed to a pact of coexistence and non aggression and to meet with the municipal advisor for citizenship security, the mayor and other municipal officers to negotiate economic, training and security alternatives. With the pigs and the *aguardiente*, the gangs made a verbal agreement not to fire their guns anymore. Later in January of 1994, they made another verbal agreement that included a principle of non aggression, sanctions for those who did not follow it, employment opportunities for these youth and human rights workshops. Meanwhile a number of economic and employment alternatives were negotiated and the municipal administration made the commitment to obtain the *libreta militar* [military pass]<sup>58</sup> for these youth. For a few months, the barrio's people regained their sense of freedom to circulate and to celebrate. Twenty of the gang members were employed in street cleaning. Others received training in shoe making and repair, painting and hair dressing, and there were even plans for youth to work at restoring the barrio's river and parks. Even though the peace lasted only a few months, it did last longer than the fleeting employment opportunities that had been promised to youth.

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<sup>58</sup> In Colombia, all young men physically and mentally qualified are required to serve in the Army for a period of a year. After they finish the service, the army issues them a pass. Most jobs demand this pass as a requirement for hiring.

During the peace interval, many of the young people who had signed the peace pact were assassinated. The peace was broken a few months after the signing of the agreement when another local war erupted between the gangs of *El Cuadradero* and *El Coco*. It was then that the *muchachos* learned that there was a hidden agenda to the peace pact. For the outside forces of organized crime, the peace pact was an opportunity to do a “cleaning” that guaranteed there would be no *chivos* [tattletales] around. Gabriel, a member of the gang of *El Cuadradero*, witnessed this peace and death process, and today affirms that, “the same drug cartel made sure that the kids killed each other.” Milton, the leader of the gang of *El Cuadradero* gives his version of death in peace and why they “had” to end up involved in a new war,

3.7. We weren't involved in that conflict, we were *pelaos sanos* [clean-living guys]. Students, good guys ... what we did we took seriously, nobody knew what we were up to... that peace [referring to the 1993 peace] was for the gangs of the *Cueva* and the *Coquito*... like this *cucho* (referring to a local drug lord) took advantage of the *Cueva* gang and took them all out... in the middle of the peace he had them killed one by one... he said there was no problem, and then *bang-bang* he killed them all. So afterwards the people from the *Coquito* wanted to monopolize the barrio. We were clean living, but we **had** to get involved in the conflict. [MW-GC/BA/07-10-97]

The economic and training alternatives did not work. They were set up as temporary relief programs, and the youth never received the military cards that would allow them into the workforce; furthermore, nobody had a clear vision of what was required for the successful reinstalment of youth in society. As padre Alejandro says,

3.8. The big mistake we made was to have told them to drop their guns and grab a broom, a shovel... it was a total failure and a situation for which we had no experience. The youth were not properly equipped to reintegrate into society. [I/BA/23-09-1997]

At the end of 1995 a new peace agreement was signed, and new verbal agreements, training programs, promises of obtaining the military cards and employment

opportunities were made to a new group of youth. Since that time, the movement between peace, high-pressure conflict, and negotiations has continued. Between 1995 and 1998, two other peace agreements were negotiated and two new wars erupted. The *patrones* were usually involved in bringing the gangs together to talk and agree on peace. However, the rumours kept circulating that once at peace, they will take the advantage to carry out a "cleaning." When a peace agreement was signed or close to being signed, the communities and the youth gained hope and reacquired their lively use of the streets and were able to join in neighbourhood celebrations. In the city of Medellin similar sectoral peace agreements made and broken with gangs of youth from the Central Eastern and North Eastern communes and with the urban militias (1994).

Nationally, a similar oscillation took place. The administration of President Cesar Gaviria negotiated peace agendas and agreements with several guerrilla groups but the peace negotiations with the two largest and oldest guerrilla groups the FARC and ELN failed (Restrepo, 1997). Peace, at a national level as in Barrio Antioquia, was a mined terrain in which hidden and not so hidden agendas could not come to terms. Desperate to show results, the government searched for negotiations with smaller guerrilla groups, such as the native guerrilla group, "Quintin Lame," two fractions of the Popular Liberation Army and with the Urban Militias of Medellin. The agreements with the urban militias were signed in early 1994, shortly after the six gangs of barrio Antioquia ratified their peace agreement. The national, regional, and municipal governments welcomed

these two processes and used them as examples of their political will to negotiate with the armed groups (Palacios, 1997).<sup>59</sup>

In 1997, when I carried out my fieldwork, barrio Antioquia continued to live in the oscillating movement from “peace” to “war.” At the same time, however, the community activity was attesting an unusual growth in the recreational, cultural and educational fields. For the first time in the barrio, a group of women and youth were taking leadership in their community. These new leaders shared a vision for their barrio, and in that vision history, culture and children offered the means to reconstruct a sense of community and a lasting peace, that would lead to the creation of living alternatives for the new generations.

### ***“Por qué, a pesar de tanta mierda, este barrio es poder?”***

This chapter described local historical events that underscore key historical dynamics of the country’s last 70 years. This review began with the rural origins of a barrio of artisans and the formation of an economically prosperous city, moving through the marking events that characterized some of the cultural traits and social dynamics of the barrio. The accounts of the lived experience over several periods of violence in the barrio and the conformation of a local economy, social networks and informal organizations around the drug economy provided concrete examples of how the local

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<sup>59</sup> The characterization of the urban militias as political actors has since then been widely questioned since the evidence of the militias participation in “delinquent” activities is ample. Palacios (1997) argues that the government was willing to overlook this aspect of their activities and to grant them recognition as insurgents in order to save face, and retain some credibility for their peace initiative.

processes were part of larger regional and international processes. The parallels between local history and national trends were clearly highlighted up to the 1990s where we noted a movement inwards to a succession of events that did not necessarily parallel national trends, and a movement outwards towards increased diversification and fragmentation of the actors in conflict. The inclusion of those events that were recalled as most significant for the residents of barrio Antioquia illustrated some of the underlying themes of the conflicting and unequal dynamics of a city like Medellin: the dynamics of a multileveled violence, the impact of policies of exclusion, the forces of competitive markets [both economic and political] and the interplay of morals, economics and political interests in the implementation of policies and regulations.

Methodologically, throughout this chapter I have attempted to provide examples of how oral sources can engage with written sources to reconstruct the multiple and overlapping layers of the local telling of the past and the ways memories inform the practice of history production that was outlined at the beginning of the chapter.

According to Muratorio (1991), this interplay of historical traditions allows for a dynamic interrogation of the oral and written traditions and for an interpretation of the transformations of the community life over time. In doing so, the history of memory and the history of events both in barrio Antioquia and regionally have shed light on each other (Roy, 1994).

Several questions remain open about the social fabric of a city like Medellin and a community like barrio Antioquia: why have barrio Antioquia's inhabitants continued to claim a sense of belonging and rootedness to their barrio despite the profound impact that the dynamics of violence have had on its social fabric and on their personal lives? In what

ways has memory managed to preserve some of the secrets of cultural and social survival? How does memory work, particularly in a society like Medellin, where violence, as the privileged system of communication, has managed to silence many areas of daily life?

The point of departure for my exploration is founded in another question, one I saw written in an improvised blackboard on the main street intersection of barrio Antioquia: *Por qué, a pesar de tanta mierda, este barrio es poder?* [why is it that, despite all the shit, this barrio *is* power?] The graffiti question certainly leads us to some of the key questions with which this thesis is concerned: to the realm of daily life and the lived experience of violence and power, and those more subtle ways of surviving –physically and culturally- and making sense that are generated by individuals in highly discontinuous and unpredictable environments. This question suggests the presence of an implicit local knowledge constructed outside the immediate layer of lived experience where the “shit” dwells. This knowledge provides barrio Antioquia’s residents with the resilience, creativity and imagination to continue making sense of the barrio as a meaningful place of their own, as a barrio that *is* power. In the chapters that follow, I shall continue to explore this hidden presence of knowledge and power by delving into a powerful underground “market,” namely, remembering and forgetting among the urban dwellers of Medellin.

## Chapter 4

### Remembering Place: Making and Sensing Places

Place-heart-memory: here is a genuine *mysterium coniunctionis* which yields heart as the place of memory, memory as the place where heart is left, heart as what is left of remembered place. -Edward Casey, "Getting Placed: Soul in Space."

This chapter explores the connections between people, memories and violence through an ethnographic account of the cultural practices that make places in Medellín meaningful. The chapter examines a) how places are culturally constructed by Medellín's city dwellers--called here place making and b) how city dwellers invest these places with significance--which I will refer to as sense of place. I approach places as physical, social, mnemonic, imaginative and sensorial realms that are actively constructed by individuals through experience and through the ways these individuals situate themselves in the surrounding environment (Basso, 1997; Casey, 1996).

As in a palimpsest, places in Medellín have become mnemonic marks where layers of memories overlap. Places are marked by memories of death, destruction or fighting as they can be haunted by images of horror and destruction, but the memories of group rituals, local myths or collective moments of encounter inhabit these places as well. Place making, in this sense, constitutes a historical, imaginative and identity making practice that is not a simple derivative of our relationships with space, but that connects people's experiences with their memories and desires, and with the ways they inhabit the world (Basso, 1997; Casey 1987; 1993; 1996; Feld and Basso, 1996). Sense of place describes the sensorial experience of individuals in their living environment and includes

those acts and means which they use to locate themselves. An inquiry into place making is an exploration into the ways in which places naturalize different worlds of senses (Basso, 1997). The senses, Seremetakis (1994) argues, are a collective medium of communication and meaning-generating apparatuses that operate beyond consciousness and intention. In Greek, the word for senses is *aesthesis*, which means emotion-feeling, and thus the Greeks established a semantic circuit in which the sensorial is intertwined to agency, memory and history.

I shall argue here that in the city of Medellín, where the last fifteen years of political, everyday and drug-related violence have profoundly affected daily life, memory has become a bridging practice that allows city dwellers to make sense of the living environment as a vivid social and relational milieu. Practices of memory, in this context, restore a sense of place to the experiences of displacement, discontinuity and fragmentation that violence inflicts on people's lives. In the following pages, specific examples are introduced of these practices of memory and of the ways places are culturally constructed and made significant by Medellín's city dwellers.

## **Encountering Place**

During a memory workshop with youth workers from the city of Medellín,<sup>1</sup> Hector, a youth worker and a poet, stood up in front of the group to name a place in the city that triggers significant memories and emotions to him:

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<sup>1</sup> This workshop took place on April 17, 1997 with the participation of twenty-seven youth workers. These workers are involved with governmental and non-governmental organizations across the city working with youth in a variety of programs such as: youth leadership and youth organizing; conflict resolution and peace processes; recreational, educational and cultural programs.

4.1. Hector: *Playa Avenue* ... There is a time I remember, that has marked me, that has marked this city, and that is between '87 and '89, in this city there were at least 10 poetry workgroups, and I remember once, in one week, we launched seven poetry magazines, and I remember it was precisely the same time when they were doing so **much** killing in Medellín, [but] there were also many recitals [...] So one would leave a recital at the National [National University] and then the next day go to another at the Antioquia [Antioquia University], and then back to the one at the Medellín, and there was a moment, during the famous curfew, the worst, **worst** moment, the day that *Juan Gómez* [the city's mayor] lifted the curfew, that was a recital that no one missed. *Playa Avenue* was packed, it was amazing, and we rolled out poems, we rolled out tragedy and that day we wanted to pay tribute [his voice breaks] to a friend..., one of the youngest poets, they killed him and another *pelao* [kid] around the *Oriental* avenue [...], he was smoking *bareta* [pot] and after (crying)... they institutionalized Poetry in Medellín, and everything ended up in goddamned festival... (silence)

Hector's sense of this place is made from the memory of an intense lived experience as well as from the emotions and images brought forward by events such as the death of his friend, the commemorative act, the presence of poetry in the streets and the city curfew.<sup>2</sup> The physical space of the avenue takes on new meaning, one that is not restricted to spatial boundaries but re-created in memory by his sensorial experience of having been there and having lived an uniquely remarkable collective experience. It introduces us to some of the ways in which Medellín's city dwellers encounter and make places: by remembering and reconstructing what happened in a specific place through storytelling, by drawing out specific kinds of knowledge about life in the city, by apprehending a place's physical uniqueness, by naming or renaming a place, by establishing landmarks, and, as Hector says, by recognizing they ways that places and events have "marked" them.

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<sup>2</sup> The years Hector is making reference to were brought up in almost every session or interview I had with Medellín's city dwellers. For some those were the feared times of "the bombs" when the Medellín drug cartel imposed a climate of terror in the country. Everyday life was affected quite dramatically for all those living in Medellín as the probability of a bomb anywhere in the city was very real. Hector's narrative is also revealing of other circumstances that took place during those years. Poetry survived and co-existed with violence, poetry circulated on the streets that were often the site of the explosions, poetry defied the city curfew, and poetry also suffered the pain of death.

Sensing of place is one of the most basic dimensions of human experience and one that is highly informative of our relationship with the environment and the landscapes that surround us (Basso, 1997; Casey, 1996). Places constitute physical, social and sensorial realms for our actions, as well as, for our memories and imaginations. Place making is a cultural activity that all of us “do” in order to locate ourselves meaningfully in the environment we interact with. My inquiry into place making is concerned with its capacity 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 comes from.

### **Memory Landmarks: a Walkabout**

Thus, by one insightful account, does the country of the past transform and supplant the country of the present. That certain localities prompt such transformations, evoking as they do entire worlds of meaning, is not a small or uninteresting truth. Neither is the fact, which he also appreciated, that this type of retrospective world building –let us call it place making- does not require special sensibilities or cultivated skills. It is a common response, to common curiosities –what happened here? Who was involved? What was it like? Why should it matter? – and anyone can be a place-maker who has the inclination. And every so often, more or less spontaneously, alone or with others, with varying degrees of interest and enthusiasm, almost everyone does make places. As roundly ubiquitous as it is seemingly unremarkable, place making is a universal tool of the historical imagination. And in some societies at least, if not in the great majority, it is surely among the most basic tools of all. *Keith Basso – Wisdom Sits in Places*

In April of 1997, Kelly<sup>3</sup> led me in a walkabout around the Central Eastern zone. A reconstruction of this walkabout and of the ways Kelly located herself in the environment

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<sup>3</sup> Kelly is a youth leader from the Central Eastern zone and an active participant in the city-wide Youth Network. She has a keen interest in youth, environmental and cultural issues. Kelly is a gifted story teller who took me on two walkabouts.

illustrates the tools and acts of place making in an urban environment like the city of Medellin. During one part of this walkabout, we visited the older barrios where Kelly grew up and began her community work. We got off the bus in the barrio *13 de Noviembre*, a barrio of busy streets with many people walking, visiting, talking, and with children playing. The barrio's bus stop is surrounded by a small park that has a privileged panoramic view of Medellin's valley where the downtown, the industrial area and the middle and upper class neighbourhoods are located. Surrounding the valley are the mountains where we stood among with the hundreds and thousands of houses of the poor. It is a drastic topographic differentiation that the writer Fernando Vallejo (1994) has described as the visual manifestation of a social and economic gap between the city of *abajo* [below] the atemporal (intemporal) Medellin, and the city of *arriba* [above], the "hot," event prone and marginal *Metrallo*<sup>4</sup>: one city surrounding the other awkwardly, embracing it with a "Judas hug."

Kelly shows me the "one surviving green area" that her ecological group wants to protect. Looking towards the peak of the mountains, we observe the endless sets of narrow stairs that allow residents to circulate up and down the steep foothills where their houses stand. Rows and rows of multileveled houses are separated simply by very narrow cement-stairs that run vertically. Tiny roads of endless turns meet the stairs and take people to their houses. Kelly points up to the barrio *Isaac Gaviria* and to an area further up that she describes as *calientisima* [very hot, in conflict] and *dura* [tough, risky] because of the ongoing shootouts. Walking on the main road of the Barrio *13 de Noviembre*, we observe that a street under construction goes in the same direction as the

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<sup>4</sup> He is playing with words as in Spanish a machine gun is called *ametralladora*.

stairs – along the slope of the mountain. Kelly notes that this is the first street ever to be built in that direction, typically streets are built perpendicular to the mountain's slope, *transversally*. Pausing to reflect, she concludes that in the area there is a “culture of the transversal street” because streets never run diagonally. Her conceptualization of this as a “culture of the transversal street” captures not only an urbanistic trend but also a distinct sense of direction and movement that is attached to walking/using the streets. A sense that is in contrast with the sense of direction and movement experienced when walking up and down the stairs.

As we move from one barrio to another, we observe the raw vegetation, an abandoned irrigation ditch [*acequia*], and a collection of stairs that became a winning ecological project of her environmental group. Their plan was to take the old irrigation system and the abandoned multilayered set of stairs as the central features of an environmental park. Water would fall down the stairs and the area would be fixed with benches and terraces while the surrounding vegetation and trees would be preserved. Her group called “*El sueño de las escalinatas*” [The dream of the staircases]. Kelly fondly remembers the inauguration day: a huge water-tank-truck hosing water down the stairs and hundreds of children and young people playing in the water. Unfortunately, that was the one and only day water ran down the stairs, as an appropriate technical study had not yet been conducted and there was not enough slope and water pressure to keep the water circulating.

During our walkabout, Kelly points out the landmarks that situate her in places like the *Sueño de las escalinatas*, or the *Cerro de pan de azúcar*, a majestic hill and a natural landmark that is seen and admired from all over the city. Kelly's sense of place

takes this *cerro* as a location and landscape referent, a sense that is enriched by her childhood memories of many *paseos* [outings, hikes] and fun. Her attachment to the *cerro* is now marked by the knowledge that the *cerro* is a hiding and operating territory for the local militias, and a place of high, risky circulation. *Barrio Villatina* is another important referent for Kelly because it is the place with which some of her significant childhood memories are associated.

In *barrio Villatina* we stop at an empty and dry area where, in 1984, five hundred people died when a mudslide devastated the area. Standing there, I am struck by my sensing of a powerful silence, a silence that I experience as a soundscape of noisy-silence that penetrates the environment and the experience of being there. Further up, there is the site where the mudslide started described by Kelly as a huge chilling hole. The mud slide area there are several crosses. Kelly takes herself back in time and remembers how she got news of the mudslide at school. She ran home, got changed and then volunteered to help. A volunteer's bracelet was placed around her arm and she went on to help, but could not do it because she could not stop crying.

Now Kelly points towards an empty and deteriorated soccer field that reminds her that it was there, in her commune, where violence was eradicated through sports. The peace accord between fighting youth gangs was settled and negotiated using soccer games as the major symbol and means of reunification.<sup>5</sup> This agreement was working quite well until one day while the soccer teams took a break, a mudslide covered the

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<sup>5</sup> As early as 1989, there were several gangs from the barrio such as "*los barbados*," "*los porkys*," "*los de abajo*" who were fighting one another. Each gang belonged to a different geographical sector in the barrio: *la piedra, la escuela, la capilla*. The war between fighting youth gangs had its harshest period between 1989 and 1993, a period in which numerous young members of the gangs died. The first peace agreement was negotiated in 1993.

field. Since then, Kelly says, the peace agreement has weakened and the youth gangs are now back in conflict with one another.

We enter the central sector of the barrio *Villatina*. Kelly asks me to guess which is the house that serves as an army base. A block away, I observe a typical barrio house surrounded by a barricade of sand bags. Soldiers with camouflaged uniforms of brown and ochre spots and with heavy machine guns stand in several corners. For many years, the community of Villatina has been fighting to get the government to recognize the responsibility of the military in the 1992 massacre of nine youth who belonged to the local church youth group.<sup>6</sup> The case has been reviewed internationally by various human rights bodies who have recommended that the community should be compensated, and that the government should give a formal apology and issue a statement of responsibility. The government has recognized the army's authorship but has not compensated the community. Kelly explains that these days the army has made an alliance with one of the gangs in order to fight another gang and that there have also been collaboration between the army and the gangs to fight against the militias. The stories of alliances among all the armed sectors and their changing fights and enemies abound.<sup>7</sup> The militias are found in the barrios higher up in the city's mountains. The militias arrived in the area after 1993

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<sup>6</sup> A group of fifteen heavily armed men came that evening and attacked a group of youth who were talking and listening to music in a corner. Nine of these youth were killed. Parents and friends of the victims organized themselves into a group that claimed for justice and developed a solidarity movement. Uribe and Vasquez (1995) argue that the poor origin of the barrio, the influence of the Christian-based communities and the presence of the guerrilla movements were seen by the death squads as indicators of a dangerous zone and focus of delinquent and militia activities. The barrio, and particularly the barrio's youth, became a target for death squads.

<sup>7</sup> Jaramillo et al., (1998) explain that during their research on conflict and political culture in Medellin, they learned of alliances between enemy gangs to fight a militia group, between the army and some gangs to eliminate the militias, between the police and the militias to eradicate the "*pillos*," or between the army and the militias, the gangs and the militias, and the paramilitary and the militias to fight other militia groups. See Jaramillo et al., (1998).

and with time have become very powerful. Kelly comments on how their location on the higher levels makes things more difficult for everyone because they can watch everything from up there. *Watching* is a key element of survival for everyone; for some it is about controlling territories, for others it is a matter of circulating in a safe manner, and for the many living in high risk areas it is a matter of surviving natural disasters and violence. Kelly tells of a barrio where the families take night shifts watching for mudslides.

On the streets of *Villatina*, we meet several people, some of them from the local community groups. In *Villatina* there is a long tradition of community work that is rooted in its origins as a squatter and pirate settlement and its development through self-help and collective work. In the mid 80s, the guerrilla movement *M-19* established a “peace camp” there after they signed a peace pact.<sup>8</sup> Youth were recruited to join the peace camps that combined political work in the community with training in the use of firearms. In the 90s, when the *M-19* became a political movement, the residents of the area voted for them. At this point and after having walked across barrio *Villatina*, we finished our walkabout.

This walkabout with Kelly documents the prolific relations between people and places in Medellin. Events and experiences such as the barrio’s foundation and settlement, the daily individual and collective survival struggles, the ways public spaces

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<sup>8</sup> During the truce of 1984, between the national guerrilla movement *M-19* and the government, the *M-19* organized “peace camps” in two barrios of Medellin and some in Cali and Bogota. These barrios were selected because of their poverty and their strategic location close to the mountains. The *M-19* practiced in these camps some of the rituals, symbols and dynamics of an army: hymns, flags, hierarchies of order and discussions about political work with the poor. Youth were very attracted to this, “We organized a “*patio de armas*” where every morning there were formations to hoist the flag, sing the hymn and shout slogans. It was like a bomb. Piles of youth began to arrive. The war summoned them rather than peace, even if this was in the symbolic terrain.” (Vasquez, 1997:17). When the truce broke and the guerrilla returned to the armed struggle, most of the youth trained in these camps were not interested in following the *M-19* to the mountains. Instead, they remained in the barrios and used their new knowledge to create feared gangs or join the militias.

have been used as spaces for socializing and the territorial tensions and restrictions within specific locations influence and give structure to Medellín's urban dwellers' experience of place. The practices of *landscaping*, *landmarking* and *circulation* are the tools used for place-making. Through the practice of *landscaping*, individuals capture those meaningful sceneries such as the multilayered set of stairs that situate them in their everyday living environment. *Landmarking* is the marking of territory through the identification of key points of reference. In this walkabout with Kelly these points included the *cerro pan de azúcar* as a natural landmark and the site of the landslide as a mnemonic landmark. The practice of *circulation* refers to the ways people move along streets, stairs or walkways and the sensorial experience attached to these movements, like in the practice of walking on streets that run in a transverse direction. The *skills* of place making are illustrated in Kelly's ability to *circulate* and recognize the social features of places and in her competence in capturing and re-creating the memories that dwell in places.

## **Place Naming**

The practice of place naming by urban dwellers, youth, women or elders in environments like the large city has been largely ignored in anthropological literature to date. Anthropological literature on place naming has mostly focused on places and names amongst native people (Basso, 1997; Cronon, 1992; Cruikshank, 1990; Fox, 1997). Place naming has been examined as a key cultural practice that situates people's minds in historical time and space, connecting them with their past and bringing forward a repertoire of local ancestral knowledge and stories. In this section, I discuss the practice of place naming in Barrio Antioquia, an area where the practice is very much alive.

In examining the evocative power of place names among the Western Apache people, Keith Basso explains the cultural significance of speaking with names. Speaking with names is about producing a mental image of a particular geographical situation in order to evoke historical tales and sagas. The sensorial familiarity with the surrounding landscape is at the root of a cultural competence for recognizing place names, and the stories, images and topographic features they evoke. Naming is also about affirming the value and validity of traditional moral precepts and often is a means of offering practical advice for dealing with disturbing personal circumstances or for commenting on the moral conduct of an individual who is not present. Cruikshank (1990) has done similar work in the Subarctic revealing the mnemonic capacity of place names and the rich ways in which their persistence describes a rich “mythscape.” In this sensuous, mnemonic, mythical, and linguistic landscape, names become metaphors that spread information and provide ways to encode information, describe the surrounding environment, and speak of very complex ideas with the simplicity and richness of one word. Names speak of people’s strong attachment to landscape and also convey practical information about the fauna, topographic, and cultural features of the landscape.

Basso has pointed to the value of exploring place naming for its capacity to communicate the conceptual frameworks and verbal practices with which communities appropriate their geography (Basso, 1997). In this section, I will examine the communicative practices of place naming and the meaning attached to place-names while searching for the conceptual tools that urban dwellers apply to make sense of and interpret their surrounding environments and the ways that they inhabit and occupy them (Basso, 1997).

## Moral Lessons and Myth-Names

In September of 1997 I was at Diana's house with two other women, one about the same age as Diana (around 33 years old) and another who was 18 years old. They were talking about a video recording made that day of the barrio's history. In their conversation, they mentioned "*el callejón del infierno*" [hell alley]. I asked them about the name and Diana responded that the name was given because a *muchacho*, who was a "drug addict," killed his mother there. Diana described how the *muchacho* was desperate to get drugs and how his friends told him that he could only get them if he killed his mother and brought her heart back to them. This young man was so desperate for drugs, Diana emphasized, that he killed his mother with a dagger, pulled her heart out, and began running. Running through "*el callejón del infierno*," he stumbled and fell, his mother's heart slipping from his hands. From the ground, her heart spoke to him: "*mijo se aporrió mucho?*" [Son, are you very hurt?]. Diana finishes her story by saying that for this reason the area is called "*el callejón del infierno*."

As I listened to Diana, the contents of the story sounded familiar. I mentioned to Diana that I had heard the story before somewhere outside barrio Antioquia. Diana emphatically tells me that the story is unique to barrio Antioquia. Her grandmother told it for many years and she died several years ago. The other friend, her age, agreed but the youngest woman said that she had *never* heard the story before. Diana suggested that I check with her mother-in-law who also tells the story. Later, I shared the story with a friend and as I retold it, I remembered where and when I had heard it before. It was in June 1997, during the International Poetry Festival that takes place every year in Medellin. The final night in an open-air theatre, sixty poets from all over the world read

their poems to an audience of more than 2,000 people. One of the poets was Nedžad Ibrisimovic, a Bosnia-Herzegovinian poet who read a poem that deeply engaged the public and received a very warm response. His poem was about a young combatant during the Bosnian war entrapped in the spiral of war-violence. This young combatant kills his mother, pulls her heart out, runs away and falls down. On the floor her heart asks whether he is all right.

Many moral lessons can be derived from this story, particularly in an environment like barrio Antioquia where drug use is widespread and the picture of a young person challenged to cross moral and ethical boundaries is also common. This is a threshold situation as the boundary that this young man crosses is one of the most “sacred”: respect towards the life of a mother, a revered icon among the regional culture.<sup>9</sup> Although the story’s “authenticity” is locally contested and not believed by everyone in the barrio, it illustrates the social knowledge and moral repertoire that circulates through places and names and the ways they become collective symbolic texts that make reference to mythical material. The origin of the story and its similarities with Ibrisimovic’s poem suggest at their mythical qualities and the ways bodies, subjects and relations have been worked within different geographical and cultural contexts to exemplify similar core cultural values at risk, and fissures generated by the impact of extreme violence in the ethical and social fabric.

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<sup>9</sup> Traditionally, in the Antioqueño family, the mother has played a key role as the center of the domestic world. With the economic and social crisis of the region during the 70s and 80s, this role was accentuated by the increase of households headed by women and single mothers (Salazar and Jaramillo, 1994). Salazar (1990) has documented how youth gangs’ re-creation of elements such as the Catholic religious practices and the spirit of retaliation from the traditional *paisa* culture has provided them with a kind of ethical backdrop to their violent actions. Thus, the symbology and beliefs of Catholic religion were integrated into their cultural practices and particularly a devotion to the figure of the Virgin. Here “God has been overthrown. The virgin gave him a coup d’état.” (Salazar 1990:197). The virgin is a closer, feminine, loyal, and more permissive figure to whom they pray and ask for good luck because she is a mother.

## Changing Names, Changing Dynamics

“*El quinto*”, the name of another street in the barrio, illustrates another type of social knowledge in circulation and further illustrates the descriptive power of place naming:

4.2. Elsa: *El quinto* [the fifth]... because it was like the fifth block of the *Bellavista* Prison. From the houses on the street they sold all sorts of drugs. One passed by there and everybody was like this (she crouches down on her haunches). In the prisons the inmates are like that, offering marijuana, everybody smoking... [MW-TC/BA/20-06-97]

Previous to “*El quinto*,” the street was called “*el callejón del oeste*” [the alley of the Wild West] for its resemblance to the “American West” that barrio Antioquia’s inhabitants had seen on TV series: ongoing shootouts, marks of gunfire on doors, fights, male bullies, and all kinds of illegal transactions. Both names capture a *mood* that is sensed in this place, a dynamic and a movement that takes place in this block at a particular time. Both names have rich descriptive qualities that focus on the social dynamics rather than on the geographical features. The names work, in this case, as visual and comparative metaphors between the actions taking place in the streets and the images they evoke from TV or from prison. The changing name of another one of the sectors in the barrio, “*El Chispero*,” suggests a similar kind of historicity in place transformation and social dynamics. Martha and Lucía explain the name changes, beginning with the name of *Marquetalia*,

4.3. Martha: *Marquetalia* Street.. was behind the Health Centre by the new street that opened afterwards. I've heard that they called it *Marquetalia* because some man who was very nasty lived there for a long time and he was called *Marquetalio*, and after he died they named the street *Marquetalia*... After that *Los Chunes* came and started to hang around the corner, about 7 years ago. [...] I guess they were called *Los Chunes* because one of them was named *Chun*. Anyways, they all hung around the corner and gathered together to smoke marijuana and so the place was called *El Chispero*.

Lucía: .. First because they killed there and later because there were so many *chispas* [sparks] lit up (by the smoking of crack and marijuana). [GS-TC/BA/16-07-97]

The names change as the dynamics of the place change. In a pictorial way they convey practical information about the emplacement of violence and its social actors. Places and their names are tools that the barrio's inhabitants use to relate to the surrounding landscape with a heightened awareness of who is present, what is happening and what could happen. The awareness also comes from a developed typology of places -- according to degree of risk and intensity of conflict. This typology is applied to qualify the names of specific locations not only in this barrio but also in many other barrios of Medellín. Territories and places are classified and named according to the degree of risk/safety and the activities taking place there. The denomination of "hot" places [*calientes*], for example, describes places that are in the middle of a conflict and where a person may run physical risks. The denomination is rich in linguistic variances that indicate the various degrees of danger: hot, burning, boiling, etc. Chapter six examines this characterization of the mood of places and territories.

Places change names, as the barrio, the social situation and the individuals change. In the two cases cited, the change of the name reflects the change of activities, social actors and social dynamics taking place. The *callejón del oeste* was the name used when this street was at the centre of the conflict because it was the territory of the gangs of *apartamenteros*. When the activity of drug dealing transformed the dynamics of the street, it was renamed as *el quinto*. Name changing, therefore, is part of the history of the barrio and is illustrative of the stories, interests, and powers that are captured and contested in a name. In the case of barrio Antioquia, the history of its name changes exemplifies how social stigma and exclusion are shaped by policy and religious

interventions and also how a community's practices of naming resist and re-create this. A community leader speaks of the various names of the barrio,

4.4. Arturo: The first name for the barrio was *Fundadores* [the Founders], because that was what people from here called it. Not just a name out of nowhere, but because the same people who lived there had founded it. Afterwards they called it Barrio Antioquia because people had come there from all over the Department. The barrio was also known as Korea. When they established a tolerance zone here it became known as Korea because of the prostitutes, the violence, etc. Then came the name of Trinidad with the foundation of Santísima Trinidad church, that about 50 years ago. Father Mario Morales urged us to call the barrio with that name because the names of Antioquia or Founders were stained and he wanted to give things a new face, it was his idea. [MW-JAC/BA/11-06-97]

These narratives establish a distinction between the practice of naming and that of "referring to." The name given is reserved for the place where there is a sense of belonging --in this case to Barrio Antioquia, or the name that is officially assigned, Barrio Trinidad. The other names given are modes of reference that describe what happened during a particular period; for example, "Fundadores," names the origin of the barrio, and "Korea" describes when the barrio became a red light district during the 1950s, the years that Colombia sent troops to fight in the Korean war.

Barrio Antioquia is territorially divided by its people into sectors: *la cueva, el cuadradero, la 68, el chispero, el coco, la 65 y la 25, los ranchitos* [see Map # 5]. Naming places is a way for urban dwellers to locate themselves in distinctive topographic referents and differentiate between sectors, dynamics, social networks and relations in the barrio. In barrios like Villatina and barrio Antioquia, solidarity and friendship networks are primarily attached to the sector you live in. Naming the sector one lives in is a way of identifying "where I come from." The sector becomes the unit where there is a feeling of rootedness and where ties of friendship, solidarity and help are closest. In the climate of violence and social conflict that has permeated these barrios, the name of a

sector has also become the main means for differentiation. Inside barrio Antioquia, for example, there are territorial and place differences that mark and define who relates to whom, what type of communicative interaction people engage in, and one's way of walking and circulating. Outside of the barrio and when speaking to outsiders, however, it is the name of barrio Antioquia that brings everybody together. Barrio Antioquia's inhabitants are proud of their barrio and when they are away their longing is for the barrio as a whole.

### **Home Far Away From Home**

Throughout the years, the number of travellers from the barrio to the United States has remained high, with some of them staying away for long periods of time and others travelling back and forth. In the American "North," barrio Antioquia's inhabitants have tried to "re-construct" a sense of place by re-creating the barrio's ambiance and relations and remarkably by place naming. A sector of Queens in New York is called the "Barrio Antioquia of the USA" because, as Don Ruman, says "Queens is where you can always meet someone from the barrio." Don Ruman, a long-time resident of Barrio Antioquia, describes to Sebastian, my research assistant and a barrio's youth leader, how naming evolved in the USA :

4.5. Ruman: ... I'm from 77, the first year that I went ..., but the big majority went to work at whatever they could find: washing dishes, running errands, in the factories, whatever... Yeah, there would've been one or two who had some bad habits, like the carteristas [purse snatchers]. But they realized one thing, and that is that gringos don't really carry money in their purses, only credit cards, and back then we didn't realize what a credit card was. So they would steal the purse and throw away the cards! [...] After that came the height of the ... the powder, and then yeah! people really began to travel. I've been told, by somebody from there in the United States, about the cocaine business, about the business going on in the cafes. They examined the "goods" and counted the money, right there at

the tables [of bars like] *Las Acacias, La Fonda, Gran Colombiano*... eh, what was it called? ... *La Herradura, Añoranzas*... I don't know if *Añoranzas* was there at that time, but at that place everybody ended speaking of the business, all those people.

Sebastian: Where exactly were these places you speak to me of?

Ruman: In Queens, exactly on *Rusbel Avenue*, all this was more or less on *Rusbel Avenue*, and at certain times, this was called ... for example, a place called *La Fonda*, but everybody called *El Baliska* [name of the most popular bar in the barrio in Medellin]. Imagine! It was the meeting place for all the people from Barrio Antioquia, to meet, chat, do business... and they ate there too, because it was a Colombian restaurant... they've told me that the restaurant, not the whole business, but the restaurant, was Doña Alicia's, the wife of that man from the *Mejias*,<sup>10</sup> [the one they call *Majapo*? asks Sebastian], exactly! His wife was the owner of the restaurant. They used to serve *bandeja paisa* [a regional dish, a tray with beans, rice, fried plantains, pork rind, eggs, *arepas* and cole slaw] ... so everybody got together to enjoy the good food, and as a place to meet, right? But then the police began to come down hard on those places, and that scared people. [I/BA/11-12-97]

The links of this community with the distribution of drugs have re-created local social and place referents. Place referents that relate to the larger city of Medellin are practically non-existent among Barrio Antioquia inhabitants. The non-existence of these city referents is mostly attached to the stigmatization and exclusion that barrio Antioquia's people have experienced since the 1950s when the barrio was declared as the city's red light district. In contrast, place referents that are located in the United States are well recognized. But as the previous narrative suggests, the practice of place naming and reconstructing place is one of imagining and re-constructing "home" far away from home. The feelings of longing experienced in a foreign land where these people live in an ongoing situation of risk are placed in the bars, restaurants and streets where they meet to remember "home," to learn about what is going on at home, to listen to music from "home" and to eat.

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<sup>10</sup> As indicated in Chapter three, the *Mejías* were the first in the barrio to establish the connection for drug trafficking in the United States.

The prevalence of place naming among the residents of Barrio Antioquia can be seen as a way of maintaining a sense of place that is nurtured by the historicity of the events evoked by the name, by the biographical and mnemonic texture that is attached both to the place and its name, by the moral lessons that may be drawn from the stories they tell about places, and on occasion by the accuracy of the residents' topographic and physical descriptions. In this urban context, place names have less of a continuous and commonly shared history than in the communities discussed by Basso or Cruikshank; nevertheless, place names are imbued with creative ways of naming that evoke past stories, foundational myths, emotions, moral lessons, or powerful descriptions of physical and social features of the place. Place names, in this context, provide city dwellers with mental images that guide their practices of walking, circulating and interacting and become cultural resources that direct them in their daily life.

## The Memory of Things Seen

For the ancient Aztecs, in tlilli, in tlapalli, la tinta negra y roja de sus codices were the colors symbolizing escritura y sabiduria (...) An image is a bridge between evoked emotions and conscious knowledge; words are cables that hold up the bridge. Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and close to the unconscious. I write the myth in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become. The word, the image and the feeling have a palatable energy, a kind of power. Con imagenes domo mi miedo, cruzo los abismos que tengo por dentro. *Gloria Anzaldua - Tlilli, Tlapalli: The Path of the Red and Black Ink.*

In a memory workshop with youth in Barrio Antioquia,<sup>11</sup> I heard the stories of Arlex and Johana. Each of them constructed an image out of cut-outs and placed it on a

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<sup>11</sup> This workshop took place in May of 1997 with the participation of twelve youth. This workshop was the first of a series of group memory sessions.

square base for a memory quilt about the “war.”<sup>12</sup> The stories they told were framed in landscape and topographic referents, and revealed the sensorial experience that walking and street wandering have for these youth and the variety of meanings given to the natural surroundings. Johana, born in the barrio and twenty years old, described the night that,

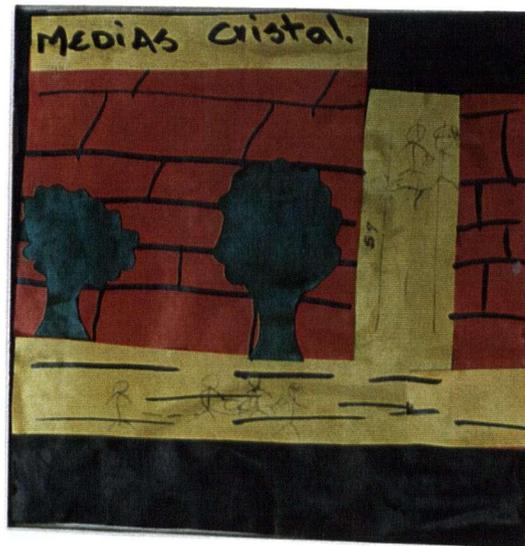


Figure 9 Johana’s quilt image

4.6. Johana: I want here to represent the night. That day they had killed my best friend *Camilo*. Let’s see, that day I was sleeping in my house, and he knew he couldn’t go there [to an alley] because he knew they were trying to kill him, but I don’t know, *cuando uno se va a morir la muerte lo busca* [when you’re going to die then death will find you]. That day he was over there and when he got to the corner they were waiting for him and they killed him, then the boys ran in and dragged him out of there ... up to 25th, and then got to the corner where I live, then my little sister ran in and woke me up and told me: “Johana, Johana, they killed *Camilo*.” When I got outside they had him halfway down the block, and so I couldn’t really do anything, I left and went with them to the hospital but he was already dead; that day they killed another guy too. So ... with my drawing I want to express my sadness when I realized that they had killed my friend.

Johana also expressed her satisfaction with the making of an image for the memory quilt,

<sup>12</sup> Youth in Barrio Antioquia refer to “the war” as the period in the early 90s when the barrio was territorially divided in six sectors. The “war” was between the gangs that controlled each of the six sectors.

I liked it... because by doing it I could identify myself as I wanted to and I represented it as it was or was for me, how I felt it [MW-YG/BA/30-05-97].

In representing the event of the death of her friend, Johana captured through colour and form, and later through narration, the meaning and impact of this event in her life. As she expressed satisfaction at her representation of the event, we understand that it is the memory of an intense visual, sensorial, and placed experience that assists Johana in creating her image. This is the memory of “things seen” that illustrates the dialectical relationship between memory and image production and the ways they inform and operate through each other (Melion and Kuchler, 1991).

Johana’s image is a powerful one that gives central importance to those physical features of the place where her friend was killed and the place where she last saw him. Walls and streets take a central role in locating her emotions. This centrality of streets is certainly one that stands out for any visitor to Barrio Antioquia as it has the widest streets I have ever seen in a low-income barrio in Colombia. In contrast to the great majority of low-income neighbourhoods, barrio Antioquia is located in a central area. It is laid out on flat terrain and surrounded by Medellin’s old airport and the industrial area. In Johana’s image, the action takes place in the middle of the street. These are streets widely used for social and recreational purposes, and they play a central role in the social life of the barrio. Their importance is now celebrated in a yearly festival called “*Calles de Cultura*” [Streets of Culture]. The festival brings people, local schools, institutions and organizations together in a celebration with music, street parades and troupes, poetry, mimes, art and local economic activities. The *calles de cultura festival*, the Easter and Virgin *del Carmen* processions, the Halloween parade and the Christmas celebrations are all recognized as “neutral” events/places respected by everyone. The tacit agreement for

everyone in the barrio is that these activities are not to be disrupted with any kind of violence and that these are occasions where circulating through the entire barrio with the parade is possible. The landmarks in Johana's image are also attached to specific physical structures (e.g. buildings such as "*Medias Cristal*", the site of a sock/garment factory where many people of the barrio work), landscape features such as the trees, and the streets and alleys where residents can or cannot walk.

## Soundscaping

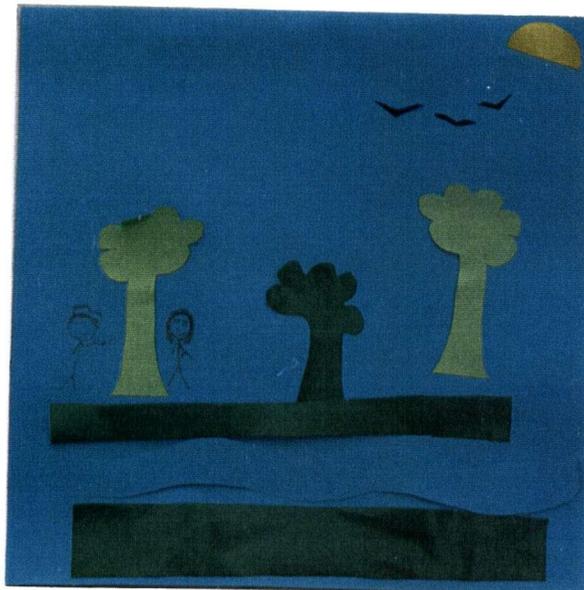
Music is a key element of the barrios of Medellín's acoustic environment. Music blasts from buses, houses, corner stores and bars without creating any conflict or bothering any one. The scene of two gigantic speakers standing outside a house while loudly playing salsa, ballad or disco music is common in barrio Antioquia and in many other barrios. Musical sounds, it can be said, are very much engraved in place and are key descriptors of the ways places are sensed. In a previous talk with Arlex, he brought to my attention music's power to make people recall past events and to describe collective feelings and social memories. His idea was that music is *the* key tool for activating youth's remembering because music has the power to take you back in time and place. Arlex's quilt image recreates a green area on the outskirts of barrio Antioquia, an area with very old trees and a ravine. This image and its narrative also includes a soundscape as part of the experience of sensing places. Arlex described,

4.7. Arlex: Here I represent that time, ok? Like the time was of *la violencia* [the violence], anyway this here was like a ravine, [in] the *La Cueva* sector. Yeah, so then all this was all bush, the river, the ravine, anyway. So I represented this because me and a buddy, actually one time me and a bunch of buddies were there, everyone *en su discurso* [minding their own business], talking, and one of

them made this comment: *The day that I die put this record on, because it signifies everything*, [Arlex plays the song *Siempre alegre* of Raphy Levitt]. So this record, it always brings me good memories:

*One has to pass through life always happy  
After one dies what is it worth  
You have to enjoy all the pleasures  
Nobody knows when one is going to die  
As life is short I live it  
And enjoy it with wine and women  
I have to spend my life always happy  
Ay le lo lay, le lo lay (coro)  
Ay le lo lai always happy.*

*I don't want you to cry for me when I die  
If you have to cry for me do it while I live.*



**Figure 10** Arlex's quilt image

Arlex's image brings soundscape to the making and sensing of place. In his narrative and through his image, soundscapes (the sounds of the natural environment, their conversation and the music), the setting and the events are brought together as important elements of his remembering. The memory of his dead friend is recreated in the natural landscape and it is given content through the song. The song has an instructive capacity, it teaches how life should be lived, and in turn this capacity is passed on to the place. The

lesson is supported by a logic that eases the imminence that death has for these youth by stressing the message of life as a simple matter of enjoyment.<sup>13</sup> For Arlex, place is experienced through the bodily relation to the surrounding environment (kynesthesia), through his body motions, through the hearing senses, and through experiencing the soundscape.

Songs, in particular, have a cycle of social life that gives them representational and documentary capacities; furthermore, they provide guidance to the ways that places are sensed and constructed. The social life of songs makes reference to the periods when the song was listened to most, to the specific events that took place during that period and quite importantly, to the places where it was heard. Later, when the song is played again the events are recalled. In another memory workshop with women from the barrio, they recalled the late 70s through the memory of the song "*Dios como te amo*" and they remembered the places where they had listened to the song:

4.8. Claudia: It was the kind of music we listened to then. I'm 30, and about 10 or 20 years ago one listened to this type of music... you would pass by some *café* and see people sipping away to it, or when people were really sad they drank along with it too. So you remember those times. [It was listened to] everywhere, since everything was *mas sano* [out of trouble] in that time, and wherever you went there were people sitting in their doorways listening to music. We had the habit, you know, while cleaning up the house or doing chores, then we'd sit by the door to listen to music, or we'd meet with our girlfriends from school to listen to music, usually *Trinidad de Colombia, Vicky, Tormenta...* [MW-TC/BA/27-07-97]

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<sup>13</sup> In an historical analysis of youth cultural expressions in the Colombian city, I argued that youth cultural expressions have been shaped by the relations established with music and with the city space. Music, in its different rhythmic manifestations, is a mediating element within the urban experience, providing youth a meaningful field in which to generate differences of style that permit identification. (Riaño, 1991; 1991a). There is a long repertoire of salsa songs that accompany and provide "guidance" for Medellín's youth. In the memory workshops, youth talked about their barrio's or their group's hymns and symbols. Most of these songs sing to the crude realities of poverty, death, drugs and violence but also expose some of the basic values and logic of loyalties that this generation has accepted.

This memory is of the musical landscape and songs that were listened to during a specific period of time. In this example songs become a landscape and template for referring to the past and often a crucial memory aide. The times of party and celebration are another source of soundscape memory. One of the remembered times in barrio Antioquia is when the “entire” barrio learned to dance the Brazilian *lambada* in the 80s and when the oppressive presence of violence made a mark in the memory of this music and the places it was heard:

*Journal entry June, 1997. Memory workshop with a group of thirty women and two men from the Barrio Antioquia's Training Centre: Sandra, a widow in her twenties with two girls, plays a tape of Lambada music. The response to the rhythm is immediate and everyone begins clapping, moving, swinging left and right against each other and laughing. Aura and Sandra end up dancing in front of everyone. They dance making wide pelvic movements, lifting their legs up and down, and moving the rest of their bodies to the sensuous rhythm with passionate and dramatic composure. The others follow them by clapping [see figure 3]. Everyone is laughing and moving.*

*When the song finishes, Sandra explains,*

4.9. Sandra: Ah no ... I liked this music a lot, and they danced to it in the Antioquia Barrio. *Natusha* sang it (what year was that? Another person asks), it was in December of 1989.

We danced it in a line, everyone got up and formed a train-line, everyone got up (numerous people talking, shouting, explaining) ... a really short skirt showing her belly and her hair up in a head band (*Natusha* was incredible!!) (Even her clothes!) and everyone in a little train, dancing. Back then anyone who listened to *Natusha* was cool, her clothing was the fashion, they even had contests to see who could dance like her and imitate her the best.

[...]

Sebastian: ... back then, with that music in a discotheque they made people strip and dance naked, and if they didn't do it they killed them ..., it was in a disco they called *La Orquidea*.

Pilar: Who were these people?

Sebastian: A gang, back then they were the *Chinos* [name of the gang] who lived in *El Chispero*. [MW-TC/BA/27-07-97]

The *lambada* soundscape described by these women gives a glimpse into the barrio's life and mood during a specific period of time. While music and dance bring everyone together in a community of movement and pleasure, violence enters as an underground marker of the memory and of the music and places where the *lambada* was heard and danced. Somehow, the pervasive presence and memory of violence have not destroyed the intense and warm memory of the pleasurable times. It is a conflictive co-existence but both sets of memories continue to dwell in places and through soundscapes. This troublesome co-existence names the cultural dynamics at work in places affected by violence and the ambiguity of ethical and social boundaries that legitimize the actions of the agents of violence or place them in the realm of the underground.



**Figure 11** Remembering the Lambada Sounds

During the workshop, Arlex and Johana stood in front of the group to tell their stories as Sandra did to tell and dance. They told their stories with their bodies, their

movements, their pauses and their voices. The expressive practice of their telling and the ways they performed the stories imbued acts, events and objects with significance. Their bodies remembered through the acts of bending, walking or dancing, while their remembering became a re-enactment of the events described and of the sensorial experience of hearing, listening and seeing. In these instances the element of performance is closely tied to a body that by the force of habit, rituals, and incorporated practices<sup>14</sup> becomes a mnemonic place and artefact, a material organizer of the field of memory.

## Dwelling

Memories are always attached to, or inherent in places; place is the house of memory and memory is the house of place in the soul.  
*Michael Perlman – Imaginal Memory and the Place of Hiroshima*

Juan,<sup>15</sup> a youth leader of the North Eastern zone, speaks of his experiences with *las casas juveniles* [the youth houses] through the following image. The image and its story engage us with the multiple lived relations that youth establish with places and the processes by which specific locations or physical buildings acquire meaning.

4.10. This here is the horizon, here is a little sun that is rising, a street that goes down, this is me and this a friend of mine; this is a store, and here in the back, here is *Doña Rubiela* and a sister of hers washing a blood stain that was on the street. This was on the 24 of December, at sunrise .. no, not at sunrise, it was already in the morning. [...] From '91, that is to say that we put together the *casa juvenil* from about the end of '89, *Giovanny* was the last one, but it was a kind of a build-up... from a certain period onwards there began to be many fights, a lot of problems, lots of arguments within the group, so many opted, and we opted, to leave. But I want to make this comment about youth work because *la casa juvenil* in that moment, and I think it will always be that way, was not something carried out within four walls and a roof. It was more a feeling, like a kind of

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<sup>14</sup> Incorporating practices are those messages that a sender or that senders impart by means of their own current bodily activity (smile, handshake), the transmission occurring only during the time that their bodies are present to sustain that particular activity. (Connerton, 1989: 72-73)

<sup>15</sup> Juan is a youth leader and founder of one of the youth houses of the North Eastern zone. He has a keen interest in history and social issues. Juan has pursued this interest through his studies in Sociology at the Antioquia university. When I met Juan, he had the project of writing the history of the youth house of the barrio *Villa Niza* to submit as the final work for his degree.

duty; in any case we'd all left the *casa juvenil* and in December of '93 we decided to put on an event in the barrio.

He goes on to describe how, among other things, they got presents for the barrio's poorer children and how they gave them away,



**Figure 12** Juan's quilt image

So off we went... and this is the memory that I have so clearly *atada* [tied] to the ravine, we grabbed a huge pile of gifts, a pile of things we had ready, and we headed to the ravine, everything in huge bags and boxes (but we did buy some beautiful wrapping paper, says another), which we decorated and headed off to the ravine, I remember now that ... we were going along completely overloaded with stuff, and Giovanni, since he was more or less heavy, or muscular (he said he was muscular), so Giovanni was carrying two packages, all full of himself, and the ravine was channelled at a certain angle, and bang!, he slipped and went down. When he tried to get up the guy was slipping back and forth, we just sat there looking at him and the guy says "have you seen nothing you *dickheads*, are

you going to help me or not...?" but he was like that. I think that the following day around sunrise they killed him .. [MW/NE/11/10/97].<sup>16</sup>

A sentiment, a feeling and a kind of duty, these are adjectives that Juan uses to describe the setting and convey in all that richness the various meanings of "being in place." It is about the experiencing and knowing developed through the awareness and familiarity of "having been there," it is about a body in motion that senses the "qualities" of places (sounds, smells, events happening, risks, etc) and that, in this case, is interpreted by Juan as a memory "tied" to a place like the ravine. In telling the story of his friend and their activities, Juan stepped back from his familiar surroundings and daily life to recognize with full awareness how he sensed places like the ravine or the youth house.

Juan's story is supposedly about a community activity but it is also about the killing of his friend and the places where his memories dwell. The narrative is displaced between these two events and an evocation of place that is tied to his memories of friendship, neighbours and community work; to specific landmarks like the ravine; and to images like the two neighbours washing the blood and the thread of blood running down the street, or his friend hanging from the edge of the gully. The grounding of his relation to places is one of *implacement*: we are or inhabit places through our bodies, by being concretely placed there,

There is no knowing or sensing place except by being in that place, and to be in place is to be in a position to perceive it. Knowledge of place is not, then, subsequent to perception -as- Kant dogmatically assumed- but is an ingredient in perception itself. Such knowledge, genuinely local knowledge, is itself

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<sup>16</sup> The narratives told by youth from the youth houses that are quoted throughout the text come from four sessions. The first workshop took place in May 17, 1999 with 27 members and ex-members of the youth house of el barrio El Popular II. The second and third memory workshops took place in October 11 and 17, 1997 with 12 leaders, and with members and ex-members of the youth houses in the barrio El popular I, El Popular II, and Villa Niza. The fourth session took place on November 8 with 15 members and ex-members of these three houses as well as from the youth house of Villa del Socorro.

experiential in the manner of *Erlebnis*, “lived experience,” rather than of *Erfahrung*, the already elapsed experience that is the object of analytical or abstract knowledge. (...) To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in. (Casey, 1996:18)

The three quilt images and accompanying stories were told by youth between the ages of 18 and 25. Narratives dealing with death, friends, and friendships are placed here within natural and urban landscapes where rivers, mountains and street corners become mnemonic, memorial and sensorial landmarks. These youth are marked by death but also by their position as “survivors,” as witnesses and storytellers of what has happened in their daily life. In the process of mourning and cultural and social survival, these youth are also giving death a place, “giving-place to death in life” (Perlman, 1988: 22). I shall come back to this idea about survivors and the place of death in life in the next chapter.

### **La Casa**

... houses that were lost forever continue to live on in us ... they insist in us in order to live again, as though they expected us to give them a supplement of living... How suddenly our memories assume a living possibility of being. *Gaston Bachelard – The Poetics of Space.*

The place of the youth house as something that goes beyond its physical features to evoke “a sentiment, a feeling and a kind of duty” was repeated in many of the sessions I had with members and ex-members of the youth houses. The house dwells in memory and in the desire to be together, to be part of a group. The architecture of the youth house is constructed symbolically in Juan’s story because for the members of the youth houses, the house is first and foremost an emotional construct. The houses changed and moved from one location to another, but the idea of the house as a place of friendship,

acceptance and gathering remained. Occasionally, the building itself carries a profound meaning when there is a story of collective effort behind it, as in the memory of this youth about the collective construction of the house:

4.11. Arley: *La casa juvenil*... the last one that I belonged to was right beside the church, I actually remember a lot because we built it right from the ground level, and finished the interior. We all participated, be that by sweeping up or any small thing, and at the same time each person felt that this belonged to him, because one didn't just go to meetings, but also could say I painted this wall, or I swept up this floor ... that was in 92, if I'm not wrong ... what I'm able to remember the most are those moments ... to in some way structure those memories so that we can see those things that are useful for us today, don't you think? I believe that the most glorious moments of the *casa juvenil* were then, in that moment, the house was truly something that one dreamed of, and I'd like that to be the case today as well. [MW/NE/08/11/97]

The house as a physical space also became a place of refuge and an alternative environment to the street:

4.12. Cesar: A beautiful thing about "Open Hearts" (the name of one of the youth houses) is to have entered the process by connecting with many young people, because so many of them hung around there *fumando vicio* [doing drugs], and they were often harassed by the *milicianos* [urban militias],<sup>17</sup> (and we would tell them) "if you do that there something will happen to you," "if you don't change ..." anyway, there are many of them not around to tell the story, it was very hard in that time. [MW/NE/17-10-97]

At the heart of this sense of place was the recognition that it was "there" where they, as youth, were able to *make a place* for themselves in society. These were years in which the stigmatization of youth from the North Eastern zone as violent and as hired assassins was transformed into a widespread stereotype used to describe and exclude youth from

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<sup>17</sup> When the *milicianos* made their presence known in the barrios they took the task of "cleaning" the barrios from insecurity and risk upon themselves. Drug users were targeted by the *milicianos* with the argument that they had been involved in acts of violence against the barrio's people. *Milicianos* would give them up to three notices requesting that they quit their drug consumption or their attacks on the barrio's people. If they did not follow their orders, they were killed. Initially these actions were mostly welcomed by the *city dwellers* as it allowed them to enter, exit and move about in the barrio without the fear of being robbed or attacked. With time, however, many began to question the *milicianos* form of social cleansing and vertical exercise of power and the denial of opportunities for drug users.

this zone.<sup>18</sup> In this context of exclusion, the experience of finding a place in the youth houses marked these youth and the ways they made sense of an extremely difficult period in their lives profoundly.

The theme of *la casa* appeared in many forms in the memories of these youth. For them, the house serves as a powerful image that implies refuge, a place of their own, remarkable memories and also a way of inhabiting and dwelling. The project of the youth houses as economic, social and cultural alternatives for youth involved in the spiral of violence ran into several difficulties. But even if the project did not succeed in achieving the expected outcomes, the idea of a “house of our own” took deep roots in those who participated in the project and are still alive. This way of place making as an activity of dwelling helps us understand that the relationship between individuals and places is not restricted to the role of places as contexts for action. The relationship also has to do with the ways in which individuals become aware of themselves in relation to the environment that surrounds them, as well as the power of places to situate individuals in that environment.

## Imagining

The link between imagination and place is no trivial matter. The existential question “where do I belong?” is addressed to the imagination. - *Walter Eugene, Placeways*

During my fieldwork, I was struck by the passion that many community workers and young people brought to envisioning and engaging in projects of transforming their

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<sup>18</sup> Chapter three describes the social and political context in which this stigmatization took roots.

surroundings into meaningful places of their imagination. I met with this kind of envisioning in the North Eastern zone. Hernan, the director of a local non-governmental organization and a resident of the zone, took me to an area underneath a high traffic bridge that gives access to the barrio *Villa Guadalupe* and several others.<sup>19</sup> That day, we went up the streets in Hernan's scooter. The thought that we were "climbing" the steep hills in such a fragile vehicle made me nervous, particularly when we reached the steepest street and the scooter looked almost perpendicular and felt as if it was defying the laws of gravity. As we arrived in *Villa Guadalupe*, he noticed a large number of people walking or waiting on the streets and a large number of taxis taking people to work. Public transit buses were in a kind of strike due to their conflict with the *Milicias populares del pueblo y para el pueblo*. The militias have been *cobrando vacuna* [a forced circulation tax] from the bus drivers and the bus drivers, tired of being pressured and killed, made an "alliance" with the army to fight the militias. The conflict was at a very critical point, with three people killed over at the weekend. Otherwise, everything else in the barrio seemed "normal:" children walking to school, women buying groceries, the frenzied activity of the many small shops, and music blasting from many speakers.

Years ago, Sylvio, a community leader conceived the idea of building an open-air theatre under the bridge. With the assistance of a local architect, the project was made, but Sylvio never saw it completed because he was killed before the construction of the

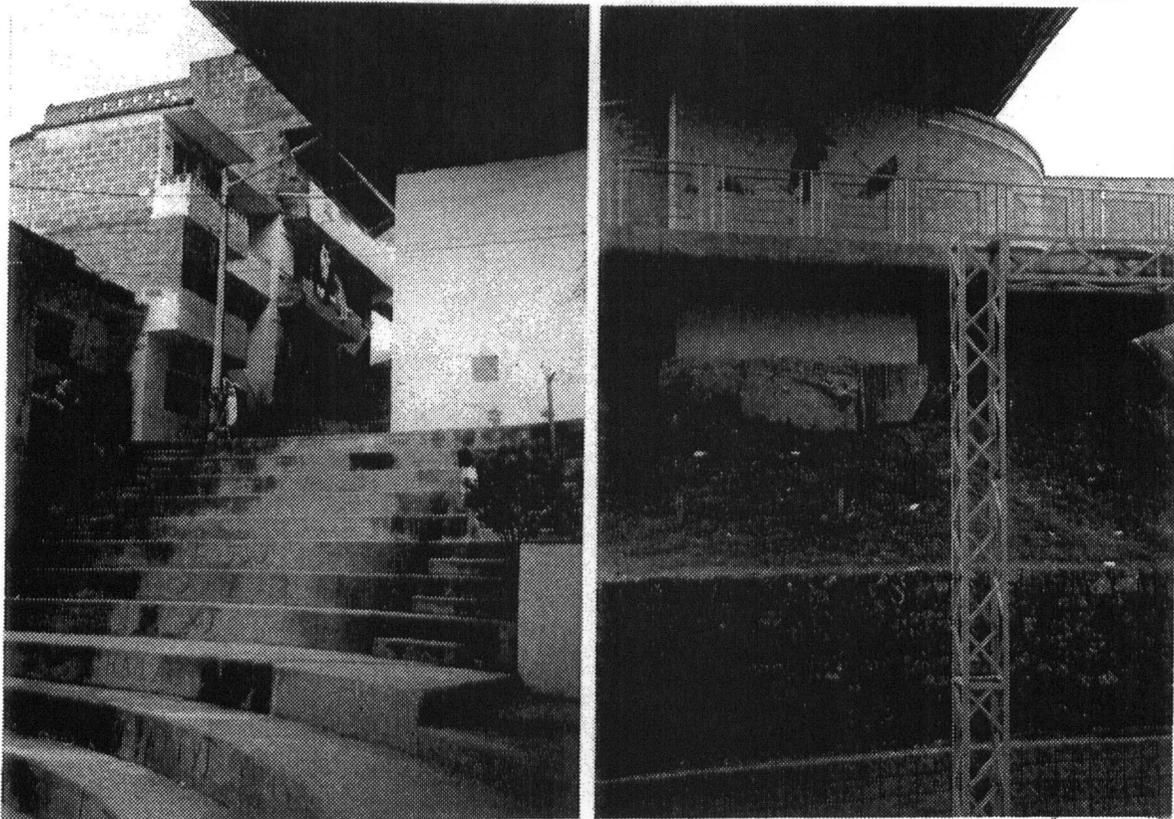
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<sup>19</sup> Hernan is the director of the first local NGO that was founded by community activists and community workers in the zone in the midst of the wave of violence and stigma that plagued the zone during the late 80s. Every year this NGO organizes the week for peace described earlier in this chapter. Hernan as a resident and activist of the zone has a deep knowledge and commitment with his work. He is also an anthropologist. I carried out a one day memory workshop with the NGO workers and community activists who were also residents in the zone.

theatre under the bridge was finished. Today, a commemorative plaque in the central column of the bridge pays homage to the leader and explains the “baptism” of the theatre with his name (see figure 13) The unique design of the theatre blends with every feature of the landscape. The stairs double as seats and are incorporated into the barrio’s alleyways. They are laid out from the bottom of the hill to the top street area and play with a circular motion that follows the many slopes of the craggy land. On each side of the rows of stairs, Hernan explains, stand houses that were beautified thanks to the efforts of their residents once the theatre was finished. The stage is found on the flattest and lowest area. Columns on the north side of the bridge are used for film projection and for storing film machines. The columns on the south side constitute the background of the stage. On one of them, Nemo, a French urban landscape artist, painted one of his urban wandering men. In between the columns on the south side, a community room was built. The red brick walls of the community room and the stage floor contrast with the green grassy area, the yellow stones, and the gray colour of the close to a hundred rows of stairs.

Hernan speaks vividly about the project. He describes the past landscape as a smelly garbage disposal area, a feared “hole,” a very muddy and slippery terrain and a ravine that was causing major erosion in the steep and deforested foothills while the houses in the surrounding area were sliding. He talks about the efforts and intense work involved in educating the community on the value and future of such a project. His attachment to this place is both sentimental and symbolic, and is one that is shared by many others. Today the landscape is fused with the human and mnemonic energy that is the place of the bridge as a centre of cultural and social activity. Here landscape acquires

the richness of a cultural process, as dynamic, multisensual, and constantly oscillating between a “foreground” of everyday lived emplacement and a “background” of social potential.” (Hirsch, 1994).



**Figure 13** Open-air theatre under the bridge

This act of place making involves, in a dialectical relationship, acts of remembering and imagining. The quality of the place is experienced here through memory and imagination (Walter, 1988). In imagining this place, Sylvio, Hernan and others projected their view of community beyond themselves, to the realm of imagination, to their ideas about what might be a community. Today, the commemorative plaque takes Hernan back, to “what did happen” and to the memory of Sylvio’s death. The bridge, meanwhile, continues to provide a material and symbolic root to his work

and his imaginings of the realm of possibilities for his community work. The close ties and dynamic relationship between place, memory and imagining speaks of the relationship between past, present and future that is embedded in the acts of remembering and forgetting. Casey (1993:23) explains:

They [past, present, and future] are complementary in character. Just as imagination takes us forward into the realm of the purely possible --into what might be- so memory brings us back into the domain of the actual and the already elapsed: to what has been. Place ushers us into what already is: namely, the environing subsoil of our embodiment, the bedrock of our being-in-the world. If imagination projects us out beyond ourselves while memory takes us behind ourselves, place subtends and enfolds us, lying perpetually under and around us. In imagining and remembering, we go into the ethereal and the thick respectively. By being in place, we find ourselves in what is subsistent and enveloping.

## Mapping

The observation of a map only becomes bearable if I intend to find a path, to draw up an itinerary and in this way travel through a country or a city (...) In the way that men produce nexuses and concatenations, stories make life itself bearable, and are an aid against terror. - *Wim Wenders*

In recognizing the sensorial and mnemonic power of places in the city of Medellin, mental maps became a key methodological tool of my research. Mental maps provided a large, vivid and concrete body of information about the “lieux de mémoire” of Medellin’s urban dwellers, and about their perceptions and uses of their surrounding environment: the barrio and the city. In one use of mental maps, a recognized local landmark (a street intersection, a building) was identified and placed on an empty piece of cardboard. From this place-reference, the individuals developed a mental map that had as its base their memories of places and their places of memory. The referent was not the

city as a whole but a section or district of the city --the one participants shared as a common referent.

The late 60s and 70s were the years of the *Mafiosos* --those from the barrio who went to the "USA," *coronaron* [made it big], and returned to barrio Antioquia. The *mafiosos* returned to transform their houses into shiny three-story places of imitation marble, green varnished rock stones, and aluminium framed doors and windows, they hung out in the barrio showing off their *bambas* [fancy jackets]. During a session with a group of women in their mid- to late 30s and early 40s, the naming and location of the *Bar Andaluz*, one of the main meeting spots for the *mafiosos*, brought back several memories. *Bar Andaluz* had been in the barrio since the 1940s and was located on a corner of the main road. The memory of this bar is shared by many generations. For Trinidad and the others, the years to remember were the late 60s and early 70s when the *mafiosos* took over the Bar and the Mambo, Bolero and Son rhythms were replaced with the fast inner-city sounds of Puerto Rican and New York salsa. Trinidad and the others provide a vivid dialogue that maps their memories of those times:

4.13. Trinidad: This is *El Andaluz*, we all used to come here.

Hilda: Ay! And there were some hot men, the *mafiosos*!

Several of them: *Ave Maria!* Ay!

Pilar: Tell us this story, it seems that there are a lot of stories around *El Andaluz*

Martha: The Maafia!... (laughter, comments among the women) [...]

Trinidad: This was *El Andaluz*, with a door here, another there at the corner (various participants indicate how to draw the door) like this... they say it was the *Gomez*, the *Carreros*... [total commotion]

Pilar: Please, a moment to be able to listen to the stories... What is the story of *El Andaluz* that you were going to tell?

Trinidad: So here at the *Andaluz* they played cards, pool, dominoes, and here as well there was a taxi fleet, it was the *Andaluz* fleet, ay! [...] (laughter)

Pilar: What years are you talking about?

Trinidad: The 60's. The taxis weren't like those of today, they were huge, with 8 seats and they were sharp and with fins (you still see them around), on my block they used to park one... very fine cars those ones. And over here the *chicas* [girls] all up and down *la 25* [25<sup>th</sup> street] (she draws the *chicas*) and she was the one who spent the most time on the street (pointing to a woman who laughs). They went to look at men.... to check the *Mejias*, the *Gomez*, anyway...

Pilar: So who was there, were they from the barrio or did they come from outside?

Trinidad: No, they lived here too!

Hilda: No... they were all from the barrio but they were the *Mafiosos*, the first ones who had gone to the United States. So it was from there that they began to do business to go to the States, and things began to go well for them, they went and returned full of *bambas* [fancy jackets], beautiful cars and well, back then the barrio women were (laughs) very—good—looking!! So... but I never went out with a *Mafioso*! I just looked .. (laughs) those guys stood around with these bunch of *muchachas* and did their business there. [GS-TC/BA/13-06-97]

As the group constructed the mental map and each one of them identified a meaningful place, memories came forth one after the other in a ripple effect. Martha's childhood memory about the construction of one of the main roads and how as a child they played on the *morritos* [promontories] brought on a different kind of memory for Fabiola who remembered running with her mother after her father and his lover.

The street as a place of motion, circulation, looking and encountering is the key landscape referent for these women. In a barrio like barrio Antioquia where the movement and speed of events is so rapid, there is much to be "seen." Walking about became a practice of opportunity for these women. And as they constructed their mental map of place memories, they also reconstructed the mood and histories of each of the places that have marked them with meaningful memories.

In Barrio Antioquia, five different groups constructed mental maps and each time the results were very different. The exercise carried out with the group of fifteen women in their mid-30s and 40s resulted in a map of the barrio during the 1960s that included the bars where they socialized and the parks as they looked in those years. The same exercise

with one of the gangs, composed of young men between 17 and 24 years old, that has signed the peace agreement, resulted in a map of the sector they controlled and a map of the 1980s: the years of their childhood. The group of barrio's youth between 14 and 25 constructed a contemporary map, rich in detail and movement through all the sectors in the barrio.

The map made by the leaders of the *Junta de Acción Comunal*<sup>20</sup> and the civic committee went as far back as the foundational years (mid-1910s) when poor peasants or intra-urban immigrants traded their material belongings for pieces of land in the barrio, or bought land through their earnings from collecting cowpats. Their memories were particularly anchored, however, in the 1950s when the *decreto 517* declaring the barrio a red-light district was announced.

The differences between the mental maps consisted of the time period they covered and the focus they developed (e.g on locating the places of recreation, identifying circulation routes); nevertheless, they all shared some common site and place referents. The flat and wide shape of the streets; the bars from both the past and the present; and the distinctive physical marks/installations of the barrio (the buildings, the *pasajes* [tenement houses], the square shape of the bus terminal) were the three referents common to all of the groups. Past landscape features like the ravines, the *morros* [small hill] and the *mangas* were remembered vividly and clearly and were placed in the maps with great detail and geographic precision. Differences in representations of places and

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<sup>20</sup> The *Junta de Acción Comunal* is the organization that is in charge of barrio affairs and the representation of the community when dealing with government, other organizations, and politicians. It is elected by popular vote for a period of one or two years.

landscapes in marks were evident, but in general the groups tended to either include the differing representations in the map or discuss them to come to a compromise.<sup>21</sup>

The stories Barrio Antioquia's residents told were grounded in specific places like the park or the bars and were remembered in a visual form that placed memories in natural and urban landscapes, in local site and chronological referents, and in sensorial and biographical environments. Memories were bound to place and in recalling these places, the residents followed the steps of a mapmaker: grasping and locating the coordinates of an environment, landscape, space, time and history. Their map, however, did not belong to the past nor to the cartography of physical space but to the realm of memory, where past, present, future, imagination, bodies, emotions and desire mix.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored the prolific relationships between people, places, memory and violence through an examination of the practices of place making in the city of Medellín. Some of the tools for place making and sensing places were present in city dwellers' practices of landmarking (the marking of territory through the identification of key points of reference), landscaping (meaningful scenarios that situate the individuals in their everyday living environment) and circulating (the movement of individuals through the space and the landscape). City dwellers' ways of sensing places were examined through their visual memories, response to the acoustic environment's power to bringing back memories and through the memories of intense lived experiences. The practices of

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<sup>21</sup> It was agreed upon collectively that the mental maps did not attempt to develop a representation of the barrio and the city. I always stressed that each participant was identifying his/her own places and representations and that the map was a means to visualize them.

soundscaping and dwelling illustrated the multiple relations that city dwellers establish with places and the processes by which specific locations or physical buildings acquire meaning. The practices of place naming and place mapping were described as providing city dwellers with mental images and mnemonic clues that guide their practices of walking and establishing social relationships, which at the same time constitute cultural resources for survival. The lived and expressive relations between individual and places, the understanding that the knowledge and meanings of places are acquired through the lived experience of having been there and the ways in which places constitute a referent of belonging was conceptualized in this chapter as a *sense of place*.

In the city of Medellín, however, these associations between people, memories and places are troublesome. Memories drawing people together and instructing them about who they are cohabit in place with a sense of destruction and pain. Feelings and landscapes of fear and terror are imprinted in places and have radically transformed the relationships between people and places. It was argued that when the social fabric of daily life is seriously affected by the dynamics of violence, it is in remembering and forgetting that Medellín's city dwellers find common referents and an awareness of the things and beings they have lost to violence. Within communities that are divided by war, and for whom the opportunities to communicate and interact are threatened, this shared way of sensing places through memory is an expression and a metaphor for establishing a sense of continuity and identity.

Through place, the city dwellers of Medellín share memories that weave together a sense of belonging to a "temporary" community that is constructed through remembering and forgetting, a community rooted in memory and the attachment to the

stories and emotions that places hold. These communities of memory are temporarily constructed when neighbours meet and share stories and may become attached to more lasting social bonds like the youth group or the family. To be rooted, in this context, crosses restricted spatial and social boundaries and escapes fixed referents of identity or community involving what Lissa Makki (1995) refers to as a “chronical” mobility and routine displacement of peoples that requires them to “invent homes and homelands” through memory.

## Chapter 5

### Oral Histories of Death and the Dead

One sometimes thinks [that] after one dies the other doesn't think or sees or feels what one believes about the other ... life, brother, in life, and don't doubt it! Even though one has been dead for a long time, one is always going to be remembered, and one can evoke those feelings.  
*Rogelio, Youth House Popular II.*

In the city of Medellin, specifically in those areas continuously assailed by deadly violence, the dead and death have an oral history. This living memory of the past based on direct accounts, personal and group experiences, eyewitnessing, hearsay and oral tradition<sup>1</sup> is organized through a cartography of mnemonic places. Local explanations of people's death, the place that the dead occupy in the life of the living, and attitudes toward death and the dead provide a fertile ground for understanding how Medellin's urban dwellers make sense of their daily lives and how they have refashioned their cultures to deal with the uncertainty and paradoxes of an unpredictable violent situation (Jenkins, 1998).

Through the study of a unique set of oral narratives and memory practices that are organized around death and the dead, this chapter explores the formation of communities of memory and their grounding in a sense of place. Chapter four explored the ways in which Medellin's city dwellers make meaning of their surroundings and the profound and diverse relations they establish with places. Places, it was argued, provide a sense of coherence and continuity amidst destruction. The mnemonic and sensory qualities that

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter three illustrates this oral tradition that in the Colombian and the regional context of Antioquia refers to two periods of bipartisan violence: the war of the Thousand Days (1895-1912) and the period of *La Violencia* in the late 40s and 50s.

places hold and their capacity to trigger reflection and acts of listening and telling make this continuity possible. This chapter will focus on the concept of *community of memory* as another realm in which a sense of continuity is constructed by Medellín's urban dwellers. It looks at death and the dead as the narrative weaving threads of a local oral history, and as central organizers of daily interactions among city dwellers.

The chapter is organized into four sections. The first section examines narratives and remembering practices that are organized and sequenced around the remembrance of the dead. The second describes a genre of this oral history that is illustrated in the chronologies of dying and listing of the dead. The third section explores the ways that death and dying as events were remembered and elaborated by two specific groups, and the final section examines a particular type of stories that deals with ghosts and spirits. Each section develops an aspect of local oral history and provides examples of the memory practices around which communities of memory are constituted.

## **Narratives of the dead**

It is striking here that the places people live in are like the presence of diverse absences. *Michel de Certeau – The Practice of Everyday Life*

### ***Ellos y Ellas: The presence of the absent bodies***

In this memory are many of the absent ones. For example he remembers Fercho, who was very important because he was everybody's friend, it looked like he belonged to each one of the Youth Houses. His talks, his happiness, he was in there with everybody. It's pretty strong stuff to remember one of them, because then you have to remember them all, so many fell..., we had to bury so many ...  
*Wilson, Youth House El Popular I*

*Ellos y ellas* (they), those *que se han ido* (who are gone), take a central place as organizers of the collective memories of Medellín's city dwellers. References to the

status of a person in life and death are intertwined in daily narratives work as a mode of contextualizing and periodization of the stories shared. They constitute an act of recognizing and remembering the person who is absent. To examine the ways the dead shape oral narratives and daily lives, I shall draw upon a rich and complex material brought up during the various sessions conducted with youth, who were members and ex-members of the youth houses, and by those of barrio Antioquia. The following narratives belong to youth who participated in the youth house projects located in the barrios *El Popular I*, *El Popular II*, *Villa del Socorro* and *Villa Niza* between 1991-1994 and to youth involved in the conflict in Barrio Antioquia. These narratives illustrate the various ways of naming and referring to the dead,

5.1. Alberto: When I arrived at the Youth House I was just someone who taught martial arts. But people started to come in, the kids joined in [...] The people who met there, some still kids, some now adults, we did incredible and beautiful things with the youth. But I remember bad things as well, **the disappeared muchachos**... Edison, we loved him so much .. but in the end we couldn't do much for him and he was killed.

Juan Diego: And why don't we talk of the work of a friend and a comrade of ours that all of you have mentioned, Geovany, *que en paz descansa [RIP]*, the coordinator of the *Parche* Youth House. He was one who fought so much for that centre and for the barrio, fought for our ideals and had to give his life for them.

Youth 2: But even so we did some very good things, like what we did down by the 42<sup>nd</sup>, over by Juaco's. Unfortunately that was the last event we did with that guy, because *al pelao lo cascaron* [they killed him ...]. We didn't do anything but recreational activities and drink, we knew nothing but *joder la vida y nada mas* [fucking around and zip to anything else]. It's the one thing I remember I have lived ...

Joven. ... before the group existed as a Youth House, I had already joined up in 1987. Edison Velez was a great person, he had a lot of plans, but they killed him of *plomonia* [filled him with lead].

Oscar: ... a wonderful memory when we were all together, the *Mellos* [twins], *los que ya no están* [those no longer here], Carlos is one of the veterans, that jerk who left... (for the USA)...

Juancho: ... so we're coming around the corner when *El Papao* appeared with *Jairito*, a black guy from the *Cueva*, a fat one, I remember him **may he rest in peace** ... they also *lo tumbaron* [kill him], they also *lo quebraron* [killed him].

The stories told in these narratives vary from childhood memories to work in the youth houses, community interactions and youth hangouts. In all of them, the reference to one person is accompanied by his/her location in the world of the living: *ya no esta* [is not longer here], *les tocó marcharse* [had to go away], has disappeared. The reference to the dead individual functions here in two ways. The first function constitutes a strategy for allowing the listeners and/or the outsider to learn about their past memories as a group, the status in life and death of the person named, and the type of relationship that existed between the teller of the story and the dead person. This can be described as an informative and locational function.

The second function is as a speech marker that acts as a punctuation – as a way to pause and contextualize the stories shared. This is carried out by placing a qualifying or identifying “tail” [*coletilla*] immediately after the person’s name. In the narratives included, this “tail” varies from the traditional religious way of naming the dead used in Juan D’s narrative, *q.e.p.d* (RIP), to local ways of emphasizing the absent “*ya no estan,*” or the disappeared, to the vivid images of a person’s death illustrated in the expressions of “*lo cascaron*” [they killed “beat him up” with gunfire]; “*lo quebraron*” [they killed “smashed him”]; “*plomonia*” [filled with lead], or “*lo tumbaron*” [they did him in].<sup>2</sup> Expressions such as “*lo quebraron*” or “*lo tumbaron*” playfully manipulate phonetic,

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<sup>2</sup> Castañeda and Henao (1996) document the appearance in the 1980s of a “social dialect” among Medellín’s poor youth and its expansion and widespread use during the 1990s. They argue that this language is the result of a process of youth differentiation and a response to the discrimination experienced from society at large. The process of language creation and the use of language is similar to the one observed with the language of the *Camajanes* (Chapter 3). To avoid the establishment of language hierarchies, I will refer to the language spoken by these youth as a “speech community” in the sense that Duranti gives to the concept as “the product of the communicative activities engaged in by a given group of people.” (1997:82) The vocabulary of this language is the result of a process of transformations of already existing words through the addition or subtraction of phonemes, the changing of gender in phonemes, syllabic inversion, or by fusing the signifiers of two words in one.

phonologic and semantic elements of the group's language and illustrate images' central place in the ways of speaking and telling stories of these youth.<sup>3</sup> Metaphors, images and words that name or verbalize actions related to the dead and death abound in this group's language. This can be seen in the word *plomonía* where a bold and horrific image of being killed by gunfire is created by combining two root words "*plomo*" [lead] and "*pulmonía*" [pneumonia] and by expressing it as diagnosis: "*murió de plomonía*" [he died of *plomonía*].<sup>4</sup>

In the narrative structure of these stories we can further observe that "the dead" are the main actors of an underlying story that is told at the same time that the other stories about youth houses or childhood games are told. The narratives of these youth further exemplify how their memories of significant experiences in the youth houses or with friends are marked and framed by the profound emotional attachment felt for those who died. An example of this is Alberto's narrative about teaching of martial arts in the youth house and his memory of the youth who gathered around the youth house to learn martial arts, the "beautiful things" they did and the memory of the *muchachos desaparecidos* [disappeared guys] like Edison, who "they loved so much" but "in the end we couldn't do much for him and he was killed" The dead come back into daily life

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<sup>3</sup> Jesús Martín-Barbero (1995) based on his reading of Salazar book's *Born to die in Medellín* highlights how the speech of the youth gangs in Medellín is predominantly a visual speech. It is a discourse filled with images in which story telling is an act of weaving images [almost like an audio-visual production but with words] that has little resemblance to a writing syntax. Martín-Barbero denominates this form of speech a *secondary orality*. This is an orality that integrates oral traditions and that is continuously transformed and re-ordered by youth's appropriation of new audio visual technologies and languages. Thus words such as *lo quebraron* or *lo tumbaron* capture a visual and moving image of the way the individual was killed and constitute a sensorial description of what happened to his/her bodies. It should be noted that the stories included here are from youth; however, most of them are not or have not been members of youth gangs. This underscores a wider use of this "visual speech" among youth of a variety of backgrounds.

through their naming as *absent* ones, as those who have departed from the world of the living.

Though the absent body does not have a physical corporeal presence, it continues to have a place in the lives of these youth through memory. Tito, an active member of the youth house of the barrio *Popular II*, provides a forceful example in his allegoric evocation of his dead friends using symbols like trees and seeds,

5.2. Tito: .. a tree, each one of us is a tree. I remember the death of a friend, I see his blood that falls like seed, I remember the death of two people who meant so much to me. Like Pocho, a youth who perhaps wanted to live, but the situation of the barrio, the situation of his own life leads him to commit an error which costs him his life. Another friend who I loved a lot and who died last year (1996). Sandra will always be there, always a friend. Death cannot separate us from the memory of a friendship we always had. [MW-POPIL/NE/ 18-05-97]

Pocho and Sandra will “always be there” for Tito. These ways of naming the dead suggest to me that the absent bodies of youth like Pocho, Sandra and others continue to have a presence in the world of the living through the ways that places like the youth house or the barrio are given meaning and acquire singularity. The absent bodies of those who are gone become part of the “spirit of a place” making it singular and specific (Casey, 1993). Augusto, a leader of the youth house of *Villaniza*, illustrates in the following narrative this place-presence of the dead. Augusto’s narrative is triggered by listening to Juanca remember those who *les toco marcharse* [had to go],

5.3. Augusto: .. for example Juanca was talking about Hugo and we talked about Luis Carlos, and others, who by chance or whatever, bad luck, *les toco marcharse* [had to go] [ ... ] for those of us left behind we have to keep fighting here and with many lessons; for example, this spot here [a little wall] ... we can’t really hang out there anymore because some guy set up a stand there to sell *chuzos* [beef cooked in wood skewers] - a tent where every 8 days he puts out the *chuzos* and there’s no room to sit. But every since that experience, when it was

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<sup>4</sup> The word “*plomonía*” and its use among youth provides an example of the ways that youth make a social commentary on the situation affecting them both as active participants in creating this situation and as members of a society.

my favourite hangout, I evoke that *murito* [little wall] when I want to remember the people who are gone. [MW/NE/11-10-97]

In Augusto's narrative we learn that his relation to places like the *murito* is deeply informed by the memory of his dead friends. The bodies of those "who are not here any longer" do not inhabit the *now* but remain in the *here* through their mnemonic and cartographic inscription in the barrio's landscape, in the place where they died or as in the case of Augusto's friends, in the place of their hang-outs where they felt a sense of belonging. Places, in this context, become cartographic and mnemonic referents for maintaining this oral history and for engaging in the practices of listening and talking about the dead that create communities of memory.

For these youth, the presence of the "absent ones" in their memory can "weigh" more than a regular living body because they obsessively inhabit the present through story telling, in the artefacts of the material world that bear their memory, in the songs played and played again in the corners, bars or houses, and in daily conversations and remembering practices. Such intensified and deep remembering in which both the living and the absent ones inhabit places through their bodies, memory, the acoustic environment and one's physical and sensorial movement in space, is fundamental to local constructions of a sense of place. Knowledge about the "felt quality of a place" (Pred, 1983) becomes enhanced and deeply constructed through these remembering practices that, as Aretxaga points out in the case of West Belfast, are part of a knowledge of place that is "... constructed through the senses –moving, seeing, listening, evoking, smell- which endowed spatial images with emotional moods –nostalgia, rage, bitterness, hope, mocking distance, longing- to convey a sense of place, a place that was at once object of knowledge and object of feeling" (Aretxaga, 1997:25).

Reviewing the various ethnographies presented in the collection *Fieldwork under Fire*, Feldman (1995) reflects on the status of the victims of violence. He stresses the impossibility of reducing the loss of lives to ideological or factual matters because in day-to-day violence the loss of human lives is rather about profound and unique emotional depths and *absence*,

The victim is an irreconcilable absence. The political victim,<sup>5</sup> deceased or alive, is always partially the disappeared. Something has been subtracted even from those who survive and return, something that can only accommodate symbolic mediation, emotions and memory (Feldman, 1995:238).

The memory practices through which Medellin urban dwellers re-signify and make the dead occupy a place in the world of the living suggest a form of reconciling this absence. The practices of place making that name and locate the dead in the here and the now are examples of the ways the absence of the dead is reconciled. Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) observed how in the community of Bom Jesus in Brazil embodiment does not end with death and is continued in the present through the retouched photographs of the dead person/child in her/his coffin that are hung on walls or through the continuous appearance of the dead in visions, dreams and apparitions. A similar observation can be made for Medellin. In this city, remembering practices and mnemonic artefacts provide a sense of continuity and coherence to daily life. By assigning a particular place a mood or spirit or through the marks made in physical environments, the deceased are inscribed in place and continue to have a link with the living.

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<sup>5</sup> The discussion of the dead or disappeared in this text is not restricted to political violence as understood in its most restrictive meaning. As explained in the previous chapters, for the case of Colombia, it is a daunting and highly unfruitful task to try to differentiate between the various expressions of violence.

In December of 1997, three youth who were founders of the youth houses escorted me in a walkabout of their commune. For me, the walkabout highlighted some of the landscape mnemonic-landmarks and the ways the memories of the dead are inscribed in place. Inside a *Nucleo de vida ciudadana* [multipurpose community centre] we observed a commemorative plaque for "Ramón," one of the dead leaders of the youth houses. The plaque's inscription clung to a memory of his leadership and the ways his friends and co-workers wanted him to be remembered. The plaque reads as follows:

*Nucleo de Vida Ciudadana "Ramón Emilio Urrrego." There is no need to explain that you're gone when even a child knows when the nest is left empty. September 15<sup>th</sup> 1995*

The plaque exemplifies a way to commemorate and remember the dead. It also encapsulates Ramon's friends' interpretation of his death/absence as leaving the nest empty. Commemoration, in this context, takes on the meaning of an "intensified remembering" of those who were part of the group/community (Perlman, 1988:10). During the walk, we also observed the new multi-sports facility that has been dedicated to the memory of "Giovanny," another youth leader recently assassinated. In youth houses, sports coliseums, community centres and mural walls, plaques are placed for those who have died commemorating youth who were briefly active in the community that have died. The plaques commemorate one particular aspect of their lives in particular, their community involvement, i.e., youth organizing sport Olympics, festivals, community gatherings, fighting for community rights, etc. The other aspects of their life such as their troublesome links with the urban militias, their maintenance of ideas of revenge and private justice, and their enemies, are left aside, forgotten in the commemorative object/act. The memory of the leader saved and orally transmitted is about their community involvement. Their involvement in "other" activities, those

familiar to anyone in the barrio, is remembered only in the privacy and intimacy of the home or when friends gather.<sup>6</sup>

The ambiguity conveyed in these dynamics of remembering and forgetting is suggestive of the various tensions that surround daily life in a society where the “logics” and cultural referents of the “war” have taken a central place. Under those referents, power and recognition are ephemerally gained through the control of firearms, weapons and territories. These dynamics of war, however, are also intertwined in daily life and although the actors in conflict may physically control territories and circulation, communities continue to have a sense of “control” of the lived-in environment through memory. Thus in daily life, silence and forgetting become essential tools for maintaining social memory and a sense of dignity as a “community.” Consider, for example, the following narrative from the text “El Parlache.” In this narrative a young man reflects on the need to remember the dead in order to continue defending society from that “atrocious job of bullfighting with death,”

Death by itself is not death complete. Complete death is in forgetting. So there is nobody more dead than the forgotten dead. We, the inhabitants of Medellin, should know this best, we who in the last 20 years have had to learn, on the run, to the music of save-thyself-he-who-can, that atrocious job of bullfighting with death, and we did it using the cape that is the reddest, the most joyous, the most

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<sup>6</sup> During the memory workshops and sessions conducted through-out my fieldwork there was a climate of trust in the open exchange of stories. These were collective remembering sessions, however, and were consequently bounded by implicit social norms where forgetting and silence played a crucial role in the framing of remembering. Participants were careful in the framing of their stories, particularly when remembering the dead. The stress was always in remembering the absent ones, their contributions, the positive aspects of their lives and the feeling of loss. The contradictions and tensions in their lives were generally referred to in an indirect and metaphorical speech that alluded to the mistakes being made or the inexplicability of what happened. When our exchange was more informal (in the bar, houses or cafeterias) and in general through one on one interactions, the stories and profiles about those who died would include more intimate aspects of their life and an outlining of the contradictions they knew their friend confronted. This interplay between the collective, the individual, and the intimate, and between the representations emerging from each of them characterizes the dynamic field of practices and representations from which a collective memory is constructed.

alive ... and weak: our young. But as well, with the reverse of the same cape, we've learned the trade of forgetting (Castañeda and Henao, 1996:32 ).

Real or complete death is the forgetting of the dead, this young man reminds us.

Medellin's city dwellers are called upon to keep remembering and commemorating.

Commemorative artefacts –the plaque- and commemorative acts such as parades, in-memoriam, the *marchas por la vida*<sup>7</sup> [walks for life] are temporal examples of

community-making that evoke the memories of the leader and those events that can be publicly commemorated.<sup>8</sup> This interplay between private memories and public narratives illustrates the shifting locations and situated distances under which we, as individuals and members of groups or communities, remember<sup>9</sup> and reinforce existing ties or create a “temporary community of feelings and shared emotions” (Portelli, 1991:174).<sup>10</sup> In conclusion, these forms of remembering place a vision and a discourse about public life and public community leaders within a historical narrative that restores a sense of community dignity about their dead (Portelli, 1991). The dead, furthermore, constitute key forces in the creation of a shared emotional place for remembering and forgetting and

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<sup>7</sup> Since 1989, the *week for peace, life and development* is organized yearly in the *North Eastern zone* with the purpose of promoting peace, breaking fears of circulating in public spaces and remembering those who have died. An important event during this week is the *Marcha por la vida* [walk for life] in which people carry photographs of those who have died because of the violence and later place them on walls with legends that “remember them as human beings, independently of why they died. (...) The idea is to remember all of them and that those who come to see, reflect about the senselessness of death” (Community leader in an interview for the newspaper *El Mundo*, Oct 13, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> The examples presented focus on the commemorative aspect of these writings or plaques. Messages written on walls and graffittis also have other uses. Sometimes the message written, particularly in the case of graffitti, assigns responsibility for someone's death to a particular group and calls for justice or revenge.

<sup>9</sup> In this instance, I follow Michael Lambek's (1996) reflection on memory as a “perspective” or “situated distance.” In the case in question this situated distance is provided by the war and the ethical dilemmas it poses to the individual involved or affected by it.

<sup>10</sup> Portelli (1991:194) highlights songs' power to create those temporary communities. Particularly, he refers to musical genres like narrative ballads that are made when an event disrupts daily life and the “continuity of ordinary time.” In this chapter, as in the previous one, there are several examples of this type of song and its power to bring people together in a community of shared emotions.

in activating the mechanisms by which communities of memory are continuously recreated.

### **The Disappeared**

“Disappeared” is another form of naming the absent person and his/her body; it is a word that has multiple meanings. This section discusses two cultural constructions in the memories of Medellín’s urban dwellers of the disappeared. The first construction makes reference to those victims of the practices of forced-disappearances by the state and paramilitary death squads.<sup>11</sup> The second is a construction that stresses the emptiness of the “here” and the “now” without the bodily presence of the friend or loved one. In this case, the “disappeared” is not one who has been disappeared by “others,” the disappeared is one who is absent from the realm of the living.

Between 1989 and 1992, the military and paramilitary practices of forced disappearances haunted the city of Medellín, particularly the North Eastern zone. During this critical period, black vans and jeeps without licensed plates were frequently seen in barrios identified as home to the gangs of *sicarios* [hired assassins] and/or home of “subversives” such as the guerrilla, leftist activists and later the urban militias. These death squads were heavily armed and on the look out for young people (Uribe y Vásquez, 1995).<sup>12</sup> They perpetrated massacres on street corners, in living rooms, and even at

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<sup>11</sup> Disappearances have been carried out in Colombia for over twenty years. Colombia’s record of forced disappearances is very high having reached a total of 2,340 by 1996 (Asociación Colombiana de Juristas, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Uribe and Vásquez (1995) document the killings of 568 youth and 96 massacres by death squads in Medellín during the period of 1985 to 1992. The highest percentage (30%) of these massacres was carried out in the North Eastern zone.

funerals or took the individuals away and “disappeared” them. The discovery of tortured bodies, the endless chain of rumours and the “wild imaginings” about what happened, or could happen created a climate of terror for youth like Rogelio, the leader of the youth house of *El Popular II* and for all the other participants in the youth house. In 1991, the fears of youths from the barrio *El Popular II* turned into outright terror when one active member of the youth house disappeared and was later found tortured and dead :

5.4. Rogelio: I also remember so much about Pocho, of his death. We were all so worried, because the threat was that they were going to wipe out all the youth from the House. So people from the institutions came and walked behind us, like... look out for that car, that guy over there isn't known to us, and we were all so nervous. [...] And .. the loud cries of Tito in the cemetery, that he wanted justice, and everybody was just so shut up, so shut up... that was very hard, but incredibly so. [MW-POPII/NE/10-03-97]

Rogelio, like many others, faced the spectre of disappearance and a growing anxiety as rumours spread and the fear of “being the next one in line” increased.<sup>13</sup> In those days, he would see the cars, the police and those “others” in uniform who would “*hacer lo que se les daba la gana*” [“do whatever they wanted,” act with total impunity]. Rumours about the reasons for the disappearances and who might be responsible for them were the only source of information available, and this is still the case today. The disappeared and the events of the late 80s dwell in the memory of these youth with the syntax of terror, with the fear of not knowing or even worse of never knowing (Simons, 1995) and with the silence of the “unsaid” that is part of the rumour chain (Feldman, 1995). Although these rumours, gossips and wild imaginings were marked by fear, they constituted some of the

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<sup>13</sup> Staff from governmental and non-governmental organizations that supported and followed the establishment of the youth houses, remembered the terror and wild imaginings they felt during this time. One of them recounted the overnight retreat in which Pocho, who feared the possibility of his disappearance and had a premonition of his imminent death, opened up to her and remembered his entire life.

few available channels of communication. These channels, furthermore, maintained a sense of togetherness and continuity –a community of memory - for the individuals whose daily lives had been dramatically disrupted. The memory of “those times” is emplaced in cemeteries and highways, as the following narrative illustrates,

5.5 Alvaro: .. if you go to the *San Pedro* cemetery you see that it is immense; that cemetery is full of people from these neighbourhoods, from *El Popular* [the barrio], from many barrios, and it's really young people who fell as a result of the violence, and from the disappearances then over by *Las Palmas* [a highway], where they used to find lots of bodies, fortunately there's less now. [MW/NE/17-10-97]

The naming of those who are missing as “disappeared” announces the empty place they have left behind and their *out-of-place* location (Scheper-Hughes, 1992). The disappeared is a displaced body that is **taken** by force to a place where the possibility of pain, torture and abuse on his/her body exists. This spectrum of horror and the “disposal” of bodies in ditches, dumpsters or alongside highways have sullied the city with landscapes of pain and fear. These places acquired a elusive meaning and demonstrated the unpredictability of daily life, as the finding of a missing body “there” or somewhere else would mark city dwellers’ relationships to these places and their ways of circulating in and through the city with fear and uncertainty.

In the second meaning of the “disappeared,” as an imaginary construction of the dead, the boundaries between life and death blur. The absent one gains a “temporary” and symbolic status as a missing one. Naming the dead as disappeared suggests a nostalgic evocation that stresses a longing for those who have journeyed outside the realm of the

living, and a nostalgic longing for their return home (Seremetakis, 1994)<sup>14</sup>. An example of this can be found in the popularization of the Salsa song “*Los desaparecidos*” by Panamanian singer and composer, Ruben Blades. This song became one of the themes most often played at the funerals of young people in Medellin. Although the song is about forced political disappearances, youth in Medellin re-appropriated its lyrics and rhythms for remembering “friends” independently of the reasons for their death.

Last night I heard many explosions  
Rifle and revolver fire  
Racing cars, braking, cries  
The echo of boots on the street  
Curfews. Complaints. Pleadings. Broken plates.

Where do the disappeared go to?  
Look in the waters and in the bushes  
And why do they disappear?  
Because we're not all equal  
And when do the disappeared return?  
Everytime they are summoned by a thought  
And how do you speak to the disappeared?  
With emotion clutched tight within.

*Salsa Song “Desaparecidos” by Ruben Blades*

According to Fabio and Augusto, both ex-members of the youth houses, youth involved in gangs and in the active consumption of psychoactive drugs and alcohol adopted this song for remembering, grieving and talking to their dead friends “with emotion clutched tight within”,

5.6 Fabio. ... *Desaparecidos* is above all the favourite record for most youth in the community, [...] but I think it's kind of a hymn for the *marihuaneros, los que tiran vicio* [the ones taking drugs]. You go by a corner where they're drinking and smoking up, and when they hear this song it's like when someone from the

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<sup>14</sup> Seremetakis (1994) makes the difference between the English word “nostalgia” that implies to trivialize romantic sentimentality and the Greek word “*nostalghia*” and verb “*nostalgho*” which are a composite of “*nosto*” (to return, to travel back to homeland) and “*algho*” which means to feel a burning pain (in soul and body). Nostalgia then is “the desire or longing with burning pain to journey.” The way these youth remember and feel nostalgia is closer to the Greek construction of nostalgia, particularly the idea of the return and longing and the sensoriality and emotional weight of the memory of the disappeared.

Coast hears a *vallenato* record [a deeply felt music].<sup>15</sup> The other thing is that you hear it at all the wakes and it's a way "to torture" friends and family.

Augusto... "*Los desaparecidos*", like Fabio said, brings up always the idea of the dead... that song is heard in a bar like *La Ponce*, and right away you can see people closing their eyes and *entre las pestañas así apretadas se les vuela una lágrima* [a tear flies out between their tight-ended eye lashes]. [MW/NE/17-10-97]

Fabio and Augusto describe some of the practices of remembering that re-create this oral history of the dead through a memory soundscape. Fabio describes the practices of listening to the songs on the street corners where some youth consume drugs, and Augusto remembers what happens in the discotheques when the song is played. Amidst the crowd and the party, those who remember take a moment to grieve. As Augusto has seen and beautifully describes, this is a private moment in which the individual closes his eyes while a tear "flies out between their tight-ended eye lashes." By being named the disappeared, the dead continue to have a symbolic and emotional place in the world of the living and the possibility of their return is left open. The disappeared person is made present with stronger force in the actions, places, artefacts and soundscapes of remembrance.

The wooden shelf that hangs on one of the walls of *El Bocha's*<sup>16</sup> room is part altar and part place of remembrance for his dead friends. *El Bocha* lives in the sector of *La Cueva*, one of the sectors involved in the conflict in Barrio Antioquia. On the bottom shelf, the framed photographs of seven of his dead friends are carefully aligned one next to the other. In the photographs, young men with dark eyes, short-shaved or long curly hair stand, sit, hug each other and laugh. These are the friends who disappeared from *El*

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<sup>15</sup> *Vallenato* is a native musical rhythm from the Colombian Atlantic coast. This rhythm could be described as a musical oral tradition: each song tells a story. It mixes African, Indigenous and Spanish cultural influences.

*Bocha's* life during the war between the gang of *La Cueva* and the gang of *El Coco* in barrio Antioquia. The photos create a row and a sequence that evoke friendship and comradeship while creating a visual record of loss and longing. The order and sequence of the photographs create a sense of continuity with a past of friendship, and mark the temporal changes in *El Bocha's* life (Radley, 1990). Images of the Virgin Mary carrying baby Jesus and of the Sacred Heart stand on the top shelf overseeing the room and protecting the dead.

Altars or home-made monuments are erected in living rooms and bedrooms, displaying objects or artefacts that memorialize the dead. These objects play a key role in preserving friends and families' memories of the absent ones and of their collective past (Radley, 1990). Outside in public spaces, tombs and walls have become the places where friends and family speak, sing, write or cry. Inscriptions carved on stones or small pieces of paper attached to the tombstone express personal and group feelings, anxieties, hopes and wishes: *Viviras para siempre en nuestros corazones* [you will live forever in our hearts], *te extraño mucho* [I miss you so much], *se que no estás ausente* [I know you are not absent], etc.

The communicative link and the presence of the dead are further stressed by the decorative symbols and artefacts added to the tombstones: the emblem of the dead person's favourite soccer team, red and pink hearts, drawings, colour laces, legends, photos and the use of musicians, *serenateros*, who sing to the deceased's favourite

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<sup>16</sup> *El Bocha* is the nickname given to one youth of Barrio Antioquia who was an active participant in the memory workshops and who lead me on several walkabouts and photograph taking sessions.

songs.<sup>17</sup> The various writings, images and objects placed in the tombstones create “polyphonic” epitaphs collectively and progressively produced by friends and families.



Figure 14 Tombstone at a local cemetery

Part of this material world that organizes the everyday and that becomes a source of material for oral narratives are the artefacts and remembering practices that establish a form of *continuity* between the life and death of the absent person. Continuity is established through means such as the *recordatorios* [in memoriam cards] and the memory of “those words” that are given/told to friends with the message of what is

<sup>17</sup> During the late 80s and early 90s, visiting the dead in the cemeteries became a “thing to do” for the groups of friends and gang members. Ghetto blasters, alcohol and artefacts were brought to be placed in the tombstone, and the cemeteries became a place for hanging out and grieving noisily. Youth from gangs suspended their visits when they became an easy target for their enemies. The practice of visiting the dead and of decorating their tombs has continued to be carried out mainly by women and friends who are not involved in the conflict.

wanted and expected when they die. Youth involved in the conflict often write the words they want included in their *recordatorios* as soon as they become entangled in violent activities. Milton was the leader of the gang *El Cuadradero* and, although his gang had signed a peace agreement in 1995 and he had become an active community leader, he nevertheless wrote the words that in February of 1998 were included in his *recordatorio* after his violent death,<sup>18</sup>

This is not a farewell but a see-you-soon, to all my friends and the people of my *ranchos* [shanty town], all those who did the impossible to ensure I came out ahead, thanks for being with me until the last of my days. To my family who despite my errors never left me alone. Do not forget me.

“Pray for Me”

Families and friends keep these *recordatorios* and often display them in photo albums and shrines, as well as on walls. Memoriam cards can also become part of the physical environment. In one of the local cemeteries on a wall besides Pacho’s tombstone, I observed his message, a hybrid of an epitaph and a graffiti written in big printed words,

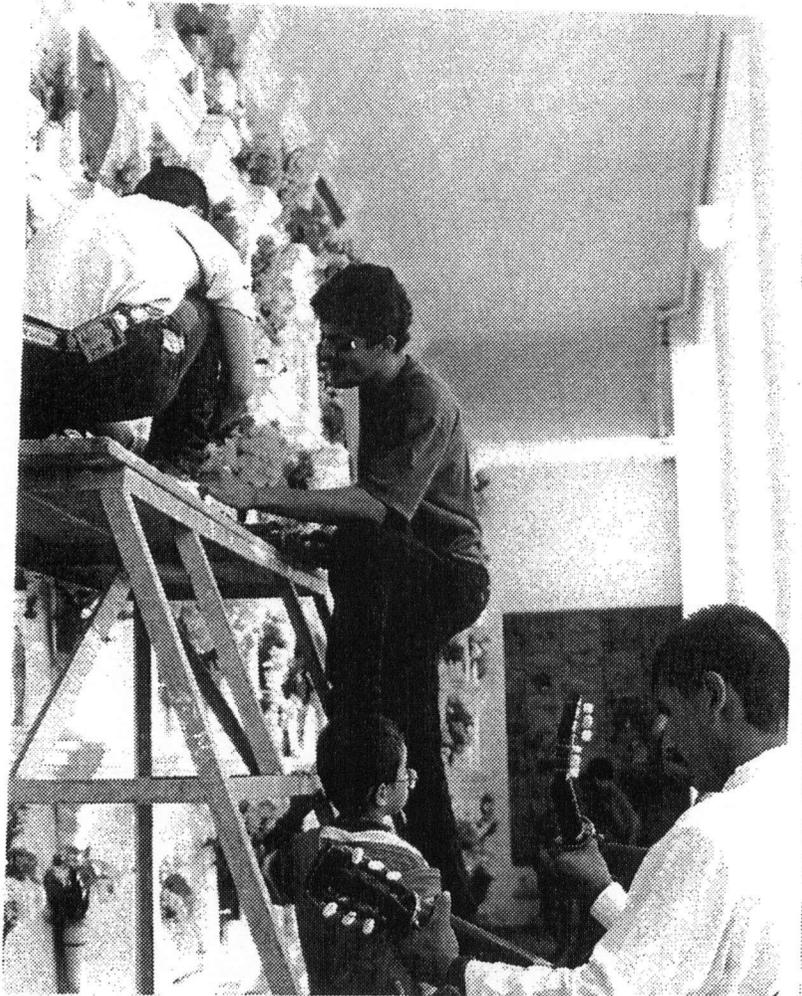
I had no time to say goodbye to you because in the moment of parting the wind outran my desires. In that hard moment my thoughts were always with you. You now know that my departure was cruel, but I never failed you because I, Pocho your friend, always had a place in my heart and my mind for all.

Both Milton and Pacho wrote their messages with the certainty that they would have a violent death, and both wanted to ensure continuity and that their friends and family

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<sup>18</sup> The relationship between the death and the youth involved in the conflict is one of close familiarity. Alonso Salazar (1994, 1996) stresses that for these youth life is associated with brevity and considered a fleeting experience. To survive or to be alive is explained by not being the moment to die. Death appears in the horizons of these youth as a concrete, embodied reality that is signed by destiny. You are alive because it is not yet your time to go. But your time could come very early in life as for youth in conflict, death is not only a close felt reality but also an accepted probability that they could be victims of. So at an age that many other youth are not thinking of death or imagining forms that will leave their marks in the realm of living, youth in Medellin are sure to establishing some of these links.

know that they considered them important. These are daily rituals anchored in the material world of artefacts.



**Figure 15** Music for the dead

The artefacts, monuments, and public facilities are part of a material world that memory grasps and manipulates. They represent tools that are put at work when people come together to remember. Rituals, remembering practices and artefacts guide city dwellers' struggles against the routinization of death and violence's taken-for-granted status. These rituals and the transformation or re-ordering of the material world are constitutive of the verbal and performance practices through which urban dwellers construct meaning and re-create the past.

## Genres

### Chronologies of death and dead-listings

Chronological narratives of how someone was killed and the spatial mapping of death sequences are part of what I would refer to as a “recitational” genre of remembering the dead. A genre,<sup>19</sup> in this sense, refers to, a) the distinct stylistic and narrative features of remembering including, in this case, “recitation” and “listing” as forms of expression about when, how and where someone died and; b) to a usage and discursive practice that is associated with the establishment of sequences and chronologies marking singular periods of life in the community. This section examines “death” as the narrative thread of a public community discourse that registers the many ways in which daily life is altered by violent actions and as a ground upon which the community comes together to remember. My observation is that this “recitational” genre is most commonly used in areas like barrio Antioquia where the immediacy and frequency of violent actions and killings places death within defined cartographies and spatial presences.

In the following narrative Diana recalls particular periods of time in barrio Antioquia. She brought these memories up during a session with the youth group in which they elaborated their mental map of the barrio. Diana being the oldest in the group,

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<sup>19</sup> For this definition I draw on Finnegan’s (1992) and Bauman’s (1992) conceptualization of genre as a social and historical conventions that provides a classificatory category for the organization of cultural objects, and a flexible and negotiable orienting framework for the organization of ways of producing and interpreting discourse. Under this conceptualization the observational focus is on the discursive practices conducted in daily life.

made a conscious effort to apprehend death by carefully sequencing and timing the killings, counting them, describing the type of death and the places where someone died, and at the same time interjecting exclamations and comments that chronicled her own emotional reactions and reflections,

5.7. Diana: Over here by the bus terminal, where they killed *La Tata*... by 68<sup>th</sup> after finishing with *El Morus*, they killed *El Mocho* and all those guys. Then a new gang came up, the *El Tata* and *El Gordo's* gang. Over here they killed all of them. [ ... ]The last to fall were those four, Tata, El Gordo, and some other *muchachos* from nearby ... Well, two more survived, but they came back and got them too. They left them so shot up, they were like a sieve, full of holes, the eyes and teeth just shot out, it was incredible. That day they killed the first ones here at 3:00 p.m. and then over there five more at 7:00 p.m. The violence was so horrible then. ...

Pilar: What year are you speaking of?

Diana: Thirteen years ago, in 1984. What more can I remember? ... and then came the death of that *muchacho*, that was on a Friday. The Saturday they killed some others by the 24<sup>th</sup>, they were three. Let's see, let me think... between Friday and Saturday in this little area they killed 14 people, guys from that generation. The gangs since then have been worse, but I remember those deaths because of all the tragedy they left behind.

Diana's remembering is a breathtaking mapping of familiar spaces in a cartography of death and through the construction of lists of the dead. She establishes these deaths as temporal markers of an epoch signed by tragedy, in which "*la violencia era muy horrible.*" Diana continues her lists of the dead, and now she considers gender,

Diana: They started to kill the women afterwards, I mean after that girl<sup>20</sup> who was already involved in the conflict. Imagine that! It's been 7 years since they killed her, and then they started to send other gangs with other girls. Some of those girls were so shit out of luck. One of them, .. the little sister of... anyway, ..they shot her so full of holes they left her black as night. So I remember how they killed Sol, the Gringa, and yeah! Eliana... I was 14 then. So there's her, she's the first one... then Eliana, then La Gringa, oh ..., and before her another girl, what was her name? ... over by the bar *Andaluz*.

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<sup>20</sup> She is referring to Sol, a friend of hers who was involved with the *apartamenteros*.

We hear from Diana the hour, location and form of the killings. In her narratives, the evocation is mainly of the event, of the *how and where* this person died and in which sequence of deaths.

Diana positions herself as a *witness* to the killings and the destruction. Stories are told in first person by a subject bodily and sensorially present. This subject location marks her emotional and sensorial involvement with the events she witnessed and her narrative role of registering and “quantifying” the profound impact that violence has had in her life. These narratives also indicate how daily life is altered by violence and how individuals adopt certain behaviours and make certain decisions as survival mechanisms. Through the frequent sharing of these stories in daily life, a number of individual and collective feelings of fear, loss, threat and terror are recognized. This is what A. Feldman (1991) describes as the community marking itself with a cartography of death events.

Though terror and violence were, and continue to be, a daily reality for these youth and women, their memories attest to the “out-of-the-ordinary” quality that any of these events have for them and the pain and grief that they continually bring to their lives. Their subject positioning and their memories hardly speak of a routinization of violence and terror from the view point of the lived experience. They challenge a widespread interpretation of the routinization of terror in Latin America’s popular classes lived experience of violence (Taussig, 1992; Scheper-Hughes, 1992; Green, 1995). These authors have argued that when the intensity and frequency of violence and terror are so widespread, an emotional and experiential vacuum is created, particularly for the “poor,” and that as terror and violence become common-place, they become what Michael Taussig calls “terror as usual.” In my view, this approach delegitimizes human suffering

and undermines local cultural elaborations of suffering while it deposes the subjects of agency. The frequency of death in places like barrio Antioquia and the execution of death related actions by people known to them -- neighbours or relatives -- might place death in a realm where it could be trivialized. The matter-of-fact narrative tone of some of the stories quoted could be used as an example of how death is trivialized; however, the narratives are also punctuated with statements of shock ("the violence was so horrible," "it was incredible" "I remember those deaths because all the tragedy they left behind") that reveal that the narrators' lived experience has been marked by suffering, and is accompanied by emotions such as rage, fear, loss and sadness.

These narratives recall the continuous alteration of daily routine and circulation in the barrio due to the violent actions. The narrative construction rests in the symbolism of what Diana calls a "tragedy." A tragedy that is signed by their collective fate of living amidst violence: their witnessing horrific images (blood, disfigured bodies) and their physical and emotional proximity to the death event. This narrative of listing establishes a sharp contrast with the narratives of the absent or disappeared ones where images of martyrdom and sacrifice abound. In the listing narrative, the imagery is built on an acute sensorial and acute description of precise images of colour (the blood on the street), movement (falling, dying, shooting), and sequence (speed of the events). As I pointed out before, these are ways of registering collective emotions in the face of violence. Scheper-Hughes (1992) underscores the cultural constructions of emotions and how they represent "rhetorical strategies" for individuals and groups. The anthropology of emotions has noted the way that cultural understandings and social institutions shape memories and reflect the tensions and issues surrounding the individuals' location as a

member of a particular group or society (Lutz and White, 1986). Through emotions individuals,

... express themselves, to make claims on others, to promote or elicit certain kinds of behaviours, and so on. In other words, emotions are discourse, they are produced in language and human interaction (Scheper-Hughes, 1992:431).

Emotions as rhetorical strategies are found in the narrative form of listing the dead that registers collective and individual emotions of fear, sadness, surprise, rage, etc., and that claim urban dwellers' experiences as witnesses of death. The memories built around the witnessing of death activate a form of discourse about the public realm where the stress is put on the disruption of collective spaces by violence. There is, as well, a political economy for these emotions (Abu-Lughod and Lutz, 1990). Those who are witness to the act carefully administrate grief and pain while maintaining a group remembering that also shapes a public realm of collective memory. A sense of the collective disruption of community life is emplaced in a historical narrative that documents the intensity of a lived experience of terror and violence through the recitation/listing of the dead. Memory, in this sense, is also social memory as far as it transmits a public construction of the individual and collective experience.

In remembering the dead and death events, urban dwellers circulate meaning and maintain a consciousness of the loss and suffering in their lives. I have stressed this dimension of human suffering in order to create a contrast with the attitudes towards life and death that Colombian researchers have documented for the case of Colombian and particularly Medellin youth thus far (Salazar, 1989; Salazar and Jaramillo, 1994; Perea, 1996). These authors highlight a shift in youth's attitudes towards death and life that is exemplified in the practices that desacralize death (e.g. with the playing of strident music

and dancing with the dead during funerals), and in the living of their lives in the immediate present where questions about the future and their legacy in life have been emptied of all meaning. The title of Alonso's Salazar pioneer book on the youth gangs of Medellin "*No nacimos pa' semilla*" [Born to die in Medellin] (1990) encapsulated the youth's worldview and the radical shift that has taken place. Though this shift can be further documented through the ethnographic material collected during my fieldwork, my fieldwork material also problematizes the interpretation of this shift as a suspension of youth's efforts towards establishing a continuity (legacy) between life and death. The ethnographic descriptions highlight youth's experiences of suffering around the loss of their friends and relatives and their attempts at establishing continuity between life and death through songs, memoriam cards, or story telling. Death is not a trivial matter for these youth when they face the loss of a loved one. Without introducing this dimension of the lived experience, there is a risk of denying humanity and agency to these subjects and reducing them to mechanic actors of scripts who are numbing themselves to violence. This view of these youth's suffering, however, is not to put forward a romanticized view of these youth who in fact are *active* agents in this spiral of violence. My intent is to illustrate how these youth are trying to come to grips with the terror and horror of the violence surrounding them and their concern with establishing links to their past, with the continuity of their lives.

## Events and their meaning: Giving death a place

### An event of life

Caminante, son tus huellas  
el camino y nada más;  
caminante, no hay camino,  
se hace camino al andar.

*Song "Andares" by Joan Manuel Serrat*

The importance of not falling into generalizations about the meaning of the narratives regarding death and the dead was made clear to me during the memory workshop and remembering sessions carried out with a group of youth from the Central Eastern zone of Medellín. These young men and women, some of them actively involved in city wide youth social movements, such as *La Red Juvenil* [The Youth Network] and the *Consejo Municipal de Juventud* [Municipal Council of Youth],<sup>21</sup> have been together as a group since childhood when they joined a church group and named themselves *Caminantes Constructores de Futuro* [Wayfarers Constructing a Future]. As *Caminantes*, these youth gathered in the church to sing to get ready for the Catholic confirmation ritual, to hold group meetings where they planned activities for the barrio and, most of all, to enjoy their friendship ties. Most of them were from the barrio *Villatina* (described in previous chapter) that experienced turmoil at the time because of the territorial confrontation between youth gangs.

To differentiate themselves from the youth who were involved in gangs or in the militias, the members of this group described themselves as *fuera del montón* [unique,

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<sup>21</sup> The *Red Juvenil* is a city-wide youth network that encourages youth involvement in grassroots organizing, policy making and in finding peaceful alternatives for the resolution of conflicts. The *Consejo Municipal de Juventud* is a popular elected council of 16 youth who represent each of the zones of Medellín and have an advisory role on youth issues and policies in the metropolitan area of Medellín.

one of a kind] because they have never used firearms, been involved in delinquent activities, or consumed psychoactive drugs. However, they have been touched by death and violence, but in a different way from the *muchachos* in the gangs. On the evening of November 15, 1992 seven members of the group and two other friends gathered to talk and listen to music on a street corner. Fifteen “unidentified” heavily armed men got out of three cars, fired their guns and killed all of them and a nine year old girl.<sup>22</sup> The group of young people from the Central Eastern zone remembered and elaborated this event in a remarkable manner that I had not observed before and that contrasts with the ways of remembering the dead described so far. The following narrative by Mari Luz, the founding leader of the group and girlfriend of one of the assassinated youths, begins to illustrate this unique way of remembering the death event as one that gives them a renewed sense of living. During the first group session, Mariluz recalled how significant this episode was to them,

5. 8 Mariluz: Something else I remember as well, another thing that is very significant... maybe others have commented on it, but I want to put emphasis on the *muchachos* and their deaths, after that the group became **SO popular**. Anyway, everybody wanted to join the youth group, so we had times when there were 25-30 people ... NO! who wanted to be in the group! They wanted to join simply because of *this* event ... we were affected so much, in so much pain... it created so many hard moments. But it also generated many *hechos de vida* [life experiences] it brought one closer to different people and families, and between families, and with other youth groups... All **because of the fact** that this was “the group” that had been “marked,” everybody looking to us ... And then, there was the Eucharist ..., which we celebrated every year. At the end of the Mass there was always a symbolic object that we see as the Eucharist, and it’s offered, you know? I remember the first year there were white balloons each with the name of one of the *muchachos* [see Figure 16]. At the end we sang that song “Look at life with new eyes”, and we sent them flying... [MW/CE/09-06-97]

Remarkably, death brought them “popularity” and triggered many other things: group growth, solidarity, friendship bonds and deeper experiences of spirituality, visibility in

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<sup>22</sup> A more detailed explanation of the massacre is presented in Chapter four.

the barrio. It further directed them to “look at life with new eyes” as the lyrics of the song they sang at the end of the mass announced.

J. and J. Kleinman’s (1996) elaboration of the concept of human suffering as the focus on an ethnography of experience is useful when examining the cultural meanings that this group constructed around this marking event of death. Suffering is defined by these authors as an aspect of human experience “in which individuals and groups have to undergo or bear certain burdens, troubles and serious wounds to the body and the spirit that can be grouped in a variety of forms” (Kleinman and Kleinman, 1996:174). There are routinized forms of suffering resulting from either chronic illness or the deprivation or oppression experienced by a group of individuals (e.g. the poor, the defeated), and there is also the suffering that emerges from extreme conditions in situations of holocaust or genocide. To the forms of suffering suggested by Kleinman, I add one that occurs when a group of individuals experience a threshold-situation, an extra-ordinary situation (e.g. a massacre) that places them in a realm of experience where emotions are heightened and the very basis of daily existence is uprooted.

For the community and for the group members, the massacre of the youth represented one of these extraordinary situations. It was a moment of deep suffering that Mari Luz describes as one in which they were “affected so much, in so much pain” and when the barrio as a whole was “*muy tocado*” [deeply touched, wounded]. As Tomas expressed, “... the barrio’s people were very touched ... that massacre ... well that massacre had really left a mark on the barrio.” These youth framed this event and gave it meaning through a narrative of re-birth that is clearly rooted in the imagery of the Catholic religion and the influence that a local priest and nun had on this group. The

memory of the death-event and of the dead is effaced into another powerful memory about the group and the community's transformation and experience of a profound and vivid sense of life. It was, according to Fabio, an event that called them to "*pisar fuerte.. a pararnos en la tierra y seguir pa'delante*" [tread firmly .. stand on this earth, and push forward with each foostep]. The memory is not of the death event but of what it generated for the group and the assembly of highly ritualized events like the mass, the singing and the releasing of balloons [see figure 16]. These ritualized events imbued the death of these youth with a religious symbolism and narrative that emphasized the transitory human condition of wayfarers of the earth, and the circle of life and death, where death is always a new beginning, a new form of giving life.

To stress this construction, the song that was sung at the religious celebration becomes the acoustic environment for remembering. Through the lived experience of this event, the name of the group as wayfarers acquired a deeper meaning that the group finds in the lyric of the song,

5.9 Ferney: The first year we commemorated the death of the *muchachos* we wanted to do something symbolic of that step from death to life, to see the massacre not as death but as something that led us to strengthen group spaces and begin to work again... this was symbolized in a Eucharist, on each balloon we put the name of each *muchacho*, and then through a song.

When Ferney brings up the song, spontaneously the entire group begins to sing while they look at each other...

To look at life with new eyes,  
break barriers without looking back,  
erase words, compose new verses,  
say I love you,  
begin to love...  
si-m-ply get up and start walking.



**Figure 16** Quilt images of group “Wayferers”  
 The images with an arrow refer to the events that commemorate the death of the muchachos

This is an event intensely remembered and collectively enacted through singing together, laughing, uninterrupted remembering, and stories told to themselves about themselves. A support network existed for this group that provided them with the spaces and the symbols for individual and collective mourning. The presence of a priest and a nun in the group’s life influenced the death-life narrative constructed by the group and the emplacement of the dead in what this group described as an honouring place: the

remembrance of “how important” they were. For the group members, this event with all its emotional and social implications is the catalyst that has taken them where they are today.

The contrast between this form of remembering the dead and the others mentioned needs to be emphasized. During the three sessions we were together, these youth did not recall, remember or describe the moment of the killing or the moment they found out about the deaths, the reasons and circumstances of the massacre. The assassinated youth were remembered collectively as “*the muchachos*.” Through this event they further acknowledged their “difference” as good young people [clean-living]. The event became the ground upon which a collective memory was built with a symbolism and narrative that instructs their ethics of living and their differences.

### **An embodied place**

Things happened quickly. Suddenly we found ourselves halfway down the path, surrounded by people with the same restless disquiet: *estar bien* [feel good]. Everything pointed towards deterioration, we walked always armed, we took on certain ideas, we identified with one kind of life. We came to know death. We saw its morbid eyes that observe us, accompany us, drown us... *Wilson Restrepo – Pobladores Urbanos*<sup>23</sup>

Juancho Calvo belonged to the gang of *El Chispero* in Barrio Antioquia, and during the time of his involvement with this gang, Juancho saw the “smile of death” more than once. Juancho narrated the following story in December of 1997 to Sebastian and to a group of friends that gathered spontaneously.<sup>24</sup> Juancho remembered the day he

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<sup>23</sup> Wilson Restrepo’s account was included in the two volume collection *Pobladores Urbanos* (Arturo, 1994). Wilson is from Medellín and belonged to a youth gang. He went on to study Anthropology.

was craving some “speed” and went to his neighbour’s house to borrow his bicycle. As he leaves the house, the signs of death are everywhere, but he is oblivious to them:

5.10 ...so I go out the door, and when I look out front I notice a guy from the *Chispero* gang over there, eh?... a little bald one carrying a 38 and loading it. So I look over across from the wall ... so [I saw] the other guys with guns in their hands. So you know what? You know it’s totally usual to see them with firearms in their hands, so I gave it no importance.

His neighbour advises him not to go, as the rumour is out that the gang of the *Chispero* plans to exterminate them [the members of the gang of the *Calvos*]. Juancho is confident that they are not “in trouble,” so he insists on getting the bicycle. As he arrives in *El Cuadradero* [the place of his gang’s hangouts], the place is desolate. He only meets *Bombin* who has just finished a *roche* [a psychoactive drug commercially known as Rophynol]. *Bombin* asks Juancho to give him a ride to his girlfriend’s house, and after sharing a *pastusazo* [a crack cigarette], *Bombin* sits on the handlebars, and they depart on the very unusually silent and empty streets,

Juancho: So when we left *El Cuadradero* by the shanty town, ... and then to the corner by *Las Estefas*... we were going around the corner there and you know? Right **there** appears the *pelao*, right **there** these two *manes* [men] appear; so they passed by ..., and *Bombin* says “hello” to them, but these *manes* say **no-thing** and we keep on pedalling by. So you know what *Bombin* says? He gets down off the handlebars and he says...

*Bombin*: NO, NO, NO, you know what? You get on the handlebars ‘cause you’re so blind (laughter) and you’re slowing us down... (laughter)

Juancho:.... just like that he told me, *parce*, and you know? I swear that when I get up on the bars and the guy was starting to pedal ... and bang! When the *man* appears by the wall at *Las Estefas*. The *man* was laughing, but with the laughter of death .. he was carrying. A totally Machiavellian laugh... what a laugh, and you know? I’ve seen that son of a bitch two times, but *no me ha podido coronar esa marica parce!* [she has never been able to do me in that faggot]. [I/BA/18-12-97]

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<sup>24</sup> Juancho was being interviewed by Sebastian about the topic of the barrio’s gangs.

The signs of death were elsewhere ... Bombin was so oblivious to the risk that he greets the "enemy," only to receive a deadly laugh in return. And it was then, when Juancho felt the first, second and third shots. As Bombin lay dying, Juancho ran desperately with the other guy "just about on my back" and managed to take refuge in a corner store.

Friendship, place and death. These were common memory themes among Medellin's youth. For Juancho and the other youth of barrio Antioquia, the places they know and inhabit are marked with the signs and presence of death. Death is an embodied entity vested with *agency*. Death can be seen in the smile or in the eyes of the "other" and is granted a communicative and expressive power that can control and regulate daily life, appearing in the case of Juancho, around the corner, chasing him, smiling at him. Juancho elaborates this event as an experience of a struggle with death and destiny. In his process of mourning and surviving, Juancho gives death an embodied form through the smile in the face of his "enemy," in the sequence of his and the "enemy's" movements, and through the emptiness of the space that silently screams of the inevitable. This youth is marked by a condition as a **survivor** and storyteller of the events that fill the history of each mnemonic place. A survivor, in this specific context, is one who has come in close bodily and psychic contact with death, up to the point that he felt "as if his heart was in his finger." Juancho remained alive, however, because it was not *the* moment for dying.

The social construction of death as "inevitability" at a young age or "predestination" was brought up in the previous chapter when Johana stated that "when you are going to die, death looks for you."<sup>25</sup> This construction guides Juancho and

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<sup>25</sup> This sentence appeared in the previous chapter in Johana description of her quilt image that framed in walls, streets and details of the barrio's landscape describes the night that her best friend was killed.

Johana's ways of walking and protecting themselves and is the narrative framework in which Juancho's story is framed, performed and retold. I heard this sentence said over and over by youth as they attempted to explain the death of their friends and the mistake made when they had gone to risky and "prohibited" areas.

The two events of death described in this section and the ways they were elaborated by the youth illustrate some of the contrasting and intense ways by which youth in Medellin construct their relationships to death and life, and the type of elaboration in the individual and group memories of death events. The most striking commonality in these two contrasting narratives –and the ways they were performed- is that death is granted an agency. For the group of Caminantes, death constitutes a carrier of life, a signal of their renewal. For Juancho, death is a messenger that controls their lives. Death in both cases is a vehicle for memory and an agent through which the individuals gain popularity and friendship, change positions in the bicycle and survive. These stories of death constitute one of the key narrative sequences that organize the local oral history and the coming together of youth, and city dwellers in what I have described throughout this chapter as communities of listening and telling, or communities of memory.

## **Types of Stories**

### **Ghosts Stories**

...All ghosts stories presupposed a life after death ... not matter how scary the ghosts are, isn't that optimistic? *Stephen King*

There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can "invoke" or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in – and this inverts the scheme of the Panopticon. [ ... ] This is a sort of knowledge that remains silent. Only

hints of what is known but unrevealed are passed on “just between you and me.” – Michel de Certeau, *The practice of Everyday Life*.

In the everyday world of Medellín’s urban dwellers, “violence” and terror are tangible realities: they can be counted (in the number of dead), grasped (the impossibility to circulate), faced (can or can not be looked at, named) and felt. Violence and terror, however, are not only experienced in a concrete manner; they are also elaborated in an imaginary<sup>26</sup> of the occult and the fantastic, where ghosts, witches, curses, anthropomorphic images and destiny feed fantasies, imagination and fears while informing social relations in daily life.<sup>27</sup> In this section, I examine two examples of this type of stories in order to illustrate another vital realm of the local oral history and the circumstances and social relations under which a group of individuals come together as a community of memory. I classify these narratives into a *type* of stories that combine human and non-human characters and human and supernatural powers. In the narration of these stories the events are generally presented as “fact” and the narrators commonly mix supernatural beings and phenomena, distant and recent past.

In the barrios, stories of mystery, of human and animal ghosts and souls, and various of various forms of magic (e.g. indigenous, black) and spirit possession abound: wandering spirits appear and disappear in the fields, a horse dragging chains, a beautiful wandering and lamenting woman who was killed by her husband, a headless priest, the barrio’s *quarterlies* [the wheelbarrow man] who wanders at dawn with his dog, and the

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<sup>26</sup> The notion of *imaginary* connects with two terms, first to “image” in the general sense of the term (not just visual but as form), and second, with the notion of invention. Cornelius Castoriadis (1997) understands *imaginary* not as an adjective but as a substantive: a place of creation in any human collective, a “dimension of images, conscious or unconscious, perceived or imagined” (Battaglia, 1995:440).

<sup>27</sup> The shared presence in community places of ghosts and devils with daily activities and violent actions was already noted in Chapter three on the history of Barrio Antioquia.

devil that since the 1950s has made appearances to the unfaithful, drug addicts, *mafiosos* [mafia people] and *malos* [bad guys]. The devil is sometimes dressed as a tall and sensual blond woman, other times with a horn and a fork, and on occasion with a tuxedo and a hat. There are the witches who run on roofs trying to seduce the young; the father or grandfather that appears in people's houses and prepares hot chocolate; the *duendes* [dwarves] that, like tricksters, use tricks and illusion to confuse and scare the *muchachos*. The night as the paradigmatic place of this imaginary is the peak momentum for illicit underground activities and for the roamings of fantastic and ghostly creatures. During my fieldwork, I heard these stories from young and old, male and female, and every time a story was told, it was welcomed with great enthusiasm and complemented with further detail and other similar tales.

How can one explain the dynamic presence of these types of stories and tales that are rather evocative of small, rural communities and maps of fear constructed on the uncertainty of the unknown, of the powers of the "supernatural"? How do we explain the vitality of these stories in an urban context like Medellin, where the immediacy of violence marks *tangible* maps of fear and terror? My argument is that the circulation and recreation of these stories in the daily life of Medellin's urban dwellers represent attempts to control the reproduction of social life in a context that is continuously altered by violence. An example of this is the story told by Mello about a procession and a curse,

5.11. Mello<sup>28</sup>: We're talking about something that happened to a procession we were in. I was very young then, but I do remember, I was in the procession. Along comes a guy named, Yomar, he was on a bicycle, and then came the whole

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<sup>28</sup> Mello recorded this story while we were at the memory workshop in "La Finca". He took the tape recorder and walked around as he taped his story. He asked me to include it with the other stories that they, the members of the gang of *El Cuadradero*, have put together for the book of anecdotes that I assembled for the community.

procession. I was at a corner when he comes and dumps his bike beside me and started to shoot at these *pelaos*, all in the middle of the procession. The boys ran up to the roof and started to throw roof tiles at him... and then, you know, they had a curse on the procession... they say that anyone who defiles a procession or a Mass is a curse. He didn't even last eight days. They got him for what he had done. So that's the story of the processions here, that nobody should interfere with them. [MW-GC/BA/29-10-97]

Curses, or better, "the fear of curses," become a strategic mechanism for maintaining the neutrality and safety of processions, and consequently for ensuring that key rituals of the culture are preserved.

A few days before November 2<sup>nd</sup>, the day of the dead, fifteen of us celebrated the birthdays of two members of the youth group of Barrio Antioquia. That night Dani -- a mother of two in her thirties -- told us about a witch who used to terrify her and her sisters every fifteen days when she would fly past on a broom casting her shadow for them to see. They became so afraid of the witch coming by, that they would go home much earlier than usual. Dani's story activated a lively exchange of stories. Diana spoke of how the devil scared her arrogant brother who was mixed-up in problems, Jeannette remembered the lamenting souls haunting her family in the cemetery, and Nini described an occasion when she and two other friends were observing the moon, which suddenly took the form of an owl. Later, the owl blurred and the moon turned first into three skulls and then into one big skull with one eye closed and a knife that pierced through the skull. Martha told the others that in November "the month of Souls," her aunts sleep all in one room because their house, a very old one, is full of *espantos* [spirits] including their father's wandering soul. Arlen, Cesar, Ivan and the others followed the stories with fascination, and we all alternated between laughs and expressions of fear. The storytelling was a rehearsal of a variety of emotions and feelings that brought this group into a common sensorial ground.

These memories that evoke imaginaries of fear, death and terror temporarily ameliorate violence's abrasive presence, reconfiguring it under specific grammatics, pragmatic strategies and regulations. This reconfiguration is achieved by displacing terror and fear from the slippery, uncontrollable and immediate realm of daily violence and moving it to other spheres: to an imaginary of fear, to the realm of memory and to the realm of emotions and magic. Feldman's (1991) argument that the presence of stories of this type is the result of the flooding of social space with death, destruction and evil is applicable in this context. This type of oral tradition tries to displace the irrationality and non-sense of the immediate reality and attempts to reassert control through exaggeration and imagination. The displacement is in this case through time, space and place, moving fear from the present and the "here" to the realm of memory and the imagined. But it is also situational, as it opens a place within the community of memory to express such emotions during the moment that the stories are shared.

### **Possessed Spirits**

During the first memory workshop with the gang members of *El Cuadradero*, Milton, their leader, stood in front of the group to recount his experiences with a sorcerer who was "possessed by five spirits" and "had made a pact with the devil." He framed this story by letting us know that those "who have lived it" are the *only* ones who know this story. Milton located himself and his friends as *witnesses* of the spirit possession and of the intervention of the spirits in their activities as a gang. The story we heard from Milton "spoke *the truth*", "because it happened to me, I was a **witness** of everything he did". Milton remembered this unique and "eclectic" sorcerer who would only become

possessed once he had consumed a full jar of *Chamber*, a mix of pure alcohol sweetened with root beer and wine,<sup>29</sup>

5.12. Milton: A sorcerer, and I didn't even believe in God then... you see, I robbed things and brought them to him... I would bring a jug of wine and he'd drink it and be taken by a spirit and then...

(Milton changes his voice using a deep guttural sound)

... "aaahhgff, uuuff" ... that's how he talked, look at this *man* (he points towards Wilderson who is laughing) he was completely scared of the guy! Ah! So one time we said, "let's go to his house", and the sorcerer said to me "you know what? bring me a jug of *Chamber*" of alcohol, and you know? ... I saw it, it happened to me, I lived it.. I saw him grab these huge jugs and drink like this (he motions to imitate having a big jar in his hands and drinking non-stop from it..) and *rararara ah!* he drank them like that when he had the spirit in him, and do you think he got drunk? *Nada* [Not at all]!!! *Ua .., ua.., uff!* You know? He would get like 5 spirits in him at once, one called *muchapaz* [lots of peace] and everything. So he'd turn off the lights and me just standing like this ..,

Milton goes and stands against the wall, his hands touching it to illustrate his own reactions to the possessed sorcerer. The entire group is looking at him and following his story while speaking and laughing. Milton, locates himself one more time, reminding them that this "happened to me, I have lived this." He continues his narration exhibiting the best skills of a storyteller,

And he'd say, "Want to see my claw?" it was like Freddy Kruger's hand, nobody believed it. So I'm standing when I feel like *ssseeZZzz...* he was there in the darkness and he took something out, I don't know what .. and the entire wall on fire and [he would scream] *uuuff.. guaff..* like when a knife is being sharpened ... *fiuull!* So .. you'd see this big hairy thing, and I'm thinking "*oh mama*", and he'd say "I'm stronger than God", and I praised him. So he'd put out his hand like this so that people would give their souls to him. I don't know if I made a pact with him, but my friends say that I did. I made a pact with him because I was so bad, and even now the Devil tells me to go back to him, but I say NO! I've already given myself to God. [MW-GC/BA/19-08-97]

<sup>29</sup> I characterize the sorcerer as eclectic in two senses. First, in terms of his spirit possession. Spirit possession has been defined as an individual's feeling of being possessed by an evil or spirit which makes him or her act as *it* wants and not as he or she wants (Caro-Baroja, 1964). In the case of these spirits and the sorcerer, there was no disagreement between sorcerer and spirits, on the contrary, the spirits did what the sorcerer wanted them to do. The second reason to characterize the sorcerer as eclectic is in terms of the combination of spirit possession practices and rituals (associated more to the sciences of the occult and Afro American religions) and satanic cults in which spirit possession is not very common.

Milton bear witness through his eyes and senses. He sees the wall on fire and feels the hand transformed into a horrific “claw” when the sorcerer becomes possessed. The spirits that possess the sorcerer intervene to guide his gang’s evil actions, memorializing the consciousness of killing, the use of firearms and the images of horror. The spirits become vehicles *for* memory, *for* witnessing with self-agency. In other words, “spirits retain specific memories and thereby index the social relations to which they pertain” (Lambek 1996:240). In Milton’s experience, the memories retained by the five spirits are those that evoke their “stronger-than-God power,” and that would lead his gang to further involvement with violence. The spirit in Milton’s remembrance is further a vehicle for witnessing the violence taking place and becomes an agent of violence and terror. On another occasion when Milton narrated this story,<sup>30</sup> he stressed again his location as a witness while he granted agency to the spirit, to the sorcerer and to themselves (his gang) in the violence that had taken place in those times: “and it was because of this that there was more violence in the barrio on our part, it was then when we were most violent.” The spirits and the sorcerer became the medium by which the experiences of Milton’s gang were organized into specific violent actions (Aretxaga, 1997).

Milton’s narrative framework emphasized the experience’s out-of-the-ordinary characteristics, and for this he relied on narrative, and particularly on an embodied performance that re-enacted how the sorcerer was possessed. The narrative also speaks of the creation of a shared experiential realm of “possession” between the sorcerer and his audience –Milton’s gang- when the possessed sorcerer invites Milton to “see his claw.” At the same time, telling this story allows Milton to document his change in lifestyle and

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<sup>30</sup> He presented this story when several people of the barrio gathered in December of 1997 for the closing event of the project of historical reconstruction of the barrio’s life.

to add to the story a narrative of redemption that bears a moral message for the other members of the group. When Milton brought the story up, the group exploded into a catharsis of laughter, but followed him with great interest. Milton brought a memory that all of them knew as members of his gang. Their troubled past made its way back through the telling and performance of this story (Aretxaga, 1997). In this context, stories of ghosts and sorcerers constitute an expression of collective memories and a vehicle through which shared interpretations of the past are elaborated.

Feldman argues that the imaginative intervention that these type of stories document alters the fundamental nature of that which is experienced as pre-given and reveal the magnitude to which “this compensation of the imaginary is simply the intensification of an imaginary infrastructure that formerly upheld the existing state of things now fading or decentered” (Feldman, 1995:23) Through the telling of and the listening to these types of ghost and spirit possession stories, a communicative channel is created. This channel opens up possibilities of elaborating individual and collective emotions, and creates communicative outlets for expressing reactions of fear and terror and for grasping situations where the limits of the possible and bearable are challenged.

Stories of ghosts and spirit possession constitute a form of documenting how the past “in its multiplicity of mythical forms has a persistent way of coming back into the present, nagging and pressing, organizing experiences into forms of actions.” (Aretxaga, 1997:40) The stories refer to imagination and to exaggeration, but at the same time they are inscribed in a movement of communicative expansion that circulates through rumour and oral tradition.

## **Conclusion: communities of memory**

In this chapter, I have discussed death and the dead as the narrative weaving threads of a local oral history, as well as key organizers of daily interactions among urban dwellers. This local oral history is rooted in daily interactions and is organized around stories of death, dying and those who have died. Artefacts, places, performances and physical marks preserve the memories of those who have died and actualize the presence and memory of the dead in daily life. This chapter also highlighted that the oral history of death and the dead nourishes the formation of communities of memory and prompts Medellin's city dwellers towards actions that address their physical, social and cultural survival in a violent social context.<sup>31</sup>

Allan Feldman (1991) argues that a similar kind of oral history exists in Belfast by pointing to the ways in which people from Belfast initiate dialogue with strangers through the "recitation of the dead" and how biographies, oral family ledgers and neighbourhood solidarity are organized around shared genealogies of the dead. The violence taking place in Belfast is characterized as a political conflict where ethnic identities and political affiliations are at stake. In Medellin, the political affiliations, social or ethnic affinities and boundaries between political, everyday and drug related violence are blurred. This is reflected in the place and use that an oral history of death has in daily life. The oral history of death in Medellin documents the magnitude of human losses and the impact that death and dying, violence and killing have on the daily life of

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<sup>31</sup> Rappaport (1994) makes a similar argument for the case of the Cumbales, an indigenous community in the highlands of southern Colombia. The context, however, is quite different as in this case the Cumbales are leading a political struggle for land recuperation. In this struggle, historical knowledge, oral tradition, stories and written texts constitute the ground that prompts the Cumbales towards action.

urban dwellers.<sup>32</sup> It narrates the tragedy of death and violence and the disruption of daily life that takes place within local communities, neighbourhood blocks, families or friends. This oral history provides survival tools for daily life, documents lived experiences of witnessing and seeing death and public community discourses of suffering and struggle. The local experience of witnessing death and violence is organized within historical narratives that allow urban dwellers to establish some control of their lives among the scattered absurd reality.

The construction of the dead as “absent/present bodies” and as “disappeared” generates a collective symbolism that defines the central place of death and the dead as realms of lived experience and as central elements of an allegory of suffering and loss that is documented in oral history. The sheer amount and regularity of these forms of remembering stresses how the dead have become a referent of the ways of inhabiting the here and the now, particularly for youth and for those urban dwellers who have a close experience with violence. The presence in memory of those “*que ya no estan*” triggers an identity referent that is not exhausted neither in the “we” nor in the “other.” Their presence introduces another element of identity formation: *ellos/ellas los que ya no estan*. The past and the absent bodies become in these memory practices closely linked to the actions in the present. The absent body is an image of the past, but it is also of the now. It is an image that inhabits meaningful places and that in Walter Benjamin’s (1988) words is an image “in which the past and the now flash in a constellation.”

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<sup>32</sup> In Belfast, the oral history of death reinforces a sense of identity as community, providing a memory material that gives substance to their struggle and organizes the local experience of political violence within a local historical narrative where a sense of collective defilement is deposited.

In speaking about communities of memory there is not a reference to the fascination of a group with its past or their impossibility of overcoming it, but to an understanding of how remembering the past and the dead provides a bridge and a link for a group of people to come together and find material, emotional and symbolic commonalities in remembering and forgetting. These temporal communities are also articulated around those social networks or “microcommunities of pain” that form around those who are absent. In a community of memory, tellers and listeners continuously inter-change roles and weave temporary threads of identity and membership through the daily acts which they remember and forget. The emotional vessels that activate the remembrance of “things past,” the pool of stories, narratives and verbal arts, the memory practices, and the individuals who tell, perform and listen to them are the constitutive elements of these communities.

## Chapter 6

### Territoriality, circulation and memory

Everywhere we turn we find place at issue in the alienation and violence from which human beings have suffered so devastatingly in modern times. More often than we realize, the alienation is from (a given) place and the violence has been done to (some) place and not only to people in places. *Edward Casey – Getting Back Into Place*

This chapter turns to the practices of territoriality and circulation -- specifically, walking and travelling in/through the city -- to further explore the relationships between people, memories and violence. It continues my task of examining how places are culturally constructed and invested with significance by Medellín city dwellers. I argue here that territoriality<sup>1</sup> and circulation, as ways of knowing and operating within the living environment of the city, constitute fundamental forces in place making (García-Canclini, 1996; Knox and Marston, 1998; Riaño, Y. 1988). Territoriality and circulation also constitute practices of memory that are continuously reconfigured through the lived experience of violence for the inhabitants of Medellín. This chapter describes the appropriation and inscription of the social spaces<sup>2</sup> of the city with territorial and mnemonic marks and the transformation of these spaces into contested territories.

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<sup>1</sup> Territoriality is defined as the demarcation of boundaries by persons or groups with the purpose of organizing and controlling the space. "Space" can range from the bubble of personal space, to the space of group membership, to the division of the world into nation-states (Johnston, Gregory, and Smith, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> So far my discussion of place has not directly addressed uses of city space. This chapter looks at these uses, focusing on territorial and circulating practices in and through the city. Space is understood here as a product of social relations and the result of a threefold historical and political process: a *built* space – product of architectural design and construction; a *regulated* space – by planning and public policies, and an *appropriated* space, as it is lived and experience by groups and individuals (Riaño, Y. 1999). This relational conception of space takes distance from a generalize tendency in natural, social and human sciences to conceptualize space either as a 'backdrop' across which social processes and individuals move, or as a physical 'container' of cultures and social processes (Agnew, 1993).

The mapping of the practices of territoriality and circulation is anchored in an understanding of *territory* as a lived space that acts as a realm for the construction of social and cultural differences. The territory also constitutes for the city dwellers a focus and a symbol that guides the remembering and forgetting practices.<sup>3</sup> *Walking*, according to Michel de Certeau, is a “way of operating” that actualizes and re-enacts memory and individuals’ sense of place. These re-enactments take place in the acts of individual appropriation of the surrounding environment, and through the relations individuals establish with the different positions and places they move through (De Certeau, 1988). *Travelling in/through the city* constitutes another “way of operating” that enables city dwellers to apprehend the city environment through the sensorial and social experience of circulating. Travelling in the city, García-Canclini (1996) suggests, is a practice that is embedded in the everyday movement of city dwellers and that is associated with the experience of dwelling [habitat]. Through travelling, city dwellers activate their memories, images and imaginations of places (García-Canclini, 1996).

The chapter begins with a description of the territorial transformations that have taken place in Medellín and with a review of current discussions on place, deterritorialization and globalization. A second section examines the circulation practices of city dwellers describing the type of restrictions faced and the tactics used for a safe and protected circulation. I review in this section, some of the geographical and symbolic typologies created by the city dwellers of Medellín. The final part of the chapter

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<sup>3</sup> An extensive body of literature on territory is related to the construction of nation states and territorial sovereignty (Anderson, 1992; Chatterjee, 1986; Gupta, 1997). My discussion does not directly address these practices of territoriality, however, it may provide interesting material to examine the ways that violence territorializes not only the micro territories or the city, but also the National State. The ways that youth gangs construct and fight over territories is similar to the ways States are constructed and macro violences operate within that State (Wills, personal communication).

discusses the relationships between territory, social groups and cultural identities, and the construction of otherness through territoriality.

## Medellin and its territorial transformations

No city is what it used to be. The same place does not remain the same.  
Yet, despite great changes some places continue to make sense. *Eugene  
Walter – Placeways.*

For Medellin city dwellers, a sense of territoriality shapes their relationships with the lived space of the city and contributes to the construction of notions of the self and the other. Several of the daily practices, stories and behaviours described in this dissertation illustrate the territorial identifications of Medellin city dwellers. There are, for example, the inscription of the landscape as a soundscape and memory-place and the remembering practices triggered by physical structures or landmarks.

*Territoriality* refers to the specific attachment of individuals to specific spaces and it is a product of culturally established meanings.<sup>4</sup> Territoriality frames the uses of space and claims to the control of a particular geographic area of individuals, groups, institutions and nations. Practices of territoriality inform the social, physical, cultural or political uses of the space by city dwellers. Knox and Marston (1998) assert that territoriality is a means by which the regulation of social interaction, the regulation of access to resources, and the provision of a focus and symbol of group identity are accomplished. The sense of *territory* represents “a critical distance” by which individuals

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<sup>4</sup> Since the pioneer work of Hall (1966), the field of proxemics has documented the social and cultural meanings that people give to personal and social space. This literature examines the “unwritten territorial rules” that people within specific social and cultural context follow. The ways each society or group claims space (e.g. regular use –who sits where-, spatial markers –plaques, graffiti-, personal space) is culturally specific but further influenced by class, gender, ethnicity, and geographical location.

mark a difference and establish a distance between themselves “us” and them, the “others” (Villa, 1998).

Territory is as well a key site where memories circulate as well as where contradictory impulses of memories dwell.<sup>5</sup> The circulation of memories in conditions of war resembles those daily movements through a city like Medellin that require from its residents a competence and sense of intuition to know the paths and detours to take and the changing conditions of risk. The circulation of memories, individuals and goods through a city profoundly affected by violence creates complex cultural and social webs. Jairo Montoya (1996a:77) describes this traffic of memories as a *knot* that: “is not the reality caused by the crossing of lines, it is on the contrary, a surface effect that is produced by the encounter of lines. [...] Beyond the knot there is nothing.” To expand further this image, one could describe collective memory as a texture formed by the encounter and crossing of individual and group memories.

Practices of territoriality simultaneously “take place” as territories and places undergo profound social and cultural transformations. The narratives and daily practices of Medellin’s city dwellers also illustrate the various ways in which violence has re-territorialized the city. Under the pervasive presence of violence in daily life, routes of circulation, uses of social space, the establishment of safety and security mechanisms, and the classification of territories are continuously redefined by degrees of violence,

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<sup>5</sup> The reference is about the connection between a territory and a traumatic or violent experience (e.g. torture, death) that is elaborated by the individual or the group as “obsessive” memory. This is a kind of literal remembering that takes the form of a repetitive memory. This memory in turn feeds hate and revengeful violent actions. This use of memory constitutes according to Todorov (1997), an “abuse” of memory in which the present violent actions and suffering of others are justified: a revenge for the past suffering that the individual or the group can not forget. The territory acts here like a template that keeps bringing back this memory and reminding the individual and/or the group of the action and motive that feed their emotions.

safety and a sense of belonging. For the city dweller, the lived experience of violence is not easily grasped. Violence acts as an erratic and chaotic force that requires resourceful survival practices. Like in the movement of a pendulum, violence sometimes confines the city dwellers to their homes or blocks, at other times displaces them by force, while at other times destroys the physical and social referents that were attached to places.

In the last decade, Medellín's city dwellers have seen the weakening of the capacity of public spaces like the *barrio*, the streets or the downtown plazas to trigger socially and culturally meaningful interactions. This transformation is the result of varied social, transnational and technological processes and has also been shaped by the dynamics of urban growth, everyday violence, and urban policies and planning. The city has witnessed the displacement of a large number of city dwellers from their place of residence because of the dynamics of territorial violence and the direct impact that macro violences (drug related, political inspired or state repression) are having in marking defined cartographies of terror and imaginaries of fear that cross the entire city [see chapter 3]. The arrival in Medellín of large numbers of *desplazados* who are escaping terror and violence from the rural areas and small towns<sup>6</sup> has produced a multifold crisis with clear re-territorializing effects. The proportion of this massive displacement towards the cities mirrors the massive migrations towards the cities in the 1950s-60s that radically transformed Colombian cities. The *desplazados*' experience of displacement is lived in the city amidst a sense of de-territorialization from their homelands and a practice of invasion and squatting in high-risk areas of the city. These transformations underscore

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<sup>6</sup> Antioquia is the department of Colombia that produces the larger numbers of forced displacement (45%) (Comisión Colombiana de Juristas, 1997). In 1998, 8,000 displaced families arrived in Medellín. These families were largely been ignored by the municipal, departmental and national authorities and established large new squatter areas in areas of high risk for landslides.

the emergence in the city of new forms and practices of identity that as Liisa Malkki has pointed out “are categorized in reference to deterritorialized ‘homelands,’ ‘cultures,’ and ‘origins’” (Malkki, 1997:52).

In the city of Medellin, affected by multiple forms of violence and conflict, the territory has become a key realm to register and follow the dynamics of social and economic exclusion, violence and war. Historian Martha Villa (1998:21) describes the place of territory in the current dynamics of a city “at war,”

One of the more notorious aspects of this transformation has to do with the place that territory has in the conflicts and its effects in the urban life. For the actors involved in the dynamics of the conflict, the territory is not only the stage for confrontations but it also symbolizes power. Territory is that which is granted during times of alliances and what is negotiated during periods of truce. But not only for them. The territory has become for the whole city, the most immediate register of the oscillations of the war.

Consequently, the processes of deterritorialization and re-territorialization of the city have been marked by war dynamics in which territories are constantly fought over and borders changed. Geographical and social realms like the zone, the commune or the barrio are subjected to continuous fragmentation and division. In the North Eastern zone, for example, territorial borders and divisions were imposed by youth gangs that since 1985 established control of entire barrios or sectors. Those who were more powerful and with direct relations with the drug cartel -- as intermediaries for the recruiting of youth who would provide a variety of criminal services -- established their “offices” and territories in some of the barrios of the zone. The appearance by 1989 of the militias as armed self-defence groups against delinquency brought another re-territorialization. The militias assumed control of several barrios and imposed new territorial conventions and regulations (e.g. prohibition of consumption of drugs and robbery in the barrios). The

signing of the peace agreement with the militias (1994) lifted restrictions for circulation in the zone and brought changes in the use of space and the crossing of borders between barrios. Later, the militias who did not sign the peace agreement expanded their territorial control and imposed other territorial borders and circulation restrictions. By 1997, the surviving members of several gangs that had disappeared with the arrival of the militias made an alliance among themselves to fight for the control of several barrios with the militias. Once the militias were weakened, this new gang established another set of territorial conventions and regulations. Since 1996, the paramilitary have been trying to establish their presence in these barrios and one of the means used is to offer employment in the “paramilitary” ranks to youth from the militias and the youth gangs.

The socially stratified response to the threat of armed violence, crime, delinquency and terrorism provides examples of the dynamics of re-territorialization taking place in the city. High wired fences and walls have gone up in middle and upper class neighbourhoods and residential complexes. Entrances to neighbourhoods and several public areas are now restricted by stop-posts, fences, closed-circuit TV cameras, and security guards who strip search and question any visitor. Bars and fences stand in windows and doors of houses and apartments regardless of the social class and guards with ‘ferocious’ dogs are a common sight around residential neighbourhoods and commercial areas.

Citizen’s protection, in this context, has become a profitable market and a profitable discourse for armed groups and other citizen groups (e.g. The Community Action Boards). Distrust by the majority of city dwellers of the legitimacy and loyalties

of institutions like the police and the army have facilitated the proliferation of both private and “illegitimate” mechanisms of defence and vigilance. Jaramillo, Ceballos and Villa (1998) have documented these official and non-official responses in Medellin. The 1994 peace agreement with the urban militias included the setting up of a security co-operative that employed 350 *ex-milicianos* to patrol and provide security in five areas of the North Eastern zone.<sup>7</sup> Militias, “*autodefensas comunitarias*” [community self-defence groups], gangs and the army have all incorporated a community discourse of “citizenship protection.” As a result, several of them have made a small business of street vigilance that often alternate with street cleaning activities.<sup>8</sup> For these services communities must pay, but these groups justify them as an expression of their commitment to “protect” the community.

Under this landscape, city dwellers’ ways of operating and moving in the city and barrios have been transformed into practices characterized by unpredictability and uncertainty. Wonder, tactical knowledge and intuition drive the competence and local knowledge required to circulate in a city like Medellin.

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<sup>7</sup> Jaramillo et al., (1998) document how the initiative of re-inserting militias to patrol the barrios was seen by the local authorities as the opportunity to access and establish some links with those communities where the police force was not seen as legitimate. However, the experiment was unsuccessful. The sudden official role assumed by militia members prompted their abuse of authority against the communities and brought power confrontations among them. As a result, the activities of vigilance became sometimes activities of retaliation against residents who complained about their abuse of authority, or bloody settlements of accounts that produced, in a very short time, a hundred deaths among *milicianos*.

<sup>8</sup> Differences between a militia and a gang are increasingly more difficult to establish, particularly as the political discourse of the militias blurs and the social projection of the gangs towards the communities grows. There are as well within each of these groups several “sub-types.” This includes the several militias still active in the barrios, the re-inserted militias, the *autodefensas comunitarias* [community self-defenses] that are against the social cleansing activities of militias and that focus their action in defending their territory (Jaramillo et al, 1998). There are as well, the reinserted youth gangs that are now providing services of street cleaning and surveillance to the barrios, and the active youth gangs with some of them providing “social services” to the community.

## Place, deterritorialization and globalization

In examining the practices of territoriality, this chapter engages with a growing literature that accounts for the impact of global processes on the cultures, the societies and the economy (Appadurai, 1988) and with postcolonial writings on place and displacement (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1995; hooks, 1990). These works challenge anthropological notions of “people and cultures” as territorially bounded and the rooting of culture in spatial and local terms (Appadurai, 1988; Gupta and Fergusson, 1997). Thus, for example, the observation of the increased movement towards the deterritorialization of identities in the cities<sup>9</sup> informs some of the arguments about the loss of social ties that were inscribed in specific social spaces. The sense of displacement that large numbers of people experience – either as refugees, as colonized peoples or as transnational workers or executives -, and the deterritorialization of experience and identity are inscribing culture in a complex terrain that concepts such as locality and community can not account for. Concepts such as diaspora, border identities and world culture are gaining a renewed importance<sup>10</sup> in the face of the articulation of economic and financial markets and the expansion of communication technologies that create

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<sup>9</sup> Ortiz (1998) describes how these processes of de-territorialization apply to the cities. For example, the creation of places void of relational and historical meaning like the airports, highways, shopping malls. Marc Augé (1992) has called these types of places “non places” because the interactions that take place there are between anonymous individuals. In a non-place, Augé argues, there is a lack of relations and symbols that can link the place with the individuals. Other expressions of these deterritorialization are the so-called “planetary identities” (e.g. environmental movement) and what Ortiz denominates an international popular memory that is the result of those images and gestures transmitted by the mass media and that allow citizens of the world to share some cultural codes.

<sup>10</sup> These concepts account for the presence of groups of people that are displaced from their homelands and that build their lives away from their homelands. For these groups, a memory of “home” articulates their collective identity and constitutes the binding point for a diasporic culture. Border identities and diasporic cultures are concepts that account for the minority status of these groups in the new society, their construction of cultural references “outside” a national territory, and their positioning – culturally and politically – at a border between cultures and worldviews. This border position represents the place from which they choose to speak (Barkan and Shelton, 1998; hooks, 1995).

common cultural referents (Barkan and Shelton, 1998; García-Canclini, 1998; Ortiz, 1998).

These works have made a contribution to challenging the spatially territorialized notion of culture, indicating the impact that global processes are having in concepts such as community and locality (Gupta and Fergusson, 1997). The notion and existence of a sense of place that is rooted to the local have also been questioned in these works (McDowell, 1999). However, their tendency to approach notions such as locality as outdated and emptied of meaning have further entrenched Social Sciences and Humanities disregard for “place.”<sup>11</sup> Reflecting on the politics of location and place by women in Northern Ireland, Aretxaga (1997) warns about the risk of creating a new binarism in which the transnational space tends to be seen as unproblematic and the local constructions of place and locality with all their heterogeneities are disregarded. Escobar also criticizes the binary reduction that may occur when the “global is equated with space, capital, history and agency, and the local with place, labour and tradition” (1997:1). Aretxaga and Escobar criticisms provide a useful place-based dimension from which to approach global and local processes.

In Medellín these dynamics are particularized by the ways in which violence has become one of the main forces that de-territorializes and re-territorializes the city. The study of the dynamics of territorialization, displacement and re-territorialization in this context underscore the impact of globalization on localities and the relevance of concepts

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<sup>11</sup> Casey (1987; 1993; 1996) has made a thorough review of this disregard of place and its reduction to the notion of space within Western models of thought in philosophy, social sciences and humanities. He argues that in the past three centuries the paradigm of natural and social sciences in which the “exclusive cosmological foci are time and space” has actively suppressed place, seeing it as something regressive or trivial.

of place and territory in the cultural processes taking place in the city. Further, they highlight the ways in which violence constitutes a force that territorializes not only national and international borders but also local and familiar borders.

## **Walking and Travelling routes and detours**

The ordinary practitioners of the city live “down below,” below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk – an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmanner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban “text” they write without being able to read it. – Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of the Everyday Life*

City dwellers’ movements in and through the city, the pathways followed and the routes created are ordinary practices that situate them in the city landscape. In Medellin, however, walking and travelling are continuously redefined and reorganized by the dynamics of violence. There are tactics that assist them in deciding when it is safe to walk and travel, when and how to look, and how to act in a “foreign” territory while continuing with their everyday activities. Michel de Certeau (1988:97) states that the act of walking “is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered.” Walking involves a process of appropriating the topography and surrounding landscape, it is a “spatial acting-out” of the place, and establishes a trajectory that is based on the continuity and relationship between the different individual positions in space. Through travelling,<sup>12</sup> city dwellers appropriate the landscape and the topography

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<sup>12</sup> With the work of James Clifford (1997) on the trip and travelling there seems to be a renewed interest in anthropology, cultural studies and human geography for this topic. Most of these works, however, are focussing on international or regional travelling and particularly in an elaboration of what may constitute a travel culture. In this sense Nestor Garcia-Canclini’s (1996) work on urban trips and travelling within the city of Mexico is an important contribution to examine the relations and networks of meanings that city dwellers establish with the city they inhabit.

through the mediation of the means of transportation (e.g. vehicular transportation, metro, bicycles, and cars). The urban voyage, García-Canclini (1996) has suggested, is a type of journey that organizes a significant part of the common sense that the city has for the subjects. Travelling is a means to actualize our memories of places and circuits and involves the array of tactics, detours and fantasies by which the city dweller establishes relationships with others and with the environment.

This chapter addresses circulation practices of city dwellers and chapter seven expands on the walker and traveller of the city and his/her subject positioning as observer and witness. In what follows, I present examples of the ways in which violence restricts the circulation of urban dwellers and becomes an active force in the processes of deterritorializing and re-territorializing the city.

### **Restrictions and protections**

On the main roads accessing the barrios of the Central Eastern zone or the North Eastern zone, the militias frequently set up stops (militias-posts) to control the circulation of public and private transportations as well as those entering and leaving the area. Collective vans, buses and pedestrians are all expected to stop at these points. The army and the gangs also practice this action, sometimes in the same areas, at others in different locations according to the territorial control they each have. The inhabitants of barrios like *La Sierra* (Central Eastern zone) often have to walk long distances and through steep hills because they cannot gain access to the nearby public transportation stops. These stops are situated in an area they can not enter easily because gangs control it and people from *La Sierra* are assumed to be supportive of the militias. To exit the barrio they have

to climb further up the mountain, walk towards the neighbouring municipality of Santa Elena, and then take the intermunicipal transportation back to Medellin. The paths they follow are detours forced by the threats of violence and the “authority” of the armed groups.

I heard many stories about the difficulty of circulation from city dwellers. I heard from a youth worker that he was unable to return to the barrio where he had been working with a youth group because the militias had issued him a “never-see-you-again” warning. I heard about a group of women who organized a community meeting and no one showed up because there was a blockade at the entrance of the barrio. A youth leader told me that she heard from two young *milicianas* that the reasons for the recent killing of a young woman had been because she was considered to be “*muy loca*”: “she was always going up and down.” Her ‘liberty to circulate’ and her transgression of the implicit code of circulation by walking “up and down” raised suspicions that she was an information carrier for the gang in the neighbouring barrio. I also heard about the difficulties that a youth group had in holding meetings and conducting other activities in the North Western zone, because many of the participants could not circulate through some of the streets that connected to the meeting place. The youth group gathered youth from several barrios. Some of these youth were seen by the gang controlling the sector as part of an “enemy” sector. The teachers from Medellin’s metropolitan area were frequently unable to carry out regular classes because of the violence in the surrounding areas, or because the gangs or the militias would have threatened a student, a teacher or several others. Travelling through the city, going or returning home, and leaving or entering the barrio were no longer, for any of these individuals, routine events. The

walker or traveller was required to continuously learn about the changing regulations that each of the “illegitimate authorities” imposed on their lives.

Accordingly, other practices have developed to ensure the safety of those who wish to circulate. The revered image of the Virgin that traditionally stood in the patio or the back of the Antioqueño’s houses is now placed in the front of the houses. The statue of the Virgin has diversified her symbolic role. In the back of the house, it stood as a sanctuary and site of worship. Now, in the front, it stands as spiritual barrier and guardian protecting the house and the family from all sorts of “evil.” Statues of the Virgin have multiplied and came out in parks, corners, buses and minivans, and in the open spaces of public areas. The Virgin is the most revered and respected icon in the local religious culture and, as it was pointed out in Chapter three, the Virgin constitutes the most “accessible” and “protective” image in the Catholic religion. The intensity of the Virgin’s cult and her pragmatic qualities for protecting city dwellers are demonstrated in the widespread displays of the Virgin in public, familiar and personal environments and the numerous festivities dedicated to the establishment of communication and worship. The virgins placed in public areas are primarily expected to protect the passers by. A kind of safety bubble for circulation is created for the walker because the Virgins constitute a deterrent to crime.<sup>13</sup> Today the statue or image of the Virgin stands in the front of the houses of barrios on the city’s periphery, in buildings, offices and houses in the downtown, in upper and middle class neighbourhoods, in stores, trendy shopping centres

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<sup>13</sup> The virgin as I pointed out in chapter three is at the centre of the religiosity of Antioqueño people and a very important icon for youth, the mafia culture and the marginalized. The virgin is the figure they pray to asking for favours and luck.

and supermarkets. It also stands in each one of the stations of the new (first in the country) metro system.<sup>14</sup>

### **Crossing borders**

Breaking barriers and border crossing experiences are very present in the memories of Medellin city dwellers. The meaning attached to border crossing is mainly about the possibility of circulating through a territory that from the view point of the subject is “prohibited” either because it is seen as unsafe or because there is an explicit prohibition. Border crossing names a movement that sometimes is transgression and other times an exploration into a territory “other.” The memories of restrictions on circulation among barrios or within particular sectors are common among the youth involved in the violent conflict or those who experience it because they live in a particular sector. Their knowledge of the circuits that allow them to arrive safely at other places is also part of this pool of memories.

The opportunity to circulate freely after a long period of restriction is at the same time one of their warmest memories. One example of this comes from Mima, a 24 year old widow with two children whose former partner was one of the leaders of the gang of *Motorratores* in barrio Antioquia. As of July 1998, Mima had not seen her cousins for several years because they live in the sector of *El Coquito* and Mima lives in the sector of

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<sup>14</sup> Certainly not without controversy. The metro represented for the *paisas* their walk into a modern and technologically sophisticated city. There were strong reactions about using a symbol that conveys such a traditional weight. Although, the intention behind the hiring of artists to make statues or paintings of the virgin in each metro station, has not been “officially” recognized, it is *vox populi* that this is what is behind it. Statistics of crime and violence according to geographical areas show little crime around the area surrounding the Virgin in the metro stations.

*El Cuadradero*, two sectors in conflict with each other. In July 1998, with the celebration of an *alborada* [a dawn parade] to inaugurate the annual event of *Calles de Cultura* (see Chapter 4), Mima, disguised by the darkness and a hood, and protected by the respect and neutrality granted to this event, knocked at her cousin's door. The re-encounter brought tears, laughs and hugging and their amazement at Mima's transgression and their meeting again.

Another example of this is Arlex's vivid memory about "December 1993" in barrio Antioquia when as a result of the peace agreement he was finally able to go out,

6.1. Arlex: With the peace pact was when people began to go out again because so many never would before. They made the peace, but many still felt insecure, we still didn't go out, but over on the 31<sup>st</sup> [December 31<sup>st</sup>] they did start to. On the 31<sup>st</sup> was when you saw all these people meeting, so then I went out to *parrandear* [party] at La Cueva, I walked around the whole barrio, me who didn't go out, that day we had a great time. [MW/ BA/ 30-05-97].

The peace agreement did not represent a minor thing for Arlex. He was then able to go out of his sector and further to party, walk the *entire* barrio and have fun. Marta who is thirty and also from barrio Antioquia remembers such a "sense of freedom" experienced by the entire barrio when Richard, one of the most feared gang members, was killed. Her memory is expressed using the image of broken chains as a metaphor to name her sense of freedom [Figure # 17]. Her memory is about the possibility of circulating around the barrio because then "everyone [was] on a bicycle going up and down" and the barrio's people were "walking about the entire barrio as if they have never done it before." Her sense is that:

6.2. Marta: ... that December because everybody thought they couldn't do anything because of that *muchacho* who was doing *de las suyas* [bad things] in the barrio, and so when he was killed the barrio felt a kind of liberation and everybody went up and down, the people walked about the barrio like never before. That Christmas really had an impact on me, and [to see] the *muchachos* together ... The dove signifies that liberation and the flag signifies peace....

violence and these hands produce blood, you see where I drew the little drops of it? So in some moments hands come together and break chains, and they can be like these three little figures united to break the chains (AAAhhhhh! Several of the group scream in unison to let her know she was inspiring.) [MW/ BA/ 26-07-97]

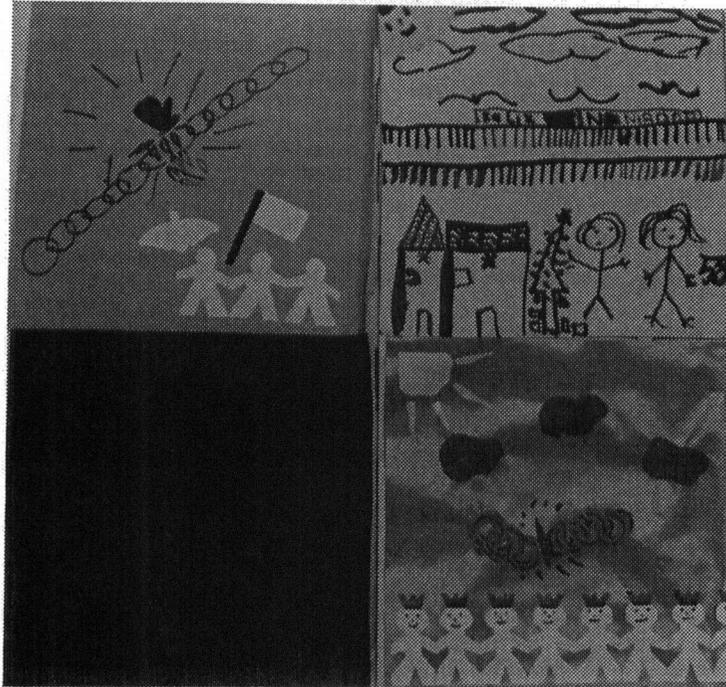


Figure 17 Liberating December, quilt image by Martha on the top left Memory workshop Training centre, Barrio Antioquia

Arlex and Marta's experience of freedom is framed in metaphors of broken chains and unity. What violence put at stake for them was their experience of territoriality and their cultural practices of wandering and walking throughout the barrio.

In the North Eastern zone, the signing of the peace pact with the militias in 1994, was of great significance for the youth participating in the youth houses. Only then, they were able to visit other youth houses. Since the creation of the youth houses, they had always met outside the zone and had not visited each other because of the territorial conflict. Wilson, the founder of the youth house of *El Popular I*, remembered these visits as was one of the "most beautiful things" they participated in. While elaborating a mental map of the North Eastern zone, he mapped these walks, framing their trajectory with the

skill of a cartographer. For Wilson, in walking to visit the youth houses, he and the others were tracing a “chain of points” that forms the “lace” that united them as youth,

6.3. Wilson: For example I know Juan because of that, because of the youth houses: I went down to Villaniza, and he came up. ... for example if someone from Villa del Socorro was there, or some people from the Popular 2 or Santa Cruz, we would have looked at the ties, I mean the chain of points that we'd united with Popular 1 and upwards. That was the idea, because in that time one of the best things was that we really knew something was happening. You felt it when you walked on foot up to the [barrio] Popular. I mean that historically there were communities up there, and you knew there were walls, so you always travelled in a *gallada* [group of friends], and since then you would see them come down [ ... ] But then afterwards you could take off and go up by yourself because there was a *sancocho* [typical soup prepared on the street], you'd go to the Youth House, because now there were ties, relationships of trust, I mean that we had produced that [MW/NE/11-10-97].

Wilson underscores this experience of visiting and building trust relations. With a deep sense of history he states their status as history makers because “we knew that something was really happening.” His cartographic image is that of a voyage through which they traced their links: up and down the steep hills to visit each other, cooking *sancochos* [potato, pork and yucca soup that is prepared on a street bonfire], and reinforcing ties that crossed borders and barriers.

Trajectory for Michel de Certeau suggests a temporal movement through space, “the unity of a diachronic succession of points through which it passes and not the figure that these points form on a space that is supposed to be synchronic or achronic.” (De Certeau, 1988: 35). Wilson’s description of their voyage incorporated both elements, the diachronic succession of points, and the figure made by these points. Movement and figure are integrated in Wilson’s reference to their practice of walking. They both evoke the acts of place making. In this sense, this youth’s trajectory speaks of a spatial figure and of the practices that invest places, and in this case trajectories, with meaning.

Martin, another youth from the youth houses, names this as the “breaking of borders,” the bringing down of “the barriers” to circulate,

6.4. Martin: Because you just couldn't, or because there was a problem (going to other barrios), so then we had the union of many groups and barrios, because there were problems between barrios and you couldn't pass through without being killed or something done to you. So because of the groups [worked together] .. this helped a lot, it was like breaking these barriers, these borders [MW/NE/11-10-97].

These youth memories resemble their movement through space that transgressed limited territorial identifications with their block, barrio or youth house and constructed ties across boundaries. I argue that these circulation practices are creating alternative territorialities and contesting those other practices in which the territory has become a war resource and a vehicle to pressure and manipulate fears. These alternative territoriality practices articulate a memory of territoriality and circulation as meaningful practices of place making. They are constructing, through imagination, territories without borders and identities across frontiers. However, this is not an easy task as the following example illustrates.

In the Central Eastern zone, the committee for youth integration promoted an event to bring youth groups together across the zone under the slogan “for a zone without frontiers.” These youth were working at promoting youth participation in city-wide issues and the establishment of youth alliances that were not restricted by territorial affiliations. During a weekend in the month of July 1997, ten to twelve youth groups from several barrios exchanged their experiences in working with the youth and participated in musical events, cultural, educative and recreational activities. The youth organizers of the event, however, feared that the armed actors, specifically the gangs, would disrupt it and to prevent this they solicited the presence of the police. Paradoxically, the way that the

police made known their presence came to contradict its idea of “a zone without frontiers.” In approaching the school where the event took place, the first visual impact was a barricade of rocks and rope set up by the police on the street that led to the school. As those approaching the event crossed the barricade and began going up the street, the second visual impact was the view of a police van at the very top of the hill.<sup>15</sup> The banners and signs made by the youth groups were out of view as the police van hid them. In the afternoon, a youth gang from the barrio higher up on the hill came down and some of the local youth challenged them to a fist-fight. The organizers had to finish the event early to prevent any clashes and because the police were leaving. The fears of the group validated their decision to ask for police protection. Unfortunately, the way that “protection” was set up brought a message of exclusion and setting up of barriers that worked against the spirit of the event.

Violence shapes in a fundamental way the activity of walking and travelling in the city. However, it affects individuals differently according to their past experience (in particular with street criminality), and the degree of social distance they establish with the violent conflict (e.g. the recognition of their neutrality, loyalties and sympathies). As well, differences of gender, age and class play a role and define the protection tactics the individuals resort to. Circulation practices are also shaped by the stories and collective imaginaries of, for example fear or faith,<sup>16</sup> which express a particular viewpoint about the safety of the how and the where of circulation (García-Canclini, 1998).

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<sup>15</sup> The view of a police van established a symbolical frontier because for a large majority of the city dwellers the presence of the police is associated with repression.

<sup>16</sup> The ways these imaginaries of fear or faith regulate and assist city dwellers in their movement through the city is illustrated in some of the innovative research carried out in urban areas in Colombia. The study of the perceptions and territories of fear in Bogotá by Niño, Lugo, Rozo and Vega (1998) is an example of this work.

## Implicit knowledge and geographical distinctions

There are several geographic distinctions that assist city dwellers in their walking and travelling in the city and that are part of a local social knowledge that guarantees their movements, daily survival and the understanding of the changing conditions governing their territories. Adriana, a resident of fifteen years of barrio Antioquia, provides an example of this geographical distinction when she explains the name of “frontier” given to her block in a sector of barrio Antioquia. This form of place naming characterizes the border between two areas, but furthermore the creation of an interstice that marks the boundaries of safety and unsafety, life and death :

6.5. Adriana: About *El Coco* [a barrio's Antioquia geographical sector]... I remember that they killed a lot of people there, although now they're in a peace process so they've stopped killing. They called our block *la frontera* [the frontier]. They came from the 24<sup>th</sup> to fight with the guys from Santa Fe. They called it *la frontera* because it was a neutral spot, because people here were very *sana* [clean-living], .. the guys met right here to fight, and then the block became something terrible. You couldn't even leave through the front door anymore because at any moment the gunfights would start [GS-TC/BA/19-06-97].

A “frontier” is endowed with a variety of uses and practices: it acts as a spatial corridor that separates the two enemy sectors. It is a site of uncertainty because of the continuous confrontations and attacks occurring there, and it is a neutral space because according to Adriana those who live there are “*sanos*” [clean-living]. Alonso Salazar (1996) describes a bridge that separates and joins two barrios in the district of Agua Blanca (Cali) which has been locally named as the “Gaza Strip.” The metaphor, Salazar tells us, “associates a frontier of death to the limits of irreconcilable enemies who want to destroy each other” (Salazar, 1996:2). The bridge stands as a physical symbol that warns about the risks of crossing. Salazar concludes that Colombia has been filled with “Gaza strips,” strips of

wars between gangs, gangs and militias, between militias, or between gangs and the army, militias and the army. Certainly, the city of Medellin provides several examples of this.

Concepts such as frontier, border or strip are incorporated in the ordinary language of city dwellers to express cultural and geographical distinctions that account for the lived experience of violence and the frontiers between life and death. They also account for the daily tactics by which city dwellers survive and establish networks of interaction and communication. The violence promoted by the armed actors imposes a cartography based on terror and restricted circulation. Municipal government and developers on the other side, impose territorial regulations and spatial exclusions. At the same time, city dwellers construct other cartographies to create safety corridors and detours, neutral interstices, and local practices and relational uses of the topography.

### **Typologies of Social Space and Spatial Practices**

The recognition of the “mood” characterizing each territory is a vital component of the local knowledge that city dwellers apply in their daily experience. During my extended fieldwork in 1996-1997 and the three other occasions I returned to Medellin, I learned to recognize the changes of “mood” in the barrios and streets according to the improvement or deterioration of the conflict. I became aware, for example, of the changes in ways of looking, moving, and interacting in the street by adults, youth and children, and in the uses of physical buildings and structures (e.g. the opening or closing of doors and windows). During my fieldwork, circulation through barrio Antioquia was “easy.” The barrio’s mood was dominated by a sense of tense peace due to the 1996 ‘non-

aggression' pact and a record period of five months without a killing. Streets were always busy with people talking, visiting, walking, riding their bicycles, or street vending; the windows and doors in most of the houses remained open and the majority of the individuals I became acquainted with circulated freely in most of the barrio. The celebrations of *minitekas*<sup>17</sup> in various blocks and sectors was the territorial proof of the barrio's peaceful mood. Several minitekas were celebrated without major interruptions or conflicts during 1997: people from all over the barrio came to them. One group that experienced restrictions in their circulation were the members of the gang of *El Cuadradero* [one of the gangs who signed the peace agreement in 1996]. This group was keenly aware of the risks of leaving their territory based on the experience of other gang members who were killed after signing the 1994 peace agreement. Their fears of circulating were also magnified by the chain of rumours that warned them about risks to their lives. Walking along with any of them, I could observe their vigilant watchfulness and alertness and the limits they established to their walkabouts.

Upon my return in July 1998, the barrio was the scene of a bloody conflict that was claiming the lives of many. A new and younger generation of the gang of *El Cuadradero* was taking an active part in the fighting. While walking in the barrio in those days, I noticed doors and windows closed, a dramatic reduction of street vending and bicycle riding, and a radically different beat and mood on the streets. As I reached the sector of *El Cuadradero*, the emptiness and the silence of the streets were remarkable, and the usual sight of children playing and youth hanging out in corners had disappeared.

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<sup>17</sup> *Minitikas* [mini discotheques] were celebrated on the streets with the setting up of a tent and a sound equipment and the hiring of a disc jockey. Alcohol was sold inside the tents and people danced all night on the street.

Even the regular group of alcoholics who gathered at the place known as *Las Estefanías* was nowhere to be seen. The few who were outside showed a vigilant attitude. I felt closely observed and scrutinized. To meet some of the members of the gang I had worked with in 1997, I went to Cesar's house, one of the oldest active members of the group. The window in the door was covered with red plastic and as I entered the house, I also observed a dark blanket covering the blinds of the living room window. During our conversation, Cesar spoke of the deterioration of the conflict and the impossibility of getting out of the house as it was assumed that he was part of the conflict. His mother also explained that she was also not able to go out as she feared for Cesar's safety. The conflict had worsened so much that he did not even find safety on his own block.<sup>18</sup> A sombre mood prevailed inside and outside.

When I went for a night visit to Doña Amparo's house, a house with constant visitors and a door I always saw opened in 1997, I found a different mood. Inside the house with windows and doors closed and locked, she and another seven neighbours spent the night decrying the situation of the barrio. They often lowered their voices to speak about what was happening, describing the latest confrontations, army searches, and shootouts. Doña Amparo and her daughter, who always watched the shootouts through the peep hole in the door, for those "coincidences of destiny," had not done so during the last shootout. This had saved them from death as many of the bullets went through the

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<sup>18</sup> Although the barrio's climate had worsened to the point of not allowing Cesar to leave his house, he still had the safety of his house. A few months later, the mood turned even worse when armed men invaded Milton's house [the leader of the gang of *El Cuadradero*] in the late night. Milton was killed while he lay in bed. By then, it had been more than a year since Milton and his group had signed the peace agreement. Milton had become a charismatic social leader in the barrio leading projects such as the setting up of a night school, the reconstruction of the barrio's history and lobbying for special schooling for children at risk.

door. All of them, one by one, described their tribulations of not being able to walk “in peace,” of not being able to let their children play outside, and the disappearance of the Friday festive night on the streets of the barrio. In December of 1998, I returned to the barrio once again. By this time, a pact of non-aggression had been signed and to my surprise I met Cesar hanging out on the street and in a sector that was not “his,” and Doña Amparo’s door and windows wide open as before. The streets were back to their business, the music blasted elsewhere, doors and windows were opened again, and bicycles and pedestrians wandered up and down the barrio. The barrio, I heard from every-one, was “calm” and “*muy bueno*.”

The mood of a place is apprehended mainly by a direct knowledge and awareness of changes in sensorial, emotional, social and geographical traits. Through this awareness, the individual relates to the surrounding social space and grasps the distinct generative energy of each place (Walter, 1988). Memory plays a key role here. It provides city dwellers with the tools and referents to sense places and the transformations operating there. In the following section, I provide another example of how city dwellers grasp changes in the mood of places by creating typologies that name and describe their mood.

### ***Mood and desire***

There is a subsidiary set of typologies that describes the mood of places and territories that are mostly built around images of fire and metaphors of death. Verbs related to death are used to describe the transformations that territories may have suffered as a result of the changes in the conflict dynamics or in the feelings that individuals attach to these places. The references are made for example to a conflict “that is dead,” and to

geographical sectors “that are dead.” While doing a mental map of the barrio, Milton, the leader of the gang of *El Cuadradero*, described the sector of “*La Cueva*” as a sector that “is now dead.” He explained that the conflict in this sector was no longer active, and that as a result he considered this sector “dead.” A “dead sector” also implies that there is not an active gang group or heightened feelings against this territory. Death is used as descriptive of absence, loss, or lack of fighting.

Images of heat and verbs associated with “fire” function as symbolic and sensorial descriptors of evil and violence: the individuals, groups and territories “*se calientan*” [literally ‘heat up’. Individuals and territories become dangerous], and sectors or barrios become territories of fighting and violence. *Calentarse* has become a local idiom to describe the sensorial transition and excitement felt by the individual when he/she becomes fully immersed in violent activities, and it is also used in its traditional popular meaning as descriptor of sexual arousal. This local idiom of “*calentarse*” inscribes an active agency to the individual but also attaches this active agency to the place or territory. The places that are *calientes* are characterized by a territorial mood that behaves like fire and its apprehension requires a kind of sensuous reasoning in which sensation and desire are deeply intertwined in giving individuals a knowledge of place.<sup>19</sup> The sensing of a place mood is articulated to embodied experiences of heightened awareness, pleasure and desire. For the ordinary city dweller, this knowledge of places according to

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<sup>19</sup> Here I follow Walter’s review of Plato’s philosophy of place as a matrix of energies and an active receptacle. Walter believes that the apprehension of a place requires a sensuous reasoning. He expands Plato’s idea that the grasping and knowledge of place is both outside reason and sensation, “but, something else – a curious, spurious mode of grasping reality” (1988:121-122). The apprehension of the mood of the place is governed by this kind of sensuous reasoning. It is a knowledge that needs to be carefully grasped when trying to capture the mood of places that are subjected to the dynamics of violence.

mood and “temperature” functions as a circulation marker of the paths and detours to take.

Juancho Calvo, a member of the gang of *El Chispero* in barrio Antioquia speaks of the sensorial transition of *calentarse* and the time he also fell in the *calentura*,<sup>20</sup>

6.6. Juancho: No, these guys dressed normally. I’m telling you, the little black guy loved to dress all in black and with a leather cap I had up in the *ranchito* [at home], ah! that son of a bitch liked that cap a lot. (Sebastian: and you would lend it to him?) Yeah, the guy would show up at the house and ask for me, and then say “*Señora*, lend me the cap”, so the *cucha* [my mom] gave it to him ... because she knew he was something really “special” .. Until one day I fell in the *calentura* with them..., I entered into the *calentura* and we got into a *calentura* with them [I/BA/21-12-97].

Juancho, suddenly, jumps from locating himself outside the gang and remembering the gang’s member borrowing his black cap, to locate himself as part of the gang. He then transits into his “fall” in the *calentura* and his subsequent “entrance” in a condition of “*calentura*.” What follows in his narrative are the evil actions and the desire for revenge by the members of both gangs. Juancho’s jump in the narration resembles the erratic and sudden transitions between times of “peace” and “war” in the barrio. The fall into a *calentura* not only conjures up the force –devastating and abrasive– of fire and heat, but also situates desire as a fundamental aspect of the mood that places and individuals acquire. *Calentarse* is an act linked to pleasure and desire. The decision and subsequent actions of someone who is “*caliente*” mix sexual desire with excitement and an awareness that develops when an individual is actively participating in violent actions. In a local context in which the use of weapons and the control of territories are highly recognized, to be a *calentón* is a sought after status for men and women. According to the

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<sup>20</sup> Sebastian was interviewing Juancho and asked him about the clothing style of the gangs.

following dialogue among members of the gang of *El Cuadradero*, this condition of *calentón* opens for them opportunities of social and sexual recognition,

6.7. Milton: What really kills the barrio is that everybody wants to have *fame* (yeah! Yeah! say several of them)

Wilderson: The *peladas* [girls] are that way, I mean the meaner the guy is the more they like him!

[ ... ]

Milton: ... And women in the barrio ... because the best known ones get to eat up the toughest guys ... in a barrio a guy doesn't need to chase after girls, they themselves say to you "Psst ... looking good!," yeah, and one as a *calentón* gets them even easier. [MW/BA/ 19-08 -97].

The individuals then, by becoming *calientes*, have access to "fame." Fame we hear from Milton is what people in the barrio "die for." Attached to it are territorial power and social and sexual recognition. This connection between *calentarse* and fame is, as the members of the gang of *El Cuadradero* are keenly aware of, a driving force in the youths' involvement in violent actions. In this view, violence becomes a sensorial and communicative experience that dwells in the bodies and territories, induces pleasure and is enacted through territorial practices and through bodily and territorial desires.

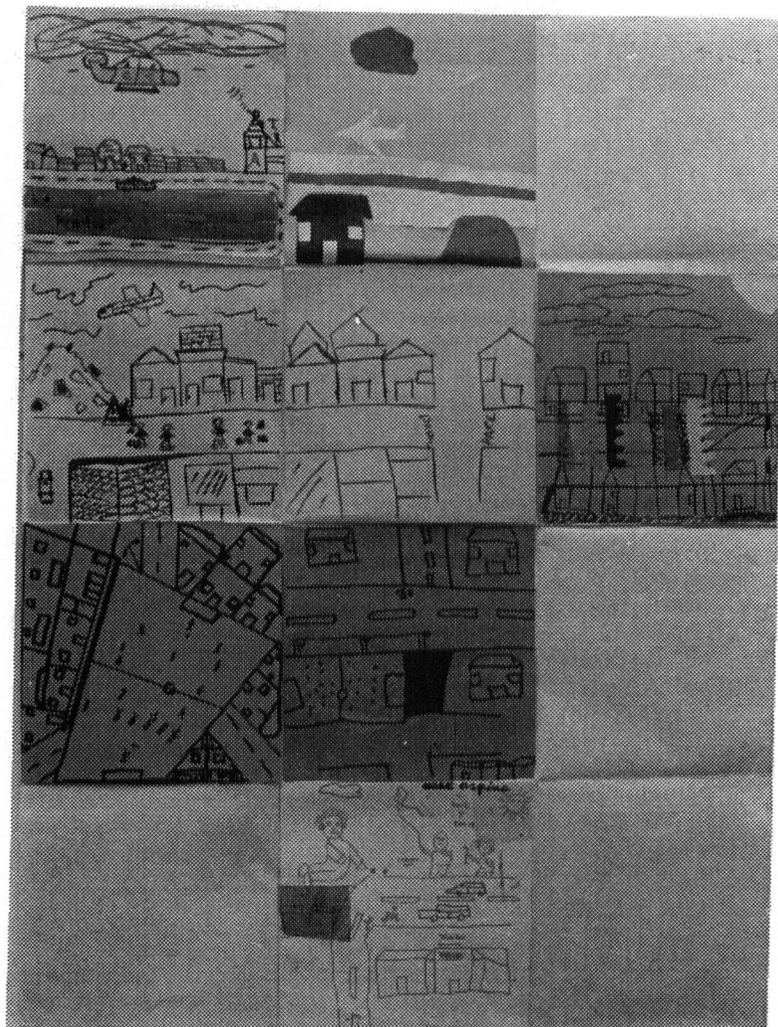
The apprehension of the mood of places is informed by a local direct knowledge of the felt quality of places. It is also a practice that allows city dwellers to grasp the city environment and the social relationships taking place. Typologies of place-mood reveal the type of interactions, appropriations and use of specific territories and places by city dwellers. They constitute an useful tool for urban dwellers to make decisions about risks and ways of walking and travelling, while they work as a kind of thermometer that assists them in their trajectories in and through the city.

## The memories of territorial practices

The pulse of the cartographer is made from many hands. Each puts forward his own, each displays the lines of his hand and in this way contributes to the configuration of an invisible map at the end of the traces. The youth who by chance and alone begins to write never imagines that from his barrio he contributes to the formation of a map from which many men can live in plenitude. This youth is, in truth, a young geographer. *Victor Gaviria – The Pulse of the Cartographer*

### Territorial attachments

The social uses of space as a mnemonic device and the ways that territoriality becomes a realm for cultural constructions of urban social differentiation further illustrate the dynamics of place making. The image presented here of the quilt made by the gang of *el Cuadradero* [MW/ BA/ 28-10-97] is a telling illustration of the deep territorial attachments and meanings that this sector has for gang members. It further illustrates the geographic awareness and knowledge through which these youth construct a sense of place. During the memory workshop, they decided to make quilt images that re-created their memories of a significant event in their lives in the barrio. Each one of them worked separately. Once they were finished and were beginning to share their images and stories, Wilmar noticed that each of the individual images stood for a geographical part of the sector of *El Cuadradero*. He then proceeded to arrange the quilt images in “order” on the quilt matrix. The others immediately recognized that he was putting together a map of the sector and began to advise him on the order to follow. Wilmar noticed that one geographical part of the sector was missing and he rapidly did one more quilt square. Once all of the images were up, they shared their stories in cartographic “order.”



**Figure 18** Quilt made by the gang of El Cuadradero, Barrio Antioquia

The memories consisted of childhood events, all related to practices that gave meaning to the surrounding landscape. Their stories remembered the ways this physical space began to be appropriated as *their* territory: their mischief at the airport track, the playing of soccer on the streets, their adventures recycling bottles and plastic from the rubbish dump located in their sector, the hang out corner where one of them was shot, the

circulation of rumours within the block that resulted in the bombing of one of their houses, and the times of Halloween. Their images mapped with precision the physical features that are engraved in their memory and the landscape that captures their territory: streets, tracks, dumpsters, houses, the squatters and the corner.

The image of an imaginary bubble that provides our personal space as individuals, and controls our comfort and discomfort areas when interacting with others, can be extended to this territorial group identification with one sector. Place making for these youth is endowed with a sense of territorial belonging and a sense of shared histories and destinies. Territoriality practices and the territory are key realms of their expression as a group.

The significance of territory as expressive realm (material and symbolic) for groups such as gangs, countercultural youth expressions or marginalized groups has been stressed since the early works of the Chicago school and in the literature of youth subcultures (Riaño, 1991; 1991a). Territoriality practices establish bonds between people and places, facilitate classification and communication, and provide a framework from which the group members create shared meaning (Knox and Marston, 1998). The sense of place of these youth is crafted through shared territoriality practices, language, symbols and stories engraved in the surrounding landscape. Furthermore, these youths' experiences of social marginalization and economic exclusion reinforce their attachment to the territory as the place of their own. The group's dynamics of alterity and difference are fundamentally situated in the territory. The territorial clue underlines the images produced for the quilt and the various ways of referring to the territory with profound emotional attachments.

This suggests a crucial point in the understanding of the processes of alterity and difference for youth who are active in the gangs. *Youth differences are constructed around processes of marking territories.* The sense of the “other,” is therefore mediated by *territorial practices*.<sup>21</sup> These practices include: establishing imaginary boundaries, associations between loyalties and site of residence, the memory of territorial relationships of friendship, solidarity and complicity, and gangs’ territorial base.

### **The Strategy of Place**

Gangs and militias in Medellin are constituted on a territorial basis and through primary relations. Generally, gang members are born in the same barrio, have grown up playing in the same blocks, have blood ties or friendship and kinship relations, and share memories of moments of sociability, play and partying. In the case of the militias, the connections are not necessarily around close territorial ties, however “neighbourhood” is invoked as a relationship that can be used to recruit militia members. The territory is of vital importance for all of these groups because it represents a familiar space of understood complicities and because it is a place where the spaces allowing them to move or escape are clearly identified.

A telling example is Henry’s description of his hangout place. Henry is an ex-member of the gang of *Los Chunes* and when Sebastian interviewed him, he described their favourite hang out place as a “T.” The T is formed by the intersection of three streets and physically resembles the shape of the letter “T.” Henry attributes their escape

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<sup>21</sup> Territoriality and construction of differences seem to be a prominent feature in the lives of youth from all social backgrounds and has been documented since the works on gangs by the Chicago School. The territories differ, and particularly the relationship between violence and territory, but the establishment of imaginary boundaries is attached to many youth’s social and cultural expression across social classes (Brake, 1985; Hall and Jefferson, 1977; Riaño, 1990).

“from many things” and his good luck to “the *strategy* of this place.” For Henry, the “strategy” lies in the physical lay out of the “T” that allows them to see who is coming before those coming can see them. The idea of a “strategy of place” also includes his group’s detailed knowledge of the physical lay out that allows them to escape or take refuge when required.

The territory can be seen as a strategic place of action for these youth in the sense that it is only within these restricted boundaries that they can claim and sense a space of their own. Outside their territories, exclusion and marginalization are common experiences. According to Michel de Certeau “a strategic place” is a place one can withdraw to for planning a “next attack” (Martin-Barbero, 1999). The “strategy of a place” is articulated to the lived experience of a territory that although regulated by exterior forces, becomes their own as a result of the forces of social exclusion and economic and cultural marginalization. Territories, frontiers or strips constitute strategic places for these city dwellers’ daily actions. The sharp spatial stratification operating in the city of Medellin marginalizes the popular classes into territorial realms that constitute, according to Bourgois (1995), politically and ecologically isolated city enclaves. The barrio in Medellin connotes this image of enclave. At the same time barrios constitute for their residents, strategic places that delimit their networks of power, the dynamics of the underground economy and cultural production, and the margins of resistance.<sup>22</sup> For the armed actors this strategic characteristic of the barrios is one of the most important

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<sup>22</sup> Post colonial studies elaborate on the concepts of the margin and the border to address the locational and territorial impact of hegemonic process and the realms from which marginal groups choose to voice their views. Most of this writing discusses explicit political strategies of resistance by these groups. Here, I am not making reference to an unified and articulated processes of resistance or the single positioning at the margins as an act of resistance. These positions varied dramatically among city dwellers and among the groups of city dwellers I worked with.

motivations in their search for territorial control. The frontier, and the barrio as a frontier, have a strategic potential because marginalized city dwellers circulate under their own rules, and also because of the “illegal” market and underground activities that barrio’s residents are able to conduct. The frontier constitutes not only the marker of routes and ways of circulation but further as a symbolic and strategic place from which it is possible to participate in the illegal and clandestine market of products and services.

This chapter has examined so far the territorial transformations and practices taking place in Medellin as well as the city dwellers’ ways of operating through the city. I have stressed the active participation of city dwellers in constructing typologies of territory and place, and in granting meaning to territorial distinctions such as frontiers, strips or borders. The discussion has also stressed the close connection between territory and youth cultural identities, and the strategic potential of the territories for those who inhabit marginalized areas of the city. In an attempt to visualize these complex relationships, I include here a map of barrio Antioquia. This map displays the territorial distinctions made by the residents of the barrio [e.g. sectors of the barrio], the typologies of mood [e.g. hot places] and place naming, and the circulation routes of residents in and through the barrio [e.g. according to the sector of residence, a different route is taken to walk in and through the barrio]. This “cartography of movement and territoriality” in the daily life is contrasted with the “cartography of memories” that is produced when the places remembered, the routes and traffic attached to memories, and the places linked to specific memories [e.g. placed memories, remembered places] are located in the map. This map is a powerful dynamic image that visualizes the metaphor of the “knot” introduced at the beginning of this chapter: the surface effect produced by the crossing

and encounter of lines. The map renders visible the relations between lived experience, memory and imagination. As a space with an open history, this map is continuously stripped down, adapted, turned upside down and re-created in the everyday life of the residents of barrio Antioquia through their practices of territoriality, circulation – walking and travelling, and remembering and forgetting.

**Map 6: Territories, Memories, and Places in Barrio Antioquia, Medellin**



## Territorial Otherness

Standing in the same relation to time that an “art” of war has to manipulation of space, an art of memory develops an aptitude for always being in the other’s place without possessing it, and for profiting from this alteration without destroying itself through it. [ ... ] Memory comes from somewhere else, it is outside of itself, it moves things about. The tactics of its art are related to what it is, and to its disquieting familiarity. *Michel de Certeau – The Practice of Everyday Life.*

I asked him why he was fighting and he looked at me and in all seriousness replied, “I forgot.” For this person, the tattered clothing he was wearing, the gun he carried, the fear and hunger he constantly felt [ ... ] were realities. The “why” of it all was for him less intelligible; unimportant even. *Carolyn Nordstrom – War on the Front Lines*

This section discusses the dynamics of difference inscribed in practices of territoriality and circulation. It introduces a closing reflection on the construction of cultural identities and the mediations of memory and violence. Through territoriality, individuals establish a distance that allows them to define who they are by establishing social, imaginary or physical boundaries (Augé, 1994). Territoriality practices place individuals in their surrounding environment and provide a locus from which to construct material and symbolical boundaries and difference from others. The raw material for the construction of self-definitions arises then from the role of territory as a means “of maintaining the stability and security of a home-place or home region” (Casey, 1997:xii) and from the power of memory to confirm “that we are” (Lowenthal, 1985). The territory in this sense *embodies* a sense of place by which individuals come to locate themselves in the world and define “who and what we are in terms of where we are (as well as where we are not)” (Casey, 1997:xv).

I have stressed that territorially based individual and group identities are crucial in the everyday life of Medellín city dwellers (McDowell, 1999). The territorial dynamics of the violent conflicts in Medellín are mapping out distinct cartographies of circulation,

territorial typologies of risk and safety, and unique constructions of the mood and spirit of places. Some questions remain unanswered: if territoriality has such a crucial role in everyday life and in the conflict, what does this suggest in regard to the formation and transformation of cultural identities in Medellin? How are cultural identities related to territoriality practices? How are they related to the mechanics of remembering and forgetting?

Literature about cultural and political identities in zones of acute conflict emphasizes that the participation and option for the violent resolution of conflicts is an act of re-affirmation, self-determination and recognition of ethnic, political and/or religious affiliations (de Vries et al., 1997; Valentine, 1996). For Valentine (1996) what is at stake in these conflicts is the death of what constitutes a group's identity:

Rather, what is at stake, especially for those whose bodies have been spared by the destruction of death, is the death of a way of being-in-the-world, the death of that which constitutes their identity, honour and dignity (Valentine, 1996:68).

Although in Medellin this tension around the loss of a "way of being-in-the-world" does not distinctly inform the discourses and actions of the groups involved in the violent conflict, cultural and social identities are at the very centre of the conflict. To examine this I start with "a forgetting:" it is a forgetting expressed by some of the youth involved in the conflict about their lack of knowledge of the reasons that initiated the conflict.

Gutierrez (1998) has argued that in Medellin there is not a direct relationship between territorial fragmentation and socio-cultural fragmentation. He observes that contrary to other contemporary national violences, Colombian urban violence lacks a clear social or cultural support. This can be seen in the ways in which the actors of violence in cities like Medellin tend to loose track of the reasons that trigger the conflict

in which they have intensely immersed themselves. A priest whose parish is located in one of the most conflictual areas of the Central Eastern zone, and who was personally involved in getting two barrio's gangs to enter into a peace agreement, also describes the lack of knowledge by gang members about the origins of the conflict and the reasons legitimating the fighting. He described a police raid in which members of the two fighting gangs were caught and taken in the same police van. In the van, the leader of one of the gangs spoke with the second in rank of the other gang. In the passage, the priest re-creates his memory of this conversation as told to him by Nicio, the second in rank in one of the gangs,

6.8. Nicio: So why are we shooting at each other?

Memo: Oh **I don't know** *parce*, because you live over there and I live over here. But I have nothing to do with you, so why do you have a bullet for me?

Nicio: **I don't know** *parce*, I didn't even know you ... so why do you have a bullet for me?<sup>23</sup>

This first conversation between the two gang leaders revealed for the priest the extent that a "total lack of knowledge between the individuals" had sustained hostilities and the importance of promoting a dialogue process between the gangs.<sup>24</sup> This lack of knowledge about the origins of the violent conflict was certainly a common theme in the stories I heard during my fieldwork. Sebastian described for me the changes and transitions of the various gangs in barrio Antioquia. When he was describing the relationships between the

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<sup>23</sup> The interview with the priest was carried out by a researcher of Corporación Región for their research on urban conflict and political culture in Medellín.

<sup>24</sup> A similar argument was presented to me by some youth workers and workers from non-governmental organizations while discussing my fieldwork project. They expressed their reservations about a memory approach to the lived experience of violence warning me that youth, for example, placed no relevance in remembering the reasons originating the violent conflicts.

gang of the *Chunes* and the gang of the *Cueva*, he underscored this lack of knowledge expressed even by those deeply involved in the conflict,

6.9. Sebastian: They [the *Chunes*] had really good relations with the guys from *La Cueva*, back then it was a new group of *pelaos*, I don't remember the names of more than one, but it was during that time .. and they got along. **I don't even know why, even the same *pelaos* will tell you they don't know**, but they started to attack them, *encenderlos a bala* [shooting at them]. So it was from then that the conflict started between the *Cueva* and the *Chunes* (my emphasis) [I/BA/08-12-97].

As a member of one of the gangs, Juan has difficulties in explaining to Sebastian the transitions to a violent conflict and the fighting,

6.10. Juan: The *parceros* [buddies] from the *Cuadradero*. No ... as I was telling you.. we weren't *calientes* brother!, **I don't know, I didn't take notice** when these people began to *calentarse* in that way (my emphasis) [I/BA/20-12-97].

The striking element I encounter in these stories is that the “not knowing” is framed as *oblivion* and located as a lack of *awareness*. At work here is the practice of forgetting. It is a forgetting that maps out the individual and collective silences, the partiality and conflictivity of knowing (Cohen, 1995), and the subjects location in what Visweswaran (1994) conceptualizes as a “refusal to speak.”<sup>25</sup> Knowledge, as Cohen (1995) and Passerini (1992) have forcefully argued, speaks of power through oblivion. The lack of knowledge in the examples is tied to a way of creating a hierarchy of what is important to remember and what is necessary to forget in order to continue with the group's present “tasks.” It is also tied to a way of reflecting and emphasizing the arbitrariness and irrationality of the conflict. Perhaps this forgetting, as a process of selection and suppression, is a way of making sense of their individual and group trajectories and

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<sup>25</sup> Visweswaran (1994) insightful discussion about the subjects' refusal to speak is framed within the research interaction of the ethnographer and the subjects. In the social context I am making reference to, the refusal is placed primarily *within the social worlds and everyday lives* of the youth involved with the violent conflict. However, it also appeared in some of my own research interactions.

actions and a tactic that suggests that there are *risks* in remembering the origins of the conflict.

As the priest and the gang members themselves articulated, the tension is about the profound similarities in values, styles, tastes, geographical and social origins of these youths. It is also about the paradoxical effects that their definition “as enemies” brings for their communities. Zulaika (1988) presents a similar reflection in his ethnography on the culturally communicative and ritually efficient context of violence in the Basque village of Itziar (Spain). In a village in which childhood ties, friendship and local networks are strong, the positioning of some of its villagers in opposite sides of the struggle expresses the internal paradox of the nationalist struggle. In a context of political violence, the assumption is that for “the combat to be meaningful, enemy and ally must stand for different causes; for the justification of the killing, slayer and victim must belong to different categories.” (1988: 97). This certainly is questioned when individuals, like those of the barrio or the village, share the “intimacy” of the communal life and their ideological positioning in different categories does not exist. For the activist involved in the conflict, remembering the “origin” of the conflict may bring just this paradox to light. To remember the origins may reveal that the reasons triggering the violence hardly justify the killings.

Forgetting the origin is also tied to a silence about the “other.” While they, *ellos/ellas*, the absent ones, have a central place and mnemonic presence in stories and daily actions, the “other” tend to be absent in daily discursive practices or in the stories remembered. The “we” is not solely constructed from the reference to an “other;” it is fundamentally constructed through a territorial mediation and for this the forgetting of the

origin of the conflict plays an instrumental role. Contrarily to Gutierrez's (1998) argument, I argue that there *is* a socio cultural support to the fighting of these youth. The territory is the realm in which they are able to construct a sense of themselves and of the other. The territory represents a context, a resource and a symbol of power that provide the socio cultural basis of their fighting. Beyond these, the territory *is the embodiment of these youths' otherness.*

An additional observation can be made about the construction of otherness. There is a distinct relationship between the youth involved with gangs and militias in Medellin and the contracultural or subcultural youth expressions (group ways of dressing, speaking, music and relationship to the body). Salazar (1998) has argued that during the 1980s, contra cultural expressions like the punk movement were co-opted and assimilated by the narcotraffic that offered an "alternative life style" for youth and large sectors of society.<sup>26</sup> Although this life style was dominated by conspicuous consumerism, its cultural pillars were anchored in a "return to tradition" regarding values, musical styles, tastes and religious practices. It was also a cultural proposal that blurred generational differences. The 80s also marked the transition towards the generalization of violence and

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<sup>26</sup> A specific example of this was the disappearance of a punk movement which emerged in the barrios and whose adherents established their radical difference through music, style and a distinct worldview. The punk movement was co-opted by the boom of the drug economy and the involvement of these youth as hired assassins. By the first years of the 1990s there were few traces of these youth movements. Sebastian underscored the absence of this subcultural difference in a barrio like Antioquia. As he was making a chronology of the various youth groups throughout the years, he remarked the absence of any of these expressions in the barrio and the presence of just a few individuals who tried to dress differently and listen to heavy metal or punk music. The disappearance of the punk movement in the barrios does not mean the total absence of countercultural or subcultural expressions in a city like Medellin. On the contrary, throughout the nineties rock, rap, punk and hip-hop have together brought a very important cultural enrichment which is reflected in youth's styles. In general, these youth are not involved in the gangs or militias.

the violent resolution of conflicts in the country. The growth of armed actors like the guerrilla or the militias further weakened subcultural and countercultural expressions.

In a society where cultural and stylistic referents of war and violence are at the forefront and cultural proposals are anchored in war archetypes, symbols and logics, youth subcultural expressions such as the punk movement disintegrated. While gangs and militias today share symbols and tastes, they also construct their *raison d'être* around local projects of defending territories. The other, "the enemy" is not one who is not accepted because of his/her cultural difference. The other is one who names and evokes a *territorial other*. Marking territory is a way to construct differences but it is also a practice that divides these youths' social ties as youth and poor.

A territory, in sum, is what situates the individual and group selfhood and contains their sense of the other through the practices of remembering and forgetting. Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* develops the idea of a memory as a sense of the other. In stressing the external circumstances that activate memory, he argues that memory is produced in "a place that does not belong to it" (1988:86). Memory constitutes an "art of operating" that is in continuous movement. In the ethnographic context discussed here, the argument is that the territory acts as both the emplacement of the other and as a mnemonic site: the place and circumstance by which memory and the senses of the other are activated.

De Vries and Weber argue that violence "is not necessarily the exclusive characteristic of the other but rather and perhaps even above all, a means through which the self, whether individual or collective, is constituted and maintained" (1997:2). This viewpoint takes distance from those binary oppositions that place violence in one or other

pole -- self, other -- to encounter violence in the field of the exclusions and mutual silences that “the lack of knowledge” argued by the various gang members of barrio Antioquia or the Central Eastern zone illustrate. This realm of silences may provide additional clues about the forgetting expressed by the youth on the origins of violence. It underscores the conflictive and painful processes by which city dwellers, and particularly youth, are attempting to construct their individual and collective selves and their cultural identities.

“Peace dialogues” have brought an awareness to the actors in the conflict of the many things they have in common, included their sense of territorial attachments to a barrio or a zone. Gutierrez reasons along the same lines,

... many of the micro-agreements of peace and the reasons given by the combatants for leaving behind their guns (fighting) are related to that re-discovery of the basic identity with their adversary (Gutierrez, 1998:3).

The political and cultural dynamics of the violent conflict in Medellin are complex and unique. The “political dimension” -- understood as the articulation of a discourse that contains causes of their struggle, principles for which you die and values that are not negotiable -- does not seem to constitute the force articulating and describing the dynamics of the conflict. A sense of group identity is constructed neither through a recognition that arises from self-affirmation, nor through processes of cultural differentiation that are constructed from the countercultural or stylistic differentiation. For these youth, the sense of territoriality is what has come to embody their otherness and the realm in which they are struggling to construct their conflicting cultural identities.

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined social and cultural practices linking city dwellers with their territories and facilitating their circulation through the city despite the violent conflict. It mapped out the dynamics of territoriality and circulation in Medellin as well as the ways these practices situate city dwellers in their living environment. The restrictions to routine practices such as walking from one place to another have displaced them from the terrain of the ordinary to that of unpredictability and uncertainty.

In this local context, concepts such as “strips” and “frontiers” take shape not only as descriptors of the territorial dynamics but also provide spatial metaphors to illustrate the ways in which socially excluded memories circulate. This traffic of memories across frontiers and margins make the formation of communities of memory possible. Memories cross borders and transgress frontiers with much more ease and freedom than individuals. As explained in the previous chapter, the investment of places with significance – even in physical sites where all social ties or physical referents have been removed – is mainly facilitated by the capacity of memory to transgress physical boundaries. Memory acts as a “bridging practice” that maintains a local implicit knowledge. Such knowledge informs city dwellers on safe circulation routes and the ways of operating while walking or travelling. It further informs the city dwellers on circulation tactics that combine resourcefulness, sagacity, know-how, a sense of opportunity and a deep sense of the mood and energies of territories.

Under the dynamics of de-territorialization and re-territorialization that take place in Medellin, memory transgresses and bridges. It is also at risk when it is “exiled and shaken loose” by the violent erasure of its physical marks and the re-territorialization of

localities as war sites (Gupta and Fergusson, 1997). The image of a knot presented at the beginning of this chapter describes the movements and forces under which practices of remembering and forgetting take place. There are two remarkable elements in the memory practices of Medellin city dwellers: a) social ties and attachment to places are facilitated by the operation of memory through strips and frontiers that preserve the awareness of the local social fabric; b) the imaginative uses of memory, its circulation through interstices and the vitality of an implicit local knowledge enable city dwellers to re-create communities of memory and a sense of territoriality and place.

In conclusion, processes of identity construction in a city like Medellin are marked by territoriality and the construction of the territory as the materialization of a group's otherness. These territorial constructions underscore the painful ways in which societies, and groups like youth, are attempting to re-affirm a self-image as individuals and collective. These processes, however, are at risk of becoming emptied of meaning by the dynamics of violence and by the power that violence has -- as a privileged way of communication in the city of Medellin -- to suppress, fragment and efface differences and commonalties.

## Chapter Seven

### Observers, Wanderers and Witnesses: Ethics and Subject Positioning

I did not shower and was always filthy, so I could frighten people and rob them easily. I learned the psychology of the street. [...] I learned not to judge, I threw away my prejudices and figured out things from that ethic worth keeping, because there [on the street] there is an ethic, but there is no morality [...] The street is an inner state of being, the street is here, I would not trade in my life as a destitute person.  
*Vladimir Montoya – Another One Bites the Dust.*

The four previous chapters described the practices of memory, history production, place making, territoriality and circulation of Medellín's city dwellers. In these chapters, the city *dweller* appeared as a social actor who inhabits (dwells in) the world through the practice of place making, through the ways he or she moves in the city, or as storyteller. This chapter closes the ethnographic exploration by focusing on the modes in which the city dwellers of Medellín constitute themselves as subjects of their actions.<sup>1</sup> The chapter examines some of the ways through which city dwellers locate themselves as part of a community (ies) and the various subject positions<sup>2</sup> they assume in order to establish their uniqueness and difference from those who are outside of these communities. More specifically, I examine *some* of the cultural referents and subject positions by which

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<sup>1</sup> In examining the city dwellers as subjects, the emphasis is on the person as an active agent of his/her processes of self-formation and as subject that is constituted through social relations. As subjects of our own actions, we are subjects *of* various agencies (i.e. law, desire, pleasure, discourse, and thought). The term "subject" denotes an entity that is constituted *by* various cultural forces, discourses and practices (Sullivan, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> I refer through out the chapter to *subject location* to name how the individual establishes himself/herself in relationship to the city environment (as a physical, social, political or cultural milieu), and *subject positioning* to refer to the emplacement and point of view adopted by the subject when he or she is located in specific places, in relationship to other subjects and in front of particular events and situations.

°Medellin's urban dwellers constitute their embodied place in the world. This line of inquiry is approached as an ethical interrogation.

The chapter begins by sketching the figures of the "martyr" and the "amazons" in order to illustrate some of the cultural constructions for subject positioning that were present in the memories of Medellin's city dwellers. I then look at how the remembering subjects located themselves as subjects with a capacity to act upon others and to reflect about their relationships to themselves and others. I discuss examples of memories of marking experiences that re-defined the individual's stance in front of others and his/her views on humanity. The last section of the chapter explores how individuals place and establish themselves in the events remembered and in relation to the living environment of the city. This is a discussion about the shifting subject positions that a city dweller assumes as an observer, actor or witness of the events taking place around him/her. The aim is to highlight the agency<sup>3</sup> of the individuals by further developing our discussion on the city dweller who as walker or wanderer of the city assumes various embodied distances of seeing and of relation to one self and others.

I note in this chapter the contested and relative nature of the subject positions and the changing definitions of otherness and self that are taking place in Medellin. In order to emphasize this idea, I provide examples of instances during my fieldwork in which cultural constructions of the individual or collective subject were problematized. I also stress that the examples presented do not speak for *all* the inhabitants of Medellin, but

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<sup>3</sup> Individuals vested with agency play an active role in the social relations they are part of. The concept of agency refers to this capacity of human beings to affect their lives.

that they are examples of the kind of cultural repertoire that is available to the city dwellers.

### **Ethical Interrogation**

In her work concerning ethics and the female body, Diprose (1994) argues that ethics is not just about moral principles and moral judgements, but that is also about *location, position and place*: “it is about being positioned by and taking a position in relation to others” (Diprose, 1994:18). The word *ethics* derives from the Greek word “ethos” that means both character and dwelling (habitat). Ethics is defined by Diprose as “the study and practice of that which constitutes one’s habitat, or as the problematic of the constitution of one’s embodied place in the world” (Diprose 1994:19).<sup>4</sup>

Diprose’s ethical interrogation informs my exploration of the ways Medellin’s city dwellers constitute themselves as subjects of action. *Ethical interrogation* refers to the modes used by individuals to form themselves into meaning-giving selves (Foucault, 1984). Ethics pertains to the problematic of place and involves the practices of self-formation in which the individuals constitute themselves as subject of their own actions (Rabinow, 1984; Foucault, 1984a; Scott, 1990). This understanding of ethics recognizes the constitutive relationship between “one’s world (habitat) and one’s embodied character (ethos)” (Diprose 1994:19). Further, it underscores the mediation of “embodied differences” (e.g. gender, ethnicity) in the exercise of judgement and in the practices of

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<sup>4</sup> This understanding of ethics is critical of approaches that see ethics as either “the study of the logical status of our moral judgements” or as “a set of universal principles for regulating behaviour” (Diprose, 1994:18). These approaches entail an assumption of the individual as “self-transparent, isolated, rational mind” and a denial of the impact of differences in the ethical formation of the individual.

self-formation. For Diprose, this focus on difference is crucial to an understanding of how one's constitutes oneself as subject of social discourses and practices, and how one's identity is constituted in relation to others.

Central to this understanding of ethics is the concept of dwelling. Dwelling, according to Diprose, includes both a reference to place (the place one returns to) and the habitual way of life (set of habits). Dwelling, as Basso (1997) points out, encompasses a form of consciousness through which people establish relations with their surrounding environment and the multiple "lived relations" that they maintain with places. Basso's views complements Diprose's place based ethics while pointing to the centrality of a sense of place and place making in the modes by which subjects constitute themselves.

Foucault's work on ethics also informs my exploration of the modes by which the city dwellers of Medellin are made subjects within the contested social environment of the city. For Foucault, ethics is seen as a self-formative social practice, a locus of experience with a domain of knowledge, a system of rules and a model of relation to the self.<sup>5</sup> Foucault relocated the ethical questioning from the dimension of moral codes to that of the ethical formation (Diprose, 1994). He distinguished between morality as 'a set of values and rules of action' and ethics as a self-formative social practice (Foucault, 1987; Diprose 1994). He attended to the ethics of the techniques by which one ethos (as a mode of being) is constituted and to the ways this ethical interrogation is part of a network of practices, knowledge and techniques (Rabinow, 1984).

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<sup>5</sup> The quest for a moral and universal truth that characterizes much of the ethical discourses is challenged by Foucault and displaced to an examination of the genealogies of ethics, of the different ways by which human beings constitute themselves as moral subjects of their own actions (Rachjman, 1992; Rabinow, 1984).

This embodied relationship to oneself is seen by Foucault in relation to four major aspects: the part of the self or behaviour which is concerned with moral conduct (*ethical substance*); the way in which people are incited to recognize their moral obligations (*modes of subjection*); what individuals do in order to behave ethically; and the kind of being to which people aspire when they behave in a moral way (Foucault, 1984a). Scott (1990) formulates the kind of questions that accompany Foucault's ethical inquiry: Do people within a given culture make themselves into aesthetic subjects, subjects of desire, subjects of pleasure, subjects of a priori law? By what means do they recognize their moral obligations in everyday life?<sup>6</sup>

The memory practices of Medellin's city dwellers provide the material to examine how the individual constitutes himself/herself as subject of his/her own actions. The interrogation therefore focuses on the dilemmas and paradoxes faced when the basic supports of the city dwellers' material and social subsistence are threatened by the ebbs and flows of violence. The practice of individual and collective remembering and forgetting which includes a full range of actions from the private moment of silent remembering to the collective and institutional acts of commemoration, is part of the pool of techniques by which one's ethical interrogation is continuously formed. The making and constitution of the self require a subject who assumes responsibility for his/her actions. This is a subject who appeals to the force of remembering and forgetting to actualize his/her definitions of selfhood, moral codes, and techniques and practices by which the individual establishes a self-uniqueness and a difference from others.

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<sup>6</sup> Here ethics moves away from a movement that promote "better" ways of caring for one self or for the general population (those universal principles of what people might do) to be *placed and specific* in the manner in which selves constitute themselves (to a concrete genealogy of problems) (Scott, 1990).

## Subjects and Cultural Constructions

### Martyrs

The martyr is one of the cultural figures used by Medellin city dwellers to remember the dead and their actions in life. The figure of the martyr is created from a Catholic mythology of sacrifice in which the symbolism of blood and the act of dying are framed as a sacrifice for freedom and liberty (Aretxaga, 1997). Zulaika (1988) analyzes martyrdom in the context of the struggle for Basque independence in Spain to highlight that a martyr is an activist that re-affirms *his* "truth" during the self-transcending act of "giving up his own life." Like Jesus Christ, the martyr is ready to give his life as a genuine expression of commitment to his people's struggle. The political ritual of risking one's life is enacted through the performance of taking up arms [as a ritual of manhood] and through the concrete acts of war [as the performative ethos of the warrior]. Zulaika (1988) and Aretxaga (1997) see the myth of the martyr as a historical model of male heroism and manhood that takes roots in a mythology of sacrifice and that is supported by actions such as hunger strikes.

This overlapping of religious imagery and political discourse explains some of the ways that the dead are remembered collectively in Medellin. The "mythology of sacrifice," however, cannot explain on its own the actions of the armed actors or can not independently endow political actions with new meaning. Individuals choose if and when they want to respond to this mythology of sacrifice; *some* individuals will respond during

certain moments but not during others (Aretxaga, 1997).<sup>7</sup> In Medellin, as noted in chapter five, the remembering of absent ones is part of an oral history that is nurtured by the memory of the dead, by death itself and by the various practices of remembering and forgetting that bring Medellin's urban dwellers together. Martyrdom is a model that inspires a particular type of story and a community-based ethic that frames and aestheticizes the "struggle" or actions of the individuals involved in the conflict.<sup>8</sup> The model of martyrdom applies particularly to the remembering of militia members or other political activists -- i.e. guerrilla members, community leaders -- whose discourse and actions are framed as revolutionary politics. Rooted in the revolutionary ethics of a human struggle for social change, the actions of these individuals are invested with political significance. At the same time, their ambiguous involvement in realms of delinquency and criminality are framed with an ethic of the "lonely bandit" who does "good" with his "crime" because of his loyalty to his community. In this context, the cultural construction of the martyr has undergone a process of hybridization between ethics of revolutionary struggle and those of a "lonely bandit".

The figure of the martyr exists to make sense of the death of friends and relatives, although the figure is questioned. A telling example of this questioning is the exchange that took place in a memory workshop conducted with youth who were members and ex-members of the youth house of the barrio *El Popular II*. Tito, who was with the youth

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<sup>7</sup> Aretxaga warns of the problematic implications of explaining violence and the choice to use or take up arms within a mythology of sacrifice that validates and fuels the actions and history of a group/community. The problem is that this explanation assumes "that myths have a force of their own, capable of determining people's behaviour" and disregards that myths require social contexts to become "something more than interesting stories." (1997:94)

<sup>8</sup> The martyrdom ethic, Zulaika (1988) argues, is built from an ethos of militantism and a mentality of fighting that perceives combat to be the necessary business of life, and war to be the background condition of life.

house since its creation, remembered the year of 1989 when he was a teenager “*sin rumbo* [without expectations],” and who “lived by the [fleeting] moment.” In those days, he met some individuals who helped him mature and grow up. Among them, there was Norberto who was killed during the first year of the youth house. Tito remembered him through a crafted performance and discourse :

7.1. Tito: Life and death are inseparable partners, they are there in every moment, we should love them ... I remember with sadness the death of my friend Norberto, a person who irradiated me with lots of life energy. He is always in our memories, what he wanted one day, little by little we have tried to do. “Lets go *calidoso* [cool guy and a friend], struggle for a life with quality” a well known phrase of his ... his death fills us with sadness but at the same time it invites us to move forward, it really fulfils something that is written that says, “the blood of martyrs is the seed of liberty.” [MW/NE-POPII/18-05-97]

Tito’s memory was followed by the clapping of the others who were present at the workshop and who jointly remembered the impact the death of Norberto had on all of them. The causes of Norberto’s death are contradictory and ambiguous but they are not beyond the point of this group’s remembering. For this group, Norberto’s death was their loss and they struggled to frame it in a way that would give meaning to them and to the community work they were engaged in. They did this by idealizing their memory of Norberto as a martyr and by establishing connections between his death and their work. Norberto’s blood, Tito told us, was the “seed of liberty,” a powerful force that brought togetherness and a renewed sense of having to continue with the work of the youth houses. Later in the same workshop, Tito reflected on their history in the youth houses and the challenges posed to them by the present reality of a widespread presence of armed groups [militias] in the zone. Far away from the barrio [we were at a retreat centre in the city of Envigado] and within the safety of the group, he shared his thoughts about their mission as a community group while locating himself :

7.2. Tito: so we go forward, and I believe that *El Popular* [the barrio] each day will need us, and it doesn't matter that there are people armed to the teeth all around us, and that they look at us with mistrust. We've already gone through that; having people by our side who mistrust us, and who perhaps at this moment have some sort of power, and if I talk this way around the barrio it may cost me my life. But as the Bible says, and as many people say "the blood of martyrs is the seed of liberation", and we're going to free our people. [MW/NE-POPII/18-05-97]

Tito appealed again to the symbolism that allowed him to find meaning and sense in the death of his friend and to locate himself as a moral agent and a liberator of his people. A heroic bent is added when Tito links their community work, the suspicion this may cause, and the possibility of dying. The ethics he is appealing to are grounded in a biblical discourse of freedom and redemption and in a revolutionary heroic ethics of warriors for freedom.<sup>9</sup> His attempt is to invest the death of his friend and his current work with meaning, and he does so by defining their place in the world within a heroic realm of "freeing their people."

After Tito finished his reflection, Rogelio who was also a founder of the youth house expressed his disagreement with this framing of the dead as martyrs and the nurturing of their community work with ideals of armed struggle and blood for liberation. Rogelio attested that there had been already "too many martyrs" and that "too much blood had been seen" and he could not see what they "could do with the dead." He further asserted that : "... several times, many people have died and we have allowed

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<sup>9</sup> The "marriage" between revolutionary movements and the Catholic church has a long and rich history in Latin America. The Liberation Theology movement was born in this region in the sixties and called for a Catholic commitment and choice with the struggles of the poor. In Medellin, a city that has one of the strongest Catholic traditions in the country, the influence of the Liberation Theology movement was/is widespread. It seemed to me that in any of the communities I went or carried out a memory workshop in (with the exception of Barrio Antioquia) the memory of a revolutionary priest and/or nun was present and recognized as having deeply influenced the community. In Colombia, the mix of religion and armed struggle was reinforced by the figure of the Catholic priest and sociologist Camilo Torres. A leading intellectual and social figure in the country, Camilo Torres joined the guerrilla movement in the 1970s until he was killed in combat. The National Liberation Army, the second largest and oldest guerrilla movement in the country, was led by a Catholic priest (until his death from hepatitis) for a period of more than twenty-five years.

them to die with their ideas, with their life wishes. I think that it is not about making martyrs .. and about this [belief] that the people love those who are armed, it is a lie.” Rogelio challenged the imagery of martyrdom, but further the politics of martyr making.<sup>10</sup>

After Rogelio, a young man remembered the meeting they had with the militias, when due to a misunderstanding, the militias were going to force them out of the barrio. He agreed with Rogelio about the risks posed by the belief in the power of “arms” and the “unfair” power that those who are up in arms take when deciding what “every one is to do.” After him, Juan D. called on everyone to continue the work of Geovanny, an assassinated youth leader, who had struggled “for the cause of the youth houses” and for freedom and who had “..to give his life for these ideals.” Rogelio intervened again,

7.3. Rogelio: Just to be clear here, the proposal is not wanting to be martyrs to build something, even though there are people who want to be martyred, because sometimes *thinking through things is very hard for us*. The proposal is that from a base of love and experience to arrive to a government of love and one which doesn't ever need to utilize hidden pressures, hidden intentions and hidden costs of power, or to take advantage of the other. Martyrs are being made in the communities simply to do something. I think that better, one should *apostarle a la vida* [bet for life], but think very carefully. Everything we've done in the *Popular 2* has had this intention, I mean there are many people there, so work hard, do things, construct things, but no going off to the ravines and the canyons, to the empty spaces, in order to feel like a superman in the community. *Because we don't need martyrs in the community, we need people who stay alive, who can enter perhaps more anonymously, more hidden.. to guard their lives, but who can accompany the others... I believe in this very much. [my emphasis]. [MW/NE-POPII/18-05-97]*

Rogelio's reflection problematizes the heroic constructions of death and dying and a morality that is rooted in principles of “sacrifice” and of life risking and giving. He questions the model of relation to the individual and collective self that is constructed

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<sup>10</sup> This is a discourse anchored in Maoist and leftist symbols that makes an association between the armed individual and the power that comes from the arms, and the love of the people.

through the acts of war and martyrdom. For him this option takes the “easy way out” and distracts the social actors from reflecting on the impact of death. The mythology of sacrifice further encompasses a double morality and a manipulation of power through the manipulation of the other. He believes that models of “supermen” is not what is needed in the communities -- which had seen enough of their love ones die -- and stresses that the need is for people who want to live in anonymity that can let them fulfil their goal of supporting others.

The images range from the public, heroic figure of the martyr to the anonymous and humble figure of those “who want to live.” They reveal the existence of contrasting social and political discourses on the ethics of violence. Factors such as the “tiredness” and suffering that the pervasive violent action has brought to the life of the city dwellers and the changing political discourses on war and peace are at play in these contrasting images. They are suggestive of the differing frameworks from which urban dwellers, based on their lived experience of violence, position themselves and remember. They also indicate the chasms between everyday life experience and the ideological formulations of the discourses about violence (Feldman, 1995).

There are several tensions at work here. The effort by Tito and Juan D. to glamorize and aestheticize the death of their friends is at the same time an effort to make sense of the effects of pain and suffering in their lives. It is also an attempt to maintain a public discourse that restores dignity to the dead and that articulates their deaths within a political discourse. By remembering the dead within these idealized constructions, the collective memory partially restores a sense of honour and a sense of purpose to an experience of violence that lacks dignity and vision (Portelli, 1991). But a tension comes

when this framing becomes a way of forgetting the suffering that each death brings with it and a legitimization of the violent expression of the conflict. From Rogelio's viewpoint, this form of remembering denies the choices of life and love in the construction of selfhood.

The martyr, in conclusion, is a cultural construction available to Medellin's city dwellers for remembering the dead. The martyr functions as a mythology that individuals resort to in order to frame their community actions or their involvement with armed choices. It also defines specific subject positions about the kind of subject they aspire "to be" and "to be remembered as." But the figure of the martyr and the mythology of sacrifice, are now being questioned. Some city dwellers are rejecting the use of the image of the martyr to remember the dead and to justify the individuals' participation in the violent conflict. Instead they are emphasizing a sense of loss and suffering around the dead, and a sense of life and anonymity around the living.

## **Amazons**

Stories about warriors illustrate a cultural model for remembering in which violence is embedded in bodily performance. Cultural constructions of the individual and collective self are erected depending on the status and reputation that are gained through the mastery of weapons and fighting. The amazon is a gendered cultural construction that provides a warrior-like figure for women.<sup>11</sup> This construction of the fearless woman

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<sup>11</sup> The amazon in Greek mythology is a member of a tribe of female warriors who fought the Greeks and the Trojans and whose way of life erected a female-only culture (they reared only girls). They were masters in the use of the javelin and the bow and the arrow. Their name Amazon was interpreted as breastless, "it was explained that the women seared off one of each girl child's breast so that it would not interfere with her use of the javelin or the bow and arrow" (The Meridian Handbook of Classical Mythology, 1970:41).

who is actively involved in the dynamics of violence was illustrated in chapter three with the images of Griselda Blanco [a drug trafficker] and Salomé [an *apartamentera*] who are remembered as *berracas* and *guerreras* [warriors] in barrio Antioquia.

In the figure of the amazon, physical performance is highly valued as the body engages in the risky social performance of fighting. I became aware of the gendered construction of the amazon during a memory workshop with the youth group of barrio Antioquia. Previous to the workshop, one group member expressed his interest in knowing about women who had been leaders in the barrio. During the practice of oral history interviewing, the theme of women leaders in the barrio was taken up and the participants broke up in pairs to interview each other about women who were considered leaders in the barrio. In the following exchange, Esmeralda reports back on the women that Cesar considered leaders,

7.4. Esmeralda: He talked to me about a leader family, the Echeverry family, they are the *carniceras* [butchers]. He considers them leaders because they are .. they are the amazons of the barrio.

Pilar: Amazons? What do you mean?

Esmeralda: Women who are true fighters, who take initiative .. (laughs)

Cesar: An amazon is a woman who is a fighter (who has initiative, says Arlex) exactly! Women who are fighters, warriors, are considered amazons and that is how I consider them ... because they have always being ...

Johanna: They have contributed a lot to the violence in the barrio

Pilar: To violence? They contribute to the violence?

Sebastian: .. To violent actions. [MW-YG/BA/30-05-97].

The exchange reveals my own puzzlement in trying to understand Cesar's characterization of these women as leaders, as "*carniceras*" [literally butchers, as someone who takes pleasure in slaughtering] and as amazons. The characterization of the

Echeverry sisters as Amazons represents a translation of the warrior values of embodied toughness, sharpness and initiative to a local context in which women have had, in fact, a leading role in the social life of the barrio. This gendered model is also tied to the history of the barrio, particularly to the period when the barrio was the red light district of Medellin (described in chapter three). Since then, women as sex workers transgressed a conservative morality that censored their freer and more sensuous relationship with their bodies.<sup>12</sup>

Women's leading role is tied to the cultural value of *verraquera*, an embodied skill and behavioural model of toughness and of fearless individuals that the barrio's women exemplify. The amazon model as a form of embodied *verraquera* is uniquely feminine. Values such as toughness are constructed based on a recognition of women's skills and sharpness in the use of their bodies, weapons, in establishing systems of communication -- including gossip and rumour -- and in recognizing routes for circulation. Women's skills and sharpness and a female culture of "war," have been central in maintaining an informal and underground economy of skilled thieves, drug traffickers and drug sellers within the barrio, and in the formation and activities of the various gangs. It is in this context of a "women's Amazon culture" that the Echeverry sisters, who are known in the barrio because of their involvement as mules (drug carriers) and distributors of drugs, are recognized as leaders despite their active involvement in the bloody violence.

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<sup>12</sup> Certainly the body is a key agent in the cultural construction of Amazons and in the local culture. Since I began going to the barrio, I noticed a freer, more relaxed and sensuous relationship between women and their bodies. It seems to me that this relationship has roots in the years the barrio was red light district and in the ways that the prostitute transgressed local morals through their bodies.

This cultural construction of women as Amazons enriches the meaning of the figure of the fighter and re-creates violent actions in an imaginary and aesthetic construction that sets these individuals “apart” from the others. The Amazon and the image of the male warrior are rooted in cultural beliefs about the superiority of physical strength, *verraquera*, and sharpness.<sup>13</sup> These values are not based on abstract, universal principles of justice and morality, but in local and gendered relative principles and in personal considerations that, negligent to the effects of violence on the lives of others, idealize the values of the fighter per se. Referring back to Diprose’s (1994) definition of ethics as the problematics of location, position and place, these city dwellers are locating themselves within a violent social context in which they constitute themselves as subjects of fighting, action and pleasure<sup>14</sup> (e.g. warriors and leaders). One can also note how according to gender differences and their subject positioning in relation to others, models such as the martyr and the amazon are differently constructed.

The gender specific frame of heroism combines various cultural influences. It is informed and mediated by media representations of heroism, toughness and bravery while maintaining elements of the Protean model of heroism<sup>15</sup> and the mythological

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<sup>13</sup> Ortiz (1991) and Salazar (1996, 1990) have argued that these similar guiding values were present in the figure of the *guapo* that was previously described in chapter III and can be traced to the rural environment of the period of *La Violencia*. During these years (50-60s), a value such as *verraquera* was associated with the fighting between Liberals and Conservatives. During the 60s and 70s the *verraquera* was expressed through the figure of the urban squatter who faced insurmountable obstacles in building his/her home and who did so through a collective effort.

<sup>14</sup> Pleasure is defined in the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (1998:448) as what “we feel and take when we enjoy something.” Pleasure can take many forms as there are many individual views of what pleasure consists in. Since Plato, pleasure has been thought to be a basic, and sometimes the only basic, reason for doing anything.

<sup>15</sup> Zulaika (1988) defines the Protean hero as a versatile figure. These are individuals who are vacillating and uncommitted, and whose heroism admits doubt and experimentation. He opposes this model to the Promethean one in which the hero denies ambiguity, compromise and change.

features of the Amazons. These various influences shape a hybrid figure that also is formed from local images of sharp bandits and uncanny thieves found in rural histories and urban legends.<sup>16</sup> For Ortiz (1991), the model of the warrior is connected to national and regional cultural beliefs that establish war and the warrior as supreme values. This cultural landscape sanctions practices such as those of the use of private 'justice' to gain lost honour by means of revenge (Salazar, 1996).

I emphasize the complex relations between the figure of the amazon and the practices of bloody violence on one side, and the practices of resistance and transgression on the other. The complexity of the relationships between gender, agency and violence ensures that an analysis of the social and cultural dimensions of violence cannot be exhausted in a division of the perpetrators and victims of violence along gender lines. The model, furthermore, introduces an element of complexity and agency to a generalized tendency to conceptualize the dynamics of patriarchal culture in Latin America in terms of the bi-polar concepts of *machismo* and *marianism*.

The cultural construction of the Amazon, furthermore, highlights the female body as a "charged place." The female body is also a battlefield -- a disputed territory -- upon which violence is performed. It is precisely within this same context of a local culture that values the agency of woman as a warrior, as one who uses her body to resist, fight and transgress established morals and dominant values that I found a troublesome positioning around the practice of rape. Rape stories are part of the oral history about

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<sup>16</sup> This is the case of the cultural frame of the warrior in male youth culture. Salazar (1996) has documented the "rambotization" of the figure of the warrior and its hybrid character that now combines conspicuous

violence in this community and places such as the *mangas* [green grassy area] are directly associated with this practice that is remembered by barrio Antioquia's residents as commonplace.

Within the territorial confrontations between gangs, rape has been one of the weapons used to create and maintain terror and intimidation. During my fieldwork I heard many stories of rape from men and women. I became well aware of the pain and grief that it has created and how women embody the suffering.<sup>17</sup> There was one instance of remembering in which I was challenged – and continue to be – in my subject location as a researcher, as a woman and in my own ethical stance.

During a session with a mixed group of residents from barrio Antioquia, one ex-gang member remembered the gang of *Los Chunes* and their bloody revengeful tactics, which included rape. These were “things,” this man said, he could never forget, “they took the girls to do everything with them; so these are things that one sees and can not forget.” His comment prompted a discussion in the group that they asked me not to record. A woman in her sixties, an active community leader, asked the others whether one or two men forcing sex on a woman constituted rape. The other participants were a woman in her twenties, the young man and a man in his sixties, all of them actively involved with the community. The youngest man, who had just talked about how terrifying it was for him to be aware of the gang rape, responded that for this action to be considered “rape” it would require the participation of more than two men. The old man

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consumerism, the fascination for the technologies of weapons and killing, and the figure of heroic exterminators.

<sup>17</sup> Diana said that during the times of *Los Chunes*, the gang members would inform a woman when and at what time they would like to see her. Women were warned that if they failed to show up, they would be killed. Many women and their families left the barrio in those years and many others could not escape rape.

gave the example of a needle and a thread to confirm this. "If the needle is moving, there is no way to get the thread through," the older man argued, and this he presented as supporting evidence that a woman could only be subjected to rape when she is physically overpowered by more than two men. There was no disagreement in the group and the conversation shifted to recount the number of wars that have taken place in the barrio. This conversation continues to trouble me. It left me wondering whether to place this within a community based ethic that values gendered constructions of warriors and the use of the body to transgress dominant values, that rejects gang rape as brutal, but that is ambiguous, negligent and *complicit* with individual rape. This in fact needs more than just a mere reflection because it might be indicating the disempowering of the cultural frame of the amazon and the prevalence of a patriarchal ideology of sexual oppression and arrogant male sexual coercion against women (Caro-Hollander, 1996).<sup>18</sup>

This is an example of some of the troublesome fissures that exist in the social and ethical fabric of the community. These fissures are the result of the entrenched practice of bloody violence that places a high value on the physical overpowering of the other and a patriarchal ideology that has normalized and legitimated rape through legal practices and a limited understanding of what coercion means (Bell, 1993).<sup>19</sup> I argue that in the local

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<sup>18</sup> My discussion of rape is limited by the focus of this dissertation on the memory practices of city dwellers. I discuss here how "rape" was remembered and discussed within the specific context of a memory workshop. I am aware that my discussion does not fully address rape as a form of violence and oppression towards women within a patriarchal society or as a practice of war. This is a field that in the Colombian context is urgently calling for a deep interrogation and analysis.

<sup>19</sup> I recall hearing in my childhood that Jorge Eliecer Gaitán (the leader of the liberal party whose assassination in 1948 prompted the escalation of the civil war) used successfully this argument of the needle and the thread to defend his client, a man accused of raping a prostitute. The construction of rape as the physical overpowering of a woman is rooted in these patriarchal attitudes and has been re-created in the regional and local context within the territorial wars in which women constitute a booty of war. Chapter six describes how sexual recognition and power are central in the "fame" sought by youth who are involved in the conflict.

context there is a kind of ethical breakdown in the ways men are incited to recognize their moral obligations (the modes of subjection), in the ways they manipulate physical and sexual power, and in the social support [or lack thereof] that women encounter when faced with rape. These individuals are ridden by ethical ambiguity and moral contradictions (Diprose, 1994). Ambiguity and contradiction, however, are present in any ethical interrogation if we assume that self-transparent individuals do not exist. What needs to be questioned is the kind of ethical interrogation and ethical “breakdown” taking place: to what extent do these subject positions and cultural constructions of the female body, of the self and the “other” (women), involve the denigration of women’s modes of being? (Diprose, 1994). This example illustrates a deep fissure in the social and ethical fabric of this community and in the ways its members are called upon to behave in moral ways. In this context, silence and suppression have become the techniques of a gendered and embodied power that denigrates women’s modes of being and overvalues patriarchal forms of oppression over women’s bodies.

## **Duties of Place and Self**

The events discussed in this section and the following one illustrate the challenges posed to youth by the environment of violence they live in and the creative means by which they problematize the relations they have with themselves and with others. Lia, a young woman in her early twenties, a leader and a youth worker, remembered a critical event in which she, as a young 13 year old, *stood up* to challenge the *sicarios* [hired assassins] who were creating terror in her barrio:

7.5. Lia: One of the things I fear the most is to remember. For me memories are disastrous, and not because they're so bad or negative but because it's very hard to take them on. I lived through the period of 89-91, which you all perfectly remember ... in 89-91, I lived in the barrio that had become the office for the city's mafia and druglords ... I was 12, or 13 years old. At that time we had there all of Pablo Escobar's gunmen, Carson, la Kika, a bunch of them. There came a moment when I had to take on the dialogue with them, because even with my few years I said to myself "it is totally unjust that the clean-living boys of my block, of my barrio, with whom I share every day, are dying because of the assassins, or because of drugs, or because of the bullets we have to dodge everyday" ... because those guys come and destroy just about anything ...

Lia warns us about the risks and sorrows of a remembering that awakens painful memories, "it is very hard", she says, but there is a duty to remember. This duty is parallel to a duty to face the present as Lia did at that time,

It was very hard, I was a *culicagada* [shitty-assed little girl], pardon the expression, against the biggest assassins of Medellin. But it was an incredible challenge, and at one moment I was talking to one of them, one of the hardest emotionally, a real brute. He had raped one of my friends, one of my best friends. So I spoke to him very hard, *from the heart*, and I made him cry. I'll always have that image engraved in my mind, I always remember it. For me this will remain very significant through all my life. [MW/MLLIN/17-04-97].

As a thirteen year old, Lia assumed her duties to the present within two complementary subject locations: that of friendship and as an inhabitant of the barrio. These two locations prompted her to take action "to stop" the impact that senseless violence was having on her community. Lia positioned herself as the one who would "take on the dialogue" and stand up *against* one of the most "emotionally tough" *sicarios*. The tools she brought to her dialogue with the *sicario* were those of "the heart." Lia spoke forcefully, energized by the rage and indignation she felt over the rape of her best friend and the violence in the barrio. She spoke from her heart and by doing this, Lia tells us, she disarmed the tough man and made him cry. This image of a "tough" defeated by the tactics of a dialogue from the heart is "recorded" in Lia's mind as an image and event to be remembered again and again.

Lia's remembering conveys the powerful meaning of the Spanish word *recordar*<sup>20</sup> and its Latin roots *re-cordis*, that means "to pass back through the heart" (Galeano, 1989 quoted by Ibañez-Carrasco, 1999). This is an example of the power of a memory that acts as an *exemplum*<sup>21</sup> and in which the past is converted into a principle of action in the present (Todorov, 1997). It is a memory turned into action that continues to inform the individual's actions and modes of defining herself as a youth leader, as a woman and as a friend.

### The Ethics in Violence

In many of the memory workshops, I heard reflections from the participants on the power of memory to actualize their individual and collective constructions of who they are. After the first memory workshop with the gang of *El Cuadradero* in barrio Antioquia, I asked whether it made sense for them to continue with the memory workshops and sessions. My question motivated the following dialogue:

7.6. Wilmar: ... of course, because otherwise we never would have ...

Wilderson: We never thought that one day we'd be here drawing our neighbourhood, from our childhood, from the time we were *culicagaditos* [shitty-assed little boys] and it has always being like this ... We're still alive and here because God wants us to be united here today to do something positive!

Wilmar: And you know why we can say this is good? Because we've all lived through the same thing... In particular our family, they haven't been as fortunate

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<sup>20</sup> Ibañez-Carrasco (1999:4) explains the differences between the Spanish word *recordar* and remembering: "In Spanish the word re-member, to put together the scattered limbs of a body, can be translated as *rememorar* but this is poetic language, not domestic; the word commonly used to mean remember is *recordar* from the Latin *re-cordis*."

<sup>21</sup> Todorov (1997) distinguishes between literal and exemplary forms of remembering. When the remembered event is recalled in a literal manner by the subject (which does not mean it's truth), the memory of the event does not go beyond itself. The associations prompted by the memory of the event are of direct causality: the causes and consequences are underscored, the authors of the triggering event are identified and blamed and the actions to be taken are drawn (e.g. revenge). When the event is worked as an exemplum, the subject decides to use it as an instance and model to understand new situations. The individual in this process elaborates the memory to make of it an exemplum and draw a lesson.

as us to be here in a dialogue, because “all” ... are dead, yes or no? So we can take them like a kind of mirror. Was that bad, or what? Where did it lead them to? .. the cemetery. And it’s something we cannot follow them in, because it is written in stone, because life is like this ..., (we have it in front of our faces, says Wilderson). We are supposed to follow evil, to follow vengeance ... [...] (One carves his own destiny, says Wilderson) It is destiny...

Wilderson: .. revenge in one side, revenge in the other side.., and if you don’t want to take revenge .. it’s difficult.  
[ ... ]

Milton: But that’s all over, thank God. (W1: We’ve all gone through it, *huevoón!*)  
In order to *stand up we have to fall first*, one doesn’t stand up when one is standing. [MW-GC/BA/19-08-97]

This exchange illustrates a deep reflection about the politics of memory and the continuity of violence. It highlights a reflective moment in the workshop in which the individuals looked critically at their past and engaged in a process of negotiation and definition of their selves.

There are several aspects worth highlighting here. Wilderson sees the remembering carried out during the session as a mapping of memories, a drawing of the barrio he never thought of doing himself. Wilderson’s awe with their stepping back to remember underlines his own exhilaration about the fact that they are still alive. Wilmar, his brother, takes this reflection further and finds in memory, and particularly in the fate of his family (“all ... are dead”), a mirror from which to construct a different sense of life and of themselves (“we can take them as a kind of mirror”). Wilmar consequently positions himself as challenging what is prescribed by destiny: a life of evil and revenge that occurs because of the literal and obsessive rememberings of their family history of death and cyclical revenge.

Milton closes this dialogue by introducing another aspect of their positioning as subjects located outside “evil.” Appealing to a Catholic religious imagery (of Jesus’ falls

in the road to crucifixion), he argues that in “order to stand up, you need to fall.” By bringing this up, Milton positions himself as a subject better prepared, because of his *direct* experience with “evil” – as agent of violence and death - to develop a practice that keeps him (and them) away from evil. They are better equipped because they know through direct experience (the ethics of place and location) the meaning of “falling” and what it does to the subjects.

But this ethics of moving away from evil and the image of standing up after a “fall” are continuously challenged in their every day life. In another group session, they talked about the local drug lord and their relationships with him. The memory of the actions of the drug lord brought about a reflection on how the past taught them the virtue of *prudence* and to distrust “everyone” :

7.7. Milton: The past has taught us something beautiful, that we cannot trust anybody... just like that *cucho* [older man] did to the boys from the *Cueva*, and so he did the same to us. So the past is useful to us, it gives us examples, lessons, wisdom, maturity... the past is always useful.

Esteban: For example, that same *cucho* that would make peace, who would pay one first only to kill you after...

Wilderson: He would fatten a chicken and then dismember it..

Esteban: .. then pluck it.

Milton: .. So, for example, that was a lesson, a very violent one because we're talking pure violence here. But it left us something in life... what did it leave me: intelligence, wisdom, prudence.

Wilmar: Don't allow yourself to be fattened because afterwards you'll be skinned...

Esteban: Don't trust anybody, or else...

Milton: It left us with something bad, and that's mistrust... [GS-CUA/BA/07-10-97]

These youth are confronted with their own conflicting interpretation of the past and its relation to the present as they try to make sense of their past history as gang members, as

agents of violence and death, and the coercive relationship with the drug lord and “boss,” while carrying on with their lives. The past left them with the virtues of “intelligence, wisdom and prudence” but it also brought “distrust,” which they see as negative. As subjects of virtue, they are able to exercise prudence (the cardinal virtue in the Classical art of memory) and wisdom with the assistance of the memory of their direct and lived experience of violence.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, they find themselves “distrusting everyone” because of the violence that the *cucho* [the drug lord and past boss] has inflicted upon them. The lesson, they said, is passed on through violence. The violent actions from which they learned are described with the poignant image of themselves as chickens who were fattened up, dismembered and finally plucked.

In this ethical interrogation they are ambiguously embracing an ethics in which the virtues of prudence, dialogue and learning from experience (from falling and getting up) have a central place. Trust, nevertheless, is absent. Pragmatics assists their ethical interrogation and their feeling of distrust. This is an ethics that is shaped with “concrete, proximate, personal considerations and relations of responsibility and care.” (Schepher-Hughes, 1992) This ethical interrogation establishes a moral vision strikingly different from that which is based on “abstract, universal principles of justice, fairness and equality” (Schepher-Hughes, 1992:407). This point brings us back to the elements of

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<sup>22</sup> Remarkably this understanding of memory, prudence and wisdom follows closely the Greek and Classical approaches to the arts of memory. Francis Yates (1960) explains how in the classical art of memory “prudence” was the cardinal virtue. Memory together with intelligence and foresight were made part of prudence. Consequently, the ethical practice of memory was seen as part of the virtue of prudence. Prudence, according to Cicero, is the “knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad” (Cicero, 160 quoted by Yates 1960:20). Cicero made the connection between memory and prudence more explicit in his observation that “knowledge of the past and prudent concern for the present and future are closely linked” (Perlman 1988:7)

difference and location stressed in the definition of ethics as an interrogative practice of our sexed and embodied place in the world (Diprose, 1994; Foucault, 1984).

## **Positioning the subject: observers, wanderers and witnesses**

In the end, we can move into place, indeed *be* in place at all, only through our body's own distinct potencies. And if it is the body that places us in place to start with, it will be instrumental in re-placing us in remembered places as well. As integral to the original experience of places which we come to remember, it is also central to the motion and time that depend on that place. *Edward Casey – Remembering.*

In Chapter six I refer to the activity of walking and travelling as an “art of operating” in the city. In this chapter *subject location*, the way that the individual establishes himself/herself in the city environment, and *subject positioning*, the emplacement and point of view adopted are examined in the figures of the walker-wanderer (location) and observer-witness (position). The relation with their surrounding environment, through the spatial practices of walking and wandering, places the individual in a position in which many sensations are available: pleasure, passion, pain, puzzlement, awe.

“Looking” is a tool for inhabiting the street and for establishing a distance and a subject positioning in relation to what happens in the street. The street, in this context, becomes the place to position oneself as a subject/object in relation to the events that take place. The street and surrounding urban environment are significant mnemonic places where group memories and feelings of fear and terror circulate. “Walking” is an embodied spatial practice that locates the city dweller in the surrounding environment. Walking locates the individual in the environment through the acts of seeing and through the recognition of the sensorial experience of circulating through places and territories.

As walkers in the street, particularly in the practice of wandering, the city dwellers locate themselves as subjects who are out to see, who are seen by others, and who establish relations and communicative interactions through their spatial practices (Shields, 1994). The body -- as a perceiving entity of knowledge -- has a central place in the practices of looking, walking or travelling in/through the city. Edward Casey describes this movement into places as one taking place "through our own body's distinct potencies." Jesus Martín-Barbero (1998) following Merleau-Ponty speaks of how through a body knowledge (*savoir*) we come to perceive the outside world. This is an embodied knowledge in which the body is the place from which one sees and touches "the world,"

.. the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds and tastes, all of which trigger social memories (Stoller, 1995:7)

Youth and inhabitants of the barrios in the peripheral or low-income areas of Medellín spend much of their time socialising and interacting on the streets and travelling through the barrios and the city. In several of the narratives included so far in this text we can appreciate the extent to which their daily and leisure activities are organized around practices such as street wandering, socializing and "time killing" (Riaño, Y. 1998). One can also appreciate the skills city dwellers develop for circulating safely within the barrio or across zones in the city. I have offered examples of city dwellers, particularly youth, who find themselves located as close observers of what happens on the streets e.g. registering how someone was killed, the intensity of the collective celebrations, the verbal exchanges, the presence of ghosts or in watching events that marked them profoundly.

Seeing and walking, in this context, are risky practices and require a connoisseur's skill if the subtleties of the how, when and where to look, speak, relate to

others, and move are to be understood. In Medellín, “seeing, hearing, and say anything” are important means of survival :

The popular proverb that “walls hear” is [in the barrios] a truth people verify every day and that imposes silence as a measure of survival. What people have come to discover is that “walls also speak.” In several occasions, and after some specific events [such as the killing of someone], the militias or their opponents made clarifications, warnings, or threats through the inscriptions that appear in the walls (Jaramillo et. al, 1998: 94).

When the movement is through a city marked by spatial stratification, the city dwellers are restricted by the practices of exclusion that assign places and routes according to social class. They also encounter street crime and the risks posed by the territorial powers and dangers entrenched in the unfamiliar places.

War and deadly violence challenge the moral codes that in each society/group determine what is permitted and forbidden, what is praised or blamed, the positive and negative value of a specific behaviour and the relations that the individual ought to have with himself/herself. This is carried out particularly by the way that war and violence – as systems of power and communication – create regimes of life and death and change the moral codes that prevent people from killing each other (Rajchman, 1992). I have selected the subject location of walker-wanderer and the position of observer-witness to illustrate some of the ways that Medellín’s city dwellers encounter these dilemmas. Those who live in the middle of war and violence face a multitude of small and large tasks in their everyday life. These tasks pose challenges to their moral codes, to their close loyalties, to who they are and with what and to whom they feel a sense of belonging.

## Positioned Observers and Pleasurable Observations

As a distant observer, the city dweller develops the art of finding safe and protected viewpoints: the peep-hole of the door, the blind spot behind a post, the elevation provided by terraces and balconies, the darkness of back alleys or hidden streets. From these points, the individual can observe and see while rarely being seen. The location as *distant observer* allows the individual to attend to details, to capture the sequence of the events, and to enjoy seeing from the top, from behind, or from the side without being seen. In Chapter 6, I referred to the peep-hole in Doña Amparo's house that provided her and her daughter with a privileged and protected viewpoint from which to peep at and observe what happens on the street. Doña Amparo's detailed knowledge of the dynamics of conflict among the barrio gangs and each of the gang member's way of acting comes from her seeing from this protected viewpoint. Her daily circulation routes complement her knowledge of the conflict during her walks to the corner stores and other small business where she and others share what they have observed. In their encounters, what has been seen and heard is the raw material of their communicative exchanges. Later, their stories spread through the barrio through the arts of gossip and the power and circulation routes of rumour.

Sebastian and his mother live in a three-floor dwelling that has a terrace at the very top. This was their privileged viewing spot during the times of the wars of the *apartamenteros*. From the terrace they looked down at the shoot outs, the running and chasing of the *apartamenteros*. It was a viewpoint that gave them a sense of protection and that allowed them to capture an entire picture of what was going on. The elevation and distance provided by terraces and floors temporarily located them as a kind of

“voyeur.”<sup>23</sup> For Sebastian and his mother this was like viewing a movie: “my mother tells me (he begins to laugh) that from the balcony we could see HOW these people *se encendia* and [how] they run, it looked like a mooovie!” [I/BA/15-12-97]. “What there is to be seen” is often the issue, because increasingly what has prominence is acts of violence and confrontation and less the observation of the social interactions and movement of the city dwellers. The terrace-observer is a close observer of the behaviours and the events that take place. He/she is protected by a distance, but is not isolated by it. His/her seeing is an embodied act of sensing that selects what will be remembered, what will be forgotten, and what will be retold to others. Their knowledge is embodied in their suffering, pleasure and flesh and in the ways they embody fear or joy.

While being on the street, on the road, walking or wandering, city dwellers locate themselves in a variety of ways. The street wanderer, for example, is conceptualized in the writings of Michel de Certeau (1984) or Walter Benjamin (1978) as an individual who makes of walking a practice of leisure and of seeing a pleasurable act. While wandering on the street and “seeing,” the street wanderer engages in an art of looking that requires the “sustained attention of an observer” (Shields, 1994). As observers-walkers, they shift their gaze from place to place, from individual to individual, from one action to another. Another image of reference is the fictional image of the Flâneur, developed in French literature in the writings of Balzac, Dumas and Baudeliare, and that captured Walter Benjamin’s imagination. The flâneur makes of walking and seeing an experience

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<sup>23</sup> Michel de Certeau (1984:93) establishes a difference between these specific forms of operation in the city and the panoptic or theoretical constructions of space: “I shall try to locate the practices that are foreign to the “geometrical” or “geographical” space of visual, panoptic, or theoretical constructions. These practices of space refer to a specific form of operations (“ways of operating”), to “another spatiality” (an “anthropological,” poetic and mythic experience of space), and to an opaque and blind mobility characteristic of the bustling city.”

of voluptuous observing. It is a seeing that attempts to discern “the subtle pleasures of urban life and detection of the truth of the street” (Shields, 1994). The flâneur is a subject, an “urban native,” for whom observation is *his* raison d’être.<sup>24</sup> His individual observations and point of view are the elements that make him singular and unique. In the figure of the flâneur, Benjamin found a rich clue to describe the individual who wanders at leisurely pace through the streets of a city transformed by capitalism. The flâneur dwells in the display of consumerism, his gaze commodified while collecting the sensations of the spectacle provided by the big city (Canclini, 1997; Shields, 1994).

The leisurely pace of the flâneur provides a contrasting image to that of the street wanderer in a city like Medellín. The walker in Medellín can never resort to a leisurely pace and has to practice watchfulness as a parallel tactical art. His/her gaze collects the sensations of the city as spectacle and “the sustained attention of an observer” (Benjamin 1989, quoted by Shields, 1994). However, city dwellers’ acts of observing may at times become acts of witnessing the suffering and horror taking place, or active interventions in which they shift their observer position to one of participant observers.

### **Observer and Wanderer Types**

In what follows, I build a typology of the observer and wanderer based on factors such as social distance, allegiance, sense of trust, and local knowledge. A first character of this typology has already been introduced in the figure of the *distant observer*. Another character is the *neutral observer*, the individual who can be in “the middle” of the action but who is protected because he/she is recognized in the community as “neutral.” A

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<sup>24</sup> The figure of the flâneur has been described as mostly a male gaze.

neutral observer is not involved with the conflict, does not have a declared or a veiled sympathy with any of the actors in conflict, and has a degree of social recognition within the barrio as a whole. Ovidio, a sports leader in barrio Antioquia during the 60s and 70s, remembers how the barrio's *pistoleros* [gunmen] have always respected his life. One day during the war between *La Cueva* and *El Coco* (late 80s), he was wandering about and talking on a street corner when Carlitos and another member of the gang of *La Cueva* came and killed a child and a man who were standing beside Ovidio. When the gang member saw Ovidio, he asked Carlitos whether Ovidio should be killed. Carlitos told him not to kill Ovidio because "this man is neutral, he knows everyone in the barrio, leave him alone brother!" His life was spared that day. The same would happen a few days later when the members of the gang of *El Coco* engaged in a shoot out with those of *la Cueva*. Richard, one of the leaders of *El Coco*, warned the others to be careful with Ovidio – who was hanging out in a corner and talking to others. As observer and wanderer in the streets of the barrio, Ovidio was able to circulate and observe anywhere in the barrio because he was recognized as neutral. His perceived neutrality was gained, first because "he knew, walked and hung out *anywhere* in the barrio;" and secondly, because he did not have a direct investment in the war. As the gang leader said: *el no lleva ni trae chismes, ni es sapo de nadie* [he doesn't bring or take bits of gossip, nor does he rat on anyone].

*Travellers* through the barrios and the city are also located in several positions according to social distances, allegiances, sense of trust and local knowledge. Nano is the owner of a collective van that provides transportation services through several barrios of the Central Eastern zone of Medellin. He has kept himself alive by carefully

maintaining his position as a neutral individual and, more specifically, as a *neutral traveller*. Neutrality for Nano has been gained because he is “a friend of everyone”. He speaks to everyone and never agrees to “carry messages” or to give away what he has heard from the others. He describes these *tactics of circulating* that position him as neutral,

7.8. Nano: On one occasion those [the gang] of the *Llanadas* and those of *Tres esquinas* were *dandose plomo* [in a gunfight]. I went up in a car to see who was being killed up there and they [the gang members] were taking refuge by the wall of a house, they were 5 or 6 ..., I arrived and said “wait a moment *muchachos* that I’m going over there to the other side,” they remained still and I went through, and over there were the others and in all that time – I went through slow – there was not even one shot. When I returned, one of the [gang members] over here told me “how many is there over there?” “see, I didn’t even take notice” and I continued, went through and they began again.<sup>25</sup>

Nano as traveller through areas of extreme danger knows the visual, communication and behavioural clues that allow him to remain safe while keeping close attention to the events witnessed. He knows, however, that he has to be careful with his gaze and even more so with his words concerning what, when and to whom he speaks about what he sees, hears and discusses. He has learned that people are killed for being “*torcidos*” [betrayers], so he has established his subject positioning as someone who is not a *torcido*, and he relates in similar ways to everyone.

Being on a corner, visiting someone, walking on the street or standing by the door provides a viewpoint to observe what is going on in the street. The observer who stands on a fixed point or walks finding “something to do” is often surprised by the events observed. There is in the barrios a practice of “rushing-to-look at what is happening” when there is a dead person or when conflict breaks out, a procession, parade or funeral

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<sup>25</sup> Interview carried out by a researcher of Corporación Región as part of their study on conflict and political culture in Medellín.

passes, or when any festivity or major event takes place. Here the character is that of the *engaged observer*. Martha, like many others in the barrio, was a “regular” observer during funerals for the barrio’s deceased. She passionately followed all the details of the funerals: the women who cried, the cars that came, what the dead person looked like, etc. Her engaged and pleasurable observations were shattered, however, when in the middle of the wake for one of the best known *apartamenteros*, a group of armed men arrived and began shooting at the coffin in a room that was packed with people. Since then, Martha has stopped her rush to see the dead, “I never went back to see dead people, with this *aha!* ... they were going to bury me on par with him!” Her pleasurable observations were shattered, they became fear.

The observers are sometimes displaced from their observational viewpoint and become helpers or agents who try to save lives. They become *participant observers*. Clara, a mother of two, heard the sounds of shootings from her house. When the shooting stopped, she came to her door to see what had happened as did all her neighbours. Upon opening her door, she saw some men injured while one of them collapsed by her elderly neighbour’s door. While this man was taken to the hospital, everyone began to talk and comment on what they had just seen and to try to figure out who was involved. Clara was talking to her neighbour when “one of them came quietly, with his jacket and his hand inside – like Napoleon – and we [said], ‘but look!’ ... it was then that he came to us and said ‘please help me, help me .. I am going to die’!!” When he opened his jacket he was soaked in blood. Clara froze, unable to do anything, while her neighbour ran to the corner of the street stopped a cab and took the man to the hospital.

Observing while wandering, walking, travelling or standing is continuously challenged by the events taking place. I have stressed the pleasurable dimension in the act of observation that evokes images of the connoisseur of the urban environment. There is also the image of the distant observer who sees from above. I have also emphasized how as engaged observers, city dwellers can not easily distance themselves from the suffering and puzzlement that affect the victims of violence and often witness the horror inflicted on those they know or on their loved ones. In chapter 5, when describing the recitational genre of death-listings, I touched on the location of the individuals and their construction as *agents who suffer and remember* the tragedy taking place in their communities. In this subject position the gaze shifts from that of the observer who establishes a distance to that of a *witness*. The city dweller becomes a subject who bears witness to the suffering and pain, of the acts of arbitrary and chaotic violence, and the senseless loss of lives.

### **The Ethics of Witnessing: What Am I to Do Here?**

As observer and witness of death, abuse and violent practices, the city dweller continuously finds herself/himself in a quandary in regards to her/his position or social distance vis a vis what and who she sees. However, as seen earlier in the accounts of Martha and Clara, witnessing brings forward a question about “what-am-I-to-do-here?” This is a question that often haunts city dwellers who witness atrocities inflicted upon others by others, and in which both “others” are often known to them through their kinship or neighbourhood ties. In such cases, the seers become voluntarily or spontaneously involved in the outcome of the events (as Clara did). While remembering, witnessing is one of the key positionings from which subjects remember and forget.

Milton, for example, in his memory of the possessed sorcerer (presented in Chapter five) attributed the validity of his story to his specific position as a witness of the events.

Anthropological literature on violence has appealed to the image of the witness as a way to describe the ethics of doing ethnographies of violence. The anthropologist, we are told, is inspired by an ethics of ethnographic witnessing that “acknowledges that no experience of violence can be reduced to another” and that establishes the anthropologist as the “witness-emissary” or “scribe” who can take the “symbolic excess of violence away and outside,” lend her voice on behalf of those who have lived the horror (Feldman, 1995; Green, 1995) or give voice to those who have been silenced (Scheper-Hughes, 1992). In chapter two, I addressed and questioned this subject position for the anthropologist. I argued that by situating himself/herself as a “witness-emissary,” the anthropologist is establishing a distance that disregards the social and political implications of their bodily presence *in* the field. I also questioned the restrictions of bearing witness through the act of writing. In this section, however, the discussion is about the location as witness of those who live amidst the conflict.

For the city dweller, however, it is precisely the meaning of “away” and “outside” and the figure of the “witness-emissary” that are riddled with ambiguity and contradiction as they are not in the privileged vantage points of the outsider. To whom are they to bear witness? Can they, at last, be positioned as witness? I argue that the city dwellers in Medellin locate themselves as witnesses, as subjects who bear witness to those communities of memory in which they strive to make meaning of their everyday lives and history. Their positioning as witnesses is that of “insiders”. It is about their individual and collective selves and their communities to whom they bear witness of suffering,

tragedy and evil. Memory acts here as a *bridging practice* through which they position themselves as subjects of witnessing and as a *situated distance* in which the individuals locate themselves as witness.

To position oneself as witness within the described landscape of violence is often a practice threatened by violence and terror. The extent of violence may at some points hinder the possibility of recording its effects, of “receiving a coded message of what has been seen” (Feldman, 1995:250). At other times, this subject position may place the individual at risk as she or he is perceived by “others” as knowing too much (having witnessed too much) (Feldman, 1995).

City dwellers continue to find subject positions that although not free of risk, threat and ambiguity still incite them to recognize themselves as active agents, as subjects acting on others, as subjects of reflection and as subjects who bear witness through their memory practices. I learned this from Clara Lia who recounted a vivid memory of her boyfriend lying dead on the floor, of her looking at him while retrospectively looking back at their six years together. She was puzzled about how someone else, the killer, in one single moment, had destroyed all her dreams. I asked her what she has learned from the experience and she responded,

7.9. Clara Lia: I learned to fight with *verraquera* [lots of passion and strength], I learned to not be afraid of life, to be capable of withstanding hard times, to conquer the unexpected, I learned that despite that people don't agree with what I'm doing, as long as I know what I'm doing it's okay, and I should continue and put a lot of love and energy into what I'm doing [MW/MLLIN/17-04-97].

Clara Lia's witnessing and her suffering were crucial in shaping herself as a subject who is determined to act and build other possibilities out of a painful and marking experience. Her positioning defies that of the “passive” victim or the revengeful one while it speaks

of a sensitive location and a self awareness (Swedenburg, 1995). It is a positioning that directs us to the power of placed experiences and their memory to guide the individuals and to provide them with a sensorial ground and the emplacement from which to construct themselves as subjects of action, reflection and pleasure. Witnessing, in summary, is a practice of embodied seeing that affects the ways each individual perceives himself/herself as part of a community – a group of friends, an organization, and the barrio – and the practices through which one defines selfhood and moral conduct. Witnessing is tied to the notion of agency. Seeing, hearing and embodied presence are not passive actions but an intrinsic parts of the act of witnessing that Nadia Seremetakis (1994) characterizes as the link between emotions and historicization.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I reviewed the modes through which the city dwellers of Medellin remember and locate themselves as subjects of action. I began by establishing a link between the practices of territoriality and circulation, place making and history production, and the specific modes Medellin city dwellers use to define themselves as active subjects. From this viewpoint, several examples were reviewed. The chapter reviewed the figures of the martyr and the amazon, and techniques of bodily performance as models for self-construction and for remembering absent ones. There were also the tools of the heart used by people like Lia who constructed herself as a subject who stood up to powerful and violent “others.” The examples reviewed discussing subject positioning and location spoke of the practices of dwelling by which we saw how the subjects inhabit the world as walkers, wanderers, observers and witnesses. The body is

placed here in various subject positions, all of them crossed by the agency of the subject who plays a role in the formation of the social reality in which he or she participates.

The subject location and the modes by which the city dwellers of Medellin come to define themselves as subjects who recognize their moral obligations, establish their ethical boundaries and position themselves are continuously challenged. In a city like Medellin, ambiguity and moral contradictions haunt social actors constantly when they face realities of life and death, friendships and enmities, rape and torture, and territorial loyalties and war. The tensions observed in the ways that city dwellers locate themselves as martyrs, amazons, community activists, teachers, youth leaders, city walkers or witnesses *may at times* refer to the presence of a contradictory or ambiguous ethics. This ambiguity is directly affected by the dynamics of violence under which, some city dwellers constitute themselves as agents of killing, rape and coercion. I have charted here how some types of suffering tended to be disregarded while violence and terror inflicted upon others tend to be legitimated. This reveals the presence of what I have called "fissures" in the social and ethical fabric. These fissures speak of the interplay of power and oppression in the local context and how, for example, the prevalence of patriarchal ideologies legitimate sexual oppression while disempowering local cultural frames of female transgression. In my view, these fissures seriously threaten the attempts of city dwellers to construct an ethics of possibility that includes elements of care, dialogue, respect, difference and responsibility. My effort has been to highlight the complex and active forms through which city dwellers constitute themselves as subjects of action and the impossibility to define their ethical interrogation and subject position within one single frame.

## Chapter Eight

### General Conclusions

#### A nocturnal map: The traffic of memories

Travelling through the city now didn't do anything for me but point out absences: on that corner I would meet Pablo ... in this "residence" I would stay with Alfredo ... in that cafeteria we would meet with Manuel y Rosa ... here we would eat with Fayad ... in this building I lived with Violeta ... this was Lucho's favourite bakery ... Someone passing by, the sound of a voice, a song on the radio, details that would evoke faces, names or pseudonyms and immediately, death would devour their image. This is how my world became populated with ghosts, I would see them strolling all over the city. In dreams I would bring them together and hug them.

*Maria Eugenia Velásquez – Bitacora de una militancia*

While mapping the complex cultural dynamics of violence and the rich field of memory practices of Medellin city dwellers, I had few certainties in deciding which theoretical, analytical and methodological routes to take. My journey can be best described with the image of "a nocturnal map." Jesus Martin-Barbero (1987) evokes this image in his discussion about the difficulties of constructing rational theories that can synthesize dynamics as complex, changing [dynamic] and plural as those of violence and cultural identities. Martin-Barbero calls for a change of the place from which we begin to ask questions and for a challenge to the certainties of a "day time logic,"

A silent but even more important tendency is moving in another direction: exploring in tentative almost groping fashion without a guiding map or with only an obscure, night-time map. This is a map which enables us to study domination, production and labour from the other side of the picture, the side of the cracks in domination, the consumption dimensions of economy and the pleasures of life. It is not a map for escape but, rather, to help us

recognize our situation from the perspective of mediations and the subjects of action (Martín-Barbero, 1993:212).

The memory practices of Medellín's city dwellers led me through a night-time map in which I explored the cultural dimensions of violence. This thesis has mapped out some of the routes and labyrinths of memory and also some of the forces at play in the practices of remembering and forgetting in a society deeply affected by violence. In this final chapter, I review some of my findings and discuss their implications for research on memory and violence in anthropology and for current social and political discussions on issues of memory in situations of extreme violence.

## **A place-based exploration of memory and violence**

What does the examination of the memory practices of Medellín's city dwellers suggest about the cultural dynamics of violence? I approached the discussion of cultural identities from the perspective of place and its significance and specificity in shaping individuals' sense of who they are and in providing a metaphor, in the local context, to think about how a sense of community is formed (Nutall, 1993). The nocturnal routes took me to a variety of practices, realms and subject positionings that underscored the centrality of violence in shaping the cultural identity of Medellín's city dwellers.

Following these routes, I became aware that when the social and physical worlds of Medellín's city dwellers have been shattered, they resort to practices of memory. For Medellín city dwellers, memory creates bridges between the physical and social destruction taking place and their efforts to maintain a sense of coherence and continuity. This thesis underscored how the remembering and forgetting practices of Medellín's city

dwellers are rooted in places. A sense of place, it was argued, enables individuals to evoke and name past events and to create a sense of continuity with the past. Places, as a dimension of our lived experience, also have the power of triggering imaginations that place individuals within “new worlds.” The insights from a small but growing field of work in the anthropology of place were discussed in order to describe the ways that places connect people with a sense of history by establishing sensorial and mnemonic links with the past and the future (Basso, 1997; Casey, 1996).

A place-based exploration of memory and violence provided me with a critical stance for questioning the disregard in the literature on violence for the crucial ways in which memory and place mediate the lived experience of violence. One of my main arguments has been that a sense of place, as a realm of embodied experience, provides a referent of belonging and knowledge which guides city dwellers towards maintaining a sense of coherence even when their immediate social worlds have been shattered by violence and terror. My work demonstrated that through their memory practices city dwellers attempt to maintain a sense of place and social belonging to “territories” controlled by armed actors through the use of weapons and terror.

This dissertation has also shown the impact that various forms of violence have had on places through the erasure of the physical and symbolic marks that give places “character” and “spirit.” This tension between the marks of violence and terror and the marks of rootedness and belonging has been described with the image of a place-palimpsest where layers of memory rest upon the traces of other memories. When everyday life is disrupted by bloody violence, city dwellers continue to fashion places as they continue to “fashion themselves”:

... as people fashion places, so too, do they fashion themselves. People do not just dwell in comfort or misery, in centres or margins, in place or out of place, empowered or disempowered, People everywhere act on the integrity of their dwelling (Feld and Basso, 1996:11).

## **Cultural Identities and Violence**

This thesis has provided ample illustration of the many and complex ways in which violence and culture intersect in the lived experiences of Medellín's city dwellers. My fieldwork indicated that a number of the cultural referents that are available to Medellín's city dwellers, and particularly to youth, come from the imagery, discourses, forms and memories of "violence." The use of the language and imagery of war, the enactment of territory and territoriality as symbols of recognition, power and war resources and the cultural constructions of local "fame" around the mastery of weapons and life-risking practices are examples of this imagery of violence. As my dissertation has shown, however, this relationship between cultural referents and violence does not imply that Colombians are mere "objects" of violence or subjugated by violence, or that the processes of cultural production are exhausted or restricted to violence. Although violence and war constitute central referents in the construction of networks of communication in the city and in the formation of cultural identities, they neither exhaust the possibilities of identity formation nor do they control the communication networks among Medellín city dwellers.

By exploring the dimensions of human agency and cultural reconstruction, this thesis has critically examined concepts such as “terror as usual” and “cultures of fear” that inform the works of ethnographers of violence. I have argued that these conceptualizations reduce the experience of those who live amidst violence to a binary field of victims and perpetrators, and that they delegitimize their lived experiences, particularly their experiences of pain and suffering. The use of these concepts to describe the experiences of a group of individuals obscures the fact that these individuals are agents actively creating their historical and social reality, and that this activity includes a complex field of practices of resistance and creativity, as well as their active participation as agents of death and violence.

My work has drawn from the anthropology of suffering and emotions in order to examine what city dwellers “do” with/to violence. Examples include the practices of “border crossing” in which city dwellers seek commonalities with “other” city dwellers; the forgetting practices of youth in conflict who argue that they do not remember the reasons that prompted them to fight with other gangs or militia groups; and the ways Medellin’s city dwellers struggle against the normalization of death and violence’s taken-for-granted status in their daily lives by re-creating an oral history of death and the dead. This thesis concludes that the oral history of death and the dead plays a vital social role in expressing the extent of disruption in daily life and the pain, loss and suffering that violence brings to the life of the individuals.

I found examples of how violence impacts the formation of cultural identities in the cultural belief in the superiority of physical strength and the power of weapons. Historically, a cultural construction such as *verraquera* has come to be a leading quality

and model of behaviour in which individuals situate themselves within their communities. It serves as a paradigmatic model of behaviour that establishes toughness and fearlessness as central values of the local culture. What individuals do with this model of behaviour varies. For some, it frames and informs their violent actions as gangs or militia members, for others, it describes a subject position in which they assume a “tough” stance while leading social community processes or positioning themselves against the violent resolution of conflicts.

The exploration of the territorial dynamics of the city led me to emphasize the way that cultural identities and the sense of self and otherness, particularly for youth in conflict, are being played out in the territory. I documented how the various forms of violence taking place in the last decade in Colombia and the macro social processes, such as the drug economy have co-opted and silenced forms of youth subcultural expression. Territory has come to represent a context, a resource and a symbol of power for these youth and, furthermore, it has come to embody youth’s “otherness” as well as a terrain in which youth cultural differences are constructed. This thesis has shown how these dynamics of territory and identity are taking place within larger dynamics of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in the city of Medellin. In this regard, the concept of communities of memory illustrated how in contexts affected by displacement, fragmentation and uprooting, the construction of a sense of rootedness challenges the idea that to feel rooted one needs defined spatial and social boundaries, and proposes that a sense of belonging can also be found through the sharing of memories. A sense of rootedness, in this context, encompasses memory and imagination and underscores the

fact that cultural identities and a sense of community are not fixed or restricted to spatial boundaries (Malkki, 1998).

The mapping of the memory practices of Medellin's city dwellers revealed the multiple and complex ways in which city dwellers are creating meaning and making sense of their daily lives within a violent social context. These forms of creating meaning are guided by memories' ability to re-create individual and collective identities that give meaning to the present and the future. In reviewing how Medellin city dwellers position themselves as unique and particular members of a community, I emphasized the ambiguity and contradiction that characterize their subject positioning. When faced with the realities of life and death, the familiarity with the actors of violence, and the human suffering that violence inflicts upon the subjects, individuals do not stand in simple and definite positions. For example, I found that individuals who search for alternatives of peace and co-existence are also questioned in terms of their loyalties and relations with those involved in the conflict. I have also provided other examples that illustrate the "fissures" in the social and ethical fabric of these communities, such as the maintenance of gendered constructions of self in which individuals re-create and legitimize their constitution as agents of rape or death. The weakening in the social fabric and the re-enactment of a *verraquera* that is complicit with the agency of death and rape indicated the profound impact that years of violence and terror have had on the society, as well as the passive and complicit stance of these subject positions in regards to violence.

Following the focus on experience within an anthropology of place, I developed a theoretical and methodological positioning that considers the multiple and contested positions the city dwellers may take. A city dweller may shift subject positions as he or

she walks the streets, travels on the public transit or wanders and observes from a street corner or from a peep hole. Thus, the observer, the walker or the wanderer of the streets establishes significant relations with the surrounding environment and places himself/herself in a position in which many sensations are available: pleasure, passion, pain, puzzlement, awe. The body and the senses play a key role in shaping this positioning of the subjects, particularly as witnesses of suffering and pain, of acts of violence, and of loss of lives. The figure of the witness was explored as one possible position in which the city dweller is located as an individual who bears witness to a community of memory. The witness attests to the suffering and pain within his/her own community realm, and, most importantly, sees the possibilities of acting and building out of painful and marking experiences. I have argued that Medellin's city dwellers' engagement in or distancing from forms of violence is affected by their emotional and social ties, their social distance in relationship to the social conflict, their ethical stance, and the interplay of larger macro-economic, social and political forces within the local context.

The discussion of the city dweller as witness to a community of memory has been contrasted with the ways ethnographers of violence position themselves as "witness-emissaries" to the outside world of "the horrors witnessed." This dissertation challenged this positioning and its location as an interpretative strategy that is resolved in the task of "writing against terror." The subject location embedded in the figure of the "witness-emissary" and the interpretative and textual resolution it conveys, perpetuates the colonial and missionary impetus of the anthropological discipline and has reinforced self-serving images of anthropological "heroism". This thesis calls for a radical shift in subject

positioning if anthropologists are to seriously address the ethical issues of studying violence and confront the discipline's Colonial impetus. For this purpose, I suggested praxis as the guiding concept of the research methodology and of the relationship between anthropologist and research subjects, including the ethical responsibility of researching on the topic of violence. This displacement from the witnessing-emissary-writer location to the field of praxis places academic knowledge and researchers in the intersubjective field of interaction. It addresses the anthropologist's location through a questioning of how fieldwork is conducted and how the anthropologist locates herself within the social worlds in which her research is conducted.

## **Memory, forgetting and reconstruction**

I have argued that although memory provides a bridge for Colombian city dwellers to maintain a sense of coherence and continuity, it is also the terrain where crucial ethical and social dilemmas and the paradoxes of violence come to light. This thesis has formulated questions about memory, forgetting, silence and cultural identity, as well as about the impact of widespread and continuous violence on individual and social memories. Much of the literature that has addressed these issues pertains to political violence and/or totalitarian regimes. This dissertation advances the discussion of memory and violence by attending to the everyday dimensions of violence and exploring questions of cultural identity at the level of the community and the city.

Memory constitutes a disputed, re-constructed and redefined terrain where identities are formed. The formation of cultural identities takes place amidst social

struggles and power, in regimes of power and violence, and in individuals' attempts to make sense of daily violence and past horrors. By remembering death and the dead within narratives that memorialize them in a mythology of sacrifice (e.g. martyrs), Medellin's city dwellers attempt to restore a sense of dignity to their community. Their practices of remembering, however, are characterized by ambiguity when it comes to what is remembered about the dead and when city dwellers define their loyalties and positioning in the conflict taking place. I have argued that the ambiguity present in the city dwellers' acts of remembering the dead is shaped by the dynamics of violence. This ambiguity is illustrated in forms of remembering the dead that recall their community involvement but not their troublesome links with acts of violence. This ambiguity, and sometimes contradiction, is suggestive of the various uses and abuses of memory within the social context of the city.

The thesis clearly shows that it is precisely within the realm of memory that a cultural construction of violence, as intrinsic to the history of Colombia, has been maintained (Pecaut, 1997). The memory of past events and sufferings legitimizes a local reading of the present violence as a continuation of the past violence. Furthermore, it legitimizes feelings of revenge or hopelessness based on past experiences. This local construction of violence poses a question of to what extent this remembering conveys a forgetting of "the place of memory" (Perlman, 1988). Is this type of remembering maintaining a memory that repeats itself in mechanistic associations and in actions such as in revenge? Luisa Passerini asks a similar question when she reflects about the kind of memory we need to face the tasks of the present,

What is required is indeed not a simple and spontaneous memory, not the one that stems from a need for vengeance, for

instance, but a memory of a memory, a memory that is possible because it evokes another memory (Passerini, 1992:2).

Memory in Colombia is at risk of “loosing its place” when its capacity as a tool for cultural survival is undermined by the pervasive abuse of the mechanistic and spontaneous practices of memory (e.g. institutionalized commemorations and rituals, revenge and selective forgetting by those involved in the conflict). At times, the argument is that a past memory of horror justifies violent and repressive agendas. Other times, memories are transformed into a mythology that ascertains that violence is intrinsic to the “national” being. In both of these cases, there is a risk of remaining in a place of remembrance in which the commemoration and legitimization of victim status is perpetuated. French historian Todorov (1997) says that an individual who does not face mourning and continues living in the past is condemned to live in anguish and over time in madness. But when entire groups decide “to live in the past” with a fixed memory that registers the atrocities to which they have been victims, the concern becomes the social memory and society as a whole. For these groups, the present tends to be repressed and erased as the fundamental dimension of existence. The freezing of the past as the only referent of group identification feeds a repetitive and literal memory that does not resignify the group’s experiences or confront their mourning processes and is a memory practice that can lead to vengeance or immobility. Todorov’s analysis is of great relevance to the dilemmas Medellin’s city dwellers face in their daily life. It is also applicable to the present reality of Colombia in which the dynamics of war and peace are continuously placing the issues of memory and violence in the agendas of peace negotiation and in the debate concerning justice and reconciliation.

Fra Mauro, a Venetian Renaissance monk, devoted his life to drawing a map of the world that he hoped would be a definitive one. While I was writing this dissertation, I read Fra Mauro's reflections. His reflections spoke to and interrogated my own experience in mapping the cultural dynamics of violence in Medellin. Fra Mauro carried out his mapping by listening to and recording the memories and stories of visiting travellers who described the worlds, peoples and landscapes they had seen. As his task came to a close and he prepared to draw the final rendition of his *mappamundi*, he realized that he needed to look at the world from "other perspectives,"

When I began this map I was intent on realizing a certainty, and now the reverse has proved to be true. No continent or people have turned out to exist except in relation to themselves. Their geographical location has also proven to be deceptive. The inescapable conclusion is that the true location of the world, of its countries, mountains, rivers, and cities, happens to lie in the eye of the beholder. Only there does its individual features partake of that dream quality that one associates with its invention (Cowan, 1996:134).

Fra Mauro's reflections helped to locate myself in the nocturnal map of the practices of memory. They also helped me understand how my own "invisible geography" and nocturnal map of memories and imaginations informed the interpretative task I carried out here. My writing keeps the traces of this geography and mapping and responds to my personal stance on violence in Colombia; a stance that I have described as non-neutral, academic, informed by the memory of personal losses, and by my cultural location as a Colombian and a Canadian.

A resolution to the violent conflict and forms of violence that affect Colombia today does not appear feasible in the near future. Keeping this in mind, we interrogate

ourselves about the kind of memory needed in facing “the tasks of the present” acquires greater relevance. This question needs to be asked if we are to think about avenues for resolution to the violent conflict in Colombia and ways of dealing with the themes of memory, mourning and reconciliation. Furthermore, this question needs to be taken through a night-time route in order to interrogate our location as researchers, our strategies of knowledge production, our theories and methods as well as the uses and abuses of memory that they convey.

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## Glossary

*Apartamentero(a)*: house thief working in a semi-organized gang

*Atarugados*: carrying many things at the same time

*Balacera*: shooting

*Bambas*: fancy jackets

*Bareta*: pot

*Bizcocho(a)*: good looking man/woman

*Calentarse*: desire to kill or commit a violent act

*Calidoso*: cool guy and a friend

*Calientísima*: very hot person, in conflict

*Calientísimo*: used to refer to a site/location that is at the centre of the conflict, where the risk of shootings or danger is high

*Carniceros*: butchers, that like to see blood running (killing)

*Carretillero*: the wheelbarrow man

*Chivos*: tattletales

*Cobrando vacuna*: a forced circulation tax

*Combo*: a group of mostly male friends

*Comuna*: a geographical area formed with barrios of a similar socio economic profile

*Coronado*:

*Coronar*: to make it big (generally in a drug “business”) and to gain a new improved status

*Cucho*: old man

*Descontroles*: a confusing moment because there is either a fight or a very intense party time

*Despechada*: heart broken

*Duro*: used to characterize a place or a person. Dangerous, ready to kill, not afraid of taking risks and dangerous actions.

*En su discurso*: in your own thoughts

*fuera del montón*: unique, one of a kind

*Fumando vicio*: doing drugs

*Galofardos*: refined, highly skilled thieves

*Junta de Acción Comunal*: Community Action Board

*Lo cascaron*: they killed him

*Lo quebraron*: they killed him, "smashed him"

*Lo tumbaron*: they kill him, "push him down"

*Mafiosos*: mafia people

*Malos*: the bad guys

*Manga*: green grassy area

*Mataculines*: teeter-totter

*Miliciano*: individual belonging to the urban militias

*Milicias*: urban militias

*Morros*: small hill

*Muchach(os)as*: the boys and the girls involved in the conflict

*Murito*: little wall

*Muy tocado*: felt it deeply

*Noveliar*: satisfy their curiosity/snoop around

*Parceros*: belonging to the same friendship group, someone you are loyal to.

*Parcharse*: to spend time in the *parche*

*Parche*: the meeting/gathering place of a *combo* (group)

*Pasajes*: tenement houses

*Paseos*: outings, hikes

*Pastusazo*: a crack cigarette

*Pelaitos, pelaos*: very young lads

*Pelao(a)*: young man/woman

*Picado*: vein

*Pillos*: involved in petty crime

*Pinchada*: feeling elegant

*Ranchos*: shantytown

*Recordatorios*: in memoriam cards

*Roche*: a psychoactive drug commercially known as Rophynol

*Sano*: out of trouble, clean-living

*Se calentaron*: they got all worked up

*Sicarios*: hired assassins

*Tropeles*: fights

*Vacano*: very good

*Verraquera*: toughness, lack of fear

## List of Workshops and Group Sessions

<b>Group</b>	<b>Type of session</b>	<b>Geographical area</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b># of Participants</b>
Gang el Cuadradero (GC)	Memory Workshop	Barrio Antioquia	19-08-97	11
Gang el Cuadradero	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	07-10-97	10
Gang el Cuadradero	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	28-10-97	6
Gang el Cuadradero	Interviews Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	29-10-97	6
Youth Group Juenfu (YG)	Memory Workshop	Barrio Antioquia	30-05-97	12
YG Juenfu	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	20-06-97	9
YG Juenfu	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	04-07-97	15
YG juenfu	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	11-07-97	12
YG Juenfu	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	08-09-97	10
YG Juenfu	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	15-08-97	10
Training Centre Women (TC) AM	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	13-06-97	15
Training Centre Women PM	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	19-06-97	10
Training Centre Women AM+PM	Memory Workshop	Barrio Antioquia	27-07-97	20
Training Centre	Group Session (Devolution)	Barrio Antioquia	16-07-97	20
Junta Accion Comunal Probapaz (JAC)	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	10-06-97	8
JAC/Probapaz	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	11-06-97	8
Interinstitutional Committee (IC)	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	30-10-97	5
Interinstitutional Committee – Schools	Group Session	Barrio Antioquia	18-11-97	10
Youth Workers	Memory Workshop	Medellin	17-04-97	27
Youth Houses POP II	Group Session	North Eastern	10-03-97	15
Youth House POP II	Group Session	North Eastern	06-04-97	16
Youth House POP II	Memory Workshop	North Eastern	18-05-97	27
Three Youth Houses	Memory Workshop	North Eastern	11-10-97	12

Three Youth Houses	Memory Workshop	North Eastern	17-10-97	8
Three Youth H	Group Session	North Eastern	08-11-97	15
Teachers M/lin and Valle Aburra	Memory Workshop	Medellín Metropolitan Area	15-04-97	27
Youth Group Wayferers	Group Session	Central Eastern	09-06-97	15
Youth Group Wayferers	Memory Workshop	Central Eastern	05-07-97	11
Civic Movement	Memory Workshop	South Western	12-04-97	18
Local Non Governmental Organization	Memory Workshop	North Eastern	23-06-97	21