

Reading the Walls in Bogotá: Imaginaries of Violence in the Urban Visual Landscape

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Abstract

This thesis examines urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá, Colombia, through the lens of graffiti and street art. Signs of these aesthetic practices are abundant in the city, and my research brings together a range of subcultures, styles, motivations and messages to highlight the role of the urban visual landscape as a site through which imaginaries of violence are critiqued, negotiated and (re)produced. Informed by an ethnographic approach, the analysis focuses on the meanings attached to graffiti and street art in different areas of the city, collected through interviews and focus groups with their creators and the wider public. The thesis is structured around three case studies, which present some of the key contemporary trends in graffiti and street art in Bogotá. In the first, the dynamics of graffiti and street art on Calle 26 reveal competing ways of seeing political violence and diverse expectations of peace through the representation of memories of violence. In the second case study, the process of beautification is used to counteract the stigma attached to vulnerable neighbourhoods in Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia, but it is hampered by the realities of structural and direct violence. Finally, in La Candelaria, attitudes to graffiti and street art are entangled in aesthetic hierarchies that reflect social hierarchies, which underscores the structural inequalities embedded in public space. The socio-spatial context informs the practices and imaginaries in, and of, these different places, and serves to highlight the heterogeneity of urban social groups and their diverse claims to space. By focusing specifically on the tensions, complexities and contradictions associated with graffiti and street art in these places, I show the convergence of violences in everyday life and their potential political, spatial and social implications, while also problematizing the cultural politics of these forms of expression.

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Chapter 1

Introduction



Figure 1 El puente del grafitero

On the 19th August 2011, Diego Felipe Becerra was shot and killed by police officer Wilmer Antonio Alarcón in an upper middle-class neighbourhood in the north of Bogotá, Colombia. He was 16 years old and had been hanging out with his friends, doing graffiti around the bridge that intersects Avenida Boyacá with Calle 116. They tried to run away when they saw the police nearby, but a few of them were caught by one of the officers. Diego Felipe was amongst those caught and, although he slipped the policeman's grasp, he was shot twice in the back as he ran. The police took him to the hospital, while the friend who had witnessed the event called the family, and the two versions of events that were subsequently released reveal very different narratives. The police stated that Diego Felipe and his friends had committed an armed robbery of a bus and that Diego Felipe was shot in the ensuing chase. Diego Felipe's friends and family refuted their claim, proving that the gun had been planted at the crime scene and that fake witnesses had been hired to corroborate the cover story. This was a significant task that involved taking the police to court (including the officer and those who helped to cover up the

crime) and persuading the media and wider public that the victim was not a delinquent whose death was inevitable but a young, middle-class boy whose only crime was expressing himself on the walls of the city. After years of intimidation, corruption and impunity, a judge in 2017 declared that the case was an example of an urban ‘false positive’, referring to both the state-sanctioned murder of an innocent civilian and the attempted cover-up. Although Alarcón received a sentence of 37 years, at the time of writing he has, apparently, evaded the law, and the accomplices within the higher echelons of the police force have not been charged.¹

The case is of huge significance in Bogotá. That a young boy had been killed just because he was doing graffiti raised the level of public debate about the right to self-expression in the city, catalysed the political mobilisation of graffiti and street artists, and reinforced the widespread recognition of the corruption of the police force and judicial system. Representations of Diego Felipe’s alias, Trípido, and his trademark Felix the Cat character pay homage to him at the site where he died and around the capital (figure 1). Local youth centres and cultural festivals have taken his name and the 19th August now officially commemorates his death as ‘Urban Art Day’ in Bogotá.² Furthermore, while a legal process to regulate graffiti was already underway by then, this case is seen as key to changing the angle taken by the local government under Gustavo Petro’s term as mayor, because he started to involve the participation of graffiti and street artists. Consequently, the 2013 law regulating graffiti (Law 075) and its amendment in 2015 (Decree 529), notably recognise all forms of graffiti as cultural expression and commit to supporting their development.

The relationship between graffiti and violence in Bogotá is the central concern of this thesis. Bogotá is a city where the visual landscape displays both an impressive quantity of graffiti and street art, and an enormous range of such aesthetic expressions, which reflects the diversity of those who write the walls. This research project moves beyond an interpretation of one subculture or another and instead represents an ethnographic engagement with their collective import and impact on the city, notably offering an in-

¹ <https://www.elespectador.com/noticias/Bogotá/siete-anos-del-crimen-de-diego-felipe-becerra-persiste-el-grito-de-justicia-articulo-807227>

² <http://www.zona57.com/los-19-de-agosto-se-celebrara-el-dia-del-arte-urbano-en-Bogotá/>

depth analysis of their production *and* reception, as well as a nuanced analysis of their association with the illicit or subaltern. It is precisely by attending to the relationships between the different forms of graffiti and street, including what they share and where they diverge, that a more nuanced and complex understanding of violence emerges. Indeed, in parallel to recognising the diversity of graffiti and street art, I also approach violence as multiple and imbricated. Violence manifests itself in many ways in Bogotá, some of which will be detailed below. Rather than focusing on the distinctions between them, though, the thesis exposes their connections and situates them on a continuum. Moreover, the analysis centres on social imaginaries of violence, where violence is not only something that is experienced, but something that is endowed with meaning in the ways in which it is imagined, reproduced, critiqued and negotiated in everyday life, by multiple social groups in the city. Specifically, the thesis considers how violence is imagined through graffiti and street art, and how that relates to broader imaginaries of violence in Bogotá, guided by the following research questions:

How do graffiti and street art offer an insight into urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá?

- *How is violence represented in graffiti and street art?*
- *How do people interpret graffiti and street art in relation to their perceptions of social and political realities?*
- *What perceptions of violence are suggested through these interpretations and discussions?*

The thesis argues that the collective construction of meaning in Bogotá, is, in part, shaped by imaginaries of violence that are marked by contradictions and ambiguities, particularly when applied to the aesthetic representation of violence in graffiti and street art. My findings contribute to social, political and cultural understandings of violence and aesthetics in that they problematise common conceptions of both violence and graffiti and street art, whereby the former is approached according to its distinct manifestations, for example as direct or structural violence, and the latter is deemed either to be subversive because illegal or appropriated because sanctioned. The research crosses several disciplines, and appeals to academic fields in cultural studies,

urban anthropology, politics and human geography concerned with the lived experiences of violence, the politics of representation and the ways in which such topics play out in and through urban space. Extensive fieldwork in Bogotá underpins this research and helps to raise questions concerning the structures of violence in urban spaces around the world, as well as the political dynamics of everyday life.

The poignant story of Diego Felipe Becerra contextualises the argument because the case captures the complex interplay between violence, imaginaries and graffiti. There is the brutal, physical violence of Diego Felipe's murder, which is exacerbated by institutionalised corruption within the state law enforcement and legal system as officials attempted to conceal the crime. The strategies that were put in place to justify the murder reveal the place of structural inequality in everyday life, in the form of civilians being denied basic rights to truth and justice. These strategies also illustrate the politics of representing violence: which events are recognised, from whose perspective and with what implications. In particular, the police sought to associate Diego Felipe, and graffiti and street artists more generally, with delinquency as a defence for their actions. This in itself reveals an insight into urban imaginaries as the police relied on the well-established fear of crime and the stigmas attached to graffiti and working-class male youth within the media and the wider public to validate their claims. Remarkably, Diego's parents did succeed in shifting the narrative that equated graffiti with violent crime, demonstrating that the imaginary is not only structuring, it is also a site of struggle and transformation. Nevertheless, their success also reveals a further reality of violence, as it relied, in part, on their social, cultural and financial capital in a city deeply divided by social hierarchies, which meant that they could contradict the image of their son as a delinquent because he was middle-class and didn't fit the stereotype. Furthermore, they could gain access to national and international media outlets, as well as pursuing legal processes, and they make the most of their position by continuing to fight for the rights of others who have been victimised by the police. For their part, graffiti and street artists around Bogotá (and, notably, belonging to different subcultures) draw on Diego Felipe's case as emblematic of their right to paint and continue to appropriate the urban visual landscape. The repeated references to him, the commemorative graffiti and even the graffiti law symbolically allude to the risks of self-

expression and the gains that were made through the mobilisation of graffiti and street artists.

This brief analysis encapsulates some of the main claims and lines of inquiry of the thesis. There is an imbrication of direct, structural and cultural violence, or 'violences', whose connections gain clarity when framed through the social imaginary, or the collective 'ways of seeing' in the city. Graffiti is not only the catalyst for the crime but becomes the focal point through which particular realities of violence are exposed and denounced in aesthetic claims to the city. The thesis advances the argument that the urban visual landscape is full of such claims and that they offer an insight into how a variety of violences are perceived, negotiated, resisted and reproduced, which is especially relevant in Colombia, a country notorious for violence. In this introductory chapter, I explain the definitions and discussions of violence broached in the thesis, providing an overview of some of the main manifestations of direct, structural and cultural violences in the country and in Bogotá, followed by a contextualisation of the current dynamics of graffiti and street art in the city.

1.1 Violence in Colombia: the everydayness of political violence and the politics of everyday violence

During my time in Bogotá, I would ask questions like 'Do you think Bogotá is violent?' or 'Do you think Colombia is violent?' and be met with responses that ranged from laughter at the apparent obviousness of the answer 'yes' to exasperation and denial, as people recognised the reputation but argued that Colombia is only as violent as anywhere else, and that there are good things about it, too. Social imaginaries are, indeed, saturated with the idea of violence, whether in or of Colombia. Representations of the nation in various forms of art and culture reproduce a founding myth of violence, suggesting its permanence and pervasive presence throughout Colombia's trajectory (Rueda, 2008; Suárez, 2010; Hunt, 2013). There have been many academic studies that have attempted to understand the place of violences in Colombian society, to the extent that the country was the first to designate the academic field of *violentología*, aimed at analysing the relationship between different expressions of violence (Camacho Guizado and Segura Escobar, 1999; Cartagena Núñez, 2015). They draw attention to the need to

collect data and recognise the social conditions through which distinct forms of violence emerge or gain force in different regions of the country and at different historical moments (Fals Borda *et al.*, 1977; Oquist, 1980; Fals Borda *et al.*, 1988; Roldán, 2002; Fals Borda, 2009). The social impact of violence is also a central problematic, with perspectives that range from positing the normalisation of violence as a mode of social and political interaction to the reproduction of fear and terror as a means of social control (Taussig, 1992; Deas, 1997; Pécaut, 1999; Uribe, 2004). Moreover, within the myth of a Colombian 'violent society' are multiple forms of violence, which are imbued with different meanings and associated with different social and political groups.

Before turning to some of the specific forms of violence that contribute to this imaginary, though, the conjuncture in which I carried out this research is relevant. It was, and still is, a moment in which peace and conflict are very much on people's minds and being widely discussed. I conducted fieldwork in Bogotá between July 2015 and April 2016, when peace negotiations were underway between the Colombian government under President Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC, the main guerrilla group in the country.³ This follows a long and protracted struggle between these two armed groups, but which also includes other guerrilla groups, such as the ELN,⁴ and the paramilitary network, including the most well-known group, the AUC.⁵ In November 2016, the Colombian state signed and ratified the peace accords, which means that one group, at least, has left the conflict and seeks legitimacy as a political party. Nevertheless, the peace process is controversial. The initial deal agreed upon by the Santos administration and the FARC was put to a referendum in October 2016 and rejected by 50.2% of the 37.4% turnout, before a revised deal was passed through Congress. The campaign was marked by political polarisation; it is significant that the 'No' drive was headed by former President Álvaro Uribe, whose own approach to the armed conflict relied on militarised attacks on left-wing guerrillas, civilians and human rights defenders (Elhawary, 2010). During the negotiations and in the build-up to the referendum there were concerted efforts to endow the peace deal with symbolic capital

³ *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, now the *Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común*

⁴ *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*

⁵ *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*, ostensibly demobilised through the Justice and Peace Law of 2005 but whose continuation has been documented by, for example, the 2010 Human Rights Watch report 'Herederos de los Paramilitares: La nueva cara de la violencia en Colombia'.

and represent it as the best solution to move forward, but its legitimacy is fragile (Elorriaga, 2017). Indeed, under President Duque, the current government's commitment to even claiming to want peace has been called into question and negotiations between the state and the ELN that began under Santos have since been suspended.

Beyond the political polarisation of state actors and their attitudes to peace and conflict, though, there is a broader problem involved in approaching the question of violence in Colombia. As part of the peace process, the Comisión Histórica del Conflicto y sus Víctimas was set up in 2015 to write a standard narrative of the conflict, involving twelve intellectuals selected by the FARC and the government.⁶ The difficulty of such a task is reflected in the scale of violences in the country's trajectory, not to mention the fact that violence continues in practice, regardless of official statements related to peace. I explore these complexities below, framed through a consideration of the key direct, structural and cultural manifestations of violence in Colombia, where direct violence refers to physical harm (or the threat of it), structural violence points to the conditions that reproduce inequality and discrimination, and cultural violence refers to the processes through which they are naturalised or legitimised (Galtung, 1990).

1.1.1 Direct violence

The Colombian armed conflict is a struggle that has been marked by human rights abuses committed on all sides (including the state), by the impact of the illegal narcotics trade and by the forced displacement of over seven million Colombians.⁷ The conflict between, and the terror imposed by, the guerrillas, military, paramilitary groups and criminal networks dealing in illicit trade have led to political assassination, homicide, forced recruitment, kidnapping, extortion, massacre, sexual violence and disappearance, have included high levels of corruption and impunity, and have affected civilians and different social groups in both rural and urban areas, while also becoming part of the political scenery (Richani, 1997; Sánchez, 2000; Camacho Guizado, 2002; Uribe, 2004;

⁶ Historical Commission on the Conflict and its Victims

⁷ <https://www.acnur.org/noticias/noticia/2018/12/5c243ef94/hay-mas-victimas-de-desplazamiento-forzado-en-colombia-que-numero-de-habitantes.html>

Grupo Memoria Histórica, 2013). The political economy of these tactics complicates their identification as examples of strictly political violence, though, because motivations for war have also been related to financial gain for different groups and land-grabs rather than political imperatives (Bergquist *et al.*, 2001; Camacho Guizado, 2002). Likewise, there are also examples of political motivations underlying forms of direct violence not normally associated with politics, such as drug trafficking and personal rivalries (Deas, 1997; Pécaut, 1999).

Even identifying the start of the conflict is problematic because, although it is officially recognised as 1985,⁸ its roots are situated within the country's longer history of political polarisation and violent struggle. In 1948, intense political rivalry between the Liberals and the Conservatives culminated in the period of political violence known as *La Violencia* that lasted until 1958. It started in the capital, when the assassination of the popular left-wing leader, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, led to an outbreak of riots known as the *Bogotazo*, but violence spread to the countryside and continued until the military intervention of Rojas Pinilla and the subsequent power-sharing agreement between the Liberals and Conservatives through the Frente Nacional. The rural armed groups formed during this civil war represent the origins of some of the contemporary guerrilla and paramilitary movements; insurgencies with left-wing revolutionary ideologies formed or gained strength in the 1960s, with groups branching off from the FARC, like the ELN, but also the M-19, which emerged in the 1970s and was situated primarily in urban areas (Sánchez, 2000). In the 1970s and 1980s, the conflict between these groups and the state was marked by the imposition of states of siege (especially under President Turbay Ayala), torture, disappearance and other dirty war tactics, including the suspension of rights that extended to civilians as well as armed groups and affected the perceived legitimacy of all sides involved (Sánchez, 2000).

In the social imaginary of Colombian violence, though, key moments stand out. The siege of the Palacio de Justicia in October 1985 is one of them, when the M-19 took the judiciary headquarters in Bogotá hostage as a protest against the broken peace accords that had been underway with then-President Betancur. The military responded with

⁸ In that the Ley 1448 de 2011 – henceforth referred to as the Ley de Víctimas – signals this as the date from which victims of the conflict can claim recognition and restitution.

force, storming the Palacio, leaving 95 people dead and disappearing many others. Victims included guerrillas, magistrates, office staff, visitors and bodyguards (González Posso *et al.*, 2012). The 1980s were also marked by high-profile assassinations, including that of Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, the Minister for Justice, in 1984, which was carried out on the orders of Pablo Escobar as a response to the legal case being built against him. The following drug wars comprised years of further assassinations, including the presidential candidate Luis Carlos Galán in 1989, who had denounced the corrupt relationships between politicians and the cartels. There were also infamous kidnappings of politicians, lawyers and journalists, as well as indiscriminate bombings, all of which were intensified by the internecine violence between cartels. Drugs was not the only point of contention in the political scene, though. The formation of the Unión Patriótica party in the mid-1980s resulted from negotiations between the FARC and the government, but thousands of members and associates of the party, including two presidential candidates (Jaime Pardo Leal and Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa), were immediately subjected to political genocide in the form of systematic assassinations at the hands of the paramilitary (González Posso *et al.*, 2012). The introduction of a new constitution in 1991 followed the demobilisation of the M-19 and represented some institutional gains in relation to the wider political participation of diverse social groups, including indigenous and afro-descendant communities. Nevertheless, the 1990s were marked by a further intensification of war as paramilitary groups gained strength and the FARC expanded, both of which were fuelled by drug money and led to kidnappings, the territorial control of rural areas through terror tactics, including massacres and the forced displacement of millions of people (Segura Escobar, 2000; Oslender, 2008). Assassinations also continued, a notable case being Jaime Garzón, a hugely popular satirical comedian whose murder in 1999 reflects the silencing of dissent from civilians or political opponents. In the early 2000s, the seemingly unending stream of violences came to be represented in some academic and media fields as a sign of anarchy, rather than recognising it as part of the political structure, and the notion of 'colombianization' was used to spread fears of its 'contagion' in the region. Later in the 2000s, the Uribe administration claimed to have stabilised the country by intensifying the war against the guerrillas but, as I have already indicated, his policy of 'democratic security' in fact continued to victimise civilians (Elhawary, 2010).

Such an overwhelming list of violences, and the hundreds of thousands who have been killed or disappeared in the last 60 years, offers some explanation for the scepticism woven into perceptions of the peace process, and the specific designation of the period since the signing of the agreement as 'post-accord' rather than 'post-conflict'. While statistics on violence in Colombia are problematic, given the difficulties of, for example, defining the multiple forms of violence and the ambiguity of the start and end dates of conflicts, the forced displacement of seven million Colombians is notable as a reflection of the scale of violence, while the more than 400 social leaders of various communities who have been assassinated since 2016 reflects the extent to which the threat of violence continues for those trying to assert social and political rights, despite the official declarations of peace.⁹ Moreover, this violent political turmoil must also be situated alongside the structural violence that remains a constant feature of Colombian society.

1.1.2 Structural violence

There is a supposed contradiction inherent in Colombia's status as one of the oldest democracies in Latin America while also experiencing one of the longest running internal armed conflicts and some of the highest levels of violence in the region. Rather than representing a paradoxical relationship, though, Arias and Goldstein argue that violence is, and has been, integral to democracies in Latin America, and Colombia fits the description of a violently plural democratic society as one in which multiple actors, including 'states, social elites and subalterns' employ violence 'in the quest to establish or contest regimes of citizenship, justice, rights, and a democratic social order' (Arias and Goldstein, 2010, p. 4). Furthermore, the deployment of violence is not only direct. Colombia is the second most unequal country in Latin America. Statistics from 2017 show that the top 10% of earners received 40% of the wealth generated that year, while 14.5 million people lived below the poverty line.¹⁰ The regional distribution of poverty is marked by an urban-rural divide, in a context where land ownership primarily takes the form of large holdings, rather than being dispersed in medium or small holdings, and is

⁹ See, for example, the 2013 report ¡Basta Ya!, which provides a detailed reflection on the trajectory of the armed conflict.

¹⁰ <https://data.colombiareports.com/colombia-poverty-inequality-statistics/>

concentrated in a small percent of the population (Guereña, 2017). This is also a feature of the armed conflict whereby Colombian elites have, since the 1980s, successively increased their control and ownership of land in the country.¹¹

The relationship between the political violence of the armed conflict and the structural violence of inequality and poverty can be observed through the dynamics of forced displacement. Although often depicted as separate factors that impact victims, they are deeply imbricated (Escobar and Meertens, 1997; Segura Escobar, 2000). Not only does displacement disproportionately affect the rural poor, but the structural conditions of inequality are intensified as a consequence of displacement and the subsequent lack of access to basic services. Structural inequality in Colombia also intersects with gender and ethnicity in important ways, which are beyond the scope of this research.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the symbolic violence of racism and gender inequality heighten the dynamics of marginalisation and victimisation in various forms (Bourdieu, 2004).

As Johan Galtung details in his argument for broader concepts of both violence and peace, the imbrication of violence means that addressing direct violence without addressing structural and cultural violence cannot lead to a society that is any more peaceful (Galtung, 1969). Thus, Jenny Pearce calls for a distinction to be made between an end to war in Colombia and a situation in which people can live without violence (Pearce, 2013). Indeed, violence is compatible with democracy, to the extent that citizens are free to partake in elections, but, for many, it stifles the ability to achieve goals relating to equality, justice, tolerance and freedom through processes of democratisation (Camacho and Guzmán, 1989). In particular, the violent aspects of state formation allow for the reproduction of hierarchical social orders and elite rule, where the poorest are those with the least access to meaningful participation in such democratic processes (Giraldo, 1994; Pearce, 2010; Gutiérrez Sanín, 2014).

¹¹ Notably, too, this will not be challenged by the peace accord:
<http://www.socialistdemocracy.org/RecentArticles/RecentTheConcentrationOfLandOwnershipInColombia.html>

1.1.3 Cultural violence

The central problematic of the thesis revolves around the politics of ways of seeing such violences in Bogotá, which I conceptualise in chapter 2. Of particular importance are the ways in which different forms of violence are given meaning, the extent to which they are recognised as an important aspect of Colombian society and the processes of making them visible or, conversely, invisible. The invisibility of violence refers to its implicit acceptance and reproduction, thus legitimising particular realities of structural inequality, discrimination and prejudice, or acts of direct violence.

These violences are manifested in the realities of racism, sexism and homophobia in the country, as well as the deeply entrenched class structure in Colombia. The perspectives and experiences of violence amongst the poorer segments of society are often either marginalised or presented as homogenous (Moser *et al.*, 2003; McIlwaine and Moser O N, 2007). The paradoxical representation of 'the people' also illustrates a symbolic, or cultural violence, imbuing collective representations of the working classes, which simultaneously romanticise them as embodying core national values while fearing them as innately criminal and threatening to the social order (Morgan, 2008). It is worth pointing out that the cover story justifying Diego Felipe's death by associating him with criminality was initially reproduced uncritically by the mainstream media, and it was only once his middle-class status was revealed that they questioned the police's narrative.

Moreover, the fear and anxiety associated with everyday criminal activity, but also with social 'undesirables' and people associated with disorder, justify the state's repression of civilians in countries around Latin America (Caldeira, 2000; Pearce, 2010). The concept of democracy is fetishized to the extent that it is used as a justification for militarised action, as something that needs defending through armed force, rather than offering an alternative framework through which to resolve social conflicts without recourse to violence (Camacho and Guzmán, 1989). Thus, the focus on insecurity has led to support for militarised security solutions over social inclusion, and masks the social and economic causes behind the reproduction of violence (Martín Barbero, 2002; Elhawary, 2010; Pearce, 2010; Hunt, 2013). Such social divisions and violences gain clarity through the socio-spatial dynamics of particular contexts, in this case Bogotá.

1.2 Bogotá

Colombia's capital is one of the top ten most populated cities in Latin America with around 8 million inhabitants, due to reach the status of megacity by 2030 (United Nations, 2014). In some respects, Bogotá is seen to be relatively insulated from the violences affecting the country. Medellín and Cali, for example, are more commonly associated with the urban impact of drug crime and paramilitary networks, while the armed conflict is largely perceived as a rural affair. The capital is also relatively prosperous compared to other regions in the country, although recent statistics note a failure to decrease levels of inequality compared to other cities.¹² Nevertheless, Bogotá has been the site of many violences, related to the conflict or otherwise, and the urban landscape brings together the continuum of direct, structural and cultural violence. I discuss the urban context of violence in the theoretical framework of chapter 2, but the politics of urban space in Bogotá provide an important contextual reference and help to situate graffiti and street art as a lens through which to understand violence.

Cities are planned, mapped out and maintained through controls and designs that reproduce the social order at different historical junctures, but this city, described by Rama as the 'city of letters', is constantly in tension with the 'city of social realities' (Rama, 1996, p. 27). This tension brings out the violences that are inscribed in urban space. The visual landscape contains the signs of institutional power and authority through the sites and centres of economic, political or cultural importance. The elites who design and control space also design and control the representations of violence in space, perhaps most explicitly through practices of commemoration and statues, memorials or, as in the case of Colombia, museums and centres for memory. Thus, even if much of urban society is insulated from direct experiences of armed conflict and political violence, such violences are mediated through cultural representations, in the form of news stories, art and popular culture, but also in the visual landscape. Moreover, there are both official and unofficial memory practices that leave their mark in urban space, and in chapter 4 I discuss the ways in which graffiti and street art are used for both.

¹² <https://data.colombiareports.com/colombia-poverty-inequality-statistics/>

The violence embedded in the 'city of social realities' also forms part of the visual landscape, not only through explicit appropriations of space, including memory practices as well as public marches and protests, but through the particular characteristics of urban space in Bogotá. Social segregation is mapped onto the spatial organisation of the city. Different *estratos* delineate the slums, poor, middle class and wealthy neighbourhoods to indicate levels of subsidisation from the government, but they also serve to reinforce the perceived relationship between social and economic being in an already entrenched class system. Access to the city centre can be limited for both those from marginalised neighbourhoods who don't 'belong' in the symbolic centre of economic, political and cultural power, or for the wealthy, whose gated communities and exclusive neighbourhoods of the north meet most of their requirements (Thibert and Osorio, 2014). In particular, the social, material and symbolic fragmentation of the city reflects deep social divisions. Urban second-class citizenship is a reality in Latin America and manifests itself through different forms of exclusion and inequality that limit people's opportunities to seek or gain citizenship rights (Koonings and Kruijt, 2007). In Bogotá, signs of such second-class citizenship are strikingly visible in the form of poverty and social exclusion. More than in other areas of the country, homeless people beg for small change and set up camps under road bridges, while *cartoneros* sort through rubbish on the streets in search of scrap or recyclable material as a form of informal work. Notably, those who have been forcibly displaced often seek sanctuary in cities like Bogotá, but many lack a support network and are subjected to prejudice, discrimination and poverty. They are one of the social groups who fall into the imagined category of '*desechable*', or '*disposable*', evidenced by their lack of access to rights and recognition, but also by the perceived indifference of urban society. Other grim realities of such perceived disposability are also present in the urban landscape through, for example, the silent practices of social cleansing, whereby marginalised groups (such as the homeless, drug addicts or discriminated groups like LGBTQ+) are killed or disappeared.

Given this context of urban violences, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that the discourses embedded in local politics highlight the centrality of violence in urban space. In October 2015, while I was conducting fieldwork, local elections took place in Bogotá and Gustavo

Petro, the mayor from 2012-2015, was succeeded by Enrique Peñalosa, who had previously been mayor from 1998-2001. The campaigns and conversations surrounding the election thus contributed to the more general discussions that I had with people about their concerns related to the city and their perceptions of violence. In Bogotá, the experience of living in the city was frequently imagined and described using the notion of violence; it informed the way that people perceived danger, used public space and interacted with others. Notably, that does not mean that people necessarily critiqued or engaged with the urban violences described above. The perceived political leanings of the city's mayors and their administrations have been marked by their supposed affiliation with different classes and social groups, who feel that those governing them are either working for 'them', or for 'us'; for the poor and marginalised or for the rich and powerful (Rincón and Hoyos, 2013). Thus, Peñalosa regained his place as mayor through a campaign that was based on 'reclaiming' the city (for the middle and upper classes), by improving security and the vilified public transport system, the Transmilenio, identified as an everyday site of conflict and tension. For some of the people I spoke to, Peñalosa represented stability and a safer city, something for which Petro had been deeply criticised in the mainstream media, which reinforced the targeted attacks on him by urban elites and the police (Gilbert, 2015). Others feared a complete reversal of Petro's social policies, which aimed to address inequality through increasing access to democratic participation in public life, from housing to education and culture, access to natural resources, and appealing to traditionally marginalised groups including Afrocolombians, indigenous and LGBTQ+ communities, as well as subcultural youth groups including skinheads and punks, as part of his focus on *nuevas ciudadanías* (new citizenships) (AMB, 2015; Gilbert, 2015).

These different approaches to the city represent some of the ways in which everyday violence is imagined in and through urban space and, more to the point, politicised. Nevertheless, while the polarisation of the different political leaders tends to be highly mediatised, they still ultimately represent (political) elites seeking to maintain their power. Indeed, urban imaginaries of violence also revealed a strong expression of disenchantment with the institutional authorities of the media, the government and the police from diverse social groups, evidenced in mediatised moments of vigilante justice

(justicia a mano propia) or police abuse, as videos of petty thieves being beaten up or corrupt police officers were disseminated on social media. As I have already mentioned, perceptions of insecurity are a significant feature of imaginaries of violence in Colombia. In urban space they can also lead to social segregation in the form of the spatial enclosures of gated communities and privatised public space that restrict access for those who appear 'undesirable', including street vendors or the homeless (Caldeira, 2000; Galvis, 2014).

It is in this context of extensive and multiple violences, on both a national and city level, that I explore the diverse and sometimes competing ways of seeing violence, as well as the explicit attempts to shift ways of seeing violence. Urban imaginaries (of violence) can be glimpsed through visual representations, rumours and jokes, memories of the city, ways of navigating the city or imaginative practices that narrate the city (Silva, 2006; De Certeau, 2011; Ochs, 2013). Moreover, graffiti and street art are key urban practices through which people respond to violence but, as the opening to this chapter shows, they are also subject to violence. In the following sections I situate graffiti and street art in Bogotá as forms of cultural expression that reflect and engage with urban imaginaries of violence in multiple ways, but also as practices that hold a particular place in contemporary urban imaginaries in the city, which informs how I have conducted this research.

1.3 Graffiti and street art

Graffiti and street art are forms of cultural expression that are difficult to extricate from their socio-political positionality. They are perpetually presented as subversive forms of spontaneous popular self-expression. Historically, they have reflected social realities because they are the messages, signs and inscriptions of those who are using and appropriating urban space, not those who are planning and designing cities from institutional positions of power. This is especially relevant to representations of violence in Colombia, where successive administrations have presented themselves as attempting to control violence, but alternative accounts ranging from oral culture to graffiti to literature undermine the silences and omissions of state narratives by

continually pointing to the role of the state as a perpetrator of violence (Hunt, 2013, p. 239).

With graffiti and street art around the world and throughout history, there are multiple and diverse ways through which they engage with violence and power. Thus, the practice of writing on the wall has been used to depict folk stories, send warnings or mark territories, express love, desire or hatred, share jokes, sexual insults and obscenities (Reisner, 1971; Abel and Buckley, 1977; Silva, 1989; Rama, 1996; Oliver and Neal, 2010; Silva, 2013). There is also a dialogue between these forms of urban intervention and political or corporate symbols of power, such as monuments, statues or advertising billboards, which draws attention to the realities of inequality in many societies (García Canclini, 2005; Herrera and Olaya, 2011). Particularly in contexts of social segregation and polarised politics, the presence of graffiti and street art is seen as a response to the lack of access to alternative means of communication, a way of negotiating ineffectual democracies or more overtly controlling power structures and the mainstream media that reproduce elite narratives (Silva, 1987a; Peteet, 1996; Silva, 2013; De Ruiter, 2015). They are perceived to offer alternative 'truths' to dominant discourses and to give visibility to themes that are hidden from hegemonic narratives of violence. Notably, the messages are not always explicit, though, as there is a politics embedded in the anarchic rejection of authority, the alternative politics of public space and the persistent presence and playful disrespect shown towards the legal and political controls of urban spaces, as well as the traditional, elitist and corporate circles of art and culture (Ferrell, 1996, p. 197).

Likewise, graffiti and street art in Bogotá are associated with a range of sentiments, political or otherwise, and their anti-hegemonic expressions of discontent, political mobilisation and critiques of society are expressed implicitly and explicitly through their form and their content. In the empirical chapters I detail the specific themes related to violence that are displayed in the graffiti and street art of Bogotá, but I also offer a more nuanced interpretation of the extent to which they can be seen as subversive. Before contextualising this, though, it is worth defining the forms of graffiti and street art that I refer to in the thesis and exploring their relationships to violence. The various forms can be grouped according to the development of more elaborate subcultures, artistic genres

and styles of political communication: graffiti writing, street art, *grafiti de consigna* and *grafiti de barrista* (Castro Pulido, 2012).

Internationally, the term 'graffiti' tends to refer to the graffiti writing subcultures rooted in hip-hop and its emergence in the U.S. in the 1970s. It is a specific form of self-expression that involves using spray paint to leave one's mark – in particular, a self-appointed name referred to as a 'tag' – in highly visible urban public spaces. Progression within the subculture is represented through the development of the style of writing, where the tag is depicted in more elaborate and intricate lettering, building up to 'throw-ups' and 'pieces', incorporating multiple colours, 3-D effects and characters (Waclawek, 2011). Progression is also marked through status, as participants climb social positions that range from the belittled 'toy' to the lauded 'king', which not only refers to their artistic proficiency but also to their ability to saturate the city with their tag, gaining visibility in infamous spaces, such as public transport systems, or reaching 'spots' that are notoriously difficult or dangerous to paint (Ferrell, 1996; Macdonald, 2002). As with other forms of hip-hop (including rap, breakdance and mixing), graffiti writing is associated with Black and Latino youth culture in marginalised urban neighbourhoods, which is reflected in the Colombian demographic of those who took an interest in, and appropriated, the subcultures from as early as the 1980s (Tickner, 2008). The direct link between graffiti writing and hip-hop has been questioned, though, and as these cultural expressions have spread around the world, they have also developed separately from one another so that there is not necessarily a correlation between graffiti and hip-hop. This is also true of Bogotá, as some artists argue that their taste in music doesn't come to bear on their preferred style of graffiti. Nevertheless, many of the events I went to or discussions I had did involve positioning graffiti writing within a wider subculture of hip-hop, and so seeing artists wearing hip-hop fashion styles was common, as was finding out that they were also rappers, or that their initiation into graffiti emerged through hip-hop schools. As I discuss in chapter 5, this relationship has an impact on how graffiti can be associated with violence, as not only do artists implicitly critique the violence of social exclusion and stigma, but they also turn to rap, for example, to express more vocal criticisms of the realities and politics of everyday violence, including social cleansing.

The closed subcultural nature of graffiti writing has also become blurred through its relationship with other forms of writing on the wall. In Bogotá, graffiti writing – especially in the case of the more elaborate throw-ups and pieces – is frequently situated alongside street art, despite their differences. Indeed, where graffiti writing still tends to rely on what can be created by the artist using spray cans and their various adjustments, street art incorporates a range of techniques and aims not only for a subcultural form of engagement but rather addresses a broader, undetermined urban audience. Thus, the term street art is applied to stencilled images, stickers, murals, posters and other material adornments, as well as written text, which are united by their position in public space. More than simply appearing in public spaces, though, street art engages with public space in ways that afford it a political quality (Ryan, 2019). Often, this engagement takes the form of an unsanctioned intervention in a particular place, which frames the meaning constructed through the piece (Waclawek, 2011; Bengtsen, 2013). That street art is unsanctioned conveys a challenge to the institutionalised and commercialised sphere of art and culture, which is reinforced through the inevitable ephemerality of street art, the frequent anonymity of pieces and the absence of financial reward. Furthermore, the meaning is embedded in the setting of particular pieces, where they play with the material landscape and highlight different ways of seeing space through, for example, juxtaposition or optical illusions (Bengtsen, 2013; Morrison, 2015). The implicit politics of such interventions are complemented by the explicitly political messages of many artists around the world (Herrera and Olaya, 2011; Schacter, 2013).

The specific context of Latin American street art comprises a rich history of political engagement in and through public spaces, which is often eclipsed in more Anglo-American-centric accounts (Ryan, 2019, p. 7). The influence of socio-political muralism is of great importance in the region, and is not only used illicitly but has been part of the communicative tactics of states and social movements (*ibid*). There is a direct engagement with the audience as pieces attempt to convey a message or draw attention to something, and the public production allows for encounters between artists and passers-by. Indeed, in Bogotá, the development of graffiti and street art is also intertwined with the political expressions of student movements and political

organisations post-1968, who used the streets to express discontent through creative wordplay, slogans (known as *pintas*) or street art that publicised specific groups (Castro Pulido, 2012, p. 33). These less aesthetically-elaborate, politicised forms of writing on the wall can be grouped together as *grafiti de consigna*, which also includes the markings of armed groups like FARC, ELN, M-19 and, on the other end of the ideological spectrum, AUC. The markings of different punk and skinhead groups in the form of monikers, swastikas or anarchist symbols are also fairly common, and again range from left to right-wing positions. However, the extent to which these signs are perceived as intimidating, threatening or extreme depends on which group they refer to, their proliferation and the spaces in which they are placed.¹³ *Grafiti barrista* represents the fourth main component of graffiti and street art in Bogotá, and refers to the tags of football fan groups, known as *barras*. Taking inspiration from the lettering of Brazilian *pixação*, the names refer to particular football teams or to the specific fan groups that are producing them. They represent a celebration of football but they are also used to mark territory, so that it is common to see such graffiti crossed out by rival fans as a form of dialogue between different groups (Castro Pulido, 2012, p. 44). This strand of territoriality and aggression reflects the reality that people mark the walls for very different reasons, some of which seek to encourage a reflection on violence and some of which reproduce particular forms of violence (Caldeira, 2012).

Not only are there diverse forms of urban inscription, which engage with violences in complex and interesting ways, but graffiti and street art are also forms of cultural expression that hold a significant place in urban imaginaries. Indeed, Bogotá is increasingly gaining attention in the world of graffiti and street art, attracting international artists and cultural tourism for the sheer quantity and diversity of styles, and because of the legal status of graffiti. Furthermore, a certain legitimacy has been afforded to graffiti and street art by the law, the media and the wider urban public, particularly since the scandal surrounding Diego Felipe's death.

¹³ In particular, the signs of armed groups are more likely to signify their presence and serve as a warning to locals in rural areas than in urban areas.

1.3.1 Contemporary dynamics of graffiti and street art

As I mention in the opening to this chapter, the Ley de Graffiti 075 recognises all graffiti as forms of cultural expression, although it still insists that it should only be produced with prior consent of the owner of the building or in sanctioned spaces.¹⁴ In order to support the development of graffiti, the law commits to providing spaces in which to carry out strategies for learning and developing skills relating to graffiti, and, if written authorisation has been granted by the owner of the building, you can paint on private property. Graffiti commissioned with public money should only last two years, and all spaces under bridges are authorised for painting, while prohibited spaces include pavements, public services, public transport, park equipment, protected natural reserves and sites of cultural heritage (on which much graffiti and street art can still be found). In terms of sanctions, the police can admonish those who are practising graffiti in an unauthorised space, expel them from the area, make them clean up the graffiti, attend training programs, do community service or impose a fine when the site of the graffiti is 'irreparable' or they have failed to restore it to its previous condition within 72 hours. None of these sanctions include detaining the person caught doing graffiti, in the UPJ (youth detention centre) or otherwise.

This law is significant, not because all graffiti and street art are now produced legally (far from it), but because it frames the legitimacy with which graffiti and street art are, to a certain extent, endowed. Partly, this legitimacy relates to the local governments who have offered most support to graffiti and street artists during their administrations. Lucho Garzón implemented the provision of free walls in 2007 as part of his approach to social inclusion, and his slogan '*Bogotá sin indiferencia*' included the subset '*Jóvenes sin indiferencia*' (Bogotá/Youth without indifference). The annual festival Hip Hop al Parque is a mark of recognition of the cultural significance of hip-hop in Bogotá, and of youth cultures in general, and was initiated as part of Mockus' focus on *cultura ciudadana* (citizen culture). It now attracts local and international artists to Bogotá, includes fringe

¹⁴ *Decreto 075 de 2013: Por el cual se promueve la práctica artística y responsable del graffiti en la ciudad y se dictan otras disposiciones, Decreto 529 de 2015: Por medio del cual se modifica el Decreto Distrital 075 de 2013 y se dictan otras disposiciones.*

events, exhibitions and funding for small-scale artist commissions and workshops. However, Petro's support for graffiti and street art represents their greatest gain. His somewhat innovative approach to the graffiti law stems in part from the discussion groups that were set up with local graffiti and street artists to explore what the practice meant to them, what their experiences had been with the local authorities and what their expectations of the law entailed. Germán Gómez, one of the directors involved in it, describes these encounters as crucial to his realisation that the function of the state is to work with everyone, not just to tell people to behave in one way: 'the state is there to recognise that there are a, b, c and d, and to work distinctly with each a, b, c and d' (*'el estado está para reconocer que hay a, b, c y d, y cómo trabajar articuladamente con ese a, b, c, y d'*).¹⁵ It is as a consequence of these meetings that the law specifically recognises all forms of graffiti and street art as cultural expression, and not just the crowd-pleasing murals. Furthermore, the collaboration between these traditionally subversive subcultures and the state continues through *mesas de grafiti*,¹⁶ as well as funding opportunities and designated spaces for graffiti, although the level of support is reflected in the amount of funding and the range of opportunities made available to artists in different administrations.¹⁷

Thus, these youth cultures have forged a space of recognition and their gains could be seen as signs of a more democratic approach to urban public space, in that they are participating in the construction of 'the city we want' (Harvey, 2008, p. 23).

Nevertheless, the changing perception of graffiti and street art in Bogotá is not only because of a more open and democratic approach to public space in local politics. To a certain extent, the government was forced to clarify its position in relation to the rights of graffiti and street artists, partly because of Diego Felipe Becerra and the attention the case gathered from the media and the public, but also because of the persistent presence of urban interventions in the city. It would also be unfair to ignore the agency implicit in Bogotá's long history of graffiti and street art in various forms, and the social and political processes at play that have contributed to its current status, which is

¹⁵ All interviews and translations carried out by the author

¹⁶ Meetings between graffiti artists and the local council to discuss problems or publicise key opportunities or events for artists.

¹⁷ Incidentally, I have been told that Peñalosa cut a lot of the support on offer after taking up office.

paralleled more broadly in the absence of Latin American graffiti and street art in academic studies (Morrison, 2015; Ryan, 2019). Indeed, Bogotá has experienced a boom in graffiti writing and street art since the early 2000s, an increase in associated cultural and tourism industries, including shops and galleries presenting and selling the work of local artists, and a graffiti tour through the city's historic centre. In addition, Armando Silva has been contributing to academic literature on Bogotá's graffiti since the 1980s, significantly as an indicator of urban imaginaries (Silva, 1987a; Silva, 1987b; Silva, 1989; Silva, 2013). Hip-hop gained force in the working-class neighbourhoods of Bogotá in the 1980s and 1990s through shared cassettes, imported videos and meetings in parks to rap and breakdance. Graffiti writers today also cite the influence of Don Popo and the Familia Ayara, a hip-hop school that was founded in 1996 and that runs classes on breakdance, rap, graffiti and mixing as well as youth leadership and entrepreneurship.¹⁸ The whole process of legalising and legitimising graffiti and street art could, therefore, be seen as a response of the government to something that was already happening, a way of accommodating people's participation in public space and going some way to recognising their right to their already existing appropriation of urban space. Indeed, one of the arguments that run throughout the thesis suggests that this support represents an effort to delimit the terms of participation in urban space.

Regardless of the political motivations behind these developments, though, they have informed the current dynamics of graffiti and street art in Bogotá and provide an important contextual reference. In particular, this context of visibility and legitimacy demands that graffiti and street art in Bogotá be recognised as cultural practices that move beyond transgressive and illicit activities. Graffiti and street art *also* represent opportunities for personal and professional development, for community and political engagement, and many artists will make the most of them, motivated as they are by the desire to continue to paint in any way possible (Kramer, 2010). This mirrors shifts around the world as graffiti and street art have gained recognition and legitimacy. Consequently, a challenge has presented itself in relation to definitions and terminology, discussions about which are marked by the tension between illegal equating to subversive and legal equating to appropriated (Silva, 2013; Schacter, 2014; Bengtsen,

¹⁸ <http://ayara.com.co/>

2017). In Bogotá there is a significant slippage between subversion and appropriation, resistance and incorporation, but defining graffiti and street art solely through notions of illegality, resistance or subversion risks a too-heavy focus on how these notions subsequently decide the extent to which graffiti and street art are deemed 'authentic' and 'effective' as modes of politics. It is true that there are differences between the subcultures, and some writing on the walls does not even belong to a subculture. There is a difference between producing something legally and at ease, or illegally, at risk of getting caught. There is also a difference between painting something that has been seen and approved by someone else, as opposed to an individual creation. Despite these differences, I position the legal and illegal together and refer to these forms of cultural expression in general terms as 'graffiti and street art' because it is through their collective dynamic that their intricate and complex relationship to violence and urban imaginaries is revealed.

Moreover, the thesis pays close attention to the reception of graffiti and street art, where the subtle distinctions between forms are obscured by etic interpretations. Audience interpretations are key to the construction of meaning of particular 'texts', especially if the focus of the investigation is on the socio-political dynamics of representational practices (Hall, 1980; Stevenson, 2002; Martín Barbero and Téllez, 2006). Though the importance of analysing the reception of graffiti and street art has been highlighted, it remains a gap in the literature (Silva, 1987b; Peteet, 1996; Rowe and Hutton, 2012; Burdick and Canessa Vicencio, 2015; Lopera Molano and Coba Gutiérrez, 2016). A notable exception is the relationship between graffiti and the law, which appears in many ethnographies and analyses of subcultural practices (Ferrell, 1996; Macdonald, 2002; Schacter, 2008), and the role of the media in shaping discourses of graffiti and street art (Young, 2012; Araya López, 2015). Such approaches tend to focus on the tensions between these different groups, as the authorities and the media are shown to spread fear by associating graffiti with more serious crimes, by denigrating the practice as youth vandalism and denying its artistic merits, and by imposing disproportionate fines and prison sentences as an exemplary tactic to dissuade other graffiti writers. Nevertheless, there are changing perceptions and reactions to the form as graffiti and street art gain more widespread acceptance (Young, 2012). This is

particularly true of Bogotá, where the graffiti law has contributed to the widely held perception that graffiti and street art are legitimate practices and so are 'passively permitted' (Schacter, 2014), if only because of the general confusion with regards to whether or not graffiti is legal.

Thus, in this thesis, I provide an alternative approach to graffiti and street art by exploring their reception through the perspectives of other city dwellers. In particular, I question the ways in which people interpret these visual representations in relation to their understandings and perceptions of social and political realities in Bogotá. Indeed, the thesis identifies urban imaginaries of violence through the processes of interpreting the content of graffiti and street art, their significance as forms of cultural expression, which social groups are associated with the practices and the critiques and judgements related to them.

1.4 Thesis Structure

There are two main claims woven into the line of argument in the thesis, which respond to the dominant ways in which representations of violence are perceived, particularly through graffiti and street art. Although often framed through the notion of subversion or appropriation, I present a more nuanced account of the relationship between graffiti and violence to explore what these cultural forms reveal about imaginaries of violence. The first claim posits that the diverse forms of graffiti and street art in the urban visual landscape of Bogotá collectively offer an insight into violence, despite belonging to different subcultural practices and whether or not they are technically illegal or illicit productions. In particular, I move beyond the rather simplistic dichotomy whereby graffiti and street art in Bogotá are perceived as either popular subversions *or* state sanctioned forms of artistic expression by recognising that the meaning of graffiti and street art is constructed through both the production and reception of these forms and depends on its spatial-temporal context. Although I pay attention to the similarities and the differences between them, I also argue that they work together to produce the insights into violence that I explore in the empirical chapters, particularly when recognising violence in its direct, structural and cultural forms, and through the implicit and explicit politics of graffiti and street art. The second claim centres on the multiple

(narratives of) violences in Colombia and insists that they should be positioned along a continuum, recognising the relationships between the direct, structural and cultural forms of violence described above. Moreover, I explore the politics of these relationships by offering some insights into how they are negotiated in and through the imaginary. In particular, I advance the argument that social imaginaries are marked by contradictions and complexities, showing that there are multiple imaginaries of violences that are in competition with one another in Bogotá, and, more to the point, that the potential political effects of representations of violence are ambiguous.

Before turning to the analysis in chapters 4-6, though, I explain the theoretical framework that guides the study in chapter 2 and the methodology in chapter 3. As indicated above, there is a complex interplay between violence, imaginaries and urban space, which graffiti and street art expose in a variety of ways. In order to recognise this variety, a number of conceptual clarifications need to be made. In particular, violence is recognised as comprising multiple forms that can overlap, reproduce each other or disguise one another and so should be situated along a continuum and identified in a broad range of everyday spaces. The concept of the imaginary provides a means of reflecting on the ways in which such violences are seen and imagined in everyday life. It is a way of thinking about the social world as it refers to collective representations and shared ways of seeing, but power dynamics are embedded in them, which means that questions related to agency and structure also arise. Finally, the conceptual approach to urban space aims to complement these discussions of power, agency and diversity by exploring the city as a space of heterogeneity. Of particular importance is the notion that the heterogeneity of urban society produces a struggle over ways of seeing violence in everyday life, and that this struggle is articulated through visual claims to the right to the city. In chapter 3, I explain my methodological approach and highlight the mixed methods that I used to investigate the different spaces through which urban imaginaries could be glimpsed, and graffiti and street art could be analysed. These methods proved crucial to understanding the nuances of urban imaginaries of violence, particularly through the self-identification of the subjects involved in the study. Nevertheless, the study also presented complex challenges, on which I offer a personal reflection.

The subsequent empirical chapters are organised according to three case studies that highlight significant spaces within the city in relation to graffiti and street art, and in relation to violence. Chapter 4 focuses on Calle 26, a major transport route in the city centre and the site of official and unofficial representations of collective memory and of peace, to explore the everydayness of political violence in urban imaginaries. While narratives of political violence are common in memory discourses in Colombia, I focus on the representation of state violence and the victimisation of civilians, which appear in commemorative pieces of graffiti and street art. That the state has endorsed some of these representations, particularly through arts council funding opportunities, reveals complex cultural politics that graffiti and street artists must negotiate. Furthermore, the interpretations of such explicitly political graffiti and street art reveal both a recognition of the critical agency of city dwellers and concern regarding the ambiguous effects of recognising that political, and especially state, violence are part of everyday life – drawing attention not only to the direct violence of the conflict but to the violence of normalising it. The explicitly visible representation of violence that is concentrated in the city centre contrasts with the graffiti and street art in more peripheral or marginalised spaces of the city and in chapter 5, I focus particularly on the visual landscapes of La Perseverancia and Ciudad Bolívar. There, graffiti and street artists draw on the notion of public space as one of encounter and appropriation, and beautify the neighbourhoods as a way of challenging the everyday violence of stigma and prejudice that manifests itself in spatialised forms of segregation in the city. However, the impact of criminal networks, state absence and corruption also contribute to the politics of representation, and talking to graffiti and street artists revealed a more complex picture of how artists perceive and experience censorship, the ways in which they negotiate depicting more explicitly critical messages, and their expectations of aesthetic transformations in the neighbourhoods. Indeed, I argue that urban imaginaries of these different areas are marked by the tendency to either demonise or romanticise them. In Chapter 6, a similar process of romanticisation and demonization can be identified through the interpretations of graffiti and street art in La Candelaria, the historic centre of Bogotá where the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty are brought to the fore. In many ways, graffiti and street art are celebrated and endorsed by the mainstream media, state institutions and the wider public. The fact that a common trope of these forms of

cultural expression is a critique of the everyday violence of indifference and inequality suggests that this wider engagement with graffiti and street art could have the potential to shift imaginaries towards recognising such violences. Nevertheless, I show that the praise of graffiti and street art has produced another kind of aesthetic hierarchy, functional to hegemonic notions of taste and art, whereby only some forms of graffiti and street art – which can also be interpreted as only some graffiti and street artists – are celebrated, while others are denigrated. This dynamic exemplifies some of the normative assumptions about citizenship, appropriate behaviour and aesthetic desirability that are woven through urban imaginaries of public space and that reproduce violence and inequality.

In chapter 7, I conclude by reflecting on the findings of the thesis and on what they suggest about broader urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá. I also highlight the key contributions of the thesis to understandings of the complex dynamics between violence, aesthetics and urban space and suggest avenues for further research. In particular, I argue that the subtle reproduction of visual complexes calls for a more nuanced reading of cultural representations or expressions of violence and the ways in which they are governed in cities, which supports the focused consideration of the thesis on the ways in which people negotiate and produce imaginaries in everyday life.

Chapter 2

Theoretical framework



Figure 2 Error in the pavement

In this chapter I present the theoretical framework that guided the study. First, I consider the multiple violences that are present in everyday life in Bogotá and argue that they should be recognised as positioned along a continuum, whereby different forms of violence cannot be easily separated and are shown to have a broad social impact. Secondly, I situate the analysis of violence within the conceptual field of the imaginary, which is presented as a structuring space but also a space for creativity and agency. In particular, I highlight the ways in which graffiti and street art are often presented as having the potential to transform dominant ways of seeing. Thirdly, I locate the analysis of violence and imaginaries within the context of urban space, which not

only influences the forms of violence that are present in the study, but also highlights the struggle over different ways of seeing violence. Accordingly, I conceptualise the city as a space of heterogeneity and inequality where there are complex power dynamics at play, which I frame through the right to the city, and to which graffiti and street art respond. I conclude with a reflection on the applicability of these concepts in relation to the research presented here, arguing against what I see as a tendency to make assumptions about the political implications of graffiti and street art.

2.1 Seeing violence

A few months into my fieldwork in Bogotá, I found myself at a pedestrian crossing next to the entrance of a Transmilenio bus station in Chapinero. I was a woman, clearly foreign (or so I was frequently told), and alone, which was often the case but did sometimes raise eyebrows and elicit concern from people. I wasn't far from home and it was in one of the more affluent, central parts of town that retained its gritty edges; perfect for the young, artistic types who had set up trendy cafés and designer shops decorated by local graffiti artists. This was the commercial area on Avenida Caracas, with all sorts of hardware shops, cheap clothing chains and fast food restaurants, as well as street vendors who were selling an array of goods, including lottery tickets, fried food, fresh juice and sunglasses. Near to me a young afro-Colombian man dressed in typical *rapero* style – baseball cap, baggy jeans, high-top trainers – was standing at the crossing and waiting for the light to change with a boom box hanging around his neck, blasting Oasis 'Don't look back in anger'. The song made me smile, it seemed incongruous in the setting and reminded me of home, and I assume seeing me smile must have encouraged him to approach me. His companion had just given him a multipack of small boxes of chewing gum and he smiled and offered me a box. I found myself feeling slightly nervous and so shook my head, but he insisted. We walked across the road, as he went into the station and I carried on, he smiled and waved at me, and I smiled and nodded back.

As I walked away I somehow felt that the interaction was significant, but I wasn't sure how. Now, reading back over the diary I kept while I was there, I associate it with other occasions, friendly moments and interactions with strangers that I have jotted down almost with surprise. The point is that moments of non-violence stood out to me, not

because I, personally, was affected by violence otherwise, but because violence is written into everyday life in Bogotá and is at the forefront of urban imaginaries. Indeed, the legacies of social and political violence permeate the cities of many Latin American countries, marking the experiences and expectations of urban citizens (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999; Camacho Guizado, 2001; Moraña, 2002; Rotker, 2002; Koonings and Kruijt, 2007; Arias and Goldstein, 2010). These authors highlight the role of violence in the trajectories of such countries, including the foundational violence of (neo)colonialism and imperialism, the violence associated with illicit industries, and the complex dynamics between different armed groups struggling for power. Such forms of violence are inextricable from the corruption and erosion of state authorities, but also from the realities of endemic social exclusion and structural inequality, which are perhaps the most visible forms of violence in contemporary cities like Bogotá.

To think through the social impact of such trajectories, violence must be recognised as taking multiple forms, some of which can be briefly illustrated in relation to the concerns that flitted through my mind during the encounter described above. Firstly, should I have encouraged a male stranger by making eye contact and smiling? Attention from men in the street was not uncommon and, though it was generally brief and harmless in my experience, gender and 'foreignness' did inform the way I moved around the city and thought about potential vulnerability. Cities are experienced differently by men and women in complex ways that are often invisible in academic and political discourses (Falú, 2009; Chant, 2013). Moreover, the threat of direct violence in urban space, especially in the form of physical abuse and crimes such as mugging or theft, but also in relation to more gendered risks such as sexual assault, plays a major role in discussions about what violence is in Bogotá.

The exchange of the chewing gum made me wonder whether money would be expected in return. Bus journeys and traffic jams in Bogotá are frequently accompanied by people selling sweets, snacks, toys or stationery, or performing for money: singing ballads and playing the guitar, rapping, displaying circus tricks, or relaying a tale of woe to beg for small change. As well as revealing people's creative approaches to the economy, these strategies for making (small amounts of) money are a constant reminder of poverty and indifference in the capital of one of the most unequal countries in the world, as

passengers might join in, give a few coins or simply ignore them out of habit or exasperation. Structural and cultural violence, in the form of normalised unequal opportunities and sets of barriers affecting different social groups (Galtung, 1969; Bourdieu, 2004; Dilts, 2012), are written into the cityscape. Extreme wealth sits alongside extreme poverty, not just in the material landscape of gated communities and self-built housing but in the social dynamics between citizens. The visibility of homelessness is striking, but there are also more subtle signs of exclusion in the form of such informal economies. To a certain extent, the manifestation of such violences in Bogotá can be analysed in accordance with the particular context of urbanisation in the Global South.¹⁹ In Latin America, intense processes of urbanisation in the 20th century led to the rapid expansion of cities, highlighting deep inequalities and bringing violence and its effects on society into sharp relief (Koonings and Kruijt, 2007, p. 7).

That the guy was young and Black did not in itself make me think that he was going to be one of these informal vendors, but the realities of economic marginalisation in the city are also intertwined with structural racism (Viveres Vigoya, 2007; Garavito *et al.*, 2013). The location and the addition of the multipack of chewing gum and the boom box made it seem plausible. As I continued thinking about the encounter and my immediate response to it, a more significant fear also crossed my mind as the exchange triggered a memory of rumours of gangs using sweets sold on public transport to drug and rob people in Bogotá. Furthermore, sensationalist stories of theft on public transport abounded in the media and often included security footage and proclamations of outrage at the audacity of these '*ratas*', or '*rats*', a common insult used to label petty thieves.

The relevance of this fleeting encounter is twofold. First, it shows the multiplicity of violences that can be identified in Bogotá and argues that they should be situated on a continuum (Moser and Clark, 2001; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004). Second, violence has a social impact not only in direct but also indirect ways, which contributes

¹⁹ 'The term Global South functions as more than a metaphor for underdevelopment. It references an entire history of colonialism, neo-imperialism and differential economic and social change through which large inequalities in living standards, life expectancy, and access to resources are maintained.' Dados, N. and Connell, R. (2012) 'The Global South', *Contexts*, 11(1), pp. 12-13.

to an understanding of the place of violence in urban imaginaries. Throughout this research project, and in particular while I was conducting fieldwork in Bogotá, I have maintained an open approach to the concept of violence and tried to identify its multiple manifestations in different spaces and contexts, holding the possibilities of different forms of violence in my mind simultaneously. As a starting point, Galtung's broad definition is useful: 'violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations' (Galtung, 1969, p. 168). The notion of a continuum of violence also provides a useful conceptual framework because it explicitly encourages a consideration of the links between 'war crimes and peacetime crimes, structural violence that is invisible, bureaucratic violence that is statistical, everyday violence that is routine and expected and extraordinary violence that is authorized, public, visible, and rewarded' (Scheper-Hughes and Robben, 2008, p. 81). The range of violences is vast, but by paying close attention to the imbrication of different forms of harm in very different contexts and spaces, the notion of the continuum attempts to challenge the supposed exceptionalism of some forms or spaces of violence while making visible that which is often taken for granted or not seen as violence. As indicated in the above encounter, the forms of violence that stood out to me during my time in Bogotá were the visible signs of poverty, the social discriminations and exclusions, the urban crime that, arguably, is a consequence of such structural and cultural violence. Political violence doesn't explicitly appear in the encounter described above, but it is important to the thesis and cannot be easily separated from everyday violence, as I show in the introduction (Pearce, 2010). Although urban spaces have been seen to be insulated from the violences of the armed conflict that are more prevalent in rural areas of the country, the separation is an illusion (Pécaut, 2000). There are still spaces in the city where political violence occurs and the effects of the conflict can be seen not only through the manifestation of violences linked to it, but through the cultural representations of it in the urban visual landscape (chapter 4). Furthermore, by political violence I do not only refer to the actions of illegal armed groups. Institutions of authority are also implicated as perpetrators of crime and the disenchantment with, and distrust of, the police and the government – particularly through narratives of corruption and impunity – runs through all of the empirical chapters.

The other conceptual approach to violence that needs to be highlighted is the idea that violence is embedded in everyday life in the city not only through the direct ways described above, where there are clearer victims and perpetrators, but through indirect ways that have a broader effect on society. The concerns I described sound like paranoia (one of the reasons I recorded the exchange in my diary was that I was annoyed and embarrassed at having allowed the thoughts to cross my mind, however briefly), but they reflected some of the everyday discussions around what violence means in the city and how to behave appropriately in order not to '*dar papaya*', meaning to expose yourself to danger unnecessarily. I found that these narratives of violence and insecurity often contradicted my actual experiences of the city and interactions with others, but I was also surprised by how often they were repeated. Violence needs to be recognised as having a social impact in both direct and indirect ways. You don't have to have experienced violence to be affected by it, although clearly that is not the same experience as being the victim of violence. One of the widely discussed impacts of violence in cities like Bogotá is fear. This can refer to generalised feelings of insecurity and anxiety in the face of difficult living conditions and high levels of violent crime, but it is also gendered (Caldeira, 2000; Rotker, 2002; Falú, 2009). It also refers to the impact of political violence, as a legacy and as a continuing reality, on citizens who are ostensibly removed from such conflict but who have to negotiate everyday violence as well as outbursts of terror (Taussig, 1992; Koonings and Kruijt, 1999; Pécaut, 2000). Moreover, the personal and political mediation of fear is particularly important as it has a performative effect on social practices and social relations, notably leading to forms of exclusion that can reproduce cycles of crime and violence (Caldeira, 2000; Martín Barbero, 2002; Ochs, 2013).

In the empirical chapters, I explore the framing of such violences, particularly in relation to the dynamics between political and everyday violence, and the people and spaces of the city that are associated with them. Thus, close attention is paid to the relationships between political repression, urban crime, fear and prejudice. Moreover, the analysis centres on the political implications of ways of seeing violence, and the specific contexts related to what, who and where people associate with violence. The vignette described above shows an example of the place of violences in everyday life in the city and a

suggestion of how it becomes possible to identify their social impact, but it also recognises the role of narratives of violence and how they circulate in the city. The way that violence is framed contributes to what is seen as violence, how victims and perpetrators are identified – if at all – and what the appropriate response to violence might be (Butler, 2009; Mirzoeff, 2010). The structural inequality that is embedded in everyday life in Bogotá is one example of how certain kinds of violence become normalised and eclipsed by other forms of violence, for example the fear of urban crime that masks the realities of poverty and social exclusion. As Žižek argues, the ‘fascinating lure’ of hypervisible violence can be a distraction from the ‘obscenity’ at the heart of capitalist societies, whereby systemic violence reproduces their fundamental inequalities (Žižek, 2009).

Nonetheless, I am wary of representing Bogotá as a space of uncontrollable danger by approaching violence in such a broad way. One of the tensions involved in researching violence in Latin America, and especially in Colombia, is how to avoid reductively identifying cities like Bogotá with violence. The representation of urban violence in the Global South runs the risk of reproducing a dystopian and apocalyptic vision of chaos and fear, and of upholding overtly negative views of the region (Silva, 2006, p. 127; Scorer, 2016, p. 1). Furthermore, Robben criticises the continuum concept as it not only suggests too much of an equation between very different scales of violence, but it also focuses too much on its inevitable reproduction, rather than paying attention to the agency and choices embedded in people’s trajectories (Scheper-Hughes and Robben, 2008). This is a valid argument, but identifying the realities of violence, and especially the possible relationships between them, is also a way of moving towards a more nuanced understanding of violence. Galtung describes violence studies as a ‘horror cabinet’, but one that needs to be known and understood as a vital move towards a fuller understanding of what peace would look like (Galtung, 1990, p. 293). My aim is to avoid reproducing an essentialist view of inherent (and, thus, inevitable) violence in the Global South, and I do so by paying close attention to the dynamics of violence as they are lived and imagined, specifying the different experiences and perceptions of violence in different spaces of the city, and as articulated by different people.

There are three further parts to this chapter that frame my conceptual approach. First, I focus on why the space of the imaginary offers a useful way of looking at the social impact of violence, and why graffiti and street art offer a way of identifying imaginaries in such a way that recognises their complexity and people's potential agency. In the second section, I argue that these discussions need to be framed through a conceptual approach to the city that recognises its heterogeneity and power dynamics. Finally, I qualify my approach to the concepts discussed by recognising the ambiguous relationship between violence and cultural agency.

2.2 Listening to people

Analysing violence through the conceptual framework of the imaginary is a way of identifying the place of violence in the social world, of looking at the social construction and reproduction of ideas about violence and of considering the impact of particular ways of seeing violence. The notion that there are social rather than scientific truths recognises that there is a tension and disconnect between what is empirically known and what is generally believed or accepted as truthful (Silva, 2006, p. 97; Lindón, 2007, p. 90; Cegarra, 2012, p. 3). The 'social truths' of violence, therefore, do not refer to people's experiences of violence as such, nor to rational, scientific explanations of violence, but to collective representations and interpretations of violence. This can apply to what violences are perceived to be part of life in Bogotá, to the social groups associated with them (either as victims, perpetrators or something in between), to the causes and consequences of violence, or to where violence happens. The collective understandings or representations of these aspects of violence are true to the extent that they are generally accepted and legitimised as true, which in itself serves to reproduce or reinforce the imaginaries of them, but they can also be challenged on the level of the imaginary. In other words, not only are there shared ways of seeing violence in Bogotá, but these ways of seeing can be productive (in that they reproduce themselves or shift the narrative) and, more to the point, they are political. To conceptualise the politics of collective representations of violence, I draw a distinction between the imaginary and the imagination, whereby the imaginary refers to what is

generally held to be true of the social world, while the imagination refers to the possibilities of other truths, of other ways of seeing.

2.2.1 Imaginary

The socio-cultural approach to the concept of the imaginary refers to the social construction of reality.²⁰ Such an approach recognises that there are collective ways of seeing particular to different social groups, which contribute to the possibility of identifying distinctions between them as well as being intrinsic to the process of identification within such groupings, often as part of specific societies. Moreover, the collective representations of and in everyday life not only reflect society, but they (re)produce it, structure it, guide what it means to be part of that society (or social group). As Silva puts it:

[S]ocial imaginaries are precisely those collective representations that govern the processes of social identification and through which we interact in our own cultures, meaning that they become discrete modes of communication and social interaction.

[L]os imaginarios sociales serían precisamente aquellas representaciones colectivas que rigen los procesos de identificación social y con los cuales interactuamos en nuestras culturas haciendo de ellas unos modos particulares de comunicarnos e interactuar socialmente (Silva, 2006, p. 104).

Thus, collective representations, or shared ways of seeing, are integral to the organisation of societies and are embedded in common practices, symbols, rituals, institutions and ways of life that are learned and negotiated by the people within those societies or social groups (Castoriadis, 1987). This can be clarified through the particular ways in which imaginaries are seen to be produced, and the effect that they are perceived to have. Silva argues that imaginaries are formed through the complex relationship between the physical place, the social life of its inhabitants, the uses of space and the symbolic identity of that space (Silva, 2006, p. 20). In their specific spatial-

²⁰ As opposed to psychoanalytic interpretations whereby the Imaginary, the Real and the Symbolic are intrinsic to the development of the human psyche.

temporal context, they combine to produce a system of significations, or a framework of meaning. Similarly, Strauss argues that imaginaries need to be identified both through 'concrete material and symbolic conditions, on the one hand, and the understandings, emotions and desires that individuals develop as they experience these conditions, on the other' (Strauss, 2006, p. 323).²¹ Thus, the imaginary is not an abstracted entity but a collective and creative practice, whereby shared ways of seeing are informed by the experience of material, symbolic and social conditions, but individual and collective ways of seeing also inform these material, symbolic and social conditions. They are also contextual, and the concept is frequently applied to the process of reinforcing the symbolic boundaries of national and regional identities (Taylor, 2002; Anderson, 2006). In an age of globalised flows of communication, power and people, though, the self-identification or self-imagining of social groups extends beyond national borders or bounded societies (Appadurai, 1996). The experience of living in cities, for example, can create common ways of constructing reality that extend across different national spaces (Silva, 2006, p. 5). Thus, situating violence, graffiti and street art, and the city, within the realm of the imaginary is a way of exploring the collective meanings that are associated with them in the particular context of contemporary Bogotá.

Moreover, the realm of the imaginary is where the organisation of societies or social groups are not only produced, but enforced. The shared framework of meaning imbues particular practices, symbols and institutions with legitimacy according to the norms of society, but in doing so it delegitimises others (Castoriadis, 1987, p. 235). Indeed, as well as highlighting the common practices and understandings that define the concept of the social imaginary, Taylor argues that '[t]his understanding is both factual and "normative"; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what missteps would invalidate the practice' (Taylor, 2002). For Taylor, these normative rules and regulations are absorbed implicitly into everyday social practices, which theoretically allows for the seamless reproduction of the social order. However, imaginaries of violence in Bogotá are not static and there is a struggle embedded in the collective practice of perceiving and imagining the world. In

²¹ The phrasing of her aim is, however, problematic as it reinforces the division between the conditions that she describes and the experiences of these conditions.

order to think through the political implications of ways of seeing, of particular assumptions, of that which is taken for granted, it is useful to consider how imaginaries are structured, which social groups they might benefit and how alternative ways of seeing are discounted or marginalised.

Gramsci's conceptualisation of common sense offers a particularly useful way of understanding the political implications of the imaginary. As Crehan explains, the Italian meaning of *senso comune* is more neutral than the positive connotations implied by the English translation (Crehan, 2016, p. x). This is important because Gramsci uses it to describe a set of generally shared assumptions about the social world, but one that has consistently contributed to the reproduction of unequal social orders (Crehan, 2016). Similarly to the imaginary, common sense recognises that collective ways of seeing the world provide dominant frameworks for interpreting meaning and that they become accepted as self-evident truths, but, crucially, these ways of seeing are reproduced by those who suffer from them. While this means that subordinated social groups share some of the same values and ways of seeing as those who dominate them, it also recognises that alternative frameworks of meaning are subordinated. The distribution of the sensible is a way of conceptualising this reproduction of hierarchical social orders because it refers to the structuring role of aesthetics, where particular ways of seeing the world are not only taken for granted as the way things are, but delimit the conditions of possibility for other ways of seeing and doing (Rancière, 2006). Thus, some imaginaries are more dominant than others and in their expansion become hegemonic, as widely accepted and legitimised representations of the social world (Cegarra, 2012, p. 11). In the empirical chapters I suggest some of the ways in which the common sense of violence as it is imagined in Bogotá articulates ways of seeing that exclude alternative worldviews, obscuring the continuum of violence or resigning people to its inevitability.

Nevertheless, the recognition of multiple imaginaries is significant. While Appadurai refers to social imaginations (rather than imaginaries) to describe shared ways of interpreting and seeing the world, his approach to the multiple 'scapes' of representation is useful because it can be applied to the idea that multiple imaginaries are produced and articulated across, through and within different cultural and social

spaces (Appadurai, 1996).²² Likewise, common sense is a ‘tangle of narratives’ and a ‘chaotic confusion’ where elites have maintained control over particular ways of seeing, but the presence of conflicting and contradictory narratives can also be glimpsed (Crehan, 2016, p. 47). Rather than representing a coherent framework, then, both the imaginary and common sense as they are here conceptualised, evoke an image of loose, rough ways of seeing that still have a structuring effect: an image which is reflected in Silva’s description of urban imaginaries as formed of sketches rather than maps that form an impression of the city as a whole (Silva, 2006, p. 66). Moreover, what is hegemonic can be transformed over time, so it is possible that elements of messy and heterogeneous imaginaries become coherent and allow a space for other ways of seeing and imagining violence (Gramsci, 1971, p. 330).

Consequently, I am interested in the everyday discussions about, and cultural representations of, violence in Bogotá, and how they speak to different, and sometimes competing, social imaginaries. The multiplicity of narratives of violence and the power dynamics embedded within them are important precisely when considering the politics of ways of seeing violence, and particularly of ways of framing it. This involves taking into consideration the possible political implications of ways of seeing violence, but it also involves listening to different people with different perspectives. Strauss argues that individuals negotiate the dominant imaginaries associated with particular cultures.²³ This does not mean that everyone is always negotiating them, rather that people select (even if subconsciously and in contradictory ways) the shared ways of seeing that fit with their particular perspective at particular times (Strauss, 2006, p. 337). Recognising that imaginaries can be negotiated, questioned, only partially applied – i.e. are not as structuring as they are made out to be – suggests that social actors do not only participate in the collective practice of imagining the world around them. Rather, they have the potential to critique and challenge dominant ways of seeing violence, and to assert the importance of ‘other’ ways of seeing. In the following section, I situate graffiti and street art within this critical and potentially transgressive space of the

²² In particular, Appadurai refers to ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financescaples and ideoscaples.

²³ Although it is not only that there are individuals and then separate, abstract, imaginaries. The imaginary is a space of collective practice.

imagination. I propose that graffiti and street art mediate urban imaginaries of violence, in that the artists are (implicitly or explicitly) expressing their ways of seeing through what they produce, and in that people are articulating their own take on imaginaries as they interpret graffiti and street art.

2.2.2 Imagination

As explained in the introduction, the various subcultures and forms of expression that comprise graffiti and street art are imbued with political significance. They are deemed to transgress a society's norms, rules and regulations, either implicitly or explicitly critiquing the social order and its sanctioned modes of expression and participation (Campos, 2015). In Bogotá, the perceived role of such transgressive practices and expressions can be related to the politics of ways of seeing violence. To take an example, which will subsequently be developed in the first empirical chapter, the images of graffiti and street art that explicitly engaged with violence were frequently interpreted by my research participants as representing some sort of shared truth. They were described as 'the people trying to speak' (*'el pueblo tratando de hablar'*), as signs that 'remind us what kind of country we are in' (*'nos hace recordar en que clase de país estamos'*). For these participants, that meant a country of repression: 'if there is graffiti about violence it is because you can't speak about it any other way' (*'si hay grafitis sobre violencia es porque no lo puedes decir de otra manera'*).²⁴ These quotes highlight the place of violence in the imaginary, suggesting that it is important to people in Bogotá, that it is something they feel needs to be talked about because it is part of what the country is. Furthermore, they emphasise the role of the creative imagination as a way of talking about violence, not only because it is depicted in graffiti, but because it is difficult – impossible – to talk about it elsewhere. This moves away from imaginaries as being implicit and taken for granted social constructions or ways of seeing, and more towards a consideration of the agency of social actors and their ability to critique the world around them.

²⁴ From focus groups carried out by the author, details of which can be found in appendix A.

The relationship between the imaginary and the imagination is key. Where the imaginary can be thought of as the socially constructed framework of meaning through which people collectively comprehend and understand reality, the imagination refers to the images that reproduce and recreate reality (Cegarra, 2012, p. 3). However, alternative images can also be circulated and so the imagination is also the space where reality can be imagined otherwise. For Silva, graffiti and street art are important precisely because of their projective quality:

The act of looking beyond the standard ways of seeing prefigures a collective imaginary: there is an absent object of desire, which is elaborated in the imagination.

El mirar más allá de las apariencias de la visión uniforme prefigura un imaginario común: se desea un objeto ausente que se elabora en la imaginación (Silva, 1987a, p. 127).

Notably, the imagination is the space in which this desire is elaborated, given shape and communicated, which draws attention to the importance of aesthetics. The possibilities of imagining otherwise form the basis of the disruptive potential of aesthetics, even if it is just refusing to accept the normalisation of the social order (Mirzoeff, 2011). Indeed, De Ruiter (2015) argues that graffiti and street art represent the contestation of dominant imaginaries because they reframe the social order through suggestive images in unexpected public spaces, and she draws on Rancière to do so. The distribution of the sensible refers to the implicit organisation of roles and modes of participation within a social order, but the disruption of such consensus allows new possibilities to emerge: '[d]issensus brings back into play both the obviousness of what can be perceived, thought and done, and the distribution of those who are capable of perceiving, thinking and altering the coordinates of the shared world' (Rancière, 2009, p. 49). According to this line of thought, graffiti and street art have the potential to provoke such disruption because they imaginatively reconfigure or re-distribute these partitions, thus contesting the dominance and implicit acceptance of particular social structures (De Ruiter, 2015, p. 594).

This is useful in relation to imaginaries because it develops the idea that individuals can negotiate ways of seeing violence, and offer alternatives, but it also reveals a more fundamental concern with the power dynamics embedded in social structures. Silva, again, draws attention to the desire embedded in graffiti:

Implicit within them is a desire for change, and so their pronouncements of class or ghetto make it clear that they are challenging another order, that which they reject; in this way their creations are directed towards a fantasy that condemns.

Llevan implícito un deseo de cambio, y entonces su afirmación de clase o de ghetto hace manifiesto que se contraponen a otro orden, el que rechazan; de este modo sus recreaciones se “ordenan” hacia una fantasía condenatoria (Silva, 1987a, p. 131).

Very specifically, in this quote, they are speaking from a position of marginality and advocating change by denouncing and rejecting the way things are. Indeed, graffiti and street art are widely associated with a critical, or subaltern, imaginary, which influences how they are interpreted as engaging with violence. Even within the few interpretations of graffiti and street art in Bogotá that I describe above, it is significant that speaking ‘truth’ is seen to come from the margins of society: the people who are trying to remind ‘us’ about violence turn to graffiti because there is no other way to do so. Crucially, though, they do voice their critiques. While Gramsci’s argument about common sense tends towards pessimism, in that he uses it to explain how subalterns have consistently ended up being complicit in their subjugation, a more optimistic approach to the complexity of everyday power dynamics can be found with Scott (1990). His argument is that those who are in positions of weakness are critically aware of the structures of power that reproduce the system, but they are unable to articulate that awareness for fear of reprisal. In collective and individual ways that are hidden from the powerful, then, subaltern groups find ways of negotiating the domination that is imposed upon them and testing the limits of such domination. He argues that ‘the hidden transcript represents discourse – gesture, speech, practices – that is ordinarily excluded from the public transcript of subordinates by the exercise of power’ (Scott, 1990, p. 27). These hidden transcripts can be identified in everyday practices such as rumours, oral culture and social interactions. Scott’s point is that, rather than seeing those who are

subordinated in any position as either ideologically conforming to the power dynamic or actively defiant in the face of it, it is worth paying attention to the practices that lie somewhere between these two extremes (Scott, 1990, p. 19).

While the visibility of writing on the walls seems too public to be a hidden transcript, the concept relates to graffiti and street art because of the association with subalterns. Writing on the walls has traditionally been one of a limited number of options for public expression, especially for people who don't have access to cultural, social or economic capital, and, thus, it represents subalterns speaking back, through *pintas* and *pasquines*, denouncing, criticising and mocking those in power (Rama, 1984; Silva, 1989; Silva, 2013). Other interpretations support this perspective. Peteet describes the graffiti produced during the first Palestinian intifada as a 'vehicle or agent of power' because it created a space of contestation and resistance for the local Palestinian communities, who turned to the walls to not only denounce violence but to converse and collectively imagine alternative political systems (Peteet, 1996, p. 140). Likewise, De Ruiter conceptualises the graffiti and street art of Cairo as a contentious performance that enacted revolutionary social and political claims related to class and gender (De Ruiter, 2015), and Rolston argues that the production of murals in Belfast were 'a dynamic element in the political process' for both Protestants and Catholics during the Northern Irish conflict (Rolston, 2003, p. 3). Graffiti and street art can, thus, be conceptualised as mediating subaltern political expressions and resistance, offering an accessible form of communication that allows people to express discontent with the dominant frameworks in particular societies or to assert their own political stances.

There are limits to relying too much on this conceptualisation of graffiti and street art through the notion of subalternity, which I explain at the end of this chapter. However, that people are social agents who critique dominant imaginaries is central to the conceptual framework. In each empirical chapter, I explore the ways in which my research participants articulated their own critiques and interpretations of violence in Bogotá through graffiti and street art, revealing the presence of critical imaginaries and narratives of violence. To explain this, I draw on McLaughlin's approach to vernacular theory. Theorising in the vernacular is, for McLaughlin, a way of asking 'fundamental questions about culture' from outside of academic spaces (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 5). His

aim is not so much to focus on those who are subaltern in that they are oppressed in particular ways, but he is making a case for paying attention to those who are not normally associated with the practices of critical theory. Similarly to Scott, McLaughlin is speaking against a pessimistic tendency in critical theory to overstate the power of ideology:

The “subjugated knowledges” of ordinary people have often been overlooked or denied. Analysts of popular culture have often depicted the public as the passive victims of power elites who control the media and thus create the popular mindset. Other analysts see individuals as capable of resistive agency, as makers of cultural meaning, but still as subjects so thoroughly immersed in ideology that they cannot perceive its pervasive presence (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 7).

This approach to agency asserts that people do consciously question the societies they inhabit and encounter, but it also goes further by arguing for a recognition of the critical processes involved in such an analysis. He attends to the ways in which people critique some of the dominant frameworks of meaning that are reproduced in seemingly disparate or innocuous spheres of everyday life and respond with alternative narratives and meanings. Thus, for example, people can ‘come to the realization that their everyday practice makes sense inside a system of meaning and belief, and that changing the everyday requires bringing that system to the surface and considering alternatives’ (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 140). For the purposes of the thesis, this is useful because theorising in the vernacular implies that people not only articulate multiple and conflicting imaginaries of violence, but they do so by questioning and critiquing what they see as dominant narratives about violence that are reproduced in everyday life – from news reports to popular culture to social interactions to government policies – or by justifying their ways of seeing violence based on their own analyses of the social world around them.

The significance of graffiti and street art, then, is that they provide access to critical imaginaries of violence, as people not only produce them in such a way that expresses their vernacular theories, but those who interpret graffiti and street art do so by theorising in the vernacular. These vernacular theories speak to the social impact of violence in Bogotá, highlighting its place in everyday imaginaries, but also highlighting

the role of urban citizens as constructing the meaning of violence and, potentially, as imagining violence otherwise. Indeed, how people actually live with violence is often missed out of academic studies and it is important to look at some of their everyday understandings of violence, as well as the tactics employed by people who neither explicitly reproduce nor resist violence, but rather negotiate it (McIlwaine and Moser O N, 2007; Lizarazo, 2018). Listening to people also involves recognising the specific contexts in which they are constructing meanings related to violence, though, so I now situate these considerations within the particularities of the city. I argue that graffiti and street art are specifically engaging with urban space in ways that shed a more nuanced light on how people not only imagine violence differently but articulate competing claims to how violence is thought about in urban society.

2.3 Reading the walls

The following quote from Leo Párraga, the founder of BogotArt,²⁵ demonstrates some of the appeal of the city as a research site:

I think that with each graffiti that you come across [...] you notice different things [...] that are happening in the city [...] Each one, for example, is telling you a story and through that you can, like, construct a bit of a picture [...] of what Bogotá is in the end, right? A city of [...] conflicts, a city that is always in this state of being ready to be in a better state... well, a city that is conscious because it is precisely because of that [consciousness] that there are these types of messages, of protests, and also [...] a city that is finding, like [...] its own voice [...] I think that each graffiti helps to reaffirm [...] part of the essence of what Bogotá is.

Creo que con cada grafiti que te encuentras [...] te das cuenta de diferentes cosas [...] que pasa en la ciudad [...] Cada uno, digamos, te va contando una historia y con eso puedes, como, construir un poco [...] qué termina haciendo Bogotá, ¿no? Una ciudad de [...] conflictos, una ciudad como que siempre está en esta disposición de estar en un estado mejor... pues, una ciudad consciente porque precisamente por eso es que se pueden dar este tipo de mensajes, de protestas, y

²⁵ A cultural foundation whose work in La Perseverancia I discuss in chapter 5.

también [...] una ciudad que está encontrando, como, [...] su propia voz [...]
Pienso que cada tipo de grafiti ayuda a reafirmar [...] una parte que constituye la
esencia de lo que es Bogotá.

In particular, he draws an important connection between graffiti and street art as practices that communicate, their role as articulating critical urban imaginaries and the city as the space within which they do so. Graffiti and street art communicate the imaginaries, and imaginations, of Bogotá's inhabitants and in doing so they produce and imagine the city. By depicting the stories and conflicts that express what it means to live in Bogotá, they provide an insight into urban society and highlight the place of contestation therein. The image of the city that Párraga describes suggests a space of agency – the city is '*consciente*' – but also of encounter because it is through graffiti that one can discover what people are doing and thinking. Thus, he presents Bogotá as a city that can be understood and appreciated by 'reading the walls', and it is precisely through the urban visual landscape that the relationship between violence and imaginaries in this thesis is articulated. To contextualise this relationship I draw on a conceptualisation of the city that highlights its heterogeneity and the struggles therein, before turning to a deeper consideration of the ways in which graffiti and street art make claims to it.

2.3.1 Heterogeneity and struggle

To focus on urban imaginaries is to think about the dynamic between the material, the social and the symbolic dimensions of cities. In other words, locating the production of imaginaries within the context of a particular city. However, identifying 'the city' as if it is a clearly defined, bounded entity is also problematic given that there are multiple components of cities, including the material conditions of everyday life and urban space, the social practices and social relations that are particular to the city, the economic and political institutions that tend to be concentrated in cities, or the cultural representations of cities and city life (Bridge and Watson, 2000). Furthermore, urban space is simultaneously planned, represented and lived by social groups with different motivations and conditions of possibility, but who, combined, produce space (Rama, 1984; Lefebvre, 1991; De Certeau, 2011). Following Lefebvre, Rob Shields uses the term

‘social spatialisation’ to recognise these dynamics and ‘to designate the ongoing social construction of the spatial at the level of the social imaginary (collective mythologies, presuppositions) as well as interventions in the landscape (for example, the built environment)’ (Shields, 1991, p. 31). These various facets of the city and definitions of space contribute to what is meant by the city, which reflects the challenge of approaching it as an object of investigation.

Any analysis of urban space must also recognise the place of diversity. Heterogeneity is a defining characteristic of the urban, alongside the density of population groups, industries and institutions, and the flows of communication within cities, between cities and between cities and rural areas (Massey *et al.*, 1999; Amin and Thrift, 2002). Bogotá is a city of around nine million people, sprawling across an area of 33km north to south and 16km east to west, and comprising 20 localities, which has an impact on conceptualising urban imaginaries and particularly whether they should be discussed in the plural or the singular.²⁶ Silva suggests that the urban produces shared ways of seeing and shared practices, meaning that there is a collective idea of what it means to be urban and live in urban space (Silva, 1987a, p. 124). While Silva does not deny the differences between inhabitants, he does speak of an urban point of view and, thus, implies that the city has a unifying imaginative force. Yet this is problematic because it is impossible to talk of a single urban experience and the scale involved in analysing ‘the city’ is immense. Conversely, Néstor García Canclini suggests that the heterogeneity of the city can be explained by the fact that people in it have multiple imaginaries (Lindón, 2007, p. 91). Although there is some truth to Silva’s representation of the city as a unifying experience, because that is precisely how people speak of the city in everyday life, I insist on the recognition of multiple urban imaginaries. In part, this is because of the sheer scale of the city and the heterogeneity of the urban population. More to the point, though, even if people do speak of the city as a whole, what they say when they are imagining and talking about it can be very different, particularly in relation to the identification of violence.

²⁶ <http://www.Bogotá.gov.co/>

Furthermore, the multiplicity of narratives, experiences and expectations of violence suggest that not only does the city *not* unify people, but that its heterogeneity produces struggle. Critical urban studies posit that space is fundamentally political and the way that city spaces are experienced, represented and transformed are subject to intersecting power dynamics between different social groups in situated spatial-temporal contexts (Massey, 1994; Brenner *et al.*, 2012; Merrifield, 2014). Thus, there are specific dynamics to different urban spaces and divergent interests of the people involved in making claims to those spaces. Paying close attention to them offers a more nuanced understanding of the trajectories of particular cities and reveals ‘a dynamic, complex and conflicting reality’ (*‘una realidad desbordante, compleja y discordante’*) (Salcedo Fidalgo and Zeiderman, 2008, p. 64). Dynamic, because people are actively participating in the way that urban spaces are perceived and used, but complex and conflicting because there are different interests in relation to how spaces should be perceived and used.

To interpret the dynamics of such heterogeneity and struggle in Bogotá, I turn to the notion of the right to the city. On a somewhat abstract level, the right to the city demands ‘[t]he freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves’, especially in relation to ‘social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values’ (Harvey, 2008, p. 23). In particular, the concept is used to critique the material and symbolic forms of exclusion and alienation in capitalist societies, arguing that supposedly democratic societies are fundamentally unequal in relation to people’s access to the decision-making processes that affect urban space and everyday life, which instead are largely in the hands of social, political and economic elites (Harvey, 2012).²⁷ By conceptualising the notion of the right to the city, Henri Lefebvre is simultaneously critiquing urban space as a product of capitalism, while claiming the city as the space through which an anti-capitalist movement might emerge (Busquet, 2013). Thus, rather than thinking about it as either an abstract right (as in human) or a concrete right (as in

²⁷ It has, thus, often been used to call for social justice in relation to various issues (including housing, access to urban resources, employment). Urban policy in many countries (including Colombia) even reflects the language of the right to the city, although implementing it is another matter – partly because of the scale of such transformation. Purcell, M. (2002) ‘Excavating Lefebvre: The right to the city and its urban politics of the inhabitant’, *GeoJournal*, 58, pp. 99-108..

recognition by law), it is more relevant to see it as ‘a cry and a demand’ (Lefebvre *et al.*, 1996, p. 158). As a political project, the right to the city aims to confront embedded structural inequalities and exclusions by demanding that the working classes, those who are socially and politically excluded and marginalised, participate in the production of urban space (Marcuse, 2012).

Of particular importance to the thesis is the corresponding recognition that urban space should be appropriated by those who prioritise its use value over its exchange value. Thus, the demands for the right to the city detailed in the empirical chapters relate both to the particular forms of violence and exclusion experienced by different social groups in Bogotá and to the forms through which graffiti and street art make claims on the city. However, I am not claiming that it always articulates a demand to transform society. Following Chatterjee (2004), I explore how people make specific claims in and through urban space, even if they are not necessarily recognised nor articulated in coherent ways. In Bogotá, the conflict over space is bound up in a highly unequal social structure and involves a complicated struggle between people with differentiated access to power. Furthermore, against the totalising aim of social transformation that is embedded in the right to the city, Chatterjee argues that ‘the politics of heterogeneity can never claim to yield a general formula for all peoples at all times: its solutions are always strategic, contextual, historically specific and, inevitably, provisional’ (Chatterjee, 2004, p. 22). In the following section I contextualise these strategic politics through graffiti and street art and the claims to the city that they represent.

2.3.2 Writing the city

In Bogotá, signs of the city’s diversity pepper the urban landscape. Up high, throw-ups and pieces display the tags of those who have followed the subcultural mandate of graffiti writing that visibility is key, and that to impress, your spot must elicit awe at the risks taken either to achieve such visibility without capture or to survive such dangerous heights. Others subvert subcultural norms by playing with invisibility, and I found tags nestled in the cracks of broken drain covers, only to be glimpsed by those who are watching where they’re walking (figure 2). Some signs of disagreement are removed of any association with identifiable subcultures, and stuck on a bollard in Chapinero a plain

adhesive label simply stated '*Peñalosa H.P*' (Peñalosa sonofabitch). Together, though, they reflect some of the everyday ways in which people participate in, and appropriate, urban space.

I have already mentioned that graffiti and street art are associated with subaltern social groups who have traditionally turned to the streets to make their voices heard, faced with a lack of access to more official forms of communication. Framing this through the right to the city adds another dimension to the interpretation, though, as the appropriation of space emphasises the diversity of urban society. Urban space is mobilised not only to make particular demands, but to demand that the city belong to those who are staking a claim to it and that it more generally represent a space of participation. Kurt Iveson offers a useful way of thinking about this because he argues that urban society comprises heterogeneous social groups who identify as publics through their relationships in and with diverse urban spaces (Iveson, 2008). Graffiti and street artists are an example of a counterpublic, referring to those who, in the face of marginalisation, 'have embodied an explicitly oppositional stance in relation to prevailing notions of what counts for 'normal' forms of public address' (Iveson, 2008, p. 25). By describing them as *counterpublics*, Iveson alludes to graffiti and street art's association with subalternity and marginalisation, but he also draws attention to the tensions embedded within heterogeneous societies that specifically arise because some publics (and their forms of expression) confront other people's ideas about what social identities and practices are appropriate in urban space (p. 219). Thus, graffiti and street artists are claiming their right to the city by demanding that their forms of address – in this case, the writing on the walls and all that it represents to those who do it – are legitimate contributions to the urban visual landscape.

The specific claims to the city that are represented in Bogotá's graffiti and street art will be discussed in the empirical chapters, but it is worth recognising that aesthetics are important in the city: 'culture is an active insertion into the flow of meanings in the city, meanings that themselves have an impact on material space and practices' (Scorer, 2016, p. 2). The image of an urban visual landscape scribbled over by its inhabitants might be celebrated by some and denounced by others, but it becomes a space of communication where the writing and reading of graffiti represents 'a symbolic

interaction between city dwellers' (*'un intercambio simbólico entre los habitantes'*) (Silva, 1987a, p. 141). Silva describes this engagement between graffiti and its audience as a playful and intellectual exercise, creating the sense of shared complicity:

[W]herever the fleeting grapheme appears, the addressee receives a half-secret message to be deciphered. Such a playful and intellectual exercise brings the 'graffiti-signers' closer together with their admirers, in the corners of urban complicity.

[C]uando en cualquier lugar aparece el instantáneo grafema, sus destinatarios reciben un anuncio medio secreto para ser descifrado. Semejante ejercicio lúdico e intelectual acerca a los "grafitografos" con sus gozantes, desde los rincones de la complicidad ciudadana (Silva, 1987a, p. 137).

More than just uniting different ways of seeing, they are seen to encourage others to imagine the city otherwise: they are 'mundane images that narrate the city and at the same time imagine it' (*'imágenes mundanas que cuentan la ciudad, y al mismo tiempo se la imaginan'*) (*ibid*). The appropriation of public space is key to the political quality of message. Indeed, graffiti and street art could be seen as representing one of the ways in which urban spaces are 'occupied' in such a way that people are not merely using space to demonstrate but creating a space for political engagement and claim-making (Sassen, 2011; Sassen, 2012, p. 6). De Ruiter argues that '[b]y placing their art in public space, street artists seek to render both culture and politics common, in the sense that it belongs to everyone' (De Ruiter, 2015, p. 593). Whether or not graffiti and street art depict direct messages related to violence, power or inequality, public space is the privileged location for expressing transgression and making claims to the city, challenging normative notions of how public space should be used (Campos, 2015, p. 22). Their publicness is seen to contribute to the possibility that 'alternative' imaginaries will reach a greater audience through their visibility: 'it is this possibility of coming across something new, something unique, something surprising, shocking, informative, something that can make us smile, think or react that graffiti, 'writing on walls' offers' (Zieleniec, 2016, p. 10).

Thus, by appropriating the urban visual landscape, graffiti and street artists insert meanings into the flow of the city and, for Zieleniec, this represents their claims to the right to the city and the potential for a radical transformation:

Graffiti then, is an embodied creative colonisation of public space. One that has the potential to surprise and change the way we not only view the city and others but also ourselves and society as a whole. By creating new ways of utilising walls for meanings and messages that represent aesthetic, cultural or political values the city comes alive to new ways of not only reading space but of being in it (Zieleniec, 2016, p. 11).

The implication is that the writing on the walls is a form of engagement for those who do it, it is an 'embodied creative colonisation', but it is also a way of disrupting the imaginaries of those who encounter it. This rather romantic reading of graffiti suggests that the aesthetic appropriation of public space is a way of affirming the use-value of space and that this represents a more democratic way of producing urban space (Zieleniec, 2016, p. 9). In particular, it leaves open the possibility that other ways of seeing will emerge. Jeff Ferrell's celebration of urban anarchy corroborates this stance, depicting graffiti as the creative process of imagining an alternative city through everyday urban practices that defy the rules and regulations of urban space and, in doing so, forge spaces of resistance and encourage a fundamental reimagining of the dominant urban norms and expectations that reproduce the status quo (Ferrell, 2001).

My aim in describing these interpretations of graffiti and street art is to situate these forms of cultural expression within the conceptual framework of a heterogeneous city that is produced through struggle. In some ways, their visual claims to the city represent the voices of those who are not normally heard within urban structures of power and so speak to a more democratic imagining of public space. However, there are important caveats to this romantic vision of the urban visual landscape, which I discuss in the following section.

2.4 Ambiguities

It was very easy to introduce the topic of graffiti into conversation in Bogotá. On mentioning that I was living in the city to research it, people would nod and agree that this was the place to do it. They would talk about the graffiti tour, the graffiti law, the tragedy of Diego Felipe's death. Furthermore, they would tell me what kinds of graffiti they liked or disliked, they would suggest reasons for its proliferation, they would remember and describe pieces that had particularly captivated them. These discussions were illuminating. They revealed that graffiti and street art hold great symbolic importance, even though they are produced by a small minority of the urban population, are not universally appreciated as creative forms of expression, and do not necessarily nor obviously engage with the topic of violence. Confronted with an imaginary of Bogotá as violent, chaotic and full of fear, listening to people critique and engage with the problem of violence is, in a perverse way, comforting – it shows that people have agency, that they are shrewd. Seeing such critiques elaborated in graffiti and street art provides some hope: that violence can be discussed, that their position in public space will provoke debate, that there are other ways of seeing and imagining the city and what urban society can be. However, in this thesis I present a more nuanced reading of these forms of cultural expression and the representations of violence articulated through them.

Firstly, I argue that the focus on the vernacular cannot be easily equated to subalternity and so, while the locus of enunciation in relation to graffiti and street art is important, it cannot be presumed. The recognition of graffiti and street artists as critically engaged social agents – as people claiming their right to the city – is significant because it not only broadens the range of media through which imaginaries of violence can be identified, but it also takes the articulation of such imaginaries as serious and considered, as opposed to flimsy or unthinking reflections. However, the tendency to assume that these perspectives offer alternative imaginaries because they are articulated from non-dominant positions is problematic. As Crehan argues, the condition of subalternity is always situated but in general refers to diverse forms of inequality (Crehan, 2016, pp. 15-16). Graffiti and street art have historically been associated with subalternity, but in the contemporary context they are not solely the markings of

oppressed groups. Rather, governments support artists and commission their work, artists are able to make a living from painting and numerous publications around the world share and celebrate graffiti and street. On a more individual level, while I don't explicitly identify the social positions of my research participants in the empirical analysis, they do represent a range of social groups, in relation to ethnicity, class and gender.

The second point that I want to consider is related to the implications of conceptualising urban imaginaries of violence through the notion of the vernacular. It is important to note that a focus on the vernacular does not necessarily correspond to the idealised image of resistance that can be seen in Scott's work. Firstly, McLaughlin argues that vernacular theories that show a critical engagement with one aspect of the social world do not equate to a critical engagement with all aspects (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 162). This links to both the idea that violences are multiple, so it makes sense that people might reproduce some forms of violence even if they critique others, and to the heterogeneity of urban society. Even within the collective of those who do graffiti and street art it is important not to think of them as homogenous. Furthermore, the outcomes of such critical engagement should not be romanticised, as the politics of vernacular theorists cannot be taken for granted and they are equally capable of reproducing particular forms of violence and exclusion. This also applies to the positioning of graffiti and street art in public space. Ash Amin notes that there is a tendency to romanticise the democratic potential of public space as a space of heterogeneous assembly, which he critiques by pointing out the impossibility of knowing what the effects of such assembly might be, and the range of social interactions that are not only positive and constructive but can also be isolating and aggressive (Amin, 2008). I would argue that the same applies to assumptions related to encounters with the urban visual landscape, and in the empirical chapters I point to the variety of responses to graffiti and street art.

Thirdly, I argue that the consequences of such vernacular imaginaries cannot be tied too closely to some sort of transgressive action, as hegemonic structures of power are deeply entrenched in aesthetics and violence. The problem with focusing too much on the agency of social actors is that it denies the power of hegemonic imaginaries, not to mention the coercive threat of direct violence associated with speaking about the

realities and politics of violence in Bogotá. One way of recognising this is that the 'chaotic confusion' of common sense requires organic intellectuals to not only articulate more critical ways of seeing, but to 'order in a systematic, coherent and critical fashion one's own intuitions of life and the world' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 327). If critical imaginaries are only articulated in specific instances, they support the idea of common sense as being sufficiently tangled to obscure a coherent narrative. The dynamic between power and resistance is of key importance to the thesis, but it is also unsatisfactory if it retains the idea that people are either resistant or submissive. Indeed, everyday life comprises tactical negotiations of power (De Certeau, 1980). Rather than framing acts as resistant, the idea of negotiation accepts the ambiguous impact of them while still highlighting their importance (Chandra, 2015).

To conclude, I conceptualise imaginaries as the framework of meaning through which societies are structured and reproduced, but within which there are struggles over ways of seeing the social world. This enables me to capture the political implications of ways of seeing violence, in that there are multiple forms of violence present in everyday life in Bogotá but different priorities within the social structure in relation to how those violences are recognised and might be addressed. Graffiti and street art are key spaces through which people respond to violence and critique structures of power, and they make important claims to the city through their presence in the urban visual landscape. Nevertheless, recognising social actors as agents in the construction of meaning does not necessarily challenge the power structures that are embedded in society, nor does it mean that these actors are offering particularly liberal critiques. I follow the imperative of the 'feminist killjoy', which means insisting on the uncomfortable realities of violence and inequality as they are reproduced in various spaces of everyday life (Ahmed, 2010; Ahmed, 2017). Indeed, the methodological approach taken in this thesis reflects this need to attend to the complexities, contradictions and ambiguities of urban imaginaries and I employ a number of methods to explore the multiple spaces through which different imaginaries of violence might be glimpsed. Moreover, I turn to the production and reception of graffiti and street art as a way of gauging how people in Bogotá form understandings of violence and contribute diverse perspectives on violence, graffiti and street art, and urban space. In the empirical chapters, I pursue this line of argument by

identifying the imaginaries of violence constructed by my research participants but paying close attention to the particular contexts and spaces within which they are situated.

Chapter 3

Methods and Methodology

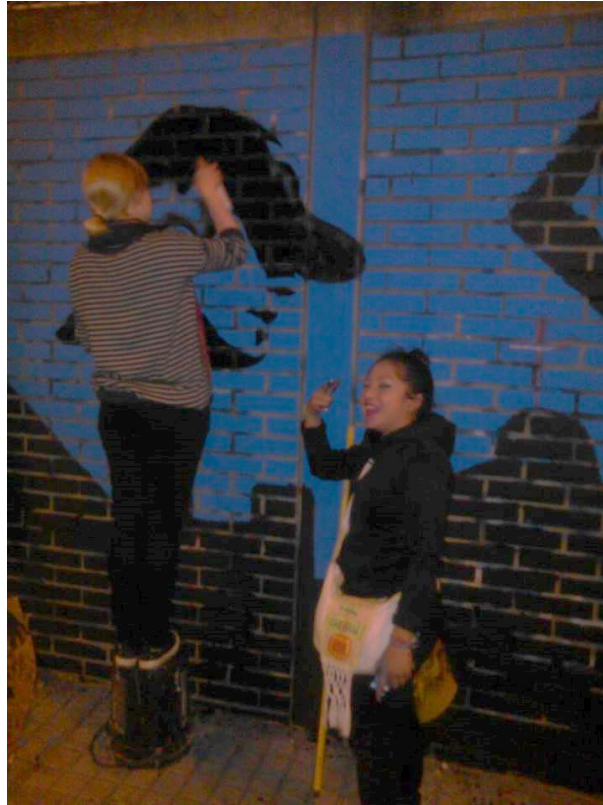


Figure 3 Painting with Cultural Futbolera

In the theoretical framework, I conceptualise the city as a heterogeneous space within which diverse social groups are making claims to urban space and are reflecting (on) multiple realities of violence in Bogotá. Accordingly, my methodological approach was designed to probe different ways of seeing the city, of identifying violence and of engaging with graffiti and street art, and, thus, necessitated a flexible attitude to where and how diverse imaginaries might be glimpsed. Trying out a variety of methods developed into a process of ethnographic stockpiling, which included photos, interviews, focus groups, Facebook posts, conferences, vox pops, news reports, participant observation, rumours, events, conversations, Twitter hashtags, diary entries, and fieldwork notes. Some of the methods and insights grew out of fortuitous, random

encounters that led to interesting conversations and snippets of data to add to my collection, and some were more intentional tactics. In this chapter, I detail the most significant tactics and encounters that contributed to the identification of urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá, but I also explore the complexities and challenges that presented themselves, and explain how I negotiated them. In particular, I present the methodological considerations that guided my approach to studying violent cities, and explain the process of conducting ethnographic work, interviews, focus groups and visual analysis, and of handling data. I conclude the chapter by reflecting on the ethical considerations required in such a study.

3.1 Studying violent cities

The motivation for this research stemmed from an interest in the idea that Colombian social imaginaries are saturated with the notion of violence and a subsequent curiosity related to what kinds of violence that referred to, and how people in Colombia actually thought about violence and negotiated this imaginary. Turning to Bogotá to conduct the research meant situating myself within the context of a 'violent city'. Violence plays a central role in geographical imaginaries of the city and produces a set of 'place-images that form a place-myth' (Shields, 1991, p. 61). To explore this spatialised myth of violence, I follow Silva's approach to identifying urban imaginaries, taking into consideration the imbrication of the material, the social and the symbolic (as I explain in the previous chapter), but also considering the diverse ways in which imaginaries are constructed. He argues that there are shared narratives, stories, jokes and ways of perceiving or moving around the city that unite inhabitants and create an impression of the city (Silva, 2006). Moreover, he notes that this collective creation is always under construction. While he recognises the conceptualisation of the city as an imagined world, a microcosm, he also complements that notion by reversing it: 'the city is at the same time the opposite, the world of an image, which is slowly and collectively being constantly built and rebuilt', (*la ciudad es del mismo modo lo contrario: el mundo de una imagen, que lenta y colectivamente se va construyendo y volviendo a construir incesantemente*) (Silva, 2006, p. 19). I apply this to the research by focusing on the multiple and shifting ways in which Bogotá is represented in the collective imagination.

However, the scale and diversity of the city also has an impact on the possibilities of studying urban space. As a way of situating the research, I focus on key spaces within the city and approach them from multiple angles. Thus, in each empirical chapter the spatial context introduces the analysis and considers the developments in local politics, the particularities of the material landscape and the mainstream representations of the neighbourhoods in question. These factors influence the everyday, lived experiences of diverse social groups in those urban spaces but, more to the point, these diverse social groups negotiate them in such a way that shows the everyday agency of social actors and their negotiation of violence and politics (Skelton, 2010; Koopman, 2011). Thus, I pay attention to people's perceptions and experiences of living in the city, recognising that they construct meaning by writing their own narratives in and through space (De Certeau, 2011).

Within the context of a city perceived to be violent, the place of violence within these narratives is of key concern. To think about the place of violence in the city is to think about the security practices, fears and frustrations that are grounded in everyday life and the emotions therein (Pain and Smith, 2008; Ochs, 2013; Monroe, 2016). Such an approach also draws attention to the notion that violence has a social impact even away from the direct action of conflict situations, and that a range of social actors are implicated in the negotiation, reproduction and construction of meaning related to violence (Moser and Clark, 2001). Thus, I focused on the everyday perceptions of violences and the ways in which people discussed violence, rather than how they might directly experience violence. In order to convey the sense that violence is present in urban imaginaries in Bogotá, even if it is noticeable in its absence, I present thick description throughout the thesis (Clifford *et al.*, 1986).

In particular, the visual landscape provides the framework through which I consider the interplay between violence and urban imaginaries. Andreas Huyssen (2003) employs the trope of the palimpsest to 'discuss configurations of urban spaces and their unfolding in time', attempting to understand how 'urban spaces are lived spaces that shape collective imaginaries' (Huyssen, 2003, p. 7). I follow this approach by observing the city, being in the city, exploring the city and reading its walls. Indeed, the idea of reading graffiti and street art as palimpsestic markings or inscriptions in urban space runs

through the thesis in the sense that it offers a way of understanding contemporary discussions of violence, and of grasping them before their natural ephemerality takes over. However, that does not just mean that the city is solely a text to 'read', rather that graffiti and street art are aesthetic practices through which people engage with the city and produce it, which can be situated alongside the wider place of violence in everyday imaginaries of urban space.

3.2 Ethnographic work

3.2.1 *Getting to grips with (violence in) the city*

Participant observation is one of the core ethnographic methods, guided by the research imperative to understand everyday life, identify meanings, interpret social behaviours and spend an extended amount of time in the context under study (Scott-Jones and Watt, 2010, p. 109). The scale and complexity of the city as a site of fieldwork contradicts the traditional view of ethnography as the process of becoming embedded in a particular community and getting to know the research participants intimately, but this should not be assumed to lessen the contributions of urban ethnography (Pardo *et al.*, p. 2). Indeed, the complexity of urban life in Bogotá revealed the multiple spaces of violences, it contributed to the collective construction of diverse imaginaries of violence and it highlighted the complexities and contradictions of such imaginaries during the nine months in which I lived in the city.

My positionality is important here as there were personal factors that informed the way that I collected data and carried out the research project. Although the debates surrounding insider/outsider status are problematized for their reliance on the notion of epistemic privilege and the lack of attention paid to intersectional power relations (Mannay, 2016, p. 29), the fact that I was an 'outsider' in relation to nationality helped me to initiate a dialogue on multiple occasions. People made an effort to explain and contextualise things to me, especially in relation to the realities (or their perceived realities) of life in Bogotá and violence in Colombia, and they offered key interpretations of what was going on in the world of the peace process, local politics and the contemporary dynamics of graffiti and street art (Monroe, 2016, p. 6). This is helpful for

a research project on imaginaries, when you are trying to get at that which is often taken for granted and implicit. Furthermore, some people seemed to be concerned about the image of Colombia that I would get and instead wanted to show me the Bogotá they knew. Graffiti and street artists in particular would offer to take me around their neighbourhoods, showing me places I might not know to go to, as well as offering a way of getting to know an area through their eyes and staying safe within them. Indeed, the question of security arose on multiple occasions, mostly in the form of people being concerned about my safety, probably related to the fact that I was foreign and a young woman. Although not a subject that I explore in depth in this thesis, my experience of conducting research was inevitably gendered and informed social interactions, my own way of seeing the world, and the way that I moved around the city.

Fieldwork notes and diaries are vital for recording the gaps, silences and contradictions that might not make sense to the researcher at the time of collecting data but which subsequently gain clarity (Scott-Jones and Watt, 2010, p. 110). I used these methods to record subtle signs or narratives that suggested violence, to collect my thoughts, make a note of links to news articles or social media posts that struck me as significant, and to reflect on interviews and conversations that I had conducted. The everyday life that I recorded reveals the imbrication of the research topic with the context of living in Bogotá between July 2015 and April 2016. Of particular interest were the peace process and the local mayoral elections because they provided discussion points and framed some of the ways in which people talked about both violence and graffiti and street art. From hashtags on social media, to advertisements for different campaigns that appeared on television, on the internet and in urban space, to slogans that were used in cultural and political events, these discussions were all around. Furthermore, conversations would naturally turn to the developments in these two areas, to the expectations of them, as well as to the campaigns underway and I sought out events and joined marches that had a focus on local politics, developments in the city or that were related to discussions on violence and peace.

Moreover, the diary provided a space where I could write down my personal impressions, experiences and emotions related to living in the city and researching violence. Jacobs argues that:

The way to get at what goes on in the seemingly mysterious and perverse behaviour of cities is, I think, to look closely, and with as little previous expectation as is possible, at the most ordinary scenes and events, and attempt to see what they mean and whether any threads of principle emerge among them (Jacobs, 1972, p. 23).

Thus, I spent a lot of time in public spaces of the city and tried to remain attentive to the visual and social landscape. I used public transport, which involved getting the wrong bus, suddenly finding myself an audience to a plea for help or a performance, or being caught up in rush hour traffic, but also seeing the landscape of different areas of the city and spotting graffiti or interesting things happening in the streets. Buses and bus stops provided sources of information through casual conversations, such as the one that I describe in the following diary entry:

On the bus on the way back from swimming this morning I also overheard people talking about the Transmilenio protest in Patio Bonito. Apparently a load of people stopped the buses and they broke some of the windows on the buses and wouldn't let anything through. One woman was telling people around her what she knew [...] she was saying that it would stop things for a day or two and they will think that it was a success and then it'll all go back to the same thing as before. And then later they were saying that there were encapuchados getting involved in the window-breaking as well.²⁸

Likewise, taxis provided a consistent source of information and entertainment, as many of the drivers I spoke to were ripe with insights into violence on a local and national level, as well as offering varied opinions on graffiti and bits of advice about how I should negotiate the city. Walking and hanging out were some of the best ways to get a feel for the city, and I spent time in parks and plazas, in cafes, galleries, museums and libraries, as well as on university campuses when I could gain access to them, and exploring the streets, which also contributed to the discovery of interesting examples of graffiti and street art. These tactics meant suffering the weather and the traffic fumes but provided

²⁸ *Encapuchados* literally translates as 'hooded' and refers to protesters who cover their face during demonstrations and are particularly associated with acts of vandalism and aggression during such protests.

ample opportunity for observing the busyness or emptiness of spaces, the inscriptions that were visible in them, the controls that were put in place, such as barriers to stop people from jumping the Transmilenio, the private security guards, and the signs on public transports and parks saying guns aren't allowed in the former, nor street vendors in the case of the latter.

In fact, the diary ended up containing many references to the practical aspects of living in the city, particularly because narratives of violence emerged in them to a greater extent than I had anticipated and contextualised the presence of (imagined) violence in everyday life. The fear of exposing oneself to crime and violence was particularly noticeable, revealed through cautionary measures that were taken and perceived risks associated with moving around the city. Other everyday practices included keeping your bag in front of you on the bus, walking through public space with a purpose and avoiding eye contact with others, ignoring people begging for money, using Uber or a taxi app so that you don't get overcharged or even robbed by a taxi driver that you have hailed from the street, and not going to certain areas of the city, especially after dark. The realities of insecurity and risk were not always told in warnings, though, some of the time people joked about them:

[T]he traffic police around Christmas stop you for any reason they can find to impose a fine, and they say 'qué tiene', and you say 'tengo however many razones para...', saying how much money you are willing to give them. And [----] once said 'no tengo ninguna razón', which everyone thought was very funny. [...] And there were various stories about nearly getting robbed. [----] managed to avoid it once by drawing some portraits for some gangster drug dealers. [----] was working at a traffic light and the guy who was going to rob them ended up just chatting to them.

These diverse narratives of violence contributed to my confusion about what to believe and how to act in different areas of the city. I often felt uncomfortable about the ways in which my experiences of the city were mediated and frustrated at the discourses of security that sometimes felt exaggerated, and at other times were an unpleasant reminder of my vulnerability. Moreover, the process of conducting fieldwork involved having my preconceptions challenged on multiple levels, for example by expecting

violence, finding non-violence, and then being confronted with uncomfortable realities of violence (which I explore in chapter 5). I ended up negotiating these factors by taking cues from those around me but also noting down when they seemed excessive, or when they proved pertinent. Significantly, as I explain in the previous chapter, I also noted down the moments of non-violence. People do talk to strangers on the street, they do ask for advice on the Transmilenio or give their seat to a pregnant woman, and someone sitting down will offer to hold the bag of the person standing next to them. So it's more complicated than people moving silently about the city and shutting themselves off from others, but there is still a negotiation that takes place, and violence is still present in the urban imaginary. Indeed, the mixture of rumours, actual threats to safety and the negotiations with others in urban space revealed the practices of everyday security that are enacted by city dwellers (Ochs, 2013), and not just given as advice to visitors. Thus, the conversations that I had with people about violence and security in the city were key because they offered an insight into their own understandings of the risks associated with violence, what they thought was real or imagined, and what was missing from wider narratives of violence in Colombia.

3.2.2 Graffiti and street art in the city

Alongside the process of observing violence in the city, I also needed to comprehend the place of graffiti and street art in Bogotá. Ethnographic approaches to graffiti and street art, particularly as subcultures, provide an insight into the norms and unwritten rules of the game, the experience of being part of a subculture and the relationships between members or with the wider society (Ferrell, 1996; Macdonald, 2002). Where there has been a tendency to make assumptions about the meanings of graffiti and street art, or the politics of particular subcultures, the perspectives of those who actually participate in them is of crucial importance (Macdonald, 2002). In the next section of the chapter I detail the interviews that were conducted as part of this process, but there were other sources of information available to me. The worlds of graffiti and street art produce a range of material in the form of magazines, photos, books, fanzines, blogs, YouTube videos and social media, which provide insights into how artists are interpreting their work and that of others, as well as how they interpret and respond to the challenges

that are faced by artists in different contexts. Through social media I was able to contact artists, find out about events and explore some of the reactions to graffiti and street art that were disseminated in comments. Furthermore, I attended conferences, talks, exhibitions and festivals that had a focus on graffiti and street art, which were occasions to chat to graffiti and street artists – or people interested in graffiti and street art – about the work and their perspective of the city and discover some of the key debates in the field. Notably, there were many opportunities to attend such events during the nine months in which I conducted fieldwork, revealing the importance of graffiti and street art in Bogotá.

It is also worth noting the globalisation of graffiti and street art, as artists travel around the world, festivals and biennales are set up for urban art, or include them, and social media, dedicated websites, blogs and online magazines make it easier to share images and experiences. Nevertheless, graffiti and street art movements in different countries or regions are still tied to the local surroundings, traditions and socio-political contexts; thus, they offer an insight into local, lived experiences (Muñoz and Marín, 2006; Tickner, 2008). For example, the local context was particularly important to identifying the forms of graffiti and street art prevalent in Bogotá and how local artists referred to them.

There are various definitions and choosing the wrong word can lead to confusion. One of the first indications of this was during a talk explaining the procedure for submitting designs to the local arts council project '*Memorias del Futuro*'. The representative from the project was talking a lot about how they 'loved graffiti' but to think outside the box, until someone finally interrupted and asked what she meant by graffiti. She stumbled a bit, and said 'hip-hop style', to which many in the audience corrected her in unison, specifying that as '*graffiti writing*'. I began to ask artists how they defined graffiti, or I would point to a certain mural or type of graffiti and asked whether it was graffiti, street art, or something else. This led to the various definitions and forms of graffiti and street art that I identify in the introductory chapter, including the distinctions between graffiti writing, *pintas*, muralism, street art and *grafiti de barrista*. However, when bringing into play the reception of graffiti and street art, it was clear that etic definitions of graffiti prioritised the more elaborate and pictorial images, and the less elaborate forms of writing on the walls were sometimes not even identified as graffiti at all. To negotiate

this field of blurred definitions and distinct terminology, I would make it very clear in interviews and focus groups that I was interested in the variety of styles, explaining that I wanted to explore *'todo lo que se ve en las paredes'* (everything that can be seen on the walls).

Observing graffiti and street art(ists) also offered an insight into its everyday reception in the city. I took any opportunity to visit and hang out with artists while they were painting and made a note of who else was around and what they were doing (figure 3). I joined five collectives and one individual artist while they were painting in the city, some of which took place during the day, others at night, some with permission, others not, some that were part of more organised events involving music and t-shirt printing and one that was part of a broader political campaign. It was gratifying to see the frequency with which passers-by would talk to the artists, bring them something to eat or drink, or just stop to observe the painting process, although there were also some more uncomfortable moments of less friendly interactions. Nevertheless, throughout the period of fieldwork I found that people had something to say about graffiti and street art in the city, especially when they remembered a piece of graffiti that they particularly enjoyed and were keen to tell me about it, as I note in this diary entry:

Yesterday me and [----] walked past the graffiti shop in La Candelaria and it was closed but there was a poster of DjLu's pictograms on the wall and we saw a homeless man (I think) who was looking at it for ages, it really was like he was in an art gallery. Which also reminded me of the homeless man who talked to [----] and me about being there when they were doing the graffiti festival in Santa Fe and how he was commenting on what he liked and didn't like.

These signs of interaction consolidated my desire to talk to people in the street, because it showed the breadth of engagement between graffiti and street art and their urban audiences.

This process of observing and understanding graffiti and street art in Bogotá led to the selection of sites in which to conduct vox pops and the selection of images to include in the focus groups. While I was struck by the variety that could be seen in most of the central areas of the city, there were some emblematic sites of graffiti and street art. I

identified them largely through informal conversations, but I also made sure to include a question about painting in different areas of the city in interviews, and I collected many photographs as I moved around the city. Some of the time this information was offered up readily, for example as soon as I started talking about my research people would ask if I had been along Calle 26, or visited the campuses of public universities, which were famous for their painted walls, or they would mention the bridge where Diego Felipe Becerra was killed and its transformation into a graffiti memorial. At other times, graffiti artists would explain to me that there is a lot of bombing and graffiti writing along the major avenues because you can appropriate large spaces there, the only people going past are in cars so there is less chance of being hassled, and you get a lot of visibility. Others would talk about the differences between painting in the north and the south of the city, by which they often meant the well-off or poorer neighbourhoods, respectively.

In the empirical chapters I focus on three case studies of four neighbourhoods: Calle 26, La Perseverancia, Ciudad Bolívar and La Candelaria. These sites were eventually chosen because of the ways in which they frame themes related to violence, on the one hand, and to graffiti and street art, on the other. Calle 26 and La Candelaria are two central areas closely associated with graffiti and street art, especially the large-scale murals, both of which have undergone recent visual transformations. La Candelaria was associated with crime and poverty for a long time, before gentrification led to its current image as a bohemian neighbourhood full of artists, a tourist attraction and a key site of historical heritage. Calle 26 connects the airport to the city centre and in the early 2000s it was widened to incorporate the Transmilenio system, leaving open spaces in which to produce a range of graffiti and street art. It is also an important site for the representation of peace and conflict and contains the Centre for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation. La Perseverancia and Ciudad Bolívar are areas that have been marked and, indeed, stigmatised by multiple forms of violence but which also produce graffiti and street artists keen to change their image in the urban imaginary through community art projects.

3.3 Interviews

Although violence could be glimpsed through the everyday narratives, conversations and discussions that took place around the city, it was through the lengthy interviews with graffiti and street artists that the complex dynamics of urban imaginaries of violence gained focus. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the complex relationships between graffiti and street art, violence and urban imaginaries, I recorded 15 semi-structured interviews with graffiti and street artists, ranging from 40 minutes in length to just over two hours, which complemented other more informal conversations with artists. I also interviewed people who were involved in graffiti and street art in a more administrative, official or personal capacity, or who had worked with graffiti and street artists on various projects, the details of which can be seen in the table in appendix A.

As part of a broader ethnographic approach, interviews can provide key insights into how people perceive the world around them and they can be used to corroborate impressions gleaned from participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 98). Often, though, that means that they become objects of analysis whereby the account of someone's experience of their social world is used by the researcher to interpret that social world. I take a more nuanced approach to the interview data, though, whereby they represent vernacular theories, or critiques, of that social world (McLaughlin, 1996). Indeed, in chapter 2, I highlight the importance of listening to people as a way of identifying critical urban imaginaries of violence based on the argument that people are always actively constructing meaning about the social world around them. Interviews represented a way of grasping the multiple layers of meaning that are embedded in graffiti and street art, and the ways in which artists theorise by relating these meanings to wider perceptions of the social world and the place of violence therein. Moreover, it follows 'Gramsci's insistence that we take seriously the complexity and specificity of the cultural worlds different people inhabit – and pay serious attention to their own mappings of those worlds' (Crehan, 2002, p. 7).

In particular, these interviews aimed to uncover the artists' perspectives on how and why graffiti and street art engage with issues related to violence. While those within graffiti subcultures often produce a range of material that reveals how they perceive the

place of graffiti and the processes that go into it, the emic perspectives of those who use graffiti and street art as part of social movements are a gap in the literature, either academic or otherwise (Ryan, 2015). Thus, I was interested in the processes involved in producing various types of graffiti and street art, the motivations behind them, the experiences on the street and the perceived role of graffiti and street art in the city. I prepared questions based on their specific work and key themes that had already arisen through informal conversations and observations. Nevertheless, the structure of interviews remained flexible and open-ended questions allowed me to pursue various themes and topics as they arose. In relation to the power dynamics of conducting research, I also felt that it was important to incorporate open questions and a loose structure so that interviews became more like conversations. Part of that involved sharing what I was thinking and feeling, and comparing what they were saying about Colombia to my own perspectives on the UK. This didn't dominate the conversation, but it built a rapport and led to some more interesting developments and insights, as well as giving my participants an idea of how I was interpreting what they were saying and fitting it into a bigger picture.

Overall, the interviews were a vital step in recognising the multi-faceted process of writing on the walls. Doing graffiti and street art is never just about what is left on the wall, it is about creative freedom, the adrenaline rush, the choice of space, the transformation of the artist's relationship to space and the encounters that take place during the production process, many of which I detail in the empirical chapters as they engage with different realities of violence. For the artists I spoke to, doing graffiti symbolised a different way of thinking about society, a different way of moving around the city, and created a space in which they could express their personal dissatisfaction or frustration. Thus, alongside the meanings embedded within the visual image it is important to consider the material, social and symbolic contexts of production, as well as situating images not only as the signs of subcultures but as part of a wider process of urban visual communication and territorial claim-making (Brighenti, 2010; Campos, 2015). Moving around the city, looking for different spots and leaving your mark is a way of engaging with different areas of the city and of meeting new people, while doing something creative. That it is largely a non-profit practice was also seen by some to

challenge the capitalist logic of the city, while the appropriation of urban public space at any time of the day or night was seen as a rejection of social imaginaries of fear. Others who identified as more explicitly political graffiti and street artists spoke about the aesthetic elaboration of their political expressions and how the content was designed to attract attention, or how the choice of space was a way of drawing attention to realities of violence, either because it was public or because it was situated close to a site of violence or power. Some were produced at specific times, commemorating historic events, or during marches and protests.

The self-understandings of graffiti and street artists changed my own understanding of what kinds of urban interventions spoke to violence, and how. Artists revealed that graffiti can be something personal and political, related to a desire for self-expression, or it can be based on the need to communicate with others, whether that means the wider public or those who understand the rules and the techniques of the subculture. They theorised that graffiti and street art are not only political in the sense that the content conveys a political message, there is also a politics embedded in claims to the city and to urban public space. Furthermore, it was through talking to people involved in doing different kinds of graffiti that led to the realisation that people articulate their understandings and criticisms of violence in all kinds of ways, even if they don't put them into their work. Indeed, sometimes they incorporate them into other creative outlets, such as rap.

To grasp the range of experiences and perspectives of people who paint the street in different ways, I specifically sought out people who engage with different styles and subcultures. Partly, I did this by contacting artists and collectives whose work I found interesting, often through a message on Facebook or other online sources, or approaching them at events. A notable characteristic of graffiti and street art in Bogotá is that its current legitimacy and acceptance, at least by some, in the local government meant that artists didn't need to conceal their identity. Nevertheless, while people were responsive to these methods, a more successful approach was the snowballing effect that came from asking people I had already met or interviewed to recommend other artists. Again, explaining that I was interested in a variety of perspectives and the experiences of people who paint different things on the street worked very well, and so

they would suggest other trends in graffiti and street art that I should look out for, and frequently gave me the contact details of people they thought I should speak to. In particular, being able to say ‘so-and-so gave me your contact details’ was a way to establish trust and start a dialogue with different artists, collectives or organisations.

3.4 Focus groups and vox pops

Academic approaches to graffiti and street art tend to focus on a discourse analysis of the inscriptions that are left on the wall, or they focus on the experiences of those who produce them. When the reception of graffiti and street art is taken into account, it is more likely to concern the perspective of the media or the institutions of authority who attempt to control them. However, I am interested in the perspectives of the wider public and the extent to which their attitudes to graffiti and street art move beyond the simple dichotomy of art vs. vandalism. Indeed, a key influence on the conception and design of the research project was the field of critical audience studies and the cultural texts that form part of everyday life, contributing to Geertz’s view of culture as a ‘web of signification’ (Stevenson, 2002, p. 77). My primary motivation for pursuing a reception study of graffiti and street art was informed by an interest in audience agency, the importance of interpretation in the construction of meaning of various cultural and artistic texts, and the hypothesis that the social or cultural backgrounds of audiences shape the way that such texts are interpreted (Hall, 1980; Martín Barbero, 1987; Morley and Brunson, 1999).²⁹ On arriving in Bogotá, it soon became clear that people do engage with graffiti and street art. In order to find out the extent to which they engaged with them, I carried out seven focus groups at four universities, and conducted 40 vox pops at various sites in the city. I anticipated that these focus groups and interviews would provide an insight into the ways in which people interpreted graffiti and street art according to broader understandings of violence. Before explaining the process of visual analysis, though, the question of who participated in the reception study is relevant.

²⁹ As Stevenson notes, there is a tension running through the field between the interpretive agency of audiences and the operations of power that structure societies (p78). Recognising the tendency to romanticise audience agency, I temper the expectations of what critical insights might lead to and remain attentive to the power dynamics embedded in cultural representation.

To recruit participants for the focus groups, I approached a number of different universities in the city. In Bogotá, there is a large concentration of universities, which are spread throughout the city, some of which are public and some of which are private, although the cost of studying in the private institutions varies and so they represent different levels of accessibility. Three took place in the Universidad Militar Nueva Granada, a public university that is in a wealthy neighbourhood in the north of the city and clearly maintains close ties to the military – a number of students were in military uniform during the focus groups. One took place at the Universidad Cooperativa, a private university whose Bogotá campus is based along Avenida Caracas, just north of the city centre. Another was at Universidad Libre, which is a private institution that claims to offer non-sectarian and unbiased education, and which has a small campus in La Candelaria (where I conducted the focus group) and a larger one to the north-west of the city. Finally, two focus groups were carried out at the Universidad de los Andes, which is the most prestigious of the private universities in Bogotá, and is situated next to Las Aguas in La Candelaria. While I did not directly identify the social backgrounds of those who participated in the research project, some assumptions can be made related to their social status. Foremost is the Universidad de los Andes, which is particularly exclusive. However, during the focus groups other students referenced the neighbourhoods where they or their families lived, which suggested more middle or working class perspectives. The diverse locations of the universities meant that there were different examples of graffiti and street art in the areas surrounding the campus, but this had less of an impact on the responses than I anticipated.

For the vox pops, I specifically chose distinct areas of the city to try and capture a range of perspectives on the part of the audience, while recognising the prevalence of different kinds of graffiti in different places. I started during a visit to La Perseverancia, and asked people about their general opinion of graffiti and street art, and whether they thought it was political, how they felt about living in La Perseverancia and their perception of violence and prejudice.³⁰ The difficulties that I encountered included getting people to elaborate on their opinions, particularly in relation to graffiti and

³⁰ As I discuss in chapter 5, this is a neighbourhood that is particularly stigmatised through its association with crime.

street art. Thus, I changed tactic and from then on situated myself in a location where there were clear examples of different kinds of graffiti and street art to which they could refer. I conducted interviews on La Séptima next to a mural by DjLu, on Calle 26 I interviewed people at the site of a mural of Jaime Garzón by MAL Crew, in Ciudad Bolívar I collected interviews in Vista Hermosa and I also visited the campus of the Universidad Nacional. The Universidad Nacional campus is notable not only because it is the country's premier public university, but because it is renowned for the graffiti and street art on campus (Benavides-Vanegas, 2005). As I found out, there are polarised opinions related to the quality or legitimacy of such graffiti and especially its political expression, and I am grateful to the student who showed me around because he helped me to capture a range of perspectives by taking me to the engineering faculty, the sociology department, law and political sciences, economy, agriculture and the postgraduate centre, explaining that particular faculties are known for their different levels of political engagement and the ideological tendencies of such engagement.

Indeed, each of the areas in which I conducted the reception study represented different socio-economic strata, they held different associations with violence, or at least its representation, and contained examples of graffiti and street art that I was interested in talking to people about. I did not recruit individual participants based on class, race, gender, sexuality or any other social category, but I did note that there was a fairly even balance between men and women. Moreover, the indicators of social status that were identifiable, particularly related to class or institutional affiliation, didn't necessarily produce the perspectives that might be expected. Indeed, the students at La Universidad Nacional were not as radical as befits their image, while those at the Universidad Militar openly criticised the state and armed forces.

3.5 Visual Analysis

The core focus of the reception study was on the visual analysis of graffiti and street art. Graffiti and street art convey meaning in many ways, some of which are more etic and some of which are more emic, and the construction of meaning is based not only on the content of the image but on the style, the form, the mode of production, the spatial and temporal context, and the emotional engagement involved in producing and viewing

these cultural expressions. During the focus groups, in particular, research participants interpreted specific images, shared personal experiences, critiqued different attitudes and approaches to these topics and related them to a wider socio-political context, thus theorising in the vernacular.

As a way of situating my research within the wide range of graffiti and street art styles, the selection of images to include in the focus groups was key and they are shown in appendix B. I chose images that I had taken of different types of graffiti and street art around the city, although most were concentrated in the city centre.³¹ Some of the images were chosen because they had already been identified as key points of reference for people in the city who had expressed an interest in graffiti and street art to me (for example, the mural depicting the Unión Patriótica and that of Jaime Garzón). I was curious to see if others would be recognised and whether the intentions of the artists would be identified. Indeed, the image of posters spelling out 'DONDE ESTAN?' (which could be read as 'Where are they?' or, 'Where they are?') was situated near the Universidad Militar and the artist told me that it was a denunciation of the still-missing bodies of the hostages taken by the army from the Palacio de Justicia in 1985 to the army barracks just along the road from this mural. Thus, I was particularly interested to see whether the students in the focus groups at the Uni Militar would recognise it. They recognised the mural, but the figure of the policeman seemed to sway their interpretation and one said that it was a comment on the absence of the police in public space, leading to a lack of security for city dwellers.

Moreover, while the images served to demonstrate the variety of graffiti and street art in the city, the use of photographs was also important as a means of drawing out the ways in which people negotiated and articulated their perspectives on imaginaries. As a means of photo-elicitation, they represented objects that people could analyse and discuss – sometimes individually, often collectively – in such a way that aimed to prod memory and even elicit a different kind of information (Rose, 2001; Harper, 2002; Mannay, 2016, p. 20). Some guiding questions were necessary, but at other times the

³¹ With the exception of one image, which was taken from:
<http://unradio.unal.edu.co/detalle/cat/reportes-de-actualidad/article/intervencion-plaza-eduardo-umana-mendoza.html>

focus group participants would ask questions of others in the group, or lead the conversation in unexpected ways. In general, the most open questions led to more interesting discussions as students responded to what others were saying in agreement and disagreement, but also filling in gaps or adding a perspective that they thought was missing. Thus, the predominant questions were: *What do you think of graffiti and street art? Which images do you like or dislike? What impression do they give of Bogotá/Colombia? How do they talk about violence?* These would lead on to further discussions about how effective they thought graffiti and street art was, whether or not they were important, and how they responded to graffiti and street art in their daily lives. Often, the process of interpreting images during focus groups relied on a comparison between what people liked or disliked and, specifically, why, the implications of which I explore in chapter 6.

Furthermore, the ways in which people interpreted the images in the focus groups or talked about their understandings of graffiti and street art during the vox pops involved a process of situating these forms of cultural expression within a wider social context of what life in Bogotá entails. Thus, they might explain that graffiti and street artists express themselves in the street because they don't have access to other forms of art or communication; and inscriptions were interpreted as 'their art' (*'su arte'*). Additionally, while the research participants interpreted and judged the content or messages embedded in images through a series of comparisons and similarities between different images, they also compared them to the discourses of violence in other forms of communication like the mainstream media. I encouraged people to elaborate on these comparisons and the themes that arose by questioning whether or not they thought that Bogotá was indeed a violent city or what they thought of the peace process. These questions allowed them to expand on the contemporary relevance of graffiti and street art, they provided a lens through which people discussed the motivations of artists, or they simply developed into an analysis of the different realities of violence in everyday life in Bogotá. In doing so, they were not only articulating imaginaries, they were participating in the collective practice of imagining and interpreting the world around them.

Another way of interpreting images was to turn to graffiti and street artists. I did this as a way of not only getting to know what it was that they thought about their own work, but how they perceived graffiti and street art in Bogotá in general. These questions arose during interviews or more informal discussions, and were particularly successful when walking around the city together and discussing what we were seeing around us. Thus, I would ask them what they liked to paint, we would discuss specific examples of graffiti and street art that either they had painted or that they thought were significant and I paid close attention to what they felt was ignored or misrepresented, which was also true of the focus group discussions. In all of the emic and etic discussions about graffiti and street art, the relationship between these cultural expressions and violence gained depth and complexity when the content, form or style was also situated within a broader framework of meaning that extended beyond describing what they depicted. What I took from these experiences was that analysing graffiti and street art requires a rounded approach to what is painted on the walls, to the message, the space, the timing and the form, the motivations associated with doing them, the kinds of spaces in which they appear (or don't), the encounters that are generated by them and the possible effects of them because they all contribute to the construction of meaning and the process of interpreting different images.

3.6 Dealing with data

The various methods that I describe above produced a lot of data that I subsequently sorted, transcribed and translated. Without going into too much detail, a few of the tactics are worth considering because of how they allowed me to process and share the data. Firstly, starting the transcription of my interviews and the analysis of the data that I was collecting while in the field was of crucial importance as it allowed me to identify some of the main themes, and gave me time to pursue them while I was still in Bogotá. Secondly, my approach to photography also contributed to the way in which I processed the data. During my time in Bogotá, I was also taking photos of the different forms of graffiti and street art that I came across in different neighbourhoods. I wanted to record interesting images and simultaneously try to identify spatial patterns in relation to what was visible and where, and I was curious to see if the images changed and how

frequently. One way of organising the images was through a blog, where I made a note of the most significant sites of graffiti that I visited. If I passed through an area I had already visited then I did try to look for changes, or spot graffiti that I hadn't seen before, but I was surprised to find that they did not seem to change that quickly. Nevertheless, the blog allowed me to articulate and work out some of my thoughts and perceptions as I was conducting fieldwork. That it was going to be public meant that I had to think about what I was saying and showing in a more confident way than that which I was sharing weekly with my supervisors or noting in my diary. In particular, it allowed me to share what I was writing and thinking with those that I was writing about because I wrote the posts and checked them with my research participants before publishing them. What the blog also means is that I can now contribute to an archive of this ephemeral form, although it is important to ensure that such images are not overly decontextualized by being disseminated on the internet. If their meaning is constructed through the spatial, temporal and experiential context of production and reception, this is a risk with such globalised flows of communication and image-sharing, not to mention the absence of dues paid to artists (Ryan, 2019, p. 9).

3.7 A note on ethics

Alongside the ethical imperative to share the knowledge that I was producing through my research project, and especially to recognise the people who were a vital part of the project, there were considerations to take into account related to researching violence. The code of ethics provided by the American Anthropology Association was studied and followed as much as possible during the research process. While obtaining written consent was often unfeasible, I did provide an information sheet detailing the project and providing my contact details to participants, and I explained the project verbally and sought verbal consent. I anticipated that the ambiguous legal status of graffiti and street art would require delicacy regarding anonymity. Thus, I made it clear to participants that they could see the transcript of the interview and change anything in it, and I explained that the information would be used in the PhD project and any publications arising from it. This was to ensure that participants understood my broad research area, that I was

looking for their personal opinions and perspectives, and that no financial incentives would be provided.

Nevertheless, I was surprised at how open people were when talking about violence and politics. While those who participated in the focus groups and vox pops will remain anonymous, the graffiti and street artists were offered anonymity, but did not seem overly concerned about it. I think that this relates to the idea that I develop in the thesis whereby people know and talk about violence, because it is part of the imaginary, even though in specific instances they have to be careful about when and how they do so. I do, however, limit myself to referring to them largely by their artistic name or the name of the collective to which they belong, rather than personal names.

Although my research participants did not directly identify as victims or perpetrators for the purposes of the study, some referred briefly to their own experiences of violence during our conversations, which served as a striking reminder that these are not abstract discussions but real life situations. My ethical responsibility towards these participants is still to ensure that they are not re-victimised or re-traumatised, and during the processes of collecting data I made sure that I was attentive to signs of distress, I did not force anyone to talk about violence or even get involved in any discussions, I obtained consent and shared an information sheet with my contact details.

Conducting this fieldwork also involved thinking about my own safety. Again, I followed local advice and remained cautious about how I was moving around the city and engaging with people. Largely, though, I felt safe in the city. A more significant stress was related to the emotional impact of researching violence. While I had many joyful experiences and happy surprises during my time in Bogotá, there are also frustrations and difficulties associated with living in an unknown city, which are compounded by the academic pressures of conducting research. There is an additional weight when researching sensitive topics such as violence, which can lead to deleterious effects on wellbeing, including exhaustion and depression (Dickson-Swift *et al.*, 2009). Alongside the support and guidance from supervisors, building a social network was vital. On a personal level, recording my own anxieties, fears and the uncomfortable situations that I found myself in through the diary was a way of releasing some of those stresses while

also providing a valuable space for reflection on the affective force of violence in everyday life, whether directly experienced, imagined, witnessed or narrated.

3.8 Conclusion

There is a certain pragmatism to mixed methods research, but it can also be used to compare macro- and micro-level analysis, or to combine quantitative and qualitative research (Greene, 2007). For this project, however, I drew on a variety of methods to explore the different spaces through which imaginaries of violence are collectively constructed and negotiated. In the above, I detail the methods that were most important to the research project and highlight how they led to the more nuanced and complex understanding of urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá, and their articulation through graffiti and street art. In the following chapter, I begin the empirical analysis of such data by turning to Calle 26 and discussing the multiple approaches to representing political violence, peace and aesthetic engagements with memory narratives.

Chapter 4

Calle 26: Memory and the everydayness of political violence

'Entras en ese juego de: reconocemos las mismas memorias o la memoria hegemónica que ustedes quieren mostrar'

Dexpierte³²

'El pueblo se cree minoría'

Focus group participant (Uni Militar)³³

This first empirical chapter introduces one of the key trends in Bogotá's graffiti and street art scene, which is the representation of violence as it is mobilised through memory narratives. Calle 26 epitomises the more institutional approaches to narratives of violence through collective memory practices, and highlights some of the political tensions related to representing armed conflict and peace. Graffiti and street art are part of this institutional aesthetic project, in that there are commissioned pieces along this road, but they also appear through less mediated processes of appropriation, which likewise engage with the representation of political violence. Following the line of argument signalled in the introduction, I explore the collective interpretation of such graffiti and street art on Calle 26, drawing on the perspectives of artists, the local government and the wider public. In particular, I pay attention to the imaginaries (and imaginations) of violence that emerge through direct depictions of violence in this space, through the (perceived) motivations behind them and through the process of negotiating representing violence on Calle 26, predominantly with regards to the relationships with state narratives of violence. I argue that they reveal the interplay between direct, structural and cultural violence as it pertains to imaginaries of political

³² 'You're in a game of: do we talk about the same memories or the hegemonic memory that you want to show'

³³ 'People think they're the minority'

violence, armed conflict and the prospect of peace, which I frame through the notion of everydayness. I begin by situating the analysis within the spatial context of Calle 26.

4.1 Calle 26

The relationship between space and the social imaginary imbues particular places with particular meanings (Shields, 1991). In other words, the imaginaries of the space work hand-in-hand with the materiality of the space. The site that I analyse in this chapter is interesting because it is not so much an identifiable neighbourhood, but a stretch of road that is significant precisely because it does not have an organic coherence as a space. Indeed, any long thoroughfare passes through a range of localities, and Avenida El Dorado is no exception. From the impoverished Engativá area near the airport, it traverses the lower-middle class neighbourhood of Quinta Paredes, where the US embassy is now situated, to the notorious Santa Fe area, synonymous with prostitution rackets run by paramilitaries, before arriving in an urban no-mans-land near the mountains. Here, the destitute live under flyovers and beg for money from passers-by, while recyclers rummage through bins near the National Library, the Museum of Modern Art, and the city's Planetarium. On its way into town the 26, as it is generally known and henceforth referred to, crosses significant arterial routes such as the Avenida Boyacá, the Avenida Ciudad de Cali, the Carrera 30, and the Carrera Séptima, and is the site of major administrative complexes, newspaper offices (El Tiempo), and the Universidad Nacional, Colombia's premier public university. As it approaches the centre of the city, it runs along the northern perimeter of the Cementerio Central, where many significant figures of national history are buried, and which has become a centre for memory in the period following the peace agreement between the state and the FARC. Alongside the recyclers and the homeless, commuters and street vendors might pass through, travellers return from or head towards the airport, students travel to university and tourists visit the sites. Diverse groups of people doing different things and living different lives intersect along this stretch of road. They might be on foot, in the car or on public transport, in which case they will, more often than not, be stuck in heavy traffic or exposed to its fumes. This varied landscape in itself juxtaposes different urban realities. The socio-economic distribution of the urban population is signposted through the

material differences between residential neighbourhoods. The relocation of the US embassy away from the centre and closer towards the airport entailed the redevelopment of the landscape, accelerating the construction of roads, while the *potreros* (pastures) were replaced by shiny new buildings and commercial complexes, which contribute to the current feel of a business or financial district. Closer to town, the territories of criminal networks might not be explicitly signposted, but they are known and negotiated by city dwellers. Poverty is visible on the street, symbolically amplified by its proximity to the sites representing the city's cultural capital. The extension of the 26 thus dramatizes the violence and inequalities of everyday life in the city. For the purposes of this chapter, though, the significance of Calle 26 does not relate so much to the implicit violence embedded within such heterogeneous characteristics and uses of the space. Rather, I am interested in the aesthetic construction of the visual landscape as a space for collective memories of violence.

Calle 26 is the site where narratives of memory, peace and political violence are institutionalised. More to the point, it is where the past is being rewritten. Official representations of historic events or significant figures in urban space frequently take the form of public memorial sites, such as statues, monuments and museums, as well as being embedded in everyday road names and signs (Dwyer and Alderman, 2008). Calle 26 contains such representations in the form of sculptures and monuments, the central, British and German cemeteries, the Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación (Centre for Memory, Peace and Reconciliation) and the planned Museo de Memoria Histórica (Museum of Historic Memory). Indeed, it is even referred to as a 'corridor of memory'.³⁴ This is, however, a fairly recent designation, and one which can be situated within an institutional project of peace and reconciliation. In 2014 the stretch of road between Avenida NQS and Monserrate was designated as a route for peace and memory, an 'Eje de la Paz y la Memoria', and inaugurated by President Santos and Mayor Petro. Although belonging to different political parties, they represented a united effort on the part of very specific sectors of the state to push forward with the peace process, and they illustrated that commitment through various projects on Calle 26 that have contributed

³⁴ <http://www.Bogotá.gov.co/Internacional/Bogotá-y-el-gobierno-nacional-reafirmen-existencia-del-eje-de-la-paz-y-la-memoria>

to its transformation under the broader urban development plan, the Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial. The Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación opened its doors in 2012 and convenes various exhibitions, activities and events related to episodes of political violence. During its construction in the Parque de la Reconciliación (Reconciliation Park), already designated as a site of historic memory in recognition of victims of political violence in 2005, they uncovered unnamed mass graves that were allocated their own memorial within the grounds of the park and the museum (González Posso *et al.*, 2012). The adjacent Parque El Renacimiento (Renaissance Park) was also built in the early 2000s, on top of part of the Cementerio Central. The planned Museo de Memoria Histórica will be situated next to the recently constructed Plaza de la Democracia (Democracy Square), which also led to the renaming of the Transmilenio station to match the Plaza. These sites and projects consolidate the collective recognition of the street as a space 'for memory'.

However, the fact that there are a number of official representations of, and allusions to, collective memory along the 26 does not mean that it presents a single historical narrative. Collective memory is always political; the 'meaning of the past is dynamic and is conveyed by social agents engaged in confrontations with opposite interpretations, other meanings, or against oblivion and silence' (Jelin, 2003, p. 26). Representations of such collective memories and meanings are important because hegemonic ways of seeing the past are produced and fought for precisely at the moment of articulating the connection between the past and the present (Calveiro, 2006). In Colombia, the struggles over memories of violence are manifold. The official end of the period of *La Violencia*, through the brief military intervention of Gustavo Rojas Pinilla and the institution of the Frente Nacional power-sharing agreement between the Liberals and the Conservatives, replicated the historic absence of institutional acknowledgement of violence in Colombia by imposing unconditional amnesty and, most importantly, silence (Fals Borda *et al.*, 1988; Valencia Gutiérrez, 2012; Uribe and Riaño Alcalá, 2016). Such a process of forgetting, or '*desmemoria*', has contributed to a lack of recognition of victims and the violences that they have suffered, has affected multiple generations, and is reflected in the lack of agreement over when the conflict even started. This has implications for processes such as reparation and recognition, even at a symbolic level of

knowing who is officially recognised as a victim and of what violence. Indeed, although the institutional approach has shifted significantly to officially and explicitly recognise Colombia's trajectory of violence, most recently through the Ley de Víctimas in 2011, there are multiple memory narratives, of multiple violences, articulated from multiple political perspectives, which suggests more a state of confusion than of revelation (Uribe and Riaño Alcalá, 2016). Marta Cabrera uses the image of a '*bosque de narrativas*' to describe the complex mixture of excess and absence in relation to memories of violence in Colombia, whereby there are different perspectives on what violence refers to, but there are also significant silences (Cabrera, 2006). The metaphor is useful because it conveys this sense of confusion, of getting lost in these multiple narratives of violence. Moreover, while discussions of political violence in Colombia are marked by the complexities of, and clashes between, multiple narratives, what they reveal are very different imaginaries of violence.

The space certainly does not reflect a coherent or cohesive imaginary of political violence and armed conflict that might unite the nation. Commemorative practices on Calle 26 are framed by the politics of what violences are recognised and how those involved are remembered (Vignolo, 2013). Thus, for example, Álvaro Uribe's vision of the conflict is embodied in the Plaza y Monumento de los Caídos, a memorial commemorating the 'fallen heroes' of the armed forces that was constructed at the very start of his presidency. It symbolised his bellicose attitude to Colombia's political polarisation and his plans for the intensification of armed conflict. Notably, though, many civilian social movements responded to his warmongering by intensifying their demands for the recognition of diverse memory narratives and this is what led to the initial development of the Centro de Memoria (Vignolo, 2013, p. 135). In the urban visual landscape, representations of the past not only convey collective understandings or interpretations of a country's trajectory, they also reflect the cultural politics of memory (Huysen, 2003; Dwyer and Alderman, 2008). It is no surprise, then, that there are multiple references to past violences on Calle 26. The construction of different sites and forms of commemoration reveals that claims on memory are staked through the material landscape, but Calle 26 is also significant because there are multiple social actors involved in those claims. Indeed, the trajectory of collective memory construction

as it relates to violence and conflict in Colombia has been shaped by the active participation of social movements and groups representing the interests of victims, who offer a more vernacular perspective on violence. In relation to memory, the vernacular can refer to the everyday spaces that act as depositories for collective memory, in opposition to exceptional spaces of the monumental (Stangl, 2008). Furthermore, they can take different forms, including more ephemeral, performative or oral practices, and they are significant because they contest official discourse, pre-empt more institutional commemorative spaces, or appear where no official recognition of a past violence is expected (Santino, 2004; Marschall, 2013). Thus, not only are there multiple memories competing for space within the *bosque de narrativas*, they also take different forms and are articulated by different social groups. As I argue in this chapter, the perceived locus of enunciation has a significant impact on the interpretation of images of violence, especially in relation to how disruptive the message seems to be.

Graffiti and street art shed a particular light on this dynamic because they represent both more institutional and more vernacular representations of past violences. The graffiti and street art on Calle 26 include official representations of collective memory. As I have already mentioned in the introduction, the support that Petro's administration offered to graffiti and street artists provided not only sanctioned spaces for people to hone their skills but also opportunities to partake in commissions and funded competitions. The administrative approach chimed with contemporary discourses about peace and reconciliation, promoted by various institutions in the context of the peace process between the government and the FARC and the Ley de Víctimas. Thus, the legalisation and legitimisation of graffiti and street art encouraged the local arts council to promote their position on the peace process by commissioning murals in the city centre, allocated through competitions and grants, and working in partnership with other institutions focused on the construction of collective memories of conflict with a view to facilitating peace. On Calle 26, the results of this collaboration take the form of large-scale murals that frequently engage with socio-political themes and that contribute to the symbolic status of the place as a site renowned for the institutional construction of collective memory.

On the other hand, the visual landscape also reflects the ways in which alternative memories are inscribed in public space; the signs that suggest that the control of memory narratives slip out of reach of the institutions, the popular appropriations of spaces for alternative memories and the publicly-voiced disagreements (Vignolo, 2013; O'Bryen, 2019). Indeed, beyond formal commissions, graffiti and street artists have claimed their right to the city on and through Calle 26. The conditions are propitious for graffiti and street art, whether or not they engage with memory narratives. While writing and tags are still visible further towards the airport, they are concentrated in the city centre where they demand visibility: along the gates of the Universidad Nacional, lining public transport routes, surrounding the national cemetery and leading right up to the foot of Monserrate Mountain as Calle 26 meets La Séptima. The thoroughfare comprises multiple lanes for traffic, intersections with the arterial roads, tunnels and overpasses, and a Transmilenio line running through the centre of it. This makes it an unpleasant space to pass through, and especially to walk along, but it works well for graffiti. The widening of the streets to make way for the Transmilenio bus lanes, along with the accessibility of the gable-ends of buildings, and the walls alongside the roads, bridges and tunnels created a perfect space for graffiti and street artists to hone their skills. As such, there is a huge array of tags, throw-ups, pieces, stencils and posters sharing the walls. Furthermore, the central location of Calle 26 and its position between the Universidad Nacional and Plaza Bolívar³⁵ in the historic centre means that it is an important route taken by protesters during demonstrations – leading to a highly visible and symbolic collective appropriation of public space (Durán Castro, 2014).

These factors mean that the presence of graffiti and street art on Calle 26 is important to different social groups. On the one hand, there are significant sectors of the local government, arts institutions, artists and the wider public who benefit from this form of public art in this space. On the other hand, access to the street is important to the variety of subcultures involved in graffiti and street art and, indeed, to anyone who wants to paint on the streets. As such, any threat to graffiti and street artists' symbolic right to the city on Calle 26 is met with resistance. Since 2013, and thanks to the graffiti law, the walls and tunnels along the 26 are now sanctioned as free spaces for such

³⁵ The main square in Bogotá

creative interventions, but the right to paint is still a point of contention. In 2013, two years after the death of Diego Felipe Becerra at the hands of the police and their subsequent cover-up of the crime, Justin Bieber was escorted by the police when he decided that he wanted to do some graffiti on Calle 26. In response, graffiti and street artists in various cities around the country took to the streets and painted for 24 hours, in Bogotá covering over the area where Bieber had left his mark.³⁶ By openly retaking the street, they challenged the police to repeat their hypocrisy, to treat them differently to the way they treated Bieber, but this time under the watchful eyes of urban society (the visibility) that the moment provided. Such a trend has continued. In 2014, Gustavo Petro was removed from office for one month, as a consequence of an impeachment that ultimately failed. Rafael Pardo was the interim mayor for that period and, within a week, controversy sparked when the police started painting over the graffiti on Calle 26. Again, there was uproar and graffiti and street artists from different subcultures (Diego Felipe's parents alongside them) 'retook' Calle 26. Such was the public backlash that the police had to change tack and help the local graffiti artists who had come out to paint, providing water and access to the tunnels and walls alongside the main road.

A final example confirms the importance of the space. Enrique Peñalosa started his second term as mayor in January 2016. Although his attitude to graffiti and street art remained ambiguous in the run up to the election, just a few weeks after taking office the newly appointed 'Security Secretary' publicly associated graffiti with vandalism, street crime and the deterioration of public space, stating that the new administration would take a zero tolerance approach to it. A clarification was later made stating that the artistic murals would be kept, but this is a distinction that is not made in the law, which focuses on the right to use particular spaces rather than on aesthetic criteria. Peñalosa's approach, therefore, is widely recognised as being markedly different from that of Petro's administration. Indeed, in January 2016, at the very beginning of Peñalosa's term, a stretch of wall along Calle 26 was painted over in pale blue, covering the graffiti and street art that had been there. Images and messages of indignation peppered social media outlets, accusing Peñalosa of already starting to get rid of the

³⁶ <https://lafamiliaayara.wordpress.com/2013/11/08/toma-24hrs-de-grafiti-por-el-derecho-a-la-vida-y-libertad-de-expresion/>

graffiti even though it was in an authorised space – and in the colour of his campaign too! As it turned out, it was just the beginning of a new mural that had been commissioned under Petro’s term in office, but the frenzied reaction from artists and other members of the public reveals the perceived instability behind graffiti and street art’s newfound status as cultural capital, the general expectations of Peñalosa’s administration, and the fierce defence of people’s right to graffiti on Calle 26.

Thus, the space itself activates memories of inequality and violence, and mobilises resistance. Moreover, representations of violence are prevalent, and particularly point to a recognition of the realities of political violence in the country, including that which is perpetrated by the state. The symbolic importance of the space was confirmed through the constant references to it throughout my fieldwork, specifically identifying Calle 26 as holding a significant place in urban imaginaries because it is a site where aesthetics meets violence, peace and memory. As I show in the following pages, though, there is a complicated relationship between the representation and the recognition of political violence, as well as tensions between the state-sponsored interventions and other, more independent, productions. Graffiti and street art participate in the broader struggle over the right to the city implied in commemorations and discourses of the past and the diverse political projects and divergent visions of what society is, has been, and could be. They particularly draw attention to the tensions related to which narratives of violence are represented, who gets to control the representation and how the effects of representing political violence don’t necessarily lead to a deeper engagement with violence and peace. Moreover, woven into the discussions around what the images represent, why Calle 26 is an important space to engage with violence and how artists negotiate their relationship with the state, are interpretations of political violence that highlight its everydayness.

4.2 Representing political violence

In the following two sections of the chapter I base my argument primarily on the reception of graffiti and street art along Calle 26, drawing from the focus groups and vox pops that were conducted in universities around the city and on the street. How people understood violence emerged through the ways in which they interpreted the graffiti

and street art on Calle 26. As I argue in the theoretical framework, the process of critiquing graffiti and street art demonstrates the critical agency of city dwellers, in particular as they think about their role in relation to other public discourses of violence. Indeed, I argue that the research participants I interviewed were theorising in the vernacular as they interpreted and described the depiction of memories of violence in graffiti and street art. Such theories offer an insight into urban imaginaries of violence and the place of political violence within them. The range of universities that I approached included both public and private institutions, where the class background of the students can be markedly differently, where some are funded by military programmes while other institutions are renowned for social engagement and activism and yet others are part of the elite. Despite these differences, there was a general agreement and recognition that the state was, and continues to be, a perpetrator of violence. Indeed, two dominant strands related to political violence emerged from these discussions, which I use to structure the section. The first strand focuses on how the content of explicitly political graffiti and street art draws attention to the multiplicity of violences that are associated with Colombia, and how the state was identified as a main actor in the violence, positing civilians as the victims of such violence. The second strand builds on this by exploring the significance of graffiti and street art's position in public space. In particular, the public commemoration of victims, especially outside of the confines of more institutional forms of communication, suggested that graffiti and street art were interpreted as representing an alternative to dominant, institutional narratives of violence and were deemed more truthful because of it.

4.2.1 Civilian victims

Multiple struggles are portrayed in the varied forms of graffiti and street art along Calle 26. I accompanied Ink Crew as they began a mural at the entrance to one of the tunnels underneath the intersection between Calle 26 and Avenida NQS. They told me that they were seeking to celebrate Colombia's wildlife by depicting giant animals interspersed with the words 'el dorado', which was included not only as a reference to the name of street but to the gold legend and the idea that the natural world is what should be valued in Colombia. Taking photos of the soon to be gone background, other claims

stood out; a grotesque face clutching a tiny man and woman yelled ‘we are the ones who rule’ (*‘Nosotros somos los que mandamos’*), an angelic Felix the Cat grinned at the cars passing by,³⁷ a stencilled policeman painted over a giant blue bird, and a stand-off between a rural family and the police was depicted (figures 4-7). These were surrounded by the many throw-ups and pieces of graffiti writers also claiming their right to paint. Along the curbs and the cement barriers between the roads some more explicit denunciations promised to survive the new mural; the inevitable ACAB (All Cops Are Bastards), ‘No free trade agreement’ (*‘No TLC’*, or *Tratado de Libre Comercio*), ‘Fewer cops more colour’ (*‘Menos tombo más color’*), ‘No more RCN’ – one of the main television networks in Colombia (*‘No más RCN’*), and a challenge directed at the interim mayor of 2014 – ‘Rafael Pardo illegitimate mayor, the people are here’ (*‘alcalde ilegítimo aquí está el pueblo’*), a leftover sign, presumably, of the protests against the painting over of Calle 26 that I describe above (figures 8-12).

Pintas, political slogans and denunciations do indeed mark many of the walls along Calle 26; words and phrases hastily sprayed by protesters, representing urban palimpsests and allowing the attentive city dweller to trace the routes of past protests through urban space. Such markings are evidence of collective mobilisation and they reveal the violences that trigger a response from people: discontent and calls for change from political and social movements standing up for the rights of women, farmers and students, or calling for peace with justice. Murals denouncing environmental and human exploitation and reminding the urban audience of everyday rural violence cluster around the gates of the public university, an institution tied in the social imaginary to revolutionary endeavour, either as idealism or subversion. More concise denunciations also appear: ‘Welcome fucking gringos’ (*‘Bienvenidos Gringos HPS’*), a reference to the US embassy buying up the land on campus, and in chalk, ‘more than 300 teachers assassinated’ (*‘+de 300 maestra/os asesinados’*) and ‘fewer bullets more classrooms’ (*‘Menos bala más aulas’*) (figures 13-15).

References to structural violence and inequality are also present in these images. Posters and paste ups overlap: one of Stinkfish’s anonymous portraits sits above a black

³⁷ A reference to Diego Felipe Becerra, who frequently used the character of El Gato Félix

and white image of a semi-naked woman surrounded by the words 'Neither a whore, nor yours' (*'Ni puta, ni tuya'*), while next to it the remnants of a poster expressing scepticism at the peace process – 'Peace as an excuse to perpetuate inequality' (*'Una paz como excusa para perpetuar la desigualdad'*) – fade away and get covered over (figure 16). The incessant claims and counter-claims of football *barras*, or hooligan firms, vie for space as their tags spread along the street on walls, benches and pavements (figure 17). They follow the subcultural mandates of territoriality – a practice that can also lead to direct confrontations between different gangs. Graffiti can, of course, be used for many reasons, and intimidation is one of them. Such signs of discord underline once more the heterogeneity of urban society. Swastikas lurk here and there, and the grandiose murals loom over the rest, taking pride of place in the urban imaginary, but still at risk of provoking discord and recrimination. On the 'O' of *'Memoria'* a mural commemorating the victims of forced displacement, for example, the faces of two boys are scribbled over, *'More-nazis'* has been added and a swastika punctuates it, but these are also contested and tagged over in red (figure 18). The Memoria mural forms part of a commissioned triptych painted by Chirrete Golden and Ark, depicting not only the realities of forced displacement but the assassination of trade unionists and the victims of the Unión Patriótica (figures 19-21). As I mention in the introduction, the peace process between demobilised guerrillas and the Betancur government in the 1980s led to the political genocide of the UP party by the euphemistically termed 'dark forces' of the paramilitary and in 2003 their recognition as a political party was withdrawn. However, since 2013 they have begun to establish themselves again, and while I was in Bogotá there were a number of references to the UP in smaller murals around the city, especially within the grounds of public universities, even though many were subject to censorship and damage.

Within this almost overwhelming list of violences, then, more direct and elaborate allusions to political violence can also be identified. Given the symbolic importance of the space to the institutions running the country, what I found particularly interesting were the references to the state that either implicitly or explicitly denounced them as perpetrators of violence. A perfect example is the unforgettable Mon-Santos Sepulcros mural, made up of huge block letters surrounded by guns and skeletons (figure 22). It

sits between the intersections of La Séptima and Avenida Jiménez with Calle 26, appropriately next to the cemetery (*'sepulcro'* meaning tomb in Spanish). The image refers to the role of former President Santos (in his time as Minister of Defence under Uribe) in the 'false positives' scandal where members of the military kidnapped and killed young men from vulnerable neighbourhoods in the city and then reported them as guerrilla casualties to boost their quotas. 'Mon' was apparently added at a later date to refer to the role of Monsanto (and Santos) in forcing Colombian farmers to use GM seeds through the free trade agreement and driving many out of business, tying political violence to structural inequality and the 'slow violence' of environmental degradation and neo-colonialism (Nixon, 2013). Not only does this example draw attention to a continuum of violences through these multiple polemics, it also highlights another dominant theme in explicitly political representations, which is the commemoration of civilian victims and the denunciation of the state as perpetrator. The term *falsos positivos* refers to such victims, especially when the state has conspired to manipulate the circumstances surrounding their death, and the references to it in graffiti and street art, as well as in people's discussions of them, reveal the imagined everydayness of political violence that takes shape in urban imaginaries of Calle 26. To explain this, I analyse the production and reception of some of the more commemorative graffiti and street art on the street.

One such example is a mural of Jaime Garzón, the comedian and a peace activist who was assassinated in 1999 (figure 23). He was mentioned to me countless times while I was conducting fieldwork, and references to him appear not just in graffiti but on clothing, in popular culture and in the news.³⁸ For that reason, I included an image of him in the focus groups I conducted, taken of the mural on Calle 26, and I also carried out interviews on the street beside the mural to gather people's impressions of it. Painted by MAL Crew, the image depicts Garzón's smiling face, framed by corn husks, while his name and the years of his birth and death sit on one side of the portrait. On the other side, a quote reads "...that's the end of comedy. What a fucking country"

³⁸ In addition, through a television programme called *El Gran Colombiano*, organised by the national newspaper *El Espectador* and the History channel, a public vote decided, somewhat surreally, that Jaime Garzón came second to ex-president Uribe as the greatest figure of Colombian history <http://www.elespectador.com/noticias/politica/piden-perdon-jaime-garzon-y-garcia-marquez-resultado-de-articulo-429946>

(“...hasta aquí las sonrisas. País de Mierda”), words spoken by a news reporter and friend of Garzón on the day of his assassination. The mural itself was adapted from an earlier portrait when the winning commission of one of the local government’s urban art competitions was being painted around it. Rather than paint over it, they worked with the original artists to restore the mural and allow it to fit into the surrounding piece. Indeed, the collective appears to have won its right to that section of the wall, as they have even more recently renewed the space to create another image of Garzón.³⁹

At first glance, the mural does not seem to be overtly political or controversial. However, it takes on more significance through the quote ‘país de mierda’, and the interpretations of the audience, in other words, through the meaning of Garzón in the urban imagination. In the interviews that I conducted, Garzón was widely associated with the risks involved in political engagement in Colombia, as people expressed sorrow that someone so well loved was killed simply because he spoke the truth publicly. In a hugely popular satirical television show, he spoke openly about corruption and violence in the country and made fun of politicians, alongside other actors involved in the armed conflict, to their faces. It is, thus, not just a commemoration of a sadly deceased famous person and the ‘what a fucking country’ suggests that the artists are denouncing the crime that led to his death and the impunity that has followed it. Indeed, the ‘social truth’ of his assassination is not only associated with political motivations, but with the variety of state actors involved. In most of the interviews, an anonymous ‘they’ killed Garzón, and one student pointed out that even though the content of his television programmes escaped censorship, they still killed him for telling the truth about violence and corruption (*‘no fue censurado porque lo mataron’*). Others did specify that it was the paramilitaries or spoke of a plot between the paramilitaries and the politicians who Garzón spoke out against, in all cases speaking to a particular form of political violence that shuts down freedom of expression. Carlos Castaño, the leader of the paramilitary group AUC, was eventually convicted of having ordered the assassination in 2004, and in 2016 the court recognised that members of the military and the state intelligence agency (DAS) had served as accomplices, including some who worked closely with ex-

³⁹ <https://mavizu.wordpress.com/2013/08/12/la-calle-no-calla/>

president Uribe, and helped to cover up the crime or at least stall the investigation.⁴⁰ A considerable length of time had to pass before this conclusion was reached, though, which speaks to the scale of impunity within the criminal justice system.

While Garzón's case is high profile, there are also other commemorations of lesser known victims of political violence. The mural of Nicolás Neira, for example, is also found on Calle 26, but it was not part of the commissioned murals, nor was it as widely recognised as the one of Garzón (figure 24). Neira was a 15-year-old schoolboy beaten to death by the riot police during a workers' day march in the city centre in 2005. The mural takes up a relatively small amount of space on a wall dominated by graffiti writing. From a distance, Neira's face emerges out of the black background of the piece and the blue and white hues match the shades of the graffiti writing that this piece partly covers. Surrounding his portrait are the words 'Nico Lives' ('*Nico Vive*'), while below it reads '10 years of Impunity' ('*10 años de Impunidad*'). On closer inspection, the black background is filled with denunciations written in grey, in different fonts and sizes, all reading 'it was ESMAD' ('*fue el ESMAD*').⁴¹ There are many people (not least his father) fighting for justice, fighting to even bring the case to court.⁴²

These realities of political violence take on particular significance when different examples are grouped together, including Garzón, the angelic Felix the Cat commemorating Diego Felipe Becerra, and the skulls of MonSantos Sepulcros that memorialise the young men who were victims of the armed forces. Furthermore, an ever-growing number of social leaders around the country have been assassinated since the signing of the peace process, and memories of them have taken their place alongside these commemorative murals. An impressive but short-lived piece by Toxicómano included a tally counter, which was repainted each time another victim was reported. Since I left Colombia the Memoria mural on Calle 26 has been replaced⁴³ with

⁴⁰ <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/jaime-garzon-fiscalia-dice-que-asesinato-fue-un-crimen-de-estado/464765>

⁴¹ *Escuadrón Móvil Anti-Disturbios*, or the riot police

⁴² <https://www.colectivodeabogados.org/?10-anos-del-asesinato-de-Nicolas-Neira-Entrevista-a-Yuri-Neira>
<http://www.movimientodevictimas.org/?q=content/se-realiz%C3%B3-jornada-art%C3%ADstica-en-rechazo-la-brutalidad-policial-y-por-el-desmante-del-esmad>

⁴³ This is not unusual as murals commissioned by Idartes specify that they can stay for 3 years before being painted over, so its time was up.

a piece by Colectivo Atempo and now reads '360+ social leaders assassinated since 1.1.16' ('+360 líderes sociales asesinados desde 1.1.16') alongside portraits of six of them and a call to recognise them with the word '*Re existe*' embedded into the image.⁴⁴ Around the city such portraits can be found, commemorating community leaders, students and human rights defenders. Together, the individual cases form a larger picture of police brutality and civilian assassinations. One student from the Universidad Libre argued that the graffiti commemorating victims like Nico Neira or Carlos Pedraza⁴⁵ do not stand alone. Rather, they reflect a broader reality, and should be recognised as a visual representation of the whole social and political movement fighting against everyday violence, corruption and impunity. More than simply denouncing isolated cases, his response suggests that these movements and memory practices point to '*falsos positivos*' as a continuing and widespread practice. Following the concept of necropolitics, the state has not only directly killed civilians: the ongoing impunity and lack of recognition that are associated with such cases enforce the idea that some lives are 'disposable' or '*desechable*' (Mbembe, 2003).

The commemorative pieces denouncing the violence of the state should also be situated alongside all of the other references to violence and inequality that appear in graffiti and street art. Collectively, they reveal an urban imaginary marked by the everydayness of political violence and the victimisation of civilians that is either perpetrated or endorsed by the state. At the Universidad Libre, one student drew particular attention to the idea that graffiti and street art reflect the place of violence in the social fabric of Bogotá:

They are part of a fabric that is the same social fabric of the city of Bogotá. If we were to take all of these images and make a map with these images, I am sure that it would take us through all of the problems; that often we're indifferent and we don't realise, so there are all of the disappeared from Ciudad Bolívar, but then as well there are those who resist military service, but then there are also those who want to call out because they are being criminalised just for painting

⁴⁴<https://www.facebook.com/fundatempo/photos/pcb.2279897138732515/2279896898732539/?type=3&theater>

⁴⁵ A social leader who was disappeared and killed in 2015, but whose death is yet to be fully investigated: <http://www.colombiainforma.info/23908-2/>

or for writing on a wall, there are women, there are the *barras bravas*, and they all come together, they are all part of the same fabric.

Hacen parte de un tejido que es el mismo tejido social de la ciudad de Bogotá. Si pusieramos esas imágenes e hiciéramos un mapa con estas imágenes, estoy seguro que nos va llevando a través de toda la problemática; que muchas veces y somos indiferentes y no nos damos cuenta, entonces están todos los desaparecidos de Ciudad Bolívar, pero entonces también están los que hacen resistencia al servicio militar pero entonces también están los que quieren hacer un llamado porque se les criminalizan solo porque pintan o porque rayan una pared, está la mujer, están las barras bravas, y todos se van uniendo, todos hacen parte de un mismo tejido.

Thus, the social fabric of Bogotá is marked by the political violence of disappearance, which sits alongside resistance to militarism, the claims of women, the expressions of football supporters or people who are criminalised for painting a wall. By plotting a map of Bogotá through graffiti and street art, this student alludes to structural, cultural and direct violence, and situates them on a continuum. Notably, though, the different forms of violence are not reproducing each other but because they are collectively represented on the walls of the city, he argues that *'hacen parte de un mismo tejido'*. Thus, these violences are part of everyday life and have a social impact. Students participating in the focus groups I conducted commented that graffiti and street art *'show the culture of the city' ('muestran la cultura de la ciudad')*, represent *'the people trying to speak' ('el pueblo tratando de hablar')* and *'remind us what kind of country we are in' ('nos hace recordar en que clase de país estamos')*. The idea that violence is a reality, a fact of life, even a part of Colombian identity, is central. Street artist Chirrete Golden described the representation of violence in art as important because *'it's what we have had to live with' ('es lo que nos ha tocado vivir')*. Such a vernacular theory posits political violence as being part of everyday life, in a democracy, and not as a state of exception, nor as something that is confined to the armed conflict.

4.2.2 Public commemoration

In the above, memories of violence are present in both graffiti and street art that are sponsored by the state, in that they stem from commissions and projects with arts organisations, and in the graffiti and street art that are produced autonomously. However, during the focus groups I did not specify which examples could be categorised according to such distinctions, and the respondents largely analysed them together without differentiating between them. While such a distinction tended to be significant for those who produce graffiti and street art, as I explore in the second half of the chapter, for the general public the images that appear on the walls around them were collectively considered to be outside of the confines of more institutional cultural production. I mention this because the interpretation of this external position subsequently informed the way that they interpreted the power of such images, even when those images were produced by the state. Rather than whether or not they were commissioned, the importance of graffiti and street art was associated with their position in public space. In particular, the fact that they were in public space was interpreted as a sign of transgression because they were an interruption in the everyday lives of city dwellers, but also because they were seen specifically as an alternative to more dominant cultural and political fields engaging with collective memories and representations. I argue that this reveals an additional nuance to imaginaries of the everydayness of political violence in that the communication and representation of violence is seen to be part of the struggle over meaning and truth.

Indeed, the importance of the graffiti and street art on Calle 26 is not just related to the commonalities in terms of the violent subject matter. The form and location of memory narratives contribute to the political motivations behind such representations, as well as their perceived impact. The fact that you are confronted with graffiti and street art and their representations of violence as you travel through the city on the Transmilenio or go to university or work or home, makes them radically different moments of encounter than if you were to read a book about violence or go to a museum or art gallery. When this relates to the representation of violence, the interruption becomes even more significant. Through graffiti and street art, students argued, city dwellers are reminded of the things that have happened in history: 'reality hits you' (*'nos aterrizan la realidad'*)

and defies the normalisation of conflict and violence (*'sacarnos de ese espacio de normalizar el conflicto'*). Graffiti and street art were also described as 'cries', directing people with very different lives to things that they should know about (*'ese grito que muchas personas le hacen a la demás población, oiga, a pesar de que usted puede ser muy diferente [...] lo tiene que ver'*). Implicit within these interpretations is the idea that there is a performative element to graffiti and street, in that they are publicly staging their messages. Furthermore, it is a contentious performance because it seeks to change the audience somehow (De Ruiter, 2015). Accordingly, graffiti and street art can be situated within a wider field of performative memory narratives, which frequently use public space to enact claims to truth and symbolic reparation (Taylor, 2003). Indeed, Santino's (2004) concept of the spontaneous shrine refers to popular, folk or vernacular practices in order to mourn, commemorate or remember a significant event. Rather than relying on the official construction of commemorative spaces, these vernacular approaches take the form of an unofficial marking of sites, for example with the presence of flowers and crosses after road accidents, or even graffiti (Santino, 2004; Marschall, 2013). The commemorative portraits and references to violence that appear along Calle 26 incorporate these elements; they honour the victim or victims by celebrating their lives and their actions, but by placing them in public space they are not only creating a private site for mourning, they are encouraging the wider public to mourn as well.

Furthermore, the vernacular appropriation of public space as a site for mourning and remembrance also links the personal tragedy to a wider message, frequently of either public condemnation or of support for a broader cause, that comments and reflects on the social conditions surrounding the private event (Santino, 2004, p. 368). Thus, the graffiti and street art that commemorate victims are engaged in a struggle that moves beyond representing a memory of violence, as one student from the Universidad Libre revealed while elaborating on the importance of not forgetting (*'sin olvido'*):

The fact they've been killed doesn't mean they've been forgotten, right? And painting this is like, here they are and this is what the country is. This is what happened to these people, but it's also... that they motivate us, right? So, it's what they did, what they managed to change, and we're not going to forget

them, so it's like you can see it from different angles. From the point of view that, well, this happened, but also that it serves as motivation. Like saying, we've got something to fight for, right?

El hecho de que los hayan matado no quiere decir que los hemos olvidado, no? Y el hecho de pintarlos es como, están acá y esto es este país, sí? Esto es lo que les pasó a estas personas, pero también es... quienes nos motivan, no? Entonces qué hicieron ellos y lograron transformar, y no los vamos a olvidar, entonces también es como, lo puede ver desde muchos puntos, no? Desde un punto de, bueno, pasa esto, pero también como un punto de motivación, sí? Como decir, vamos a luchar por algo, sí?

For her, the commemoration of victims of political violence in graffiti and street art does not just represent sorrow and commiseration. It is also an act of defiance, a visible reminder that people actively remember these crimes and are trying to fight the impunity and corruption that attempts to keep the realities of violence hidden. Another student from the Universidad Militar argued that painting an image of Garzón in the city centre is one of the most effective ways to ensure he's not forgotten. She interpreted the motivations of these artists as wanting the painful memory of what happened to him, and the recognition of what he did, to be recognised as part of what it is to be Colombian, reminding people that what happened then is still happening now, that speaking freely and without censorship is still restricted. While a few people argued that these representations of violence were from so far in the past that it didn't make sense to keep talking about them, others pointed out that it was not only important because these kinds of violence are still happening today, but that there hasn't been any closure for these past events because of the levels of impunity in the country.

Furthermore, the images are not only addressing the general public. The specific location can also contribute to the meaning of the image or performance by, for example, situating a performance close to where the violent incident took place or targeting areas where perpetrators are known to be (Taylor, 2003, p. 164). Calle 26 is far removed from the site of some of these crimes, with the exception of the mural of Jaime Garzón, which is relatively close to the neighbourhood of Quinta Paredes, where he was shot. However, the symbolic importance of Calle 26 as a space for memory and as a site

of institutional power frames the significance of placing alternative memories and denunciations in that space; they have the potential to be seen not just by the wider public but by the state actors who are complicit in particular forms of violence and they interrupt some of the dominant memory narratives in that space.

The everydayness of political violence thus leads to the appropriation of public space as a means of activism and denunciation, in that they reach a wide audience and interrupt their routines as they move around the city. However, the appropriation of public space is also significant because it is seen to be unmediated. Indeed, the politics of graffiti and street art are related not only to the setting in public space but also to their independent production, which contributes to the construction of their meaning and distinguishes them from other forms of public art (Bengtson, 2013). In particular, their position outside of the confines of more institutionalised spheres of communication was interpreted as a sign that they were more 'truthful' and somehow more legitimate. At the Universidad de los Andes, one student said, 'here we don't have a monument in the centre of the city, commemorating this stuff, we have graffiti' (*'acá no hay una torre en la mitad de la ciudad, hay grafitis, como, conmemorando eso'*). People suggested that graffiti and street art are mediums through which the truth about violence is spoken, or at least through which we are encouraged to question mainstream discourses and do our own investigation (*'investigar aparte de lo que los medios y opiniones tan divididas nos cuentan'*). These responses make it clear that within urban imaginaries of violence there is an invisibility of some forms of violence; as the student at Los Andes says, where there are no formal commemorative spaces, there is graffiti.

Graffiti also represents a call to question dominant narratives, showing that the mainstream media are seen to distort, or selectively represent, violence according to their political and economic interests. One student described the media as contaminating the audience, because they only offer sensationalist accounts of violence or only depict what it suits them (and the state powers behind them) to show. In this context, graffiti and street art are alternative forms of communication that specifically respond to such censorship, or at least manipulation: 'you can make demands that would be impossible any other way [...] If there is graffiti about violence it's because you can't say it any other way' (*'por eso eres capaz de exigir lo que no puedes hacer de*

cualquier otra forma [...] Si hay grafitis sobre violencia es porque no lo puedes decir de otra manera'). It is true that controlling the narrative, having the power to guide and shape the 'ways of seeing' that construct social imaginaries, is an important gain in the struggle for hegemony (Calveiro, 2006, p. 375). Consequently, control over the media is highly sought after. In Colombia, there is a complicated relationship between the mainstream media and the state. The dominant media institutions are owned by the same elites who are part of the government, and the representation of violence, especially in relation to the armed conflict and the peace process, has been criticised as partisan and fear-mongering (Ortíz Leyva *et al.*, 2002; Tamayo and Bonilla, 2014).⁴⁶ The distrust of the media thus adds another layer to the everydayness of political violence, suggesting an implicit disenchantment with the dominant narratives that are communicated on a daily basis through radio, television and newspapers, either through absence or because of the lack of depth or context to reports (Philo, 2002). The extent to which the manipulation of discourses of violence can be proven is almost irrelevant. Graffiti and street art are perceived as refocusing the urban imaginary on who is important in society and offering a more truthful version of everyday life, revealing a deep sense of mistrust, disenchantment and a lack of faith in the institutions running the country. Indeed, it is the silence and denial from official institutions about specific acts of violence that has led to victims and artists turning to the public arena to make claims to truth and relevance, and to demand action (Rolston and Ospina, 2017, p. 29). Such collaborations reflect people's disenchantment with the state, especially when they are still seeking justice for historic crimes. Thus, not only are state actors implicated in committing acts of direct violence, but the institutions around them enforce their impunity and shut down the democratic processes through which victims seek recognition and reparation.

Accordingly, the everydayness of political violence, as it is understood here, implicates the state as a perpetrator of violence against civilians, and highlights the state's influence over narratives of collective memory. Camacho argues that the legitimacy of

⁴⁶ This does not mean that political violence is always absent from such discourses. Indeed, the media played an important role in reporting the *parapolítica* scandal, where members of the state were implicated in corrupt relationships with drug gangs and paramilitary networks. However, there are still notable silences or distorted versions of events and so they continue to be perceived as part of the system that reproduces violence.

the state is called into question when the recognition of the realities of corruption and impunity affects the faith that people hold in state institutions, such as the police force (Camacho Guizado, 1994). In the responses of my research participants detailed above, the government is recognised as capable of killing civilians and getting away with it. I argue that this lack of faith extends to the institutions that are supposed to communicate the realities of violence and contradicts the idea that Colombia's trajectory of violence can be linked to a weak state. Instead, particular actors within the state apparatus benefit from high levels of corruption and repression, which supports the notion that democratic societies comprise realities of state violence and oppression (Elhawary, 2010; Gutiérrez Sanín, 2014). Moreover, in the rest of the chapter, I show that the sense of distrust or disenchantment with the state apparatus has also started to bleed into the interpretations of graffiti and street art.

4.3 Complexities and contradictions

It is worth remembering that the graffiti and street art along Calle 26 are not merely aesthetic interventions in the city centre, interrupting passers-by as they go about their business. This is a space where graffiti and street art are authorised and the more informal or independent graffiti sits alongside that which has been commissioned and paid for by the state. As I discuss in the introductory chapter, it is not necessarily easy to distinguish between what is legal or illegal, what is paid for by the state, produced by the artists autonomously or in collaboration with other cultural, social or political organisations. However, the relationship between the graffiti on Calle 26 and the symbolic identification of Calle 26 as a space for memory is worth considering through the perspective of graffiti and street artists because it reveals key ways of seeing violence. In this section of the chapter, I focus on how graffiti and street artists perceive the place of memory and violence in graffiti and street art, epitomised by that which can be found on the 26. Some of the artists I spoke to contribute to these institutional projects, others negotiate or hesitate to engage with representations of violence that are aligned with the state. I explore their concerns and argue that the apprehension related to these trends in graffiti and street art reveals both a questioning of how violence is or should be represented or engaged with through art and culture, and a

broader concern related to the ambiguous effects of the visibility and recognition of different forms of violence.

4.3.1 *Negotiating the state*

The formal construction of Calle 26 as a space for collective memory is both challenged and endorsed by graffiti. Signs of discontent play out in the visual landscape and reflect the complexities of urban imaginaries of violence: underneath the entrance to the Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación, a *pinta* reads ‘peace means change’ (*‘La paz son cambios’*), before it is scrubbed out to a faded half sentence (figure 25). The commissioned murals are also open to attack. Shortly after the completion of Chirrete Golden’s mural commemorating the Unión Patriótica, an extreme right-wing group called the Tercera Fuerza painted over it with swastikas and fascist slogans (*‘Fascismo totalitario YA. Fuera UP, fuera Farc. Colombia libre’*).⁴⁷ The damage was condemned by the local government but, more importantly, the local community came out and began to paint over the neo-Nazi graffiti, thereby repairing the mural and thus reclaiming the right for this particular mural to speak about a shameful period in recent history. On Calle 26, therefore, it is not as simple as saying that whatever has been paid for by the government is sanctioned by society, because in the case of the UP mural there were sectors of society who very visibly attacked it. Nor can it be claimed that the representation of memories of violence, including those which implicate the state, are necessarily transgressive when the state itself commissioned them.

As I explain in the opening to the chapter, the development of Calle 26 as a place for aesthetically engaging with questions of memory, peace and violence has drawn together graffiti and street artists with the state in ways that move beyond contestation. The people I spoke to outside of the field of graffiti and street art were generally in favour of this collaboration and, indeed, hardly distinguished between them. Perceptions within the field, however, were more complicated. These differing perspectives also affect the ways in which people engage with the space of Calle 26 as a whole. The Bogotá Bike Tour, for example, travels to the 26 to show tourists the murals,

⁴⁷ https://www.vice.com/es_co/article/nnpmqq/chirrete-golden-nos-habla-de-graffiti-y-de-paz

while images and stories about the space and its graffiti are reproduced on websites and in the media. On the other hand, the Bogotá Graffiti Tour avoids the area because there are too many commissioned murals, which do not fall under their definition of graffiti and street art.

From an institutional perspective, the convergence of interests between artists with an explicitly political agenda and the state's endorsement of the Ley de Víctimas, peace process and graffiti law might be interpreted as fortuitous, rather than forced. Catalina Rodríguez is the director of visual and fine art at the local arts council, Idartes (*Instituto Distrital de las Artes de Bogotá*). She explained that the murals can be situated within a longer-term project aimed at creating an open-air museum along Calle 26, which would include various forms of public art. Many of the graffiti and street artists thus responded to an open call for proposals before any specific theme related to violence, peace and memory was imposed but still they still referenced these themes in their work, suggesting that the association with victims and the conflict was 'tacit, like a common interest, on the part of city dwellers and the council' (*'tácita, como un interés común, tanto de los ciudadanos como de la administración'*). Subsequently, the explicit theme of Memories of the Future (*Memorias del futuro*) in 2014 consolidated the desire to situate such projects within, in this case, imagining a utopian future through a focus on the country's past:

[W]e invited people to imagine a, well yeah, a future in peace, on the one hand, and questioned which would be the images that would represent this or the images that should exist in this future that is still utopian, right? And on the other hand invite people to present or send the images that they thought should be recorded and remembered in this future peace.

[I]nvitamos a la gente a imaginar un pues sí, un futuro en paz, por un lado, y cuáles serían las imágenes que, o representan eso o las imágenes que deberían existir en ese futuro pues, utópico todavía, no? Y por otro lado invitar a la gente a presentar o a mandar las imágenes que ellos consideran debían ser recordadas en ese futuro de paz.

Thus, the call highlights the importance of memory as a thematic that runs through public art projects, but specifically situates the memory project as something that should contribute towards peace. Significantly, the engagement with graffiti and street artists developed at the same time as the local and national government were promoting the three tenets of the Ley de Víctimas: rights, recognition and reparation.

And last year with [...] the peace talks underway, the department for victims, peace and reconciliation in the mayor's office, with huge resources to generate ideas and projects that would contribute to recognising the rights of victims, restoring the names of the unnameable, or the unnamed, meant that Mayor Petro commanded the council to create projects that would allow, yeah, ways of restoring these rights or at least putting a name to things.

Y el año pasado con [...] los diálogos de paz andando, la alta consejería para las víctimas, la paz y la reconciliación de la alcaldía, con muchísimos recursos para mover ideas y proyectos que permitan restablecer derechos de las víctimas, restituir los nombres de los innombrables, o los no nombrados, hace que el alcalde Petro le ordene a la administración inventarse proyectos que permitan, si como restablecer esos derechos o por lo menos poner nombre a las cosas.

The provision of funding was specifically aimed at illuminating the past, at discussing violence and recognising the need to engage with victims of violence. Thus, the arts council reflects one particular line of thought within the state that supported the transition to peace. It is worth remembering that there were, and are, deep divisions within the state in relation to the peace agreement with the FARC and these disagreements were highly mediated in the lead-up to the referendum of 2016.

That art and culture is a field within which people seek to promote peace and denounce continuing violences was not a surprise to Rodríguez. She argued these are topics that have always been sought out in Colombian art and culture, particularly in relation to exposing the truth behind acts of violence, and compared to the mainstream media and the political and economic interests behind them. She related such a trend to the idea that people don't feel like everyone knows what has happened in Colombia's trajectory of violence and why, that there is a common feeling that what we know isn't what really

happened, and that there is a desire to talk, in and through art, about the things or the people that have been ignored. The relationship between the state and cultural agency is complicated, with cultural agents often fulfilling the role of the state or providing symbolic forms of engagement in the face of states failing to do so (Sommer *et al.*, 2005). When the state does start to create a space for other truths and discourses, particularly in relation to political violence, they are not necessarily creating those narratives but legitimising the already existing cultural processes and collective memory practices of diverse and previously marginalised segments of the population (Milton, 2007, p. 150). However, in Bogotá the perspectives of some of these cultural agents revealed a more nuanced interpretation of this process.

The murals that were funded through Idartes in line with this state vision of peace and memory include some of the most well-known names in graffiti and street art; DjLu, Toxicómano, Lesivo, Chirrete Golden, Ark, Bastardilla, Vertigo, Guache to name a few. I interviewed some of these artists, and running throughout the discussions there was a recognition that such projects allowed them to support the socio-political intentions behind engaging with memory and peace, but they were deeply cautious about aligning themselves too closely to the state in general. DjLu is a street artist based in Bogotá who is famous for the socio-political content of his work. He argues that the legitimacy of the relationship depends on the individual artist maintaining their autonomy:

[I]f the opportunity arises to work alongside a business or an institution in such a way that the conditions are favourable for you, I think that's valid. [...]

[U]ltimately, I think that there is always the potential to reach an agreement where you are not sacrificing your proposal nor your intentions, and that does comply with the parameters set by the institution. [...] At those times when conditions are propitious for you and you're not betraying yourself nor selling out, it's really good.

[S]i aparece la posibilidad de trabajar aliado a una empresa o a una institución en la medida en que las condiciones sean propicias para uno, me parece también válido. [...] [E]n últimas, creo que existe siempre la posibilidad de llegar a un acuerdo en el cual uno no se traiciona en su propuesta y en sus intenciones, y sí logra cumplir con los parámetros que exige la institución. [...] En el momento en

que las condiciones sean propicias para uno y que no se esté traicionando ni vendiendo su intención, está muy bien.

Indeed, the possibility of funding and support is important to graffiti and street artists – it allows them to develop their skills, to earn money doing something that they are passionate about, to contribute to the urban landscape and to urban society. Chirrete Golden, too, has worked with the local government and the Centro de Memoria, Paz y Reconciliación. He produced the aforementioned trio of murals on forced displacement, the assassination of trade unionists and the political genocide of the Unión Patriótica, as well as a more recent mural that reads ‘Peace is now’ (*‘La paz es ahora’*) and depicts a group of people torn away from (or held back by) their literal roots in the countryside (figure 26). For him, working on such commissions has given him the opportunity to combine a creative approach with a socio-political agenda, and to work within a wider community engaged with contemporary discourses of violence and peace. He says:

[I] think we’re at a point where, where it’s necessary to make a commitment. Or, to commit to something [...] and with urban art [...] we’ve got a lot of potential to make things happen.

[C]reo que estamos en un momento en el que, en el que es necesario tener un compromiso. O, comprometerse con algo. [...] y desde el arte urbano [...] tenemos mucho potencial para lograr cosas.

For both of these artists, though, the relationship with the state is something that requires careful negotiation, which can be seen in DjLu’s insistence that the conditions ‘*sean propicias*’, that the artist ‘*no se traiciona*’, that they aren’t selling out. In the context of representing violence, peace and memory, Chirrete Golden warns:

And here I think that, that there’s a sort of opportunism there [...] the institutions, the big brands, the advertisers realised that graffiti has great potential, so what they did was capture it, take advantage of it to spread their message, to sell their products, to sell the idea of post-conflict and peace and everything. I support, the idea that the mural has this initiative, and that, let’s say, it can change the way people think. But it seems to me that sometimes you have to be really careful because the subject of memory [...] is a really serious

subject and you have to treat it delicately. Like, so there's a ton of murals talking about it, and not being sufficiently conscientious about what they're doing, and they stay being a simple exercise of talking about memory but in reality that's not what they're doing.

Y aquí creo que, que hay como un oportunismo ahí [...] las instituciones, las grandes marcas, la publicidad se dio cuenta que el grafiti tenía un potencial muy grande, entonces lo que hizo fue captarlo, y aprovecharse para decir sus cosas, para vender sus productos, y para vender la idea del posconflicto y la paz y todo. Yo apoyo, como que el mural tenga esa iniciativa, y pueda, digamos, cambiarle el pensamiento de la gente. Pero me parece que a veces hay que tener mucho cuidado porque es que el tema de la memoria [...] es un tema muy serio y hay que tratarlo muy delicadamente. Como, para que haya pues un montón de murales que hablen de eso, y que no sean lo suficientemente conscientes de lo que están haciendo, y se quedan en un simple ejercicio de hablar de memoria, pero en realidad no es lo que están haciendo.

Thus, while the artistic representation of memory has great potential to engage the public and change their ways of seeing or thinking about violence and peace, there are also signs of opportunism. The equivalence between the interests of institutions and big brands for the purposes of advertising is revealing; a subtle reminder of the co-optation of subcultural practices and a need to recognise the motives of the different people engaging with these aesthetics. Furthermore, he describes their motivation as being to 'vender la idea del posconflicto', which reveals a significant amount of distrust in relation to the commitment to peace of the institutions, although he does not mention which institutions in particular. Moreover, he argues that the theme of memory is at risk of overuse. It is significant that this is associated with the notion of danger, that to get funding for a project people are only engaging with very deep and traumatic issues on a superficial level.

The appropriation of memory, on the part of both artists and the state institutions funding such projects, has drawn criticism from various artists involved in different subcultures, and is closely linked to the political vision of peace. Two of the artists from the politically-engaged street art collective, Subversión Visual, described the

representation of peace in graffiti and street art as 'in vogue', or 'en boga', and at risk of becoming a cliché, which has dissuaded them from engaging with it. Stinkfish is a street artist who also distances himself from such projects. He provides a damning critique, arguing that graffiti isn't going to construct or destroy a peace process, nor help it to be any more or less successful:

[G]raffiti counts as long as you are depicting themes that are important, so do graffiti on memory. [...] *Now graffiti is important, right. Graffiti about the peace process [...] like graffiti artists are helping to construct peace. It doesn't make any sense, right? With graffiti you're not going to construct or destroy a peace process, nor are you going to make it any more or less successful.*

[E]l grafiti vale en la medida en que tratas de temas que sí son importante, haga un grafiti sobre la memoria. [...] Ahora sí importa el grafiti, sí. Un grafiti sobre el proceso de paz [...] como los grafiteros están ayudando a construir la paz. No tiene ningún sentido, cierto? Con el grafiti no se va a construir ni destruir un proceso de paz ni va a ayudar que sea más exitoso o menos exitoso.

Consequently, the support and opportunities provided are limited to graffiti artists who engage with memory and peace. This he interprets as a way of circumscribing the conditions within which graffiti is acceptable, which is otherwise a subversive form of cultural expression that is based on the autonomous appropriation of the visual landscape. Indeed, around the world, graffiti and street art have been increasingly incorporated into urban planning initiatives that detract from their traditional role as either popular art or transgressive self-expression and instead represent a means of 'selling' creative cities. Thus, street art is not just passively permitted but actively employed, and street artists are complicit in their own manipulation (Schacter, 2014).

A further reason for this distrust of the relationship between the state and graffiti and street art is that, more than just representing violence because it is fashionable, there is a deeper preoccupation with the mediation of the message. Christian is the founder of the Bogotá Graffiti Tour and he explained why he doesn't take the tour to Calle 26:

Because a lot of people ask me, oh why don't I take people to the really big walls that have gone up that were council sponsored, and I actually prefer not to

because they've all gone through a proposal process so they've been watered down. You know, the council in some way has decided what is allowed to be painted in, in large scale. Which I think is wrong. I think, you know, everyone should have a chance to paint what they want, whereas Idartes I think tends to, they can sort of water it down and they don't want too sort of political statements or, or things that cause issues, to offend people, etc.

[...] anything that goes through a proposal process is going to have some sort of censorship or, or be subjected to some people in office not liking it or liking it, even if there's artists in Idartes making the decisions...

Even when there are explicit attempts to engage with the politics of peace, violence and memory on the part of the state, the fact is that graffiti and street art have to go through a selection process. The implication is that this form of control necessarily extends to which memories are suitable for the public, what kinds of violence can be discussed, what messages are allowed to enter the public domain and, indeed, be endorsed by the state. There is precedence for such concern, which can be related to the institutionalisation of urban aesthetics and especially that which deals with violence. The transition to post-conflict in Northern Ireland, for example, has included controversial attempts to change the contents of the partisan neighbourhood murals that divided the city. There, the visual transformation of the urban landscape is intended to present a more peaceful image, even though the lack of structural changes mean that communities continue to be affected by violence (Hill and White, 2012; Hocking, 2016). On Calle 26, it felt like memory was being imposed, that it overlaid the space in a way that doesn't necessarily encourage the participation of urban society, although chairs and tables have been constructed under some of the murals. I have walked a significant distance along this road, I have interviewed people on the street there, I have visited the cemetery and the museum. These spaces were quiet, they were hardly being used and actually being on the street was fairly unpleasant: you are exposed to the weather and to the noise and dust of the traffic. Mostly people are not spending a significant amount of time on Calle 26 and contemplating what is around them, nor imagining a peaceful future.

Consequently, graffiti and street artists reveal ambiguous interpretations of the politics

of representing violence and memory at a time when, and in a place where, the government is encouraging those representations. While this is significantly different to the interpretations of the general public, who insist on the importance of such images in public space, in the following section I argue that the unease and ambivalence regarding the state's appropriation or support of graffiti and street art (depending on your point of view) can be related to a broader concern with collective memories or ways of seeing violence. Namely, that the recognition of violence as part of everyday life, and the state as a perpetrator, does not necessarily catalyse or mobilise a reaction on the part of civil society. This adds another layer to the imaginary of political violence, whereby its everydayness refers to normalisation or banality.

4.3.2 Normalising violence

It is particularly revealing that the recent interest of the state in themes of memory and political violence is unnerving above all for those artists who have long worked on similar issues. Dexpierte is a street art collective that started in the early 2010s and whose members sought to combine an academic and political interest in questions of political violence and memory with public and artistic engagement in the street. They describe their interest in such topics as preceding that of the present day 'memory boom', which they see being institutionalised:

And at the moment, the theme of memory [...] has passed through law, through decrees, [...] through a ton of, let's say, institutionalisation, which at one point as social movements or organisations was needed, or was asked for, demanded. [...] The corridor of the 26 is a corridor of memory, institutionally it's known as that. And, for sure, there are some large-scale murals, there are some things that, in technical terms, have always been sought out. Right? Doing a big mural, large interventions. But at the moment there's also the thought, the doubt related to the theme of the institutionalisation of memory

Y actualmente, el tema de la memoria [...] ha pasado por una ley, por unos decretos, [...] por un montón, digamos, de institucionalización, que en cierto momento como movimientos y como organizaciones sociales se necesitaba, o se

pedía, se requería. [...] El corredor de la 26 es un corredor de la memoria, institucionalmente se conoce así. Y efectivamente hay unos murales en gran formato, hay unas cosas digamos que, en cuestiones técnicas, siempre se habían buscado. ¿Cierto? Hacer el mural grande, hacer grandes intervenciones. Pero en ese momento también empieza uno a, a pensar y a dudar un poco el tema de la institucionalización de la memoria.

Dexpierte are not denying the importance of memory as something that needs to be recognised by those in power. Indeed, they point out that many social movements have been fighting for this recognition. Likewise, they support the opportunities for cultural development and the funding of large-scale murals. Nevertheless, they hesitate to fully endorse the way that it plays out in Bogotá, and especially on Calle 26. This hesitation is related to the risks associated with the institutionalisation of memory:

[Y]ou always hoped that the recognition of victims would be established, right? So it was like a reaction that you get from throwing the ball against the wall, right? Waiting for the other to catch it. And on this occasion the state has caught the ball and said ok, you want the victims' law, you want memory, fine. Here. The thing is you never expect that reaction, right? And when you don't expect that reaction, you don't realise that, although the state has caught the ball with memory, they've caught it their own way.

[S]iempre uno esperaba que instaura a reconocer a las víctimas, no? Entonces era como una reacción que tiene uno tirar la pelota a la pared, si? Esperando que el otro la cogiera. Y en esta ocasión el estado ha agarrado la pelota y dijo ok, quieren ley de víctimas, quieren memoria, listo. Tan. El caso es que uno nunca espera esa reacción, no? Y cuando uno no espera esa reacción, uno no se da cuenta de que aunque el, el estado coge la pelota de la memoria, la coge a su manera.

In this quote Dexpierte corroborate Vignolo's claim that civilians and social movements were the ones to mount pressure on the government, but they also draw attention to the subsequent complexities of negotiating topics such as memory, peace and violence with the state. Indeed, they argue that the state appropriates and reconfigures memory

narratives: *'la coge a su manera'*. The political significance of memory is not just about recognising the violent past, it is about how that violent past is given meaning and what purpose that recognition serves in the present. Collectives like Dexpierte represent some of the artists described by Rolston and Ospina, those who try to bring the politics of memory and the politics of aesthetics together and who produce 'politico/memorial murals' in collaboration with victims (Rolston and Ospina, 2017, p. 31). They are specific in their intentions of mobilising people around memories of political violence and using graffiti and street art to do so, partly because aesthetically pleasing messages are more likely to attract attention and partly because working in public space creates opportunities for dialogue. However, the institutionalisation of politically engaged muralism hasn't achieved this radical potential of memory narratives:

I think that just the act of remembering the dead doesn't necessarily mobilise us politically, [...] politically, I think that memory isn't conceived to be an exercise in monumentalisation. Whether it's graffiti, urban art, murals. That's to say, I think that conceptually memory activates other things. It activates people in relation to mobilisations, it activates change, it activates transformation. And effectively I think that, although some spaces have been opened up to talk about memory and in this country that's a huge gain, I think that this moment is missing. *A resistant memory, a rebellious memory, a memory that questions the present reality according to the past.*

Yo creo que solamente el hecho de recordar los muertos no necesariamente nos activa políticamente, [...] políticamente yo creo que la memoria no está concebida para un ejercicio de monumentalización. Sea graffiti, sea arte urbano, sea murales. O sea, conceptualmente la memoria creo que activa otro tipo de cosas. Activa gente entorno a la movilización, activa entorno al cambio, activa entorno a la transformación. Y efectivamente yo creo que, aunque se han abierto espacios para hablar de memoria y que eso en este país es una ganancia muy grande, creo que hace falta ese momento. Una memoria insumisa, una memoria rebelde, una memoria que cuestione la realidad actual, en función del pasado.

For Dexpierte, memory narratives are torn between, on the one hand, a pacifying vision of the past and a remembrance of victims of violence, and on the other hand, a counter-

hegemonic memory that would radically shift perspectives and actions in the present. Thus, even though the murals on Calle 26 are important, merely depicting past violences doesn't necessarily elicit an active and collective process of reflecting on them. In terms of cultural representations of collective memory (for example, in the form of monuments or memorials), there is a distinction to be made between that which fixes memory and that which activates memory (Young, 1992; Herscher, 2011). If it doesn't activate a discussion around what violence has been and continues to be, the representation of collective memory in graffiti and street art merely reinforces a tokenistic approach to the recognition of violence.

Furthermore, one of the problems in Colombia is that there is a selection of which kinds of violence and which victims are given visibility. Indeed, Subversión Visual argue that the current framing of political violence is limited to the armed conflict and the peace process, which fails to interrogate the trajectories and structural conditions associated with them:

Once again, from the political perspective that has shaped us, there is still a need to remember who are the ones responsible for the conflict. Like, now there's, there's the idea that the insurgencies are particularly responsible for the acts related to the armed conflict. But you've got to look, you've got to construct memory in relation to who is responsible. [...] And what are the structural conditions in the country, and, and why the insurgencies emerged. [...] Like, they weren't formed because people wanted to take up a weapon, or anything like that, instead they were responding to particular conditions, right? And those conditions are the things that need further engagement, and to see, well, ok, who is producing segregation in the city, who is generating poverty, who is making it so that children in la Guajira are dying of hunger.⁴⁸

Una vez más, desde el pensamiento político en el que nos ha construido, todavía falta recordar quienes son los responsables en el conflicto. O sea, ahorita está, está el tema de que las insurgencias son responsables de actos adentro del

⁴⁸ Statistics published in early 2016 revealed that Wayúu children in the desert region of La Guajira were dying of malnutrition and illnesses linked to extractivism.

conflicto armado en especial. Pero, hay que ver, y hay que hacer memoria sobre quienes son responsables. [...] Y cuáles son las condiciones estructurales del país, y, y por qué se pensaron las insurgencias. [...] O sea, no nacen porque quieren coger un arma, ni nada, sino responden a unas condiciones, si? Y esas condiciones son las que toca ir más allá, y ver entonces, bueno, quién es el que genera la segregación en las ciudades, quién genera la pobreza, quién genera que ahorita en la Guajira los niños estén muriendo de hambre.

Thus, there is no discussion about why the conflict began, what the insurgents were fighting against. Rather, the current narrative sees these insurgents as initiating conflict out of the blue and fails to identify the catalyst of structural conditions of violence and inequality. For these artists, structural violence needs to be recognised because it is precisely that which continues in the present through hunger, poverty and social segregation. Dexpierre offer a similar critique by describing the current situation as the ‘recognition of some memories and silence in the face of others’ (*‘es como el reconocimiento de unas memorias y el silencio frente a otras’*).

Vignolo argues that the different approaches to recognising (or not) the country’s trajectory of violence in Uribe’s administration compared to that of Santos meant that ‘in Colombia we went from no conflict to post-conflict, without ever having engaged properly with the truth of the conflict’ (*‘en Colombia pasamos de un no-conflicto a un posconflicto, sin nunca hacer cuentas de verdad con el conflicto mismo’*) (Vignolo, 2013, p. 139). Not only has the state jumped from not recognising the armed conflict (Uribe famously declared that Colombia was not at war but facing a terrorist movement, and you don’t negotiate with terrorists, you defeat them through military tactics and without international observation of human rights) to entering a phase of negotiated post-conflict, but this process of ending the war limits the discussions around why it started. Furthermore, despite the state’s notable recent acknowledgement of their role as perpetrators of crimes and human rights violations against civilians, Uribe and Riaño Alcalá suggest that the perspectives of victims (and the notion of victimhood) have been instrumentalised, domesticated and depoliticised: ‘this state model of solidarity – and not of responsibility – has been harmful, as it has generated confusion with respect to the responsibilities of the state in the Colombian conflict’ (Uribe and Riaño Alcalá, 2016,

p. 9). Thus, the state recognises that multiple forms of violence have been present in Colombia, and they recognise the rights of victims, but they still elide responsibility because they position themselves in solidarity with the victims, but not as owing them anything.

Alongside the recognition of political violence, then, there is a danger of ‘fixing’ memory and controlling the narratives that are associated with peace and conflict. The quotes above suggest that this occurs through the lack of context surrounding artistic representations of violent events and the wider narratives of political violence. On Calle 26, the allusions to violences are represented in such a way that they are deemed to be of the past. The mural stating ‘*La paz es ahora*’, for example, could be interpreted as a call for peace or as a statement of fact; peace is the present while violence is the past. The images of the UP, the trade unionists, the victims of forced displacement and social leaders who have been assassinated all include statistics. The number of deaths is striking and powerful, but the difficulty of agreeing on figures when it comes to victims, and especially victims of forced displacement, is notorious in Colombia (González Posso *et al.*, 2012, p. 145). Thus, they seem to contribute to the memorialisation of these violences, counting victims to fix them in the past, when in fact these violences are ongoing. Indeed, the fact that violence is ongoing while there is an official process to try and construct a narrative of post-conflict marks the Colombian context (Uribe and Riaño Alcalá, 2016). I show that this idea of continuing violence not only marks urban imaginaries of the past but affects expectations of peace, as they were articulated by my research participants.

In many of the interviews and focus groups that I carried out, scepticism and disenchantment pervaded urban imaginaries of peace. To return to Stinkfish, his criticism of the representation of memory in graffiti and street art extended to disenchantment with the peace process:

The peace process is a racket. [...] It’s a racket where drugs will keep being produced, there’ll still be a load of bad things happening, but on the face of it they’ll be wrapped up and over with on signing peace.

El proceso de paz es un gran negocio. [...] Es un gran negocio en donde las drogas

se va a seguir produciendo, se van a seguir existiendo un montón de cosas que están malo, pero que aparentemente se sellan y se acaban haciendo ahora firmando la paz.

By describing the peace process as a racket, Stinkfish suggests that those involved are complicit in the illusion. They are painting a picture of peace (literally), while fully aware that criminal and harmful activities will continue. There is an inevitability to violence, which is reflected in graffiti artist Skore's explanation about why he doesn't engage with discourses of peace and violence:

The thing is too that I don't look into it much [...] there will always be war because that's what keeps money moving. If it ends, a lot of people in power, even politicians, lose out, right? Like a cycle that's never going to end; it'll change, the leaders will change, die, grow, there's always new ones, another group that I don't know what, so, they might be able to make peace with one group, and the others don't like it.

Es que igual no investigo mucho. [...] siempre va a haber guerra porque eso es lo que mantiene como un dinero moviéndose. Si acabe eso, mucha gente con alto poder, hasta políticos, pierden, me entiendes? Como un círculo que nunca se va a acabar; se va cambiar, van a cambiar mandatarios, morir, crecer, siempre hay unos nuevos, otro grupo no sé qué, entonces, quizá pueden hacer la paz con un grupo, y los otros no les gustó.

Specifically, then, there will always be war because people gain power and make money from it. The banality of violence weaves through and governs social relations in Colombia, offering opportunities for some and at least appearing to be compatible with daily life (Pécaut, 1999). The state is an actor in the conflict, and even a perpetrator of violence, but this response incorporates another element into the imaginary of political violence, which is that there are also key figures who explicitly benefit from continuing violence (Pearce, 2013).

The inevitability of violence is also associated with the lack of clarity about what violence refers to, and, likewise, what peace refers to. Graffiti writer Saks says:

[A]s a pastor in my church said, he said 'close your eyes and try to imagine a Colombia without war'. No Colombian can do it. For us, they wear us out so much [...] with peace, war, peace, war, peace, war. [...] They fuck us up so now people don't understand, don't know how to differentiate between what is peace, right, peace, in their lives, in their selves, or peace in the world, right?

[C]omo decía un pastor [...] en mi iglesia, decía 'cierren los ojos y traten de imaginarse Colombia sin guerra'. Ningún colombiano puede hacerlo. Para nosotros nos trillan tanto la cabeza [...] con que la paz, la guerra, la paz, la guerra, que la paz. [...] Nos jodieron la cabeza entonces la gente ya no entiende, no sabe diferenciar que es paz, si, paz, en su vida, en su ser, a paz como en el mundo, si?

For Saks, the constant references to peace and war become empty signifiers. People can't even imagine what peace might look like in the country, but not only because of the historic trajectory of violence in the country. Rather, it becomes unclear what people even mean by peace. Many of the discussions around peace and political violence that I had with people reinforced the perceived illegitimacy of those running the country, and this affected their expectations in relation to violence and post-conflict, as the possibility for change was not really expected, even when it was hoped for. As one interviewee in Ciudad Bolívar said about the peace process, 'if they do it, great. But I'm not, I don't pay much attention [...] one thing is what the news readers say, another is what is really happening there' (*'si lo hacen, chévere. Pero no le pongo [sic] así mucha, muchas bolas [...] una cosa es lo que ellos dicen los noticieros y otra pues lo que pasa realmente allá'*). Urban imaginaries of everydayness thus take on a more nuanced meaning. It is not just that political violence is recognised as part of everyday life and enacted by the state, but that this recognition risks becoming banal. Indeed, everydayness, interpreted along Lefebvre's lines, includes the imposition of 'generalized passivity' (Lefebvre and Levich, 1987, p. 10).

Again, the media has a part to play in shaping this imaginary and in imposing limits on the collective imagination of peace. For one of the artists in a street art collective called Sur Vano, such generalised passivity is a consequence of the lack of knowledge about violence:

And peace is very far off [...] because of the general level of ignorance about the precise situation of the country. Because, let's say, those who have control of, well, all of the resources, of all of the money, of all of the communication media well, they manipulate the rest of the people through entertainment and the media, to maintain this state of ignorance, which is the most favourable position from which to continue with these strategies that keep the people as they are. So people know that everything in the news is a lie but they don't know what the truth is.

Y la paz es algo muy lejano [...] por el índice general de ignorancia sobre la situación misma del país. Porque, digamos, los que tienen el control pues de todos los recursos, de todo el dinero, de todos los medios de comunicación pues, manipulan el resto de las personas a través del entretenimiento y los medios, para mantener como ese estado de ignorancia, que es lo más favorable para continuar con todas estas estrategias que tienen el pueblo como están. Entonces el pueblo lo sabe que todo lo que sale en el noticiero es mentira pero tampoco sabe cuál es la verdad.

In Lucas' view, those who have the power to control the country are enforcing the state of ignorance that the rest of society find themselves in. These are the elites who might not have been elected, but who control key spaces; the media, finance, natural resources. Notably, though, people are not necessarily duped into believing what these elites say – '*sabe que [...] es mentira*' – but neither do they know the truth. Indeed, it is almost perverse that the multiplicity of representations of violences was also associated with art losing its potential political effect. Guayra is a politically engaged muralist in Bogotá, and she argues that representations of violence are commonplace, and it is this that creates indifference:

[T]he production of indifference has been massive and it has been effective, right? For example, for however many years there have been news stories every day about assassination, assassination, persecution, right? So people are, they have naturalised all of that violence, it's natural that that's the way it is, almost like it has been legitimised that there has to be a margin of the population that dies...

[L]a producción de indiferencia ha sido masiva y ha sido efectiva. ¿Sí? Por ejemplo, si aquí durante cuantos años todos los días en las noticias te muestran que asesinatos, asesinatos, persecución, ¿sí? Como que la gente está muy, ha naturalizado toda esa violencia, ha naturalizado que es así y que, casi que legitima el hecho de que, tiene que haber una franja de población que muere...

Violence is embedded in everyday life, it is constantly talked about and referred to. Indeed, Guayra implies that the sheer numbers of representations of violence are overwhelming and they don't necessarily lead to resistance, they can also lead to normalisation, passivity and everydayness. Common assumptions about the effect of shocking images of trauma and suffering range from hoping that visibility will catalyse a reaction in the viewer to controlling their dissemination by deeming them too sensitive (Sontag, 2004; Butler, 2009). However, Sontag and Butler both suggest that, despite their power, people move on with their lives and things don't change. There is, therefore, a normalisation of political violence, an acceptance and expectation of it that is intricately linked to getting used to seeing such images or seeing representations of violent events out of context.

Rather than criticising people for not reacting in outrage at every image of violence, the identification of such passivity can be identified as a key element of political violence. I argue that this notion of indifference and normalisation is related to the disenchantment with the state and the dominant media institutions described above. As Sontag says:

If one feels that there is nothing "we" can do-but who is that "we"?-and nothing "they" can do either-and who are "they"?-then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic. [...] The states described as apathy, moral or emotional anesthesia, are full of feelings; the feelings are rage and frustration' (Sontag, 2004, pp. 101-102).

The responses from my research participants clearly show that political violence is neither endorsed nor unknown. Instead, the cynical and shrewd recognition that it is a fact of life mirrors the ambiguous responses to explicitly political graffiti and street art. The interpretations of graffiti and street art on Calle 26 drew attention to the complexity of what to expect from aesthetic representations of violence, which called into question

the intended audience and the desired effects of such representations. Some of the students in the focus groups interpreted the explicit denunciation of the state to mean that the intended audience is the government. With this in mind, they argued that the effect on Calle 26 would be limited as Santos flies into the nearby office (in Plaza Bolívar, a few blocks away), while others drive with tinted windows and, specifically, those who govern 'are very indifferent to people's opinions because for them we're not worth anything' (*'son muy indiferentes a la opinión del pueblo porque nosotros para ellos no valemos nada'*). Accordingly, the corrupt political atmosphere meant that protests, strikes, graffiti and street art were of no use. As one student put it, 'people think they're the minority' (*'el pueblo se cree minoría'*).

4.4 Conclusion

Is the representation of political violence in the graffiti and street art along Calle 26 a contestation, then, or is it simply, as Dexpierte suggest, 'just one more' (*'uno más'*)? Narratives of the armed conflict, of political violence and of peace are, indeed, being articulated through the visual landscape of Calle 26, and they represent an important recognition of some of the key manifestations of violence in Colombia's trajectory. Institutional *and* vernacular commemorations of victims collectively encourage passers-by to reflect on the violences that have impacted, and continue to impact, the lives of other Colombians. The specificities of the form, including the appropriation of public space, further encourage a reflection on the broader politics of representation, as graffiti and street art are interpreted as somehow alternative to the more dominant representations of violence dispersed in the mainstream media, as cultural forms which unveil everyday realities of violence excluded from mainstream representations. However, it is precisely the question of mediation that signals the main point of contention in relation to the dynamics of graffiti and street art on Calle 26 and draws into play the struggle over the right to the city. The importance of having a discussion about peace, violence and memory to graffiti and street artists, and to the wider public, reveals itself in the visual snapshot presented here of Calle 26. Nevertheless, within the field of graffiti and street art the numerous interpretations of how to negotiate not just the politics of representing violence, but the relationship with the state are revealing.

Artists expressed discontent with the fact that the local government appears to be appropriating graffiti and street art, and they critiqued the vision of peace and violence that is being disseminated by the state. Indeed, the nuanced complexity of the right to the city on Calle 26 pertains both to the struggle to appropriate urban space for graffiti and street art, represented by their mobilisation when their right to paint there is threatened, and it pertains to the struggle over collective memories of violence. In particular, this struggle was articulated through concerns over what violences are recognised, who they implicate, and how they are represented in ways that 'fix' memory narratives of violence instead of opening them up to debate and a recognition of their continuity.

Moreover, the politics of representation on Calle 26 reveal a distinctive feature of urban imaginaries of political violence, which I describe as its everydayness. Everydayness refers to the recognition of political violence as a part of Colombian life, and here that specifically includes the role of the state as a perpetrator of violence. The everydayness of political violence also has a more nuanced meaning, though, in which everydayness refers not only to reality but to normalisation. That political violence is normalised by its association with the everyday is not to imply that it is endorsed, rather that the state is distrusted to such an extent, and the sheer scale of violence is so overwhelming, that people find it difficult to believe in the prospect of peace and to expect anything other than more violence. Such distrust and disenchantment can be framed through the image of a '*bosque de narrativas*', where engaging with collective representations of violences (both 'past' and present) necessarily entails confronting the heterogeneity of narratives, perspectives and experiences. The metaphor is apposite when applied to social imaginaries because, as with Gramscian common sense, the multiplicity of memories and narratives of violence suggest an obfuscating lack of coherence and highlight the ambiguous effects of implicitly knowing violence, where knowledge does not necessarily provide a clear direction for acting on such knowledge.

The following chapter continues this line of argument by expanding upon the everyday recognition and negotiation of violence in urban imaginaries, but this time focusing on neighbourhoods where violence is not something that happens elsewhere, it is not something that people need to be reminded of. Rather, violence is intricately tied to the

imaginaries of those spaces. As a response to the presence of violence and to its spatialization in the city, graffiti and street art depict non-violence, thus highlighting a very different approach to the politics of representation.



Figure 4 *Nosotros somos los que mandamos*



Figure 5 *Trípido*



Figure 6 *Police painting over blue bird*



Figure 7 *Dignidad campesina*



Figure 8 *ACAB*



Figure 9 *No TLC*



Figure 10 Menos tombs



Figure 11 No más RCN

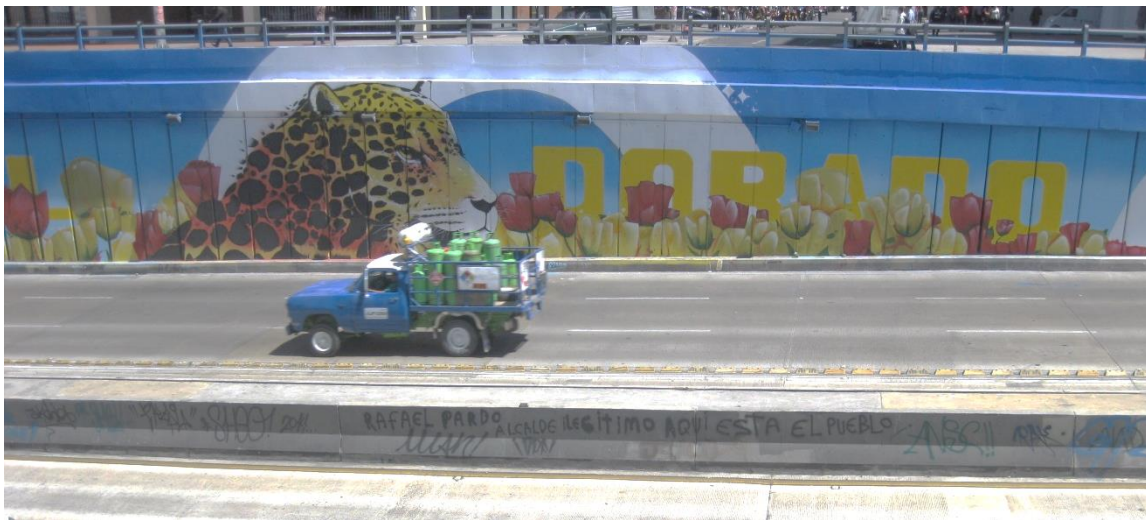


Figure 12 Rafael Pardo alcalde ilegítimo



Figure 13 Bienvenidos Gringos HPS



Figure 14 +300 Maestro/as asesinado/as



Figure 15 Menos bala más aulas



Figure 16 Ni puta ni tuya



Figure 17 Barristas



Figure 18 More-Nazis



Figure 19 Sindicatos



Figure 20 Memoria



Figure 21 Unión Patriótica



Figure 22 Mon-Santos Sepulcros



Figure 23 Jaime Garzón

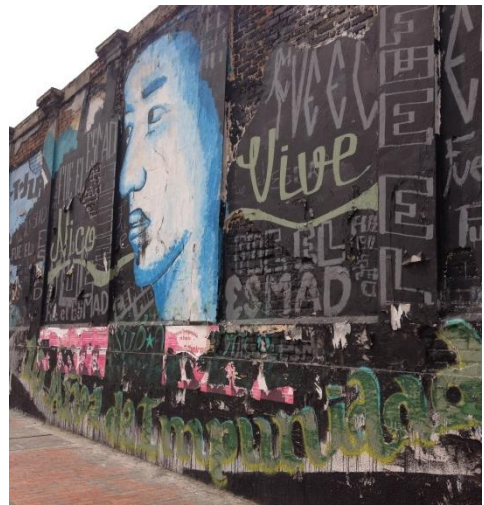


Figure 24 Nico Neira



Figure 25 La paz son cambios



Figure 26 La paz es ahora

Chapter 5

Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia: The politics of beautifying the neighbourhood

'Hay muchas Bogotás, y uno vive la Bogotá que le tocó o que quiso o que puede'

Focus group participant (Uni Militar)⁴⁹

'Estamos aportando también, a la cultura de un país. Porque somos los jóvenes quienes estamos haciendo esto. La gente joven quien se está apropiando de la ciudad de esta manera'

Lili Cuca⁵⁰

In this chapter, I develop the argument that various forms of violence are recognised to be part of everyday life in Bogotá. Contrary to Calle 26, though, I do so by exploring the absence of direct depictions of violence in graffiti and street art, and the social spatialisation of violence. In Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia, graffiti and street artists are involved in processes of beautification and local community development, which engage more implicitly with the realities of violence in the city. The spatial context is, again, significant as these are neighbourhoods marked in urban imaginaries by social exclusion and crime, which local residents have to negotiate on a daily basis and to which graffiti and street artists are responding by representing non-violence. However, by listening to these residents and the graffiti and street artists who partake in such beautification projects in these areas, the chapter shows that the politics of representing violence are more complicated. Indeed, the absence of direct depictions of violence reflects both the desire to destigmatise communities and the challenges of critique in areas where violence is ongoing, particularly in the form of structural inequalities and corrupt criminal networks. These negotiations offer a more nuanced insight into how different forms of violence are experienced and imagined in different city spaces.

⁴⁹ 'There are many Bogotás, and you live the one you're in or the one you want or the one you can'

⁵⁰ 'We're also contributing to the culture of a country. Because it's us, young people, who are doing this. Young people who are appropriating the city in this way'

5.1 Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia

Bogotá is a divided city, a city of invisible borders and individual neighbourhoods crowding together in the metropolitan area. To a certain extent, the North-South division describes the social segregation along the lines of wealth to the north and poverty to the south, with the centre of the city fragmented at the micro-level between middle-class and lower income, or poverty-stricken, areas. As in many other cities in the Global South, the trajectory of urbanization in Bogotá has led to quick but uneven growth and is characterised by diverse forms of fragmentation and segregation (Smets and Salman, 2016). There are material differences, epitomized by the gated communities with private security on the one hand and self-constructed housing on the other, and the right to the city is limited by unequal access to resources, transport and infrastructure (Thibert and Osorio, 2014). The institutional stratification of the city categorises these different neighbourhoods on a scale from 0 to 6 according to the infrastructure and characteristics of housing units, which, generally speaking, represent a good reflection of the socio-economic background of the inhabitants. Thus, the system identifies the level of subsidies needed by the inhabitants, but it has also come to form an essential part of the way the class-based fragmentation and segregation of the city is understood (Thibert and Osorio, 2014). Such spatial dynamics intensify (and are intensified by) inequalities and injustice, in relation to a wide range of economic, political, cultural and social forms of exclusion and alienation (Holston, 1999; Caldeira, 2000; Salcedo and Salcedo, 2012). In this chapter, I explore some of these forms of violence and their manifestation in the working-class areas of the city. However, it is important to note that the socio-economic segregation of the city does not mean that the neighbourhoods on the lower end of the *estrato* system are homogenous. The similarities and differences between different areas expose the dynamics of violence in the city, the imaginaries of inclusion and exclusion, and the cultural responses to these realities at institutional and grassroots levels, as I show in relation to Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia.

Ciudad Bolívar is the third largest *localidad* in the metropolitan area of Bogotá, with a population of around 700,000 people, dispersed in 360 neighbourhoods or *barrios*.⁵¹ It lies to the south of the city and borders Bosa to the north, Usme to the south and east, Tunjuelito also to the east, and Soacha to the west. All of these neighbourhoods are part of the 'south', associated in the urban imaginary with the image of an 'underclass', or the lower-working class sectors of the population, but they are very different in their identities and characteristics. In Ciudad Bolívar, the terrain is arid and mountainous, and a large part of it is uninhabited. Although the neighbourhoods spread up the hillsides and the Rio Tunjuelito river runs through the northeast of the locality there is limited access to any sort of rural way of life (unlike in Usme, for example, whose inhabitants have access to a rural hinterland) (Hernández Gómez and Rojas Robles, 2015). Legal and illegal mining sites are present, as are zones at high risk of landslides, floods and earthquakes, and the local environment is affected by pollution from the quarrying activities of multinational cement companies such as CEMEX and HOLCIM. Historically, there are particular neighbourhoods where the agents of the state have been limited in their ability to stem criminal networks, if not complicit as perpetrators of crime. Indeed, general access to the rural hinterland was denied by powerful landowning figures such as Victor Carranza, an emerald dealer and paramilitary who died in 2013, and General Rosso Serrano, a previous head of the national police. Furthermore, *barrios* like Altos de Cazucá are synonymous with drug and gang crime, while El Paraíso is one of the neighbourhoods where paramilitary groups sought to control the *comedores comunitarios* (canteens that were designed to address child hunger), and charge locals a tax to access water and electricity (Berents, 2015). Microtrafficking is common in the south, and bus companies have historically paid a bribe, or *vacuna*, to criminal organisations identifying as paramilitaries in order to instil fear. On other hand, other *barrios*, like Potosí or Jerusalén, have historically had closer ties to left-wing organisations, included the armed insurgency.

The heterogeneity of the area is marked in the visual landscape, as are the signs of embedded structural inequality. The more established *barrios* lie closer to the river and have greater access to the Portal Tunal interchange and the Avenida Boyacá, which run

⁵¹ <http://www.bogota.gov.co/localidades/ciudad-bolivar>

to the centre of the city. Ascending the hillsides, though, represents a shift in the demographic and the material landscape; these peripheral *barrios* are largely the result of *lotes piratas*, plots of land sold without legal titles for a small price.⁵² They house recently arrived and often forcibly displaced immigrants from around the country, contributing to the significant cultural diversity of the area but also distinguishing them from the more established and close-knit communities (García, 2013). On the *estratos* system, the neighbourhoods are largely categorised between 0 and 2, although there are a few *barrios* that qualify as a more middle-class status of 3.⁵³ Despite the Transmilenio and subsidiary bus services, the steep inclines to some of the neighbourhoods and the pot-holed, semi-tarmacked or even dirt roads mean that journeys between the centre and the periphery (and especially between peripheries) take time.⁵⁴ Improvements in urban infrastructure and social programmes implemented by left-wing administrations have greatly benefited the area, especially in terms of health care and access to education, even if they are also accused of driving up the rent in places where the more structural lack of employment opportunities remains unaddressed. Indeed, different forms of violence persist in different areas.

Because of these realities of violence, but despite the heterogeneity of the neighbourhoods in the *localidad*, Ciudad Bolívar has traditionally figured in urban imaginaries as a '*territorio del miedo*' and is avoided by those who don't need to be there. Residents have been stigmatised not only as poor, but as uncivilised, immoral, dangerous and, ultimately, '*desechable*' (Alape, 2006). This is especially true of young men from Ciudad Bolívar, who were disproportionately represented amongst the victims of the '*falsos positivos*' scandal (alongside young men from Soacha). Furthermore, social cleansing has also marked the dynamics in the area, whereby gangs 'clean' the streets of 'undesirables' or '*desechables*' by killing homeless people, street kids, drug addicts and LGBTQ+ locals. There is a history of popular resistance to such violences, and their implicit acceptance by some in the communities, which includes organised night walks that reclaimed the streets for young people at risk of violence after dark, as well as

⁵² The dominant model of informal housing in Colombia, as opposed to the land invasions that characterise other countries.

⁵³ Secretaría de Planeación.

⁵⁴ Though they have recently built a cable car in a move mimicking Medellín's supposed urban transformation.

performance pieces that used posters to humanise the young people being targeted (Herrera and Chaustre, 2012). They reflect important struggles over the right to the city, particularly in the form of recognition. In municipal institutions the move towards recognising these communities as 'vulnerable' represents a significant shift in the outside perception of people who live in areas like Ciudad Bolívar and a different 'way of seeing' violence. Rather than aggressors, the recognition that they are victims of different forms of violence is part of refocusing political attention and incorporating them into an urban community as opposed to rejecting them for being too poor or too violent to belong.

The notion of belonging provides an important point of comparison between Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia. La Perseverancia is embedded in the centre of the city; it is a much smaller neighbourhood that forms part of the central *localidad* of Santa Fe. To the east, La Perseverancia has access to the mountainsides, or *cerros*, that represent one of the city's rural perimeters, although these are often deemed to be dangerous areas. The handful of blocks that define its boundaries sit tight behind and alongside the financial and tourist district around La Séptima, the bullfighting ring and planetarium, and the trendy apartment blocks, cafés and restaurants of La Macarena. It is firmly working-class and categorised as *estrato* 2 but surrounded by a middle-class and metropolitan demographic of *estrato* 3.⁵⁵ The geographic location is significant, as I discovered when I conducted interviews on the street and asked locals to describe their perception of the *barrio*. The best thing about it, one man said, was that it was in the centre of the city, there was easy access to transport and you never had to deal with traffic jams. Another said that it was better than other *barrios* because it was so central ('*por la sencilla razón de que se presta por lo central*') and you can walk to the centre or to Chapinero. Furthermore, all of the basic necessities were provided and even security had improved over time. Unlike Ciudad Bolívar, the exclusion of the neighbourhood is not related to its geography, it is not imagined as 'outside' of the city. Indeed, La Perseverancia was the first *barrio* to be built specifically as a working-class neighbourhood in the late 19th and early 20th century, where lots were sold to workers to build their houses alongside the site of the Bavaria brewery. Inhabitants not only built

⁵⁵ Secretaría de Planeación.

houses, but also used the space as allotments, and gradually built up the roads and demanded public services, drainage, water and electricity (Ruiz Gutierrez and Cruz Niño, 2007). Their descendants still live in the *barrio*, which contributes to the deep-rooted sense of community and working-class identity. This identity has historically allowed them to fight off gentrification and the more insidious signs of exclusion and alienation. In the past, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán played a key role in this and La Perse was a stronghold of support for the liberal leader. More recently, there were signs around the *barrio* of the fear of gentrification and people spoke to me of the resistance to the Plan Centro, the local government's redevelopment project for the centre of the city, which I discuss in the next chapter. The continuation of particular traditions and the insistence on the cultural identity of the area contributes to their struggle for the symbolic right to the city. Such traditions include the production of *chicha*, the fermented maize drink of the working classes, and semi-formal annual events like the '*carritos de balineras*', where locals construct go-karts and race down the steep inclines of the neighbourhood, or the celebration of the Virgen de las Candelas on the 7th December that involves fireworks rather than candles. While such activities might unite the neighbourhood, they also highlight historic tensions with the state. *Chicha* production was banned in the 20th century, blamed in part for stirring up the violent passions of the working-classes who took part in the rioting of the *Bogotazo*. The year that I was in Bogotá, a friend from La Perse told me that, as usual, the fireworks celebration had descended into a violent confrontation between locals and the police. Like Ciudad Bolívar, the realities of violence are marked in La Perseverancia. Despite its centrality to the city, imaginaries of and in the *barrio* are marked by the deep divisions with the surrounding neighbourhoods and especially with the state. Inhabitants are affected by structural inequality, and there are criminal networks that operate in the area, particularly in the form of drugs, delinquency and theft. The tense relationship with the police is enhanced by the proximity of the police station on the border between La Perse and La Macarena, and the police almost seem to act as a containing force separating the two social groups.

In this chapter, the focus on these two case studies offers a glimpse into the everyday realities of violences in different areas of the city. Moreover, they reveal the spatial dynamics of urban imaginaries of violence. The social spatialization of Bogotá manifests

itself in the identification of neighbourhoods in the city as being inherently violent, and Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia hold a mythic status as notorious sites of violence. Indeed, common sayings related to these two neighbourhoods include ‘the only law in Ciudad Bolívar is the law of gravity’ (*‘en Ciudad Bolívar la única ley es la ley de la gravedad’*), while of La Perse they say ‘you go up there on foot but you come down in an ambulance’ (*‘subes de pie y bajas en ambulancia’*). Significantly, though, the imagination of violence is influenced not necessarily by experience but by stories of past events, news reports, rumours and other collective representations, which consequently inform everyday spatial practices (Ochs, 2013). These imaginaries are imbued with fear and lead to tactics designed to avoid or negotiate the threat of violence. This social truth was confirmed during the focus groups that I carried out at different universities in the city, where I would question students about their perceptions of violence in Bogotá. At the prestigious and private Universidad de los Andes, students said that they don’t experience violence everyday but there is always a news story about it (*‘en las noticias, o sea en serio, todo es como violencia y esto’*). They know that the bad things you hear about particular places in the south, especially through the media or through rumours, don’t necessarily reflect everything, that there are huge generalisations made about urban violence, but the myths are enough to discourage you from going:

You have no reason to go and check, once they’ve said it, why would you go?

Uno no tiene porqué ir a comprobarlo, ya lo dicen, ¿pues pa’qué va a ir?

Why expose yourself? *¿Para qué dar papaya?*

It’s more of an urban myth, I would say. You know what they say about over there... right? And that’s it, finished. The place is vetoed, a no-go area, you’re never going to go. *Es más mito urbano, diría yo. Uno sabe que le dijeron que por allá... ¿no? Y ya, fin, ya. Lugar vetado para uno, equis en el mapa, nunca vaya.*

Rationally, these privileged students might recognise that it can’t be as dystopian as the representations of these places imply, but they’re still not going to go there and find out what it is actually like. Such perspectives reveal that the segregation of urban society intersects with the socio-economic fragmentation of the city through the fear of violence. The process of imagining places through narratives of violence extends to the

people in them and contributes to Orientalist assumptions about the violence of the 'Other' (Springer, 2011, p. 94). Indeed, being associated with working-class *barrios* acts as a powerful territorial stigma, or a 'taint of place', and compounds structural inequalities related to, for example, wealth or race (Wacquant, 2008, p. 238). In particular, the representation of people in Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia ranges from depicting them as dangerous, morally degraded and disposable, to seeing them as vulnerable groups. Thus, while the right to the city is 'a right to change ourselves by changing the city' (Harvey, 2008, p. 23), it could also be argued that we need to change ourselves in order to change the city – especially in the way that the city is produced in the collective imagination. The shift towards identifying neighbourhoods marked by different forms of violence as vulnerable communities rather than as violent actors is significant, and it contributes to the particular dynamics behind different infrastructural and cultural programmes.

Such programmes can be situated within a broader regional context of localised collective action, known as *movimientos barriales* or the widespread programme of *cultura viva comunitaria* expanding out of Brazil to Peru, Argentina and other countries. They developed in the 1970s and 1980s as a response to various forms of urban marginalisation and informality, combining protest with alternative community action and more official demands for recognition from the local government, particularly gaining strength in the 1990s (Cuéllar Obando, 2015; Pulido Chaparro, 2016). By speaking to the needs of local communities in terms of basic access to infrastructure, services and housing, they directly engage with the right to the city as the right to benefit from, and participate in, urban decision-making processes. Significantly, though, they also recognise the importance of appropriating urban space and fortifying a sense of belonging through creative and cultural activities, which will be explored in this chapter (Cuéllar Obando, 2015).

Through the focus on the right to the city, these urban intervention programmes share commonalities not only in terms of vulnerability and exclusion, but also in terms of the language, practices and relationships that develop as a response to such violences. Such movements forge relationships between social organisations, community groups and the state in complex and contradictory ways. Alliances are negotiated between local

political parties and local communities, reflecting some of the ideological disconnects between national and municipal governments, as left-wing mayors have had to negotiate more conservative, right-wing presidencies to implement their political projects. They also attract a considerable amount of caution and scepticism on the part of the community organisations, wary of the local government appropriating their participatory activities (De Souza, 2006). Nevertheless, these relationships and movements have had a huge impact on the cultural politics of neighbourhood organisation, particularly in terms of the incorporation of cultural diversity (specifically the recognition and protection of it) into cultural and creative development projects as a central tenet of government policy (Yúdice, 2018). Thus, despite the patchy spatiality and temporality of such projects, dependent as they can be on the priorities of local and national governments at different periods in time and in different countries, the language and ideas that they engage with have filtered through and interventions in urban space and their place in political agendas are framed through demands for inclusion, the recognition of diverse social groups and their everyday, creative forms of self-expression.

In particular, institutional approaches to spaces like Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia have supported beautification projects as part of this broader neighbourhood movement, as a way of challenging the violence of exclusion and supporting community engagement, although the question of more fundamental structural improvements in terms of increasing access to employment and relieving the effects of poverty remain. Where the policies of Lucho Garzón, for example, aimed to address inequality through social programmes such as the provision of free meals for children, the administrations of Mockus and Peñalosa aimed for a more aesthetic transformation (Rincón and Hoyos, 2013). Thus, for example, the neighbourhoods of Ciudad Bolívar were invited to participate in small-scale infrastructure programmes to improve neighbourhoods, such as the '*Mejoramiento de barrios*', which was instituted by the Caja de Vivienda Popular⁵⁶ and included building steps, parks and sports facilities. Notably, projects of beautification not only attempt to transform spaces physically, they also seek to intervene in the imaginaries of the neighbourhoods. Again, though, while the image of

⁵⁶ <https://www.habitatBogotá.gov.co/node/228>

inclusion is important, who is chosen to represent inclusion reflects the priorities of different administrations. Key demographics are frequently sought to participate in such projects, including the elderly, young people and mothers who are heads of households. Lucho Garzón implemented the provision of free walls in 2007 as part of his approach to social inclusion through the attention paid to urban cultures and youth programmes – ‘youth without indifference’ (*jóvenes sin indiferencia*), which was part of his broader campaign ‘Bogotá sin indiferencia’. Petro attempted to follow Garzón in capturing the support of marginalised social groups through his programme for ‘new citizenships’ (*nuevas ciudadanías*). It aimed to increase the recognition of social groups marginalised in urban and political discourses and encourage their participation in the symbolic construction of collective public space. This was significant because young people in areas like Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia, and especially young men, are typically represented as perpetrators of crime and violence, rather than victims.

Furthermore, graffiti and street art played a large role in this initiative as representative of youth subcultures to be celebrated. As part of the graffiti law and increasing interest of the local government, cultural initiatives related to graffiti and street art have emerged in different neighbourhoods around the city. Alongside the commissions and competitions for large-scale murals, funding has been made available for smaller projects, and there is a formal network of graffiti and street artists around the city through the *mesas* in different areas that feed back to the local arts council. The current dynamics between graffiti and street art and the local government are significant, then, because they highlight the involvement of this particular sector and encourage the appropriation of space as a means of challenging the violence of stigma. Even outside of the institutional framework, such cultural activities in vulnerable communities are important because they speak to a broader recognition of cultural agency and ‘alternative’ forms of political participation. Doing politics can take many guises and young people are deeply involved; although often seen as a problem or challenge, they are active agents who are critically engaged and participate politically in their own ways (Oliart and Feixa, 2012; Patiño *et al.*, 2014). Although the projects discussed in the body of the chapter are only loosely related to the institutional programs of the *alcaldía*, they are linked to the broader cultural politics of neighbourhood action and the *movimiento*

barrial by the focus on the self-representation of communities, the language of the right to the city and the complex relationships between social movements or socially-engaged youth, local communities and the local government.

In the following pages, I explore the politics of representation in Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia, neighbourhoods that are marked in the urban imaginary as dangerous and marginalised. The diverse perceptions and experiences of violence in these areas of the city reveal a complicated and ambiguous combination of violences, real and imagined, political and everyday. In the graffiti and street art, though, there is a noticeable absence of explicit references to either peace or conflict. Rather, graffiti writing and decorative murals dominate. This is not to say that graffiti and street artists do not engage with violence, and I argue that processes of beautification can be seen to respond to the symbolic violence of stigma, for example. Nevertheless, there are also silences around particular forms of violence, and my research participants revealed the complex process of negotiating continuing realities of structural and political violence. A closer analysis of the dynamics of graffiti and street art in these neighbourhoods thus challenges the tendencies that seem to *either romanticise or demonize* these neighbourhoods, and indeed graffiti and street artists, and instead offers a greater insight into urban imaginaries of spatialized violence that are marked by contradictions and subtle forms of exclusion.

5.2 Representing non-violence

Notably, the recognition of young people as political subjects implies listening to what it actually means to live in areas like Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia (Alape, 2006; Skelton, 2010). Contrary to the dystopian imaginaries of violence and marginalisation in urban areas ‘tainted by violence’, I show that part of the beautification programme involves talking about more than the negative characteristics of these areas. The experiences and perspectives of two groups of young people who specifically use graffiti and street art within this framework of beautification constitute a vital source of information and represent attempts to produce alternative imaginaries. One is Sur Vano, a graffiti and street art collective from Ciudad Bolívar that runs an annual festival called Museo Libre. The other is BogotArt, a cultural organisation that works in La

Perseverancia. I compliment their discussions with interviews from other graffiti and street artists, as well as with people who live in these areas, and argue that the meanings associated with painting in La Perseverancia and Ciudad Bolívar reveal vernacular theories of the spatial dynamics of violence. In part, my participants emphasised the negative effects of stigma – indeed, the demonization of these areas and the people in them.

This symbolic violence is challenged by the appropriation and aesthetic transformation of the neighbourhood and the communities that are part of it. The process of beautification involves the visual transformation of the areas as a means of transforming people's attitudes to, and actions in, space. Graffiti and street artists encourage people to appropriate the spaces around them, but they also encourage a dialogue between artists and the local communities in which they are working. Thus, despite the marked absence of references to violence, the practices and motivations behind such graffiti and street art engage with the spatial dynamics of urban imaginaries of violence. They challenge the stigma of vulnerable neighbourhoods – in particular, those neighbourhoods that are associated with everyday urban violence, poverty, crime and exclusion – and they challenge the perceptions of the people who live in them – and, in particular, young people who continue to be stigmatised.

5.2.1 Beautifying space

The social dynamics of different neighbourhoods cannot be reduced to their proximity to violence, and those who do move around the city offer a different perspective. Graffiti and street artists, for example, tend to cover large areas of the city, encountering different people in different places. While some of the artists I spoke to were reticent about generalising their experiences of painting in particular neighbourhoods in the city ('a wall is a wall' muttered one graffiti artist), many people told me of encounters that offered a more nuanced interpretation of urban segregation. Stinkfish, for example, spoke of his experiences of different neighbourhoods:

[I]f you go to poor neighbourhoods, let's say, poor in the economic sense, graffiti is really well received. Because you're, you're going to an area where there are

lots of things lacking, and, off your own back, because you want to, you're going there and you're painting something to share with others. If you go to a wealthy neighbourhood, obviously you have to be three times as careful. [...] I've been able to paint in almost all of the neighbourhoods in Bogotá and this happens a lot. In working class neighbourhoods or poor neighbourhoods, you get there and the lady in the house comes out and gives you something to drink, something to eat, or they hang out with you, they talk to you. There are other neighbourhoods where you paint and no one, absolutely no one, stops to talk to you, no one gives you anything, right? In fact the opposite, a guard comes over and says, asks if you've got permission, or the police stop 5 times to ask what you're doing or they have... It goes much worse than in other neighbourhoods.

[S]i vas a barrios eh pobres, por decirlo de alguna manera, pobres en el sentido económico, el grafiti es muy bien recibido. Porque estás, vas a un lugar donde hay muchas carencias, y por tu cuenta, porque quieres, vas y pintas algo que compartes con los demás. Si vas a un barrio de dinero, obviamente tienes que tener el triple cuidado [...] Yo he podido pintar en casi todas las zonas de Bogotá, y pasa mucho eso. En barrios populares o barrios pobres, vas y sale la señora de la casa, te regala algo de tomar, o algo de comer, o están contigo, o hablan contigo. Hay otros barrios donde pintas y nadie, absolutamente nadie para a decirte nada, ni a dar nada, ¿sí? Al contrario, llega un vigilante te dice o - que tiene permiso, o la policía para 5 veces a preguntarte qué estás haciendo, o pues tienen - te va mucho peor que en otro barrio.

Stinkfish describes how the relative wealth of the local population influences their attitudes towards graffiti, but in doing so he is also challenging the dominant imaginary that decides that vulnerable neighbourhoods should be feared or avoided. Artists enjoy painting in them, these neighbourhoods are friendly and welcoming, and locals appreciate them, instead of suspecting them of wrongdoing. I certainly noticed this in Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia, and my experience of being there contrasted drastically with the worried looks and concerned advice that I would receive from people outside of these areas. The visual landscape was also striking, as the monotony of apartment blocks was replaced with painted facades and murals. Following projects

like Museo Libre and BogotArt provided an insight into how different the look and the feel of such neighbourhoods were in comparison to the more middle-class areas of the city. Even more significantly, such differences extended to the graffiti and street art in them.

In 2015, Museo Libre transformed the neighbourhoods of Ciudad Bolívar into an open-air urban art gallery by inviting graffiti and street artists from around the city to come and decorate the houses and buildings of the communities there.⁵⁷ It was organised by Sur Vano, a collective from the area, and has grown considerably since starting in 2013: from welcoming 12 artists in the first year, to 42 in 2014, to over a hundred in 2015, when I visited. As I walked around the neighbourhoods with the organisers of the events, and another friend I had met in Bogotá, the buzz of a festival was in the air. The locals whose houses and businesses had been painted encouraged others to agree to it as well, and waited anxiously for their artists to turn up and get working; ‘Where’s the Mexican?’ (*¿Dónde está el mexicano?*) the local shop owner called out each time we passed that day, ‘he’s coming, he’s coming’ (*ya viene, ya viene*), the guys from Sur Vano assured him. At one house, a young woman answered the door and considered the proposal carefully. Very carefully. She looked at the paperwork explaining the project. She looked at the photographs from previous years. Eventually she seemed to agree, but was concerned about what would be painted on her walls. It’s up to her and the artist to come to an agreement was the answer. What she didn’t want was anything with a theme of violence (*tema de violencia*). As the murals took shape and we wandered around the neighbourhood seeing the artwork from previous years, there was a noticeable absence of *temas de violencia*, especially compared to the graffiti and street art in city centre spaces like Calle 26 and La Candelaria. The shop owner eventually received his artist, who spent the day painting a beautiful bird on the outside wall of the establishment. Magical scenes started to adorn the walls of people’s houses, fantastic images of humans, animals and mythological creatures, enacting a fusion of the natural world with the built environment (figures 27-29). Children rode their bikes in front of a mural being painted of two brightly coloured figures riding their bikes (figure 30).

⁵⁷ Specifically, La Esmeralda, Vista Hermosa, Nutivara, Nueva Colombia, Manitas, Villa Gloria and Juan Pablo II. Although it seems like a long list, these neighbourhoods are small and close together so it was very easy to walk around all of the places that were being painted.

Linares, an artist and cartoonist who normally works with paper rather than brick, painted a mural evoking the strength and sound of music (figure 31). Elaborate throw-ups and pieces of graffiti writing were situated alongside images of dogs, people and birds, against brightly coloured backgrounds and abstract patterns (figures 32-33). While the locals had few requests, and the artists were normally free to design and paint what they wanted, there were sometimes negotiations to be made, from people just asking for a lot of colour, to more specific requests like passages from the bible (figure 34).

Furthermore, Ciudad Bolívar is not unusual. My trips to La Perseverancia included taking part in pilot versions of tours that BogotArt was trying to set up to showcase the neighbourhood or to walk through the woods in the mountain. Sometimes I would help out on Saturday mornings when they put on activities for the local children: playing football, making origami, learning how to juggle. On these occasions, children ran about playing and shouting, locals hung out on the street, the marketplace was filled with people eating, selling and chatting, because everyone knows each other. There, graffiti and street art don't exactly cover the neighbourhood, but you come across them down alleyways, in the main square, surrounding the school and playing court and then higher up the hill where the Circunvalar main road demarcates the border between the neighbourhood and the woods of the mountains (figure 35). Some of the city's most celebrated street artists have contributed to the visual landscape: Guache's trademark indigenous aesthetics adorn the famous food market, DjLu's stencilled portraits celebrate the neighbourhood's ties to rural life and sit alongside the phrase 'More isn't better' (*Más no es mejor*), and Toxicómano celebrates *chicha*, with twinkling corn and the assertion of *pura dicha*, or pure joy, a nod to the local 'Festival de la chicha, la vida y la dicha' (figures 36-38).⁵⁸ Such images actively celebrate the neighbourhood, the community, and their traditions and sense of belonging, but the apparent lack of explicit references to violence is noticeable.

Indeed, this absence is one of the characteristics of beautification programmes like those described above, whereby the visual landscape is transformed to aesthetically improve an area. More than that, though, I argue that not depicting violence is part of

⁵⁸ <http://www.bifurcaciones.cl/2016/09/festival-de-la-chicha/>

the transgressive action implicit in the projects run by Sur Vano and BogotArt.

Toxicómano hinted at this during an interview I conducted with him. Along with many other graffiti and street artists, he argued for a recognition of illegality as being a defining feature of graffiti. That which has permission or that which is funded is not so much graffiti as it is urban art, he says. However, the definition of transgression is more complicated. His explanation of the difference between adornment and beautification is revealing because it draws a distinction between doing something superficial and doing something that retains graffiti's transgressive spirit:

[I] think it can be good and be attractive, as long as it's not... 'lite'. But sometimes it changes its meaning, because you're in an area that might be vulnerable, in the south, where it's really great to do something pretty. Understand? That really does make someone feel good. Why not do it? In the same way, you want to tag something in the north and make it look ugly, dripping, because that's precisely how you want to make those people feel.

[C]reo que sea bien y sea atractivo, pero tampoco sea... 'lite'. Pero a veces cambia el pensamiento, porque estás en un sector tal vez vulnerable, en el sur, donde que chimba hacer algo bonito, ¿si me entiendes? Y que realmente inspire a alguien a sentirse bien. ¿Por qué no hacerlo? Como también quieres hacer en el norte el rayón y que se vea horrible y chorrea porque también quieres precisamente hacer sentir esa gente así.

Toxicómano is saying that it might not seem directly political or controversial, but the act of painting something beautiful in a vulnerable community is more than just adornment, it can be subversive. Likewise, an ugly tag takes on a different meaning a socio-economically wealthy area of town. As I show in this chapter, this is because it intervenes in the urban imaginary of that space. Rather than reinforcing the idea that the more vulnerable areas are the neighbourhoods to fear or avoid, Toxicómano implies that they are the ones to beautify, while the others are the ones to 'attack'. This nuanced interpretation of transgression is interesting because it seems to be elided in much of the literature on graffiti and street art. As I explain in the introduction, there is an ongoing distinction between the legal and illegal production of graffiti and street art. Transgression is related to the subversive content of graffiti and street art, to its position

outside of the confines of institutional gallery spaces and to the idea that they subvert the spaces in which they are placed, but it is always associated with illegality (Silva, 2013; Campos, 2015). However, the illegality of a piece of graffiti does not necessarily mean that it will be read in a subversive way, particularly given the worldwide celebration, or at least recognition, of these forms of cultural expression. Graffiti and street art as beautification do not sit easily within the subcultural standards of illicitness and illegality. In Bogotá (but this is also a trend around the world), graffiti artists and collectives work in collaboration with the local government, or at least using funding provided through them, although sometimes they are more independent or seek private backing. The graffiti and street art that I describe in this chapter are produced openly, they are painted with permission, the artists paint what people want them to paint, and the images are not explicitly transgressive. At the same time, they should not be reduced to adornments, marketing tactics or government propaganda. Such graffiti and street art might be different to more autonomous or illegal forms of production, but their transgressive potential should not be discounted. Though not illegal, their transgressive meaning is contextualised by the spaces in which they are placed; and in the case of La Perseverancia and Ciudad Bolívar, they subvert the expectations of their audiences and they challenge dominant narratives of violence within urban imaginaries. Moreover, the relationship between beautification and transgression offers a key insight into the struggle over meaning in spatialized imaginaries of violence.

This becomes clearer once you take into account the symbolic violence of stigma and prejudice and consider how it reinforces socialised segregation in Bogotá. In Vista Hermosa, people complained that Ciudad Bolívar shouldn't be labelled as especially violent or insecure because good people also live there, and they are honest, hardworking people (*'no deberían tenerlo fichado así, porque igual son barrios donde vive gente, y aquí también vive gente de bien, gente trabajadora, gente honrada'*). They said that it was stereotyped purely for being in the south (*'lo tienen, mal, como, mal catalogado por ser en el sur'*), and one woman laughed that 'they think we're so bad' (*'nos tienen re-mal'*). Likewise, interviews on the streets of La Perseverancia revealed that many people are proud of where they come from; 'La Perse is the best!' (*'La Perse es lo máximo!'*), one young man exclaimed when I asked about the neighbourhood. He

explained that people are proud of its traditions and history, all the while aware that the wealthier neighbourhoods surrounding them 'see us as garbage' (*'nos ven como basura'*). The violence that these locals identify is related to the idea that the spatial imaginaries of the two neighbourhoods are based on a misperception, an untrue social truth, or at least one that is not the whole truth. Indeed, stigma is formed through the relationship between holding particular attributes and the stereotypes associated with such attributes, which then come to dominate. Fundamentally, stigma reinforces the otherness of social subjects through their 'undesirable' attributes (Goffman, 1968, p. 14). It is, therefore, significant that it is not the violence that these research participants are denying, but the idea of 'differentness'. Violence and crime were recognised as being part of everyday life in those areas; there are obviously people who are involved in criminal dealings, but this is the case everywhere, people argued. In Vista Hermosa, one person reinforced this through a comparison with the north of the city, saying that it is assumed to be where the *crème de la crème* of society lives, but there are still bad people there (*'en la parte del norte donde vive se supone que la crema y nata de la sociedad, también hay gente mala'*). The violent reputations of the neighbourhoods are deflected by this counter-imaginary that violence is everywhere.

Instead of feeding into an imaginary that associates the neighbourhoods exclusively with crime, violence and poverty, further stigmatising the people from these areas, graffiti and street art are used by artists and organisations to resist the negative connotations of living in less wealthy conditions, to challenge the idea that these are no-go areas and to subvert people's expectations of them. Indeed, Leo argues that the internalisation of narratives of violence and exclusion mean that spaces of the city are not only segregated, but that people in areas like La Perseverancia feel excluded from some of the more public and shared spaces of the city:

There are people who, who can tell you a thousand bad things about La Perseverancia, but they've never spoken to someone from the neighbourhood, they've never gone into the neighbourhood. So, they just have these imaginaries in their heads that help to discriminate the group even more, and then, see, this external discrimination ends up turning into an internal discrimination where even they don't feel like they belong in places where the rest of society does.

Hay gente que, que te puede decir mil cosas mal de La Perseverancia, pero nunca ha hablado con una persona de ese barrio, nunca entraba a ese barrio, entonces simplemente tiene imaginarios en la cabeza que ayudan a discriminar mucho más este grupo y pues, digamos, esta discriminación externa también se termina trasladando a una discriminación interna, ellos mismos también se sienten que de pronto ellos no coinciden en otros lugares donde la sociedad sí podría.

Leo is referring to the feeling of being excluded from art galleries and explaining why they wanted to take art and culture to La Perseverancia. This response is interesting because it brings into play the idea of inclusion/exclusion and how it extends beyond the physical location of marginalised neighbourhoods. Where La Perseverancia sits in the centre of the city and has access to a number of cultural institutions, people still don't feel like they belong in the symbolic and cultural city centre spaces. That kind of culture isn't for them, in other words. Part of aesthetically transforming working-class neighbourhoods, then, is also to show that they do have a right to art and culture. This is directly reflected in the graffiti and street art that celebrates its cultural identity. Furthermore, La Perseverancia's traditions and practices are important sites of resistance, in that they challenge homogenising tendencies in popular culture by asserting difference and insisting on the neighbourhood's working-class identity and close ties to rural culture (Carreira, 2016). Likewise, subverting the expectations of Ciudad Bolívar was precisely the aim of Museo Libre. This took the form not only of painting the neighbourhood, but was clear through my conversations with people as I spent time in the *barrio* of Nueva Colombia. Seeing Monserrate from the south would be unusual, if not downright alarming, for many in the north of Bogotá and certainly for tourists, because the mountain, with Christ atop of it, orients people in the city. Thus, the view from the south would be a reminder that they are in a dangerous area, but the people I spoke to raved about the amazing views over the city that they had. The evocative names of the neighbourhoods reflect these discourses; 'Vista Hermosa', 'Paraíso', 'La Esmeralda' are alluring, while La Perseverancia (meaning perseverance) commends the tenacity of the residents. In the neighbourhood of Naciones Unidas, in Ciudad Bolívar, I also went to an *olla comunitaria*, community gatherings that involve sharing food, which in this case was a *sancocho* that was being prepared by those

organising and participating in the event. Again, there was life on the streets and people of all generations came together for the showcase at the local recreation centre, to watch the breakdance performances, share a meal, play football and chat by the community garden (figure 39).

Within this context, beautification is about recognising that these are neighbourhoods that should be celebrated and enjoyed, that are not-only-violent. One could, arguably, interpret the absence of violence in the graffiti and street art as representing escapism, but even that is framed within a recognition of the everydayness of violence. After all, as street artist Lili Cuca commented, 'we live in a world that is so ugly at times, that I think it's ok to do something [...] that's not overly aggressive towards the people who are reading and interpreting it' (*'vivimos en un mundo a veces tan feo que para mí está bien plantar algo [...] que no sea tan agresivo ante las lecturas de quien lo ve'*). The desire to engage the audience and challenge the violent image of such neighbourhoods has even led to a rethinking of the ways in which more explicitly political collectives use graffiti and street art. One of the members of the collective Aitue explained that there had been a shift in their focus and they had decided to seek out the already existing, more positive narratives about the places in which they lived and worked:

[P]eople complain a lot [...] in the work that we do, with communities, with young people, with children [...] and there is a feeling that people are always denouncing something. But it also gets [...] to the point where you say ok, let's stop diagnosing the situation, being negative, about what is happening in the neighbourhood, in the school [...] because there are also a lot of good things that aren't being told.

[L]a gente se queja mucho [...] en el trabajo que nosotros hacemos, que es con comunidades, con jóvenes, con niños [...] y el malestar es que la gente siempre denuncia. Pero también llega [...] un punto en el que se dice como bueno, pues, paremos de ser diagnósticos, negativos, de lo que pasa en el barrio, de lo que pasa en el colegio [...] porque hay muchas cosas muy buenas que, que no se cuentan.

In response to the over-representation of violence, Guayra describes the need to focus on the positive aspects of marginalised neighbourhoods and to listen to how people in those communities want to be represented.

Although beautification is about fantasy and imagination, there is a difference between fantasy as escape, divorced from projects and actions, and imagination as 'a staging ground for action' (Appadurai, 1996, p. 7). For Lucas, Museo Libre should be framed through their intention to 'promot[e] the construction of a new imaginary of the territory' (*'promover la construcción de un nuevo imaginario hacia el territorio'*). In La Perseverancia, the aesthetic transformation is also projective. As Leo explains:

When people started to see that there were more examples of artistic expression in the neighbourhood, apart from the colourful houses, that there were also works of art that transmitted a message, people started to ask what is this, what is going on there, why have they done that? And this helped to break down some of the prejudices that they held towards the neighbourhood. At least by starting to ask questions and show an interest in something, it could be the first step to building up a greater understanding.

[C]uando la gente comenzó a ver que había, como, más expresiones artísticas allá en el barrio, cuando comenzaban a ver que aparte de casas coloridas también en el barrio había como obras y obras que [...] transmitió un mensaje, la gente por lo menos comenzó a preguntarse qué es eso, qué hay detrás, por qué se ha hecho esto? Y pues esto ayudó un poco a que se rompa esta, digamos, estos prejuicios que se tienen frente al barrio. Por lo menos a comenzar a hacerse preguntas y mostrar más interés sobre algo, por lo menos sea el primer paso para generar este entendimiento.

The aim is relatively modest: to encourage people to start to think that there might be more to the neighbourhood, that there might be art and culture in the neighbourhood and that it might even be worth exploring in more depth. Thus, the aesthetic transformation that I discuss in this chapter is not only the visual beautification of the neighbourhoods in Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia, but the symbolic transformation of their identity within urban imaginaries. Furthermore, the processes

and motivations of graffiti and street artists participating in projects of beautification build up a critical theory of the spatialization of violences and of the imbrication of structural and cultural violence. One of the ways they do this is by focusing on images of non-violence as a response to unfair stigma and prejudice that is decided by geographic location. Another, as I discuss in the following section, is by encouraging the appropriation of space to improve community cohesion within vulnerable neighbourhoods and problematize the stigmas that are associated not just with place but with specific social groups in those places.

5.2.2 Neighbourhood dynamics

Instead of feeding into an imaginary that associates the neighbourhood exclusively with crime, violence and poverty, graffiti and street art are used by artists and organisations to resist the negative connotations of living in less wealthy conditions, to challenge the idea that these are no go areas and to subvert people's expectations of these areas and the people in them. There is a utopian tendency in urban studies to value public space because of the unexpected social encounters that can take place within it (Amin and Thrift, 2002; Amin, 2008). The possibility of meeting new people, of gathering as a collective and of sharing political and civic ideas is one part of it. Another part of it is the idea that the material landscape can encourage forms of engagement between people and the spaces around them. In Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia, graffiti and street art provide the means to foster such encounters, both with and within the space. One of the members of Sur Vano explained that it was through graffiti and street art that he began to explore Ciudad Bolívar more, having previously only travelled between school and home because he had internalised the idea that he lived in a dangerous area. Their motivation to set up Museo Libre was precisely to encourage a greater understanding of the area, not only by inviting other people to visit but by urging local people to appropriate the spaces around them. Furthermore, they have noticed an impact in just a few years. As Wilson put it:

After each version of Museo Libre we analyse what was different from the year before, and we have noticed how, how much people's perspectives changed in the first, second, third version... and it has, this change has been building and

people, like, respect what has been painted as 'my block', 'my neighbourhood', 'my space where I live', yeah? Because it's being created through graffiti, with all of the styles that there are, because it's not just graffiti it's also murals [...] the fact is that it is, it is doing something to the neighbourhood that makes people appropriate it and feel, they feel a bit more love for the spaces in which they live.

[T]erminar cada versión de Museo Libre, hacemos como un análisis de, de ¿qué fue diferente del año anterior?, y sí nos damos cuenta, como, de la cantidad en que cambió la perspectiva de la gente en el primero, en el segundo, en el tercero... y sí ha ido creciendo, como, ese cambio, y ya la gente como que [...] respeten un poco lo que ya se pintó, como que 'mi cuadra' o 'mi barrio', 'mi espacio donde yo habito', ¿sí? Porque se está, se está generando como eso a través del graffiti, con todos los estilos que hay, porque no es solo graffiti sino mural [...] el hecho es que se está, se está haciendo algo acá en el barrio que hace que las personas se apropian como de eso, y sientan, sientan un poco más de amor por ese espacio en el que habitan.

As the neighbourhood fills with paintings each year, people increasingly identify the spaces around them with graffiti and street art. In Wilson's quote, the implication is that this process of painting contributes to the positive connotations of the area, feeling more love for it than they did before. The symbolic appropriation suggested by the references to 'mi barrio, mi cuadra' reveals the transformative potential of the collective imagination. In areas like Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia, such a potential transformation is significant considering the stigma of violence and, especially, when these stigmas are internalised. It also speaks to the demands of the right to the city; the demand to participate in the production of space and counteract the processes of exclusion and alienation.

The use of graffiti and street art as a way of articulating this right to the city is significant because it represents a very visible appropriation of public space, but also because it encourages community cohesion and specifically challenges the stigmas attached not just to place but to young people. Accordingly, graffiti and street art represent a tool for personal, social and community development and can be situated within the broader project of beautification. As a way of critiquing urban imaginaries of spatialized

violences, graffiti and street artists insist on the recognition of non-violence, or not-only-violence, but not only by focusing on the positive characteristics of these neighbourhoods, also by transforming the image of young people who are involved in this beautification. Indeed, Cest's perspective of the transformative potential of graffiti and street art (through beautification) supports the idea that they encourage encounters that can help to dismantle the perceived divide between social groups:

[A]s soon as there's some sort of cultural activity in the neighbourhood, [...] when the kids have decided to paint the wall of the communal room, that's when the neighbours come and see what's happening. They realise that the kids that are painting are the same kids they've seen grow up all their lives in the neighbourhood, that that's the son of whoever, the daughter of so and so, the son of the nephew, of the cousin, of the uncle, or rather that they're people, people. [...] And that these are [...] kids who can do something pretty in the neighbourhood.

[E]n el momento en que hay una actividad cultural en el barrio, [...] cuando los muchachos decidieron tomarse la pared del salón comunal entonces los vecinos salieron a mirar, a ver qué. Se dieron cuenta de que los muchachos que estaban pintando ahí son los mismos que han visto crecer durante toda su vida en el barrio, que es el hijo de tal, que es la hija de tal, que es el hijo del sobrino, del primo, del tío, o sea que son gente, gente. [...] Y que [...] son muchachos que se pueden hacer algo muy bonito en el barrio.

Graffiti and street art encourage young people to take their own initiative and organise themselves, which includes fundraising for materials, speaking to the local community, and getting permission to paint a mural. Significantly, though, they do not just beautify space by persuading young people to choose non-violence, they also work specifically towards changing the relationship with the community and encouraging the community to challenge the prejudices attached to young people, counteracting the effects of stigma that lead to people being discredited (Goffman, 1968). This is noteworthy because street crime is especially associated with young, working-class men, the same social group that dominates the field of graffiti and street art, and especially that which is linked to hip-hop subcultures. Cest is a graffiti writer from Suba who I met during

Museo Libre and he participates in various local community and youth projects around the city. He describes how imaginaries of hip-hop intensify the prejudices that are faced by young people in the city:

But see you're walking along, the fact that you are dressed like a rapper, or rather, you're going down a street, I'm going and dressed like a rapper, another young man is dressed like a rocker, let's say, and another is going along wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase. The one with the suit and briefcase is the one who has the weapon. But who do you think they're going to stop and search? The rapper. See?

And the rocker as well?

No, the rocker they don't search either, the rapper. Why? Because unfortunately there are many people who dress like or call themselves rappers or wear caps and the oversized stuff, or baggy clothes, but they're delinquents. So there's a, well, like, you can't expect that everyone in the culture is alright and has a good lifestyle. That would be ideal, but it's not real. So there are a lot of people who belong to the hip-hop culture and have a more gangster way of life [...] And that's why they like rap, because they feel more gangster, they feel rebellious, they appropriate this culture and its all-American stuff that was part of that life but only existed there.

Pero digamos tú vas caminando, por el hecho de que te vean vestido de rapero, o sea, tú vas por una calle, voy yo que voy vestido de rapero, va otro muchacho que va vestido de digamos rockero, y va otro muchacho que tiene un traje de paño y un maletín. El que tiene traje de paño y maletín es el que tiene el arma. Pero a quién crees que van a requisar? Al rapero. Ves?

Y al rockero también?

No, al rockero no lo requisan tampoco, al rapero. Por qué? Porque lastimosamente hay muchas personas que se visten o se hacen llamar raperos o se visten con gorras o con esa cosa ancha o con ropa ancha, pero son delincuentes. Entonces hay un pues, si, o sea uno no podría esperar que toda la

gente que está en esa cultura pues está bien y tenga un proyecto de vida. Eso sería un utópico pero no es real. Entonces hay mucha gente que pertenece también a esa cultura de hip hop y pues llevan una vida un poco más gangster [...] Y por eso les gusta el hip hop, porque se sienten más gangster, se sienten en contravía, o sea apropian esa, esa cultura y esa all-americana que se vivió y que existe solamente allá.

In this analysis, the external imaginaries of young men who look like *raperos* stigmatise them by associating them with criminality and violence; they will be the ones targeted by police. Nevertheless, Cest admits that many delinquents do dress like rappers and appropriate the styles of the subculture. This apparent contradiction can be situated within the divergent trajectories of progressive hip-hop and Gangsta rap (Tickner, 2008). In one version of the subculture, young people use hip-hop to challenge their violent image. In another, they appropriate that same image. Particularly in areas where there are social problems, violence, fewer resources, territorial gangs and fear, Cest argues that following hip-hop can go in different directions for the kids there:

[W]hen you see groups of young kids around in the street, and you see them starting to take an interest in rap, in being on the street, that sort of thing, there are two options. These young kids might become, let's say, leaders in their community; being rappers they can become community leaders and develop positive things, or they can become the bad guys in the community and the ones that the community don't want because they are rappers and because, according to them, they are the ones who steal, the ones who smoke weed, who take drugs and do all of the bad things.

[C]uando tú ves los grupitos de muchachos por ahí en la calle y los ves así como que están empezando a coger los pasos en el rap, en la calle, en eso, ahí hay dos opciones. O esos muchachos o se vuelven, digámoslo, líderes en su comunidad; siendo raperos se pueden volver líderes ahí y fomentar cosas buenas, o se pueden volver los malos de la comunidad y los que la comunidad no quiere porque son raperos y porque son los que roban, los que fuman marihuana, los que meten drogas, los que hacen cosas malas según ellos.

Cest differentiates between the kids who become community leaders through rap, and those who follow a criminal path through rap. For that reason, hip-hop schools and youth workshops in the marginalised neighbourhoods of Bogotá pursue the progressive strand. The idea is that this form of cultural development acts as an alternative to violence and can be an effective way to get young people involved in cultural activities, can allow them to explore cultural and professional avenues, give them something to work towards and have a direct impact on the spaces around them.

Furthermore, it represents an attempt to shift the imaginaries of who these young people are and what right they have to the city. Youth politics include a variety of forms that are not necessarily recognised as political actions but that do represent people's engagement with the world around them and foster creativity and a sense of belonging (Patiño *et al.*, 2014). Hip-hop is about claiming a positive identity based on experiences of inequality and marginalisation (Tickner, 2008). Thus, it is fundamentally about, and speaks directly to, the structural and cultural violences that are embedded in society but are often reproduced uncritically. The responses to such violence might be different (challenging stigma or, you could argue, reinforcing stereotypes), but there is an underlying recognition of it and an attempt to make it visible by appropriating the discourse, by claiming the right to speak. Furthermore, the stigma of hip-hop draws attention to the direct violence that can be associated with cultural violence. Young men are not just perpetrators of violence, they are victims of violence – and especially when they are seen as disposable or undesirable. The question of social cleansing, and the acceptance or tolerance of it within the community, is a phenomenon that brings together political violence, urban space and the imaginary of citizenship. It came up in my interview with Guayra:

And even within the communities, in that situation people say [...] or rather, they don't say they should be killed but if some kids who have been involved in drugs end up being killed, with the reproduction of indifference in society, it is, and it has been, a powerful weapon to sustain this, this kind of logic. And people don't feel remorse, seriously, that a kid who they have seen grow up, who they have seen play with their kids, and they have seen the kid's destruction because of

abandonment or economic situations or family, that the kid is killed doesn't produce any kind of indignation or solidarity.

Y las mismas comunidades, y la gente en esa situación dice [...] o sea, no dicen hay que matarlos pero si venga matar a unos chicos que estaban en las drogas, no, o sea, con la producción social de indiferencia es, y ha sido, un arma muy poderosa para sostener esta, esta lógica de vida. Y la gente no le remuerde, o sea, en serio, que maten a un chico que lo vieron crecer y que vieron que, que jugaba con sus hijos y que, o sea, que vieron a esa persona y vieron toda su degradación producto de, el abandono, por situaciones económicas, familiares, y que lo maten no genera una expresión de indignación o de solidaridad.

The normalisation of social cleansing and the repeated phrase that 'they must have done something' is one example of the coping mechanisms that emerge in the face of multiple violences, but hip-hop has been one of the ways in which young people in areas like Ciudad Bolívar have denounced the violence of social cleansing.⁵⁹ They specifically draw attention to the imbrication of stigma and direct violence, not only through the targeting of people who are poor or deemed transgressive in some way but through the cultural violence that legitimises it. Their demand for inclusion is part of a more general beautification project, but it is also significant because it sheds light on ways of seeing violence, which can be seen through the image of them as perpetrators of violence, as criminals from these dangerous neighbourhoods, or as victims of violences and part of vulnerable communities.

Thus, projects like Museo Libre and organisations like BogotArt use graffiti and street art to re-signify public space, drawing people into the neighbourhoods that they would normally avoid as well as changing people's relationships with their own neighbourhoods. Such an analysis draws a parallel between the democratic potential of public space as a place of encounter, and the belief that encounters in and with space lead to a recognition that stigmatised communities are not as violent as they are imagined to be. The vernacular theory of spatialized violence that emerges, then, focuses on the effects of everyday stigma on the people who live in such areas. This

⁵⁹ <https://colombia2020.elespectador.com/pais/hip-hop-contra-la-limpieza-social-en-Bogotá>

does not just lay the blame on the kids who choose crime and violence, but on the wider community who have internalised the fear and stigma associated with such people and places. Therefore, changing the aesthetics of the neighbourhood is one part of beautification, but the right to the city that is encouraged through such beautification is about challenging alienation by encouraging the appropriation of space, and about recognising the rights of citizens to 'belong' to the wider urban community, which also means the right to be recognised as victims of particular forms of invisible violence.

5.3 Complexities and contradictions

There are, however, tensions and complexities associated with such beautification programmes. The above shows that people critique violence by drawing out the effects of stigma and prejudice, and, indeed, it is important not to ignore their negative and distorting effects. But neither should the realities of structural and direct violences be ignored. The lack of explicit references to violence in places like Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia was also explained by my participants through the fear of reprisal, especially when the anonymity of the artist is not guaranteed, and in relation to depictions of violence that are a continuing reality – including social cleansing, criminal networks and the political violence of the state. In the face of such violences, I explore the perspectives of graffiti and street artists who either find it impossible to produce particular kinds of work in certain areas, or have to find a way of negotiating it. Beautifying space does not rid an area of violences, it risks romanticising them. These different approaches to beautification do not negate the intentions or perspectives of those who represent non-violence, rather they offer a greater insight into the complexities and contradictions of spatialized violences, negotiating the balance between demonising and romanticising neighbourhoods like Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia.

5.3.1 *Gaps, silences, negotiations*

Thinking about the different spaces of the city and what could be seen on the walls, the words of one muralist in particular captured my attention; 'painting on 26 is still placing

ourselves in the centre, or rather, the 26 onwards is the north, right? [...] it's still the gallery of the city, exhibiting the pretty side of the city' (*'meternos en la 26 sigue siendo meternos en la centralidad, o sea, la 26 para allá es el norte, ¿sí? [...] sigue siendo la galería de la ciudad que es muestra de la ciudad bonita'*). In this quote, Guayra is not just referring to the elaborate aesthetics of the urban interventions in the city centre, but the possibilities of representation and the realities of violence in different spaces of the city. As described in the previous chapter, the presence of graffiti and street art on Calle 26 is, of course, significant. Even though some of the murals are more mediated than others, they draw attention to important realities of violence in the country's trajectory. Nevertheless, Calle 26 does not reflect the city and all of its urban realities. In this section of the chapter, I show that particular neighbourhoods are marked not just by the graffiti that is there, but by what is not there.

It is difficult to talk about the absence of graffiti and street art in a city like Bogotá, where it sometimes seems that you can't walk further than one block without seeing some sort of inscription on the walls. However, a subtle distinction emerges between different spaces of the city in relation to what kinds of graffiti tend to be more or less visible, and what kinds of messages they depict. During my time in Bogotá I tried to compare different neighbourhoods based on the graffiti and street art that I saw there, as well as paying close attention to how artists and other city dwellers perceived the possibilities of representation. Subtle suggestions, explicit denunciations and contradictory statements problematized the politics of beautification and revealed notable silences (Felman, 1999). Despite their global presence, graffiti and street art respond to local contexts and, as such, an absence is indicative of the dynamics and possibilities of public space in specific places (Bush, 2013). Thus, while people might not talk about censorship in relation to Bogotá, there were different contexts in which artists felt limited in relation to what they could say, or there were measures that they described taking to negotiate the possibility of retaliation. DjLu, for example, talks about the choice of space in relation to the risks of censorship, even if it is something that he only rarely feels like he needs to consider:

[A]rt, for me, talks about terrible things but from an aesthetic position that subverts the terrible and makes it beautiful. So, I haven't had any problems

where, let's say, I've thought 'oh no, I can't put that there', right? Obviously it has happened to me, but only a couple of times. I have got a few pieces that are directly related to the paramilitaries, for example I've got one of a chainsaw and it says 'paraco' and whatever. Obviously with this graffiti, I wouldn't put it up in a paramilitary zone, right? [...] I think that's going beyond what I want to do, which is make art. Like, I would be playing with fire there. I'm not a politician, I'm not an activist. I'm not a guerrilla. No, I'm an artist. So I'm not going to get that close to the flames.

[E]l arte, para mí, habla de cosas terribles, pero a partir de una estética que subvierte lo terrible y lo vuelve bello. Entonces, no he tenido problemas digamos de pensar 'uy no, eso no lo puedo poner allá', ¿sí? Obviamente me ha pasado, pero es poco las veces. Digamos, tengo, tengo algunas obras que son directamente relacionadas con el paramilitarismo, por ejemplo, tengo una que es una motosierra que dice 'paraco' y tal. Obviamente ese, ese grafiti yo no, no lo pondría, pues, en zonas paramilitares, ¿me entiendes? [...] creo que ya se sale un poco de, de la cuestión que a mí me interesa que es hacer arte. O sea, ya estaría yo jugando con candela. Y pues no, yo no soy político, no soy activista. No soy guerrillero, no. No, yo soy artista. Entonces también pues no voy a meter las manos al fuego así de fuerte.

His interpretation of the politics of representation is contradictory. He initially argues that there isn't censorship, that he feels free to create his socio-political messages, but immediately qualifies that by saying that he does draw a line in relation to the risks that he is willing to take. Moreover, his hesitation is not related to the content of his art but to the spaces within which he places it: he still makes pieces that denounce paramilitary organisations, he just wouldn't show it to them. As he puts it, he's not a politician, nor an activist, nor a guerrilla. As an artist, he has different priorities and can only be expected to do so much to deal with the realities of violence. However, the limitations that artists experience, that they perceive or that they have to negotiate reveal the complexities of spatialized violence. At one point during Museo Libre, for example, the site chosen for one of the murals had to be rearranged because the local drug dealers thought it was too close to their territory. Another spot was found, and nothing much

happened, but their control was part of everyday life and the job of Sur Vano was to negotiate rather than confront that threat of violence.

Of course, some of the people using graffiti and street art do identify as activists, and the risk of censorship is something that is either negotiated or that serves as motivation. According to Machete, graffiti exists as a means of denunciation, but that doesn't mean that there aren't risks in doing it:

[T]alking about the conflict in Colombia is difficult, it's complicated. And sometimes you have to do it anonymously, like sometimes on the walls where you're talking about these things, it's best not to say who did it because these 'dark forces' are still around. Paramilitarism in Colombia hasn't ended, it's here and they're in the cities, camouflaged, and so you never know, you never know when you might be painting about these things and then they capture you, or disappear you, you don't know what might happen. These themes of victims, of the disappeared, they're complex. You do them, because that's what graffiti is for, to denounce. But it's difficult.

[T]ocar temas del conflicto en Colombia eso es difícil, es complicado. Y a veces hay que hacerlo de manera anónimo, o sea, en muros donde a veces si uno habla de cosas así es, mejor no poner quien lo hizo porque, porque esas fuerzas oscuras todavía están allí. El paramilitarismo en Colombia no se ha acabado, está ahí y están metidos acá en las ciudades, camuflados y, entonces uno no sabe, uno no sabe en qué momento puede estar pintando cosas así, pues lo capturen, lo desaparezcan, o no se sabe qué pueda pasar. Esos temas de víctimas, de desaparecidos, son complejos. Se hacen, porque para eso es el grafiti, para denunciar. Pero es difícil.

The euphemistically termed dark forces refer to the criminal organisations that perpetrate political violence, and to the fear that is instilled in the civilian population in Colombia. While Machete suggested that anonymity is the way to get around this threat, Dexpierte explained their process in more detail:

I think that what we have learnt to do is choose the context. Like, there are things that you can say aloud, directly, and there are other things that we say,

but not as nicely. Or, we make sure that we're accompanied by various people. It's about reading the context and learning to look after yourself in the surroundings. To avoid things.

Yo creo que hemos tocado muchísimos temas. [...] Pero sí creo que lo que hemos aprendido es como elegir los contextos, si? Como que hay cosas que podemos decir en voz alta y muy directamente, y otras cosas que, las decimos, pero no, no hacemos como tanta, tanta bella, no? O sea. O, nos aseguramos de estar acompañados de varias personas. [...] Es como aprender a leer el contexto, a aprender a cuidarse también en el entorno. Esto es para evitar cosas.

In this quote from Dexpierte, the spatial context is relevant. There are some spaces that are more dangerous than others. Negotiating the threat of violence involves reading the context. In Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia, graffiti and street artists are out in the open, encouraging people to appropriate and participate in their neighbourhoods, to beautify the spaces around them. Anonymity is more difficult to maintain in such places, and the consequences can be severe. During my interview with Guayra, she explicitly stated the risks associated with painting in particular areas:

In the neighbourhood you can't paint a mural that denounces drug dealing, trafficking, the relationship between the police and... I don't know, like the tolerance shown by the police and the community in relation to drug trafficking and dealing. You can't do it [...] because you're exposing yourself. Right? Because you're exposing yourself and there is a power there that is watching, controlling and deciding what can happen and what can't, and not even in a particularly organised way. But there's the 'olla', which is where they sell, and it has its own bosses and these bosses own and control the space. It's like the country. But we still think that in the cities this doesn't happen and you don't hear about it.

[E]n el barrio tú no puedes hacer un mural en el que denuncias el tema [...] del narcotráfico, el microtráfico, la ligación entre la policía o la, no sé, como la permisividad de la policía y de la comunidad frente al tema de narcotráfico y microtráfico. No lo puedes hacer [...] porque te estás exponiendo. ¿Sí? [...] [Y] hay un poder que vigila, controla y ordena qué se puede y qué no y ni siquiera tiene

que ser de forma tan organizada. Pero pues la olla, que es en donde se vende, tiene un, unos respectivos capos y esos respectivos capos tienen y controlan el espacio. Es como el país, ¿sí? Pero todavía pensamos que en las ciudades eso no se vive y no se entiende.

There is, therefore, a presence that watches to make sure you are not saying anything that explicitly implicates the criminal networks. There is an unspoken truth that it is dangerous to speak too loudly or too directly about particular realities of violence in Colombia (Taussig, 1992, p. 22). The production of explicitly political graffiti and street art is constrained by this reality.

In comparison with the first half of this chapter, it is notable that the collective representation of violence is at odds with reality, but here it is not because people imagine violence that isn't there – rather it is about not recognising the violence that is there. One of the artists from Machete explicitly draws attention to how political and everyday violences overlap but are invisible:

There are many people who come here to claim reparation for their dead, who have been displaced from one city to another and they find different kinds of victimisation; the lack of work, the fact that no one will rent them a place, [...] racial discrimination, discrimination [...] that's social, gender based. This city is completely submerged in violence. [...] [H]ere people might think that it doesn't happen in Bogotá but if you go to the neighbourhoods then it's a different reality.

Hay muchas personas que vienen aquí para reparar sus muertos, que habían desplazado de una ciudad a otra y se encuentran aquí con diferentes tipos de victimizaciones, la falta de trabajo, que no le arriendan en ninguna parte, [...] La discriminación racial, la discriminación [...] social, de género. Esta ciudad está completamente sumida en la violencia. [...] [A]quí las personas piensan tal vez que en Bogotá no sucede, pero si tú vas a los barrios la realidad es otra.

People who flee the complex dynamics of the armed conflict in rural areas tend not to have access to financial resources. Once they arrive in the city, the structural and cultural violence of discrimination compounds the political violence of forced

displacement, and they are faced with a lack of institutional and social support networks (Segura Escobar, 2000). Thus, the multiplicity of violences in everyday life leads to this image of submersion, but the visibility of this reality is confined to the marginalised neighbourhoods of the city. Moreover, this invisibility contributes to the contradictions embedded in urban imaginaries in relation to what is seen and what is not seen, particularly in different spaces of the city. She continues:

It's just that there are so many kinds of violence here. Because here, well, there aren't, paramilitaries as paramilitaries, per se, but actually there are. There is no guerrilla movement here, but there are groups, that protect neighbourhoods. According to them. According to them. Here there are crimes against humanity, because many trade union leaders have been assassinated and not only trade unionists but community leaders, who are only known within the neighbourhood.

Es que aquí hay tantos tipos de violencia. Porque pues aquí pues no están, los paracos como paracos, pero si los hay. Aquí no hay un movimiento de guerrilla, pero hay bandas, que protegen los barrios. Según ellos. Según ellos. Aquí hay, victimizaciones de lesa humanidad, porque aquí muchos líderes sindicales son asesinados y no solo líderes sindicales sino líderes comunitarios, de los cuales solo sabe el barrio.

If the spatialization of violence was marked when people discussed the symbolic violence of stigma, it is even more striking in this recognition of structural inequality and political repression. The spaces within which terror manipulates people are more diffuse than is necessarily realised; terror is not only mobilised by armed groups in the countryside, they are in cities as well (Pécaut, 2000). But, of course, within the cities they are in specific areas.

Violence is, thus, inscribed onto space (Feldman, 1991; Ochs, 2013). In Bogotá, spatial forms of marginalization and exclusion are entrenched. The stigma of violence can have the effect of demonising and misrepresenting entire communities and the ways in which they interact with the spaces around them. In Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia this stigma dominates urban imaginaries, which then fail to appreciate the dynamism and

vitality of people living in close proximity and interacting in public space (Jacobs, 1972). Furthermore, it ignores local strategies for negotiating violence by failing to pay attention to actual living conditions and the way people manage violence in its various guises (Jacobs, 1972, p. 57). Rather than reducing residents to either resistant or submissive stereotypes, the subtleties of violence require a recognition of negotiated survival strategies where people live alongside violence (Lizarazo, 2018, p. 177). The question is, how do these realities of violence and the strategies for negotiating them relate to the institutional and grassroots beautification programmes in La Perseverancia and Ciudad Bolívar? In the following section I discuss the balance between trying to challenge the stigma of violence that clouds people's expectations of certain communities, while being realistic about the different experiences of violence in different spaces of the city. It is a difficult one to maintain, but it is precisely this difficulty that demonstrates the nuances of spatialized violence in everyday life.

5.3.2 Romanticisation vs Demonization

While the risk of violence and crime dominate imaginaries of fear, they are not only imagined. In La Perseverancia, some of the problems in the neighbourhood are written on the walls: 'there are too many paisas' (*los paisas sobran*) appears in the main square (figure 40). It is a reference to one of the criminal gangs from Antioquia, dealing in hired assassination, extortion and drug trafficking. Since the fall of the major cartels, drug dealing and other criminal activities were taken over by smaller organisations in urban areas. Some of their members tried to install themselves in La Perseverancia but were eventually kicked out because the neighbourhood already has gangs of their own, pursuing their own criminal endeavours.⁶⁰ Graffiti can also, of course, represent violence and intimidation, and the names of armed groups represent terror tactics that stem from *La Violencia*.⁶¹ Again in La Perseverancia, FARC was written in big red letters on the corner of one of the streets – but it's a lie, they assured me (figure 41). Nonetheless, they serve as a reminder that the idyllic images of community-focused, unfairly stigmatised neighbourhoods that I have used to describe La Perseverancia and Ciudad

⁶⁰ <http://www.semana.com/nacion/articulo/cae-el-terror-de-ciudad-Bolívar-santa-fe/385643-3>

⁶¹ Although it is important to note the difference between graffiti in urban and rural areas.

Bolívar are somewhat misleading. Each time I visited La Perseverancia (sometimes in a group, sometimes alone but meeting someone from the area), my presence did not go unnoticed and the people who I was working with would insist that I be accompanied wherever I went. I would be met at the marketplace and dropped off in the city centre (all of five minutes' walk away). On one occasion, two police officers on motorbikes stopped our guide to carry out an identity-check (a *requisa*) and warned him (apparently without irony) that our safety was his responsibility. On another occasion, local women approached our guides to admonish them for taking us to the dangerous parts of the neighbourhood, commanding them to keep an eye on us. There were times when such warnings were vindicated. As we climbed one of the central streets, heading for the woods, our guide hid at the back of the group when he saw some locals he knew catch sight of us. As their eyes widened and they started to approach, he jumped out with laughter. They all had a big laugh and joked that they thought Christmas had come early when they saw these tourists wandering around the neighbourhood on their own, ripe for pickpocketing. The risks associated with outsider status were also confirmed in Ciudad Bolívar, when a friend had her camera snatched from around her neck during one of the days of Museo Libre. The person who did it was chased (to cries of '*rata*', alerting other residents) and the camera was recovered, but afterwards the discussions about having spotted him earlier and being wary of him (he seemed drunk) were revealing. They showed that people were on the lookout, that they were cautious about what was going on, who was around and what they were doing.

To a certain extent, the realities of violence call into question the transformative potential of graffiti and street art. Indeed, the limits of beautification as a way of challenging imaginaries guided by fear, stigma and prejudice are directly associated with continuing crime. Lucas describes the situation in Ciudad Bolívar:

What people are thinking is that, yeah, they painted something pretty but now I'm going to get attacked against a background of colours. That has happened, people have done it. And it's sad as well because it undoes all of the Museo's intentions, and setting it up requires loads of energy, it tires you out, the thought process, not only wearing you down physically, working, packing supplies, carrying, running, doing all of the logistics, there are only four, five of us –

maximum. You've seen it all. It requires so much work, to then see it all undone with the simple act that 'they painted, but nothing changed.'

Porque la gente lo que está pensando es que si, pintaron bonito pero entonces ahora me van a atracar con un fondo de colores. Eso ha pasado, lo ha hecho la gente. Y entonces es triste también porque se desdibujan todas las intenciones del museo, y generar el museo libre requiere mucho esfuerzo, [...] hemos destejido la mente, pensando, no solo destejido de los dedos trabajando, empacando pintura, llevando, corriendo, logistiquando, somos cuatro, cinco personas máximo. Tú lo has visto todo. Y requiere un esfuerzo muy grande, para que luego todo se desdibuje como en, como en un simple acto de 'pintaron pero no pasó nada'.

After all their hard work, people are still victimised in these areas. The interesting thing about this quote, though, is that it speaks to more than just the realities of violence in different areas of the city. Despite the celebration of projects like Museo Libre, Lucas implies that there is also a cynical dismissal of the project because 'they painted but nothing happened'. The utopian hopes of beautification are undermined in the imaginary, but this raises the question of what people should expect from such projects. The multiplicity and imbrication of violences make it seem unlikely that a project of beautification can change the violent dynamics of an area. Indeed, as Leo confirms the limits of beautification, he also highlights the more structural conditions that art cannot be expected to tackle singlehandedly:

In reality, we are supplying a function that is really that of the state. And if the state, which is the principal entity that has to resolve these problems, doesn't recognise this, then things aren't easily going to change. We can help to reduce the stigma, the gentrification, and help to make sure these people are better seen by society. But to change the panorama of trafficking, of violence, of delinquency [...] they need to start generating programs where there is a need for them. Through art we have shown a bit of what exists, but if they think that an organization has more power than they do to change the situation then they are definitely on the wrong page.

Pues en realidad nosotros estamos supliendo una función que es del estado. Y pues si el estado, que es la entidad principal que tiene que resolver estos problemas, no toma conciencia de ello, pues difícilmente se van a cambiar las realidades que hay allí. Nosotros podemos reducir un poco el tema de estigmatización, de gentrificación, y ayudar a que estas personas sean mejor percibidas por la sociedad. Pero digamos para ya cambiar el panorama de microtráfico, cambiar el panorama de violencia, eh de delincuencia [...] ellos tienen que comenzar a generar programas viendo que allí hay esta necesidad. Digamos a través, a través del arte hemos mostrado un poco lo que existe, pero pues si ellos piensan, digamos una organización tiene como más poder que ellos para cambiar una situación, pues o sea, definitivamente están como en la página equivocada.

As Leo points out, reducing the negative effects of stigma is not the same thing as tackling delinquency, microtrafficking and criminal networks. The fact that aesthetics are, seemingly, charged with this task reveals the invisibility and common-sense acceptance of the structural violence that continues to be the order of things. Furthermore, the profundity of structural violence that is revealed through the limitations of beautification programmes is also apparent in the discussions of what violence means to people in Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia.

The people I interviewed on the streets of Vista Hermosa in Ciudad Bolívar didn't deny that there were problems in the neighbourhood. Rather, they argued that people didn't have the economic resources to go to university and so the area didn't produce many professionals (*'tenemos pocos recursos para llegar a la universidad [...] no tenemos una mentalidad muy avanzada'*). They suggested that it was the lack of opportunities for people in the area that led to problems of delinquency and kids 'following the wrong path' (*'falta de oportunidades que les dan a los de acá por eso es que los chinos se va por el mal camino'*). The depth of everyday violence relates to the imbrication of different forms of violence, not only because people make their living through crime but because the subtle forms of exclusion lead to crime representing their best option (Bourgois, 2003). Furthermore, the recognition of violence as being part of everyday life, part of the social order, is the baseline from which people then distinguish what it means to live

in the city and where. One man in La Perseverancia resisted my suggestion that the area was violent, saying 'there's insecurity everywhere' (*'en toda parte hay inseguridad'*). Although initially ambiguous, his interpretation of what 'insecurity' means can be clarified by his argument that 'it's like every neighbourhood, it has its reputation of delinquency' (*'es como todo barrio, tiene su fama por parte del delincuente'*). Delinquency is the violence that he is referring to, and this is reinforced when he says 'everywhere, say, Las Cruces, Belén, Los Laches, from there to the east, over there towards the south, it's the same story' (*'en toda parte, digamos Las Cruces, Belén, Los Laches, de allá para el este, por allá para el sur, la misma historia'*). Thus, he insists that La Perseverancia is no more dangerous than anywhere else, but still situates it within other *barrios* associated with urban crime and does so in such a way that suggests that it is so obvious, it is barely worth mentioning. The realities of structural and direct violence are, thus, entrenched in the spatial dynamics of Bogotá. The fact that they are taken for granted is not a sign of such violence being hidden, rather it is a sign of cultural violence where it is accepted as the norm.

The mythification of violence in Colombia implies that it is merely a cultural problem that could be transformed if only people believed it (Llorente *et al.*, 2002, p. 182). The responses above implicitly reject this social imaginary of violence by pointing to the ways in which violence is endemic: criminal networks are intact, and this is partly because people have fewer opportunities and support systems to provide alternatives. The recognition of structural inequality is also important. Indeed, particular forms of violence are not everywhere, they do affect certain neighbourhoods and social groups more than others. There is a violence 'from above' in the form of unemployment, relegating people to particular areas that are deprived from particular kinds of access and heightening the stigma of social structures by spatializing them (Wacquant, 2008, p. 25).⁶² Therefore, the beautification of areas like Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia is a problem when it means ignoring or eliding the realities of violence in such areas. A sentimental rhetoric that romanticises the more vulnerable or marginalised

⁶² On the notion of violence 'from above', it is also worth noting the direct violence that flows into these spaces rather than out of them, including, for example, the abduction of young men from Soacha and Ciudad Bolívar by the military to serve as *'falsos positivos'*, or the rape and murder of Yuliana Samboní who was abducted from Bosque Calderón in December 2016.

neighbourhoods in the city risks falling into the trap of insisting upon the virtues of the poor, which implies that money is not important (Lefebvre, 2008, p. 153). Accordingly, the aesthetic transformation of these neighbourhoods would not only be mere adornment but would serve to obscure the power relations behind such spatialized inequality. Jacobs is explicit in her attack of urban planning projects that fail to take seriously the realities of everyday life in the city: 'there is a quality even meaner than outright ugliness or disorder, and this meaner quality is the dishonest mask of pretended order, achieved by ignoring or suppressing the real order that is struggling to exist and to be served' (Jacobs, 1972, p. 25). Instead of painting a pretty face on areas that do suffer from problems, there is a need to listen to what those problems are and try to address them. The state plays a role in reproducing and maintaining structural inequality so they are not desperately trying to tackle it through beautification, they are trying to provide enough so that the more systemic violence can continue unimpeded. Indeed, the abandonment of the state is summed up in one man's reflection on whether or not graffiti was a good way of protesting in Vista Hermosa:

But so, protesting in that sense, well, they never come over here. So, they are never going to see this graffiti, so... Well yes, if they come and they see it and they go, right, people don't agree... but if they never come here how are they going to know what people are saying about them?

Pero pues, protestar en ese sentido, pues ellos por acá nunca vienen. Entonces ellos nunca van a ver un grafiti ese, entonces... Pues sí, es, si ellos vienen y miran, dicen bueno, la gente no está de acuerdo... pero si por acá nunca vienen ¿cómo van a saber lo que la gente está hablando de ellos?

5.4 Conclusion

Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia are places where people strive to resist the powerful stigma of violence – 'good people also live here' (*'aquí también vive gente de bien'*). Although traditionally marked in urban imaginaries as 'territories of fear' (*'territorios de miedo'*), graffiti and street artists choose to celebrate the positive connotations of living in these neighbourhoods. This takes the form of working with the

local community to aesthetically transform the neighbourhoods. Thus, colourful, creative and imaginative murals adorn houses and buildings, incite interest and encourage dialogue between neighbours and graffiti and street artists. Collectively, they reimagine what it means to live in the more marginalised and vulnerable spaces of Bogotá, and in doing so offer a means of resisting the stigma of poverty, crime and violence. Notably, this stigma is shifted not only from the territories in question but from the young people who might otherwise be seen as a problem in the neighbourhood, not as a positive contribution to the local community. Furthermore, the collective appropriation and celebration of the neighbourhood represents a claim to the right to the city in that the symbolic value of Ciudad Bolívar, La Perseverancia and the communities that live in them is insisted upon. There is a demand to be recognised as belonging to the city, and not as excluded or alienated problems to be avoided. However, there is also a complex relationship between trying to challenge stigma while at the same time recognising the realities of violence (Bourgois, 2003). Indeed, artists revealed the need to negotiate the production of graffiti and street art in areas where violence is not something of the past, but of the present. Threats posed by criminal networks and their accomplices in the state are real, and so as well as through beautification and direct denunciations, graffiti and street art reveal the realities of violence through what is not there, through the ways in which the possibilities of representation are limited.

The spatial dynamic of violence represents a key characteristic of the urban imaginaries of violence identified in this thesis. That there are different experiences and expectations of violence in different areas of the city suggests that the multiplicity of forms of violence in everyday life in Bogotá have to be considered alongside the spaces in which they manifest themselves. Indeed, violence plays a part in the social spatialization of Bogotá. On the level of the imaginary, the city is divided and identified through the risks, expectations and myths about violence in different spaces of the city, but particularly those that are seen as more marginalised. Such violences range from the fear of being mugged or attacked in particular areas, to the endemic poverty and structural inequality suffered by some communities, to the control maintained by criminal networks. However, even presenting such neighbourhoods as homogenous is a

form of symbolic violence and reducing a place to one particular characteristic of undesired differentness – whether it is real or imagined – fails to recognise the complexity of life in those spaces. This leads to the tension between demonising or romanticising the places and people that are associated with different forms of violence in the social imaginary, which is constantly being negotiated by collectives like BogotArt, Sur Vano and those who live and work in La Perseverancia and Ciudad Bolívar. Specifically, though, this tension reveals that urban imaginaries of violence are marked by ambiguity and contradiction.

In the following chapter, the contradictions embedded in urban imaginaries of violence are explored in more depth as the line of investigation moves away from spatialised segregation towards an analysis of public spaces where diverse social groups come together. Different forms of violence are highly visible in such spaces, but social encounters are marked by the ‘need to ignore’. Graffiti and street artists not only critique this symbolic violence, they are also subjected to it through the development of an aesthetic hierarchy.



Figure 27 Mermaid



Figure 28 Fantasy scape



Figure 29 Built world – Fantasy world



Figure 30 Bicycles



Figure 31 Music



Figure 32 Cest



Figure 33 MAK



Figure 34 Religious messages



Figure 35 La Perseverancia



Figure 36 Marketplace



Figure 37 Más no es mejor



Figure 38 Chicha



Figure 39 Olla comunitaria



Figure 40 Los paisas sobran



Figure 41 FARC

Chapter 6

La Candelaria and the centre: Aesthetic hierarchies and the politics of everyday violence

‘¿Quiénes son ustedes para decirnos qué es bonito y qué es feo?’

Anonymous graffiti artist⁶³

On first impression, La Candelaria symbolises the acceptance of graffiti and street art in Bogotá. The range of large- and small-scale murals, street art, *pintas*, writing, *grafiti de consigna* and *grafiti de barrista* appears on the walls of the historic and surrounding city centre. Moreover, they are celebrated and endorsed as tourist attractions, as signs of a democratic right to self-expression in the city. This chapter critiques this first impression. Closer analysis of the dynamics between these different forms of graffiti and street art reveals a much more complicated series of relationships: between subcultures, with the state and with other city dwellers. By situating the different forms of graffiti and street art together and exploring the comparisons that are made by audiences to distinguish them, I show that there is instead an aesthetic hierarchy and that it parallels a social hierarchy. The politics of everyday violence are exposed through this aesthetic order as the recognition of the right to the city of diverse social groups are dependent on the extent to which they conform to hegemonic notions of ‘good citizenship’. Despite the extreme forms of poverty and social exclusion that are visible in everyday life on the streets of the city, then, I argue that urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá are marked by the need to ignore such structural inequality.

6.1 La Candelaria

As the historic centre of the capital, La Candelaria is also the symbolic centre of the nation. The main square, Plaza Bolívar, is surrounded by the primary cathedral, the renovated headquarters of the judiciary (the Palacio de Justicia), the congress building

⁶³ ‘Who are you to tell us what’s pretty and what’s ugly?’

(the Capitolio Nacional) and the ornate offices of municipal government in the Palacio Liévano. These collective representations of executive power are surrounded by iconic architecture, museums, churches, art galleries and the main libraries and archives in the centre. In addition, there are cafes, bars and independent shops that range from artisanal crafts to hipster clothing and accessories. Thus, La Candelaria provides the necessary checklist for tourists visiting the capital and offers picturesque accommodation in the hostels that have taken over some of the smaller colonial-era buildings, although the north gets their attention for the upmarket restaurants and nightlife. However, if '[a] city teaches and conditions by its appearances, its facades and its plan' (Berger, 1980, p. 97), the lessons and practices that are imparted through the visual landscape of La Candelaria are also interwoven with violence. As I discuss in relation to Calle 26, the built landscape reflects imaginaries of violence through the material signs commemorating past violence, or that are significant in their absence. Here, for example, the Palacio de Justicia was newly built after the attack of 1985, when M-19 guerrillas took the congress hostage but were subsequently stormed by the military. The latter took their own hostages, some civilians and some guerrillas, to the adjacent Casa del Florero, the museum that commemorates the beginning of the fight for independence, where they were tortured and disappeared. Or, leading away from the square, shoppers, street performers and idle passers-by on the pedestrianised section of La Séptima might pass by the small section of a wall where plaques pay homage to Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, close to – but not exactly – the site where he was assassinated. On the corner of Séptima and Jiménez where he *was* shot, the most visible landmark is a MacDonal'd's. Furthermore, while the everyday aesthetics of the city centre subtly reflect the violence and struggle embedded in its socio-spatial dynamics, the way that these spaces are produced and controlled also condition the possible uses of them. Behind the Capitolio lies the presidential palace, the Casa Nariño, noticeably set back from the square. Indeed, it is even difficult to see it from the street, as greenery shields it from sight, while fences and guards shield it from crowds. When important enough people are actually in the building, the roads are closed to pedestrians and drivers trying to navigate their way to and from the square. Such enclosures contribute to the imaginaries of the state that I describe in the chapter on Calle 26, where people feel ignored by, and isolated from, those in power.

In this chapter, though, I focus not on the divisions between the state and the people, but on the divisions within the civilian population. The tourist industry is not the only attraction in the area. It shares the space with an impressive number of universities in the centre, like the exclusive Universidad de los Andes, whose campus extends up the slopes of the *cordillera* and is fortified by security measures (such as security guards with Rottweilers), which radiate into the streets beyond the campus and set up layered barriers to separate the prestigious students from the ‘undesirables’ in the surrounding area. These material defences corroborate imaginaries of the university that see Los Andes as turning its back on the city centre, rejecting its relationship with the community there. In contrast, I was told that the equally private Universidad Externado is seen as facing the city instead of turning its back on the city, supposedly evidenced by the fact that it has *fewer* security checks. All the same, numerous controls mark the urban landscape around the centre because it is not only a place of historic importance and social gathering, but a place where deep socio-economic divisions are brought to the fore. To the west of La Candelaria, the commerce of the centre moves away from either the trendy independent shops around Las Aguas or the high street chains on La Séptima towards the cheaper market stalls and small shops selling an array of goods, both legal and illegal, along La Décima and towards San Victorino.

The heterogeneity of Bogotá society has historically been condensed in the centre and marked by the processes of categorising different social groups and visually demarcating their social place through the urban territory (Salcedo Fidalgo and Zeiderman, 2008, p. 79). Over the years, the expansion of the city meant that social groups became more fragmented and more widely dispersed throughout the urban territory. In particular, La Candelaria and the surrounding city centre saw the displacement of wealthy families, alongside centres of financial, commercial and industrial power, to the north and west of the city in the 20th century. From the 1970s, La Candelaria was abandoned by the city’s elites and associated increasingly with degradation, poverty and criminality. To the east and south of La Candelaria, neighbourhoods like Las Cruces, Belén and Egipto continue to be synonymous in the urban imaginary with historic trajectories of street crime and violence, as well as suffering from poverty and inequality. This variegated landscape is contained within a relatively small area (La Candelaria itself only covers 184 hectares),

but it represents a series of fragmented territories that are constantly negotiated as people imagine and move around public space. On one occasion I joined Cultura Futbolera as they painted a mural slightly to the south of the centre. One of the members of the collective picked me up on his motorbike, and as he drove me to the mural he took great delight in pointing out the sites of 'alternative tourism': the places that were notorious for drugs and other crimes, the places that were 'abandoned' by the police. He was sure that I wouldn't have been to any of them because tourists and wealthy residents most definitely do not stray into these spaces. Indeed, the city's most notorious sites of criminality are only a stone's throw from Plaza Bolívar. In the 1980s and 1990s, El Cartucho was a street of destitution, prostitution, drug dealing and other forms of criminality. The centre for such activity subsequently moved a few streets away, to El Bronx, which was only 'cleaned up' in 2016. Thus, the transformation of the city centre is a relatively recent phenomenon, both in relation to the material landscape and the urban imaginary. Wealth is now returning to La Candelaria, through projects designed to renovate sites of cultural heritage, increase the construction of residential buildings (largely in the form of apartment blocks) and improve urban infrastructure (Manrique Gómez, 2013).

The cornerstone of this current transformation is the 2015 Plan de Revitalización del Centro Tradicional de Bogotá (Plan to Revitalize the Historic Centre of Bogotá). Where the colonial aesthetics were previously rejected in favour of more modern architecture, now they are being protected and buildings are being renovated. Planning projects employ the euphemistic terms of 'recuperating', 'revitalising' and 'protecting' areas that are '*feo*' (ugly), by which people mean dangerous, and some of the more intense sites of violence in the city centre have been taken under control. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, El Cartucho was dismantled and replaced with a park, while in 2016 El Bronx was evacuated and reclaimed by the local government and the site now hosts the 'Festival Bronx'. The language of 'reclaiming' and 'recuperating' these spaces is significant, as is the focus on aesthetics. With El Cartucho and El Bronx, for example, the widely mediated process of transformation was celebrated through the creation of new spaces in those areas: El Cartucho became the Parque Tercer Milenio and the festival in El Bronx represents the appropriation of the space. While the need to tackle networks of

violence and criminality is evident, the focus seems to have been on the removal of signs of violence, and not necessarily on the resolution of systemic problems associated with poverty, drug abuse and prostitution. Thus, visible signs of disorder and degradation have been removed – broken windows have been fixed – in an attempt to deter criminal activity and put people’s minds at ease (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Kelling, 2015). Furthermore, the spaces around the city centre have been cleaned up and even beautified, in an attempt to not only deter crime but to reclaim them for the urban middle classes and encourage alternative uses of public spaces. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Bogotá was supposedly transformed from a city of violence, aggression and intolerance to a more united city through the local government’s approach to public space. The urban policies implemented in particular by Mockus and Peñalosa aimed to address the lack of public space, and new sites were constructed that city dwellers could access freely and easily through renovated public transport facilities, and, notably, where different social groups could interact and learn how to be better citizens (Berney, 2011, p. 17). For many of the people I spoke to in Bogotá, these policies really did shift urban imaginaries and drew attention to the need for greater tolerance and coexistence in public space. Parks around the city centre were cleaned up, and now contain signs urging people to recognise that this is a shared public space for everyone to enjoy. The Ciclovía was introduced, where some of the main roads in the city are closed to traffic on Sundays and bank holidays to allow cyclists and pedestrians to use the city for leisure. So, while some people rush through the city centre, others now hang out and consume the fresh juice, coffee, baked goods, fried food or ice creams on offer all around. It is easy to find a street performance to idly listen to alongside the students and tourists in Plaza Chorro de Quevedo, walking along La Séptima with the rest of the city, or in Plaza Bolívar for special events.

Nevertheless, Bogotá has not escaped the common trope that characterises Latin American cities as chaotic and dangerous, where imaginaries of public space as comprising places of fear, crime and violence lead to strategies of self-protection that reproduce spatial and social forms of segregation (Caldeira, 2000; Ochs, 2013). The narrative of transformation was repeatedly undermined by my experience of the city and the experiences and stories of my research participants. For example, visiting sites

where cultural projects represented attempts to intervene in imaginaries of violence involved taking particular precautions. In 2015, the walls around the Cementerio Nacional were painted as part of the *Festival Internacional de Revitalización con Arte Urbano* in Santa Fe. When I visited them with a friend to take photos of the graffiti, we went early in the morning with a local artist because it is considered to be one of the more dangerous neighbourhoods in the centre of town, and, even then, a taxi driver stopped in the street to warn me to be careful. Other impressions of the city that I came across throughout my research correspond to a national imaginary of the capital's inhabitants as irritable, bad-tempered, aggressive and suspicious (Silva, 2006, p. 22). At the Universidad Militar, the frustrations related to city life were palpable. One student spoke at length of the daily indifference that is displayed on public transport. Her examples ranged from people refusing to give up their seat for those more in need – elderly people, pregnant women, people with small children – to ignoring the cries for help of someone who has just been robbed, to women and girls being sexually harassed on a daily basis. This reality of violence contradicted the demarcation of women-only carriages and seats reserved for those who need them. Another student shared her experience of being physically assaulted on the street after complaining when a driver ignored a green light at a pedestrian crossing. She concluded that the level of aggression in urban space leads to people shutting themselves off from others: 'you can't expect anything from anybody, because no one is going to do anything for you' (*'uno no puede esperar nada de nadie, porque nadie va a hacer nada por uno'*). Thus, public space is collectively imagined as a dangerous place where inhabitants dart through the streets with a sort of tunnel-vision: solely on the lookout for danger (Martín Barbero, 2002, p. 22). This has an effect on how people move around the city and perceive others and the everyday threat of violence. Conducting interviews on Calle 26, a young man from Cúcuta who had recently started living in Bogotá described people avoiding public space, rushing home from work because of fear. He admitted that when I approached him on the street to interview him, he only stopped to talk to me because he could see that I wasn't Colombian: 'you asked me something and I immediately realised that you weren't Colombian, so I felt safe. But if another person [...] came up to me, I'd get nervous, that something would happen to me' (*'tu me preguntaste algo,*

inmediatamente capté que no eres de Colombia, entonces estoy seguro. Pero si otra persona [...] me acerca, yo tengo nervios, que me va a pasar algo').

These tensions associated with public space and urban life were brought to the fore during the local elections in 2015. During the campaigns leading up to them, I had many conversations with people about which mayor would be best for the city. They tended to be deeply divided between those who wanted Clara López to follow Gustavo Petro's lead and continue working for 'us', meaning the more working-class sectors of the population, and those who wanted Enrique Peñalosa or Rafael Pardo because Petro had been ignoring 'them', meaning the middle classes and their desire for better public transport and security from street crime. Indeed, many of the narratives related to everyday crime and violence depicted a situation where Bogotá's inhabitants are 'under siege'. This image and the division of urban society during the campaign are important because they reflect the different perspectives towards what violences are identified, who they are deemed to affect and how they should be dealt with. The effects of these different priorities are played out within the urban visual landscape and the aesthetic transformation of public space. For some, the everyday violence of the city refers to the fear of urban crime and aggression. Transforming the city therefore means making public spaces safer and more enjoyable, but in the face of heterogeneous urban groups with multiple claims to the city, to whom do such transformations apply? Delgado argues that the desire to assert visual order and transform or 'regenerate' cities reproduces marginalisation and exclusion through the policing of different social subjects and their visibility in public space. In other words, covering up and displacing the visible signs of poverty as a way of trying to hide it and at least appear to be controlling crime (Delgado, 2012).

Furthermore, how people perceive and value public space also depends on their priorities over its uses and who can enjoy them, and one of the consequences of the urban policies aiming to revalue public space was the process of exclusion, whereby 'undesirables' in the form of street vendors and homeless people were denied access to the supposedly public space of parks and squares (Berney, 2011; Galvis, 2014). Thus, those signs in the newly transformed parks and public spaces not only encouraged people to use them, they also specified the exclusions, including street vendors, and the

re-election of Peñalosa quickly led to the enforcement of such rules through the displacement of informal vendors from public spaces like Las Aguas and La Séptima, and the announcement that local bakeries and cafes had to stop giving food to the homeless. For DjLu, the displacement of street vendors and performers epitomises the superficiality of the local government's discourses when they claim to be providing order and stability in the city, and he highlights the place of aesthetics within such policies:

On the level of public space obviously I think the policies are terrible, for example displacing street vendors or moving people who do circus tricks, I think it's terrible because if we lived in a country like Switzerland, where obviously everyone has a chance, then ok, maybe the informal vendor is being lazy. But in a country like Colombia where not everyone has the chance of getting formal work well... people have to eat. If [...] you don't let them sell on the street so that they can get enough to eat then they are going to end up stealing. [...] And what this man is prioritising is the aesthetic. Because the city looks prettier. Please, what's more important? What is pretty, or what is essential, like having enough to eat?

A nivel de, del espacio público me parece terrible obviamente también las políticas, por ejemplo, desplazar a los vendedores ambulantes, o desplazar a la gente que hace circo, me parece terrible porque si nosotros viviéramos en un país como Suiza, donde obviamente todo el mundo tiene posibilidades, pues, listo, que pereza de pronto el vendedor ambulante. Pero en un país como Colombia donde no todo el mundo tiene posibilidades formales de trabajo, pues [...] la gente tiene que comer. Si [...] no los deja vender en la calle para que coman pues van a terminar robando. [...] Y lo que este señor está priorizando es la estética. Es que la ciudad se ve más bonita. ¿Por favor, qué es importante? ¿Lo bonito o lo esencial como puede ser el hambre?

Notably, the presence of street vendors and people doing circus tricks is, in itself, a sign of structural inequality because these strategies for making money are a response to the lack of formal employment and not, as DjLu points out, a sign of laziness. Furthermore, they represent an alternative to crime. The act of covering them up, then, reveals the priorities of the local government, whereby the illusion of order takes priority over the realities not only of hunger and poverty, but of the socio-economic dynamics of street

crime. The street artist condemns the mayor's decision to prioritise the aesthetics of public space over the social needs of urban inhabitants, arguing that his intention is simply that Bogotá conforms to a pre-conceived image of an 'ordered' city. Indeed, the right to the city is not about providing spaces of enjoyment for the middle and upper classes. Lefebvre insists that the transformation of urban space – and, thus, urban life – must prioritise those who inhabit and know the city intimately, which means the working classes (Lefebvre *et al.*, 1996, pp. 158-159). Marcuse elaborates on this by including those who are both materially and culturally excluded or alienated, which takes on greater significance throughout this chapter when I turn to graffiti and street artists and their claims to the city (Marcuse, 2009). The point is that the right to the city that is advocated by Lefebvre is more radical and wide-reaching than is often recognised in many of the contemporary deployments of the term (Purcell, 2002). Fundamentally, it is about transforming the deep-rooted inequalities that produce urban space in capitalist societies and lead to alienation and exclusion.

The limits of the right to the city are especially marked in La Candelaria, where people are at least physically coming together, because the processes of exclusion and inequality are reproduced through the control over what, and who, can be seen in public space, but they are also resisted. Thus, the pedestrian spaces of La Candelaria are also perfect for marches or demonstrations, which can range from chalk-based commemorations and protests written on the pavement to open-air events in the main square. The more belligerent protesters leave signs of their dissent on the walls of buildings, the windows or closed shutters of shops, banks, monuments and statues, sometimes in the form of graffiti, occasionally breaking glass. Being present during a march is exciting, there is an energy created by the protest, but the intimidating presence of the riot police is never far away. In response to these interventions, controls pepper the urban landscape. Young men are stopped and searched by the police, ostensibly to check their *libreta militar* (confirming their military service or exemption), or simply because a protest is happening somewhere and they want to check their bags for complicit materials. Mostly it just seems to be a way to visibly assert control while deepening people's resentment towards them and, thus, reproducing the cycle of frustration and resistance. Numerous videos on social media show the police abusing

their power, from beating people to purposefully spilling the produce of street vendors onto the street. When cafes and bakeries were told that they couldn't give food to the homeless, whose presence is extremely visible in this area of town, local priests publicly defied the rules and handed out food in the street, showing that visual signs of difference are policed through the process of distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate practices in public space, which represent diverse social groups and their acceptance, or not, in urban society (Iveson, 2008, p. 214).

The language of visual order represents a form of cultural violence because it seeks to naturalise the limits of the right to the city, evident through the displacement and invisibility of signs of poverty and exclusion, but it also speaks to embedded structural inequalities and the direct violence that enforces them (Galtung, 1990). Graffiti and street art participate in this dynamic as they make claims to the right to the city through their implicitly confrontational presence, defying the rules and regulations of urban public space by appropriating it (Ferrell, 2001), and because they directly address urban processes of social exclusion and structural inequality in Bogotá. In particular, though, the dynamics of graffiti and street art in La Candelaria bring out the complexities and contradictions associated with the politics of everyday violence and highlight the ways in which political claims and counterclaims are embedded in visual culture (Mirzoeff, 2010). The production and reception of graffiti and street art reveal the politics of aesthetics because they occupy an ambiguous position between being celebrated as cultural capital or denigrated as urban blight. On the one hand, graffiti and street art are part of the narrative of transformation and regeneration, they attract tourists and contribute to the hipster feel of Las Aguas and Chorro de Quevedo. Further to the west, they take the form of large-scale murals commissioned by the local council on La Décima or in Plaza San Victorino. On the other hand, interspersed throughout the city centre there are also more rebellious inscriptions. These signs are judged rather more harshly, which reflects both an aesthetic hierarchy and its parallel social hierarchy. Overall, I argue that they point to an urban imaginary where the aesthetics of order take precedence over a more fundamental recognition of the inequalities embedded in urban society.

6.2 Representing everyday violence

In this section of the chapter I introduce some of the main trends within the production and reception of graffiti and street art in La Candelaria and the surrounding centre, and I explore how they engage with everyday violence and the right to the city. As I argue in the following pages, graffiti and street artists specifically critique everyday violence in and through urban public space. They draw attention to the inequalities, exclusions and marginalisation visible in everyday life by being in public space, by encouraging a dialogue with urban others, but more fundamentally by appropriating public space – thus claiming the right to the city for themselves and others. To a certain extent, in La Candelaria they have been successful at engaging audiences in a discussion of everyday violence because they are recognised as having meaning beyond vandalism and are celebrated as cultural capital. However, the extent to which their claims to the city are accepted – even celebrated – is limited by the development of an aesthetic hierarchy, which classifies different forms of graffiti and street art according to what is deemed legitimate or not.

6.2.1 *The right to the city*

The Bogotá Graffiti Tour was set up in 2011 by an Australian street artist and a Canadian graffiti writer. Although the city lacked international recognition within the field of graffiti and street art, they were struck by the quantity and quality of the scene in Bogotá, Christian Petersen, one of founders, explained to me. As the tourist industry grew in the early 2000s,⁶⁴ so did the tour, and by 2015 a group of four guides were providing two daily tours, running a shop selling the work of local artists and offering private tours in a number of different languages. The tour group meets in the Parque de los Periodistas and follows a two-hour route through the historic centre of the city. Navigating the narrow and broken pavements, stepping onto the roads in front of annoyed drivers, getting in the way of exasperated locals and crowding around the tour guide, we are presented with posters, paste-ups, stickers, ceramics, stencils, murals, tags, throw-ups and pieces. The norms of the different subcultures of graffiti writing and

⁶⁴ A component of ex-President Uribe's policy to supposedly strengthen security in the country and claim that the kidnappings and bombings associated with the left-wing guerrillas were in the past.

street art are explained, and the country's social and political trajectory is woven into the narrative as the painted walls are interpreted and contextualised. Abstract references to regional identity appear, from Guache's affirmation that 'our north is the south' (*'nuestro norte es el sur'*), to Toxicómano's '100% Latin power!' ('100% poder latino!'), to Carlos Trilleras' portrait of an indigenous woman, while murals of flora and fauna are admired and praised by locals and tourists alike (figures 42-44). Predictably, there is a lot of talk about violence on the tour, and the combination of everyday and political violence can be seen in many of the images. Mal Crew's 'We Are Memory' ('Somos Memoria'), brings the violence and destruction of rural life to the outside wall of a carpark, showing a family in mourning as their crops are sprayed and bull-dozed by shadowy, militarised figures, along with their memories of happier times (figure 45). Toxicómano's 'No more displacement' ('No más desplazamiento'), stages a call for an end to forced displacement as a film poster, adding the tagline 'a film that you shouldn't have to see, let alone live' (*'una película que no deberías ver, mucho menos vivir'*). The gravity of the topic is reaffirmed through repeated reminders that 'this is real life' (*'esto es la vida real'*), real life is stranger than fiction (*'la vida real supera la ficción'*) and the provocative 'A mafia story?' (figure 46). I was also struck by the many references to the violence of inequality and exclusion. An image by Praxis suggested that the homeless are abandoned, not just in Colombia but in the region as a whole. It depicts a figure lying parallel to the ground on a low wall by one of the parks in La Candelaria. Their head is covered with a cardboard box and in the background is a map of Central and South America (figure 47). Urban violence is also referenced in Bastardilla's inconspicuous paste-up in the corner of a metal shutter. Children clamber out of matchbox beds: stretching, waking each other, and even possibly dancing, their faces lit up by the flames around their heads and the slight smiles on their faces suggesting a tenderness that seems at odds with the context (figure 48). The touching image references the lives of street children, the guide tells us, abandoned by society. The life of (and on) the streets is a recurring theme in DjLu's work, too, and on the graffiti tour we are led to some of his black and white stencilled portraits. In one, a street performer displays a circus trick, while in another a clown is creating a balloon animal alongside the phrase 'more isn't better' (*'más no es mejor'*) (figures 49-50). The presence of street performers is a

familiar sight at traffic lights, where they execute their tricks and quickly collect any donations in the time it takes for the lights to change.

Despite criticisms from more conservative tourists and locals, Petersen argues that the socio-political content of the tour is not chosen especially by the tour guides, it is indicative of the socio-political agendas of artists in the city. Indeed, the recognition of marginalised social groups seemed to be a common trope in the more socio-political graffiti and street art around the city, and even appears in some of the commissioned murals that are endorsed by the state. 'The kiss of the invisible' (*El beso de los invisibles*) fills the side of a 10-storey block of apartments where Calle 26 leads into the historic centre (figure 51). Such was the appreciation of the mural, depicting a tender kiss between two drug addicts lying on the street, that one of the artists involved spoke of people hugging him and thanking him for it. In and around La Candelaria there are also other examples of graffiti and street art, including an array of *pintas*, tags, pieces and throw-ups, guerrilla advertising, *grafiti de barrista*, personal and even religious messages, many of which respond to, and reflect, everyday violence. Even more so than along Calle 26, the routes of protests are marked onto the buildings and monuments in the centre, alongside signs of territorial graffiti, showing the multiple ways in which public space is used as a space of contestation. One *pinta* in Parque de los Periodistas reads 'Rat Santos, what does La Guajira produce for children to be dying?' (*Santos rata q produce la guajira para q los niños mueran?*'), another along La Séptima plays with Peñalosa's campaign slogan and questions 'Bogotá, better for who?' (*Bogotá...major para quién?*'), while in Plaza Bolívar an intervention on the Palacio de Justicia insists that 'Without bread for the poor there is no peace for the rich' (*Sin pan para el pobre no hay paz para el rico*) (figures 52-54).

Thus, reading the walls in Bogotá seems to reveal contemporary realities of violence because artists want their audiences to pay attention to local and global issues, which is a theme of graffiti and street art around the world (Mathieson and Tàpies, 2007; Waclawek, 2011; Schacter, 2013). Accordingly, they might be seen as demanding the right to look, in that they are refusing to accept everyday violence as just part of the way things are, as something that can be absorbed into the social imaginary. The right to look represents a demand to be heard and seen as equals, which also implies the ability to

'arrange the relations of the visible and the sayable' (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 474). It is, thus, a demand to the right to the city that incorporates a call to change the city. Indeed, while the specific motivations behind different examples of graffiti and street art inevitably depend upon the individual author, there are also some general trends that display a shared rejection of inequality and marginalisation in (and through) urban space. The subcultures related to graffiti writing and *pixação* are famously associated with claiming their right to visibility in response to the structural violence of marginality and exclusion. Bombing allows writers from lower socio-economic backgrounds in stigmatised urban neighbourhoods to spread their names across the urban landscape, re-writing the city through their alternative languages (Baudrillard, 1993; Morrison, 2015). In particular, they demand visibility in exclusive, central neighbourhoods or target the spaces 'belonging' to the middle and upper classes. Teresa Caldeira, for example, argues that '[m]ore than improper appropriations of public or private space, they imprint on the city, especially on its wealthier part, the presence of those who are *supposed to be invisible*' (Caldeira, 2012, p. 400).⁶⁵ By leaving their mark on urban space, these artists denounce, because they reject, their own exclusion and alienation. Furthermore, Ferrell argues that graffiti and street artists, alongside other urban anarchists, obtain their unique perspective of public space because their experience of the margins reveals the social and political forces that attempt, at all costs, to keep them there and thus maintain the visual order (Ferrell, 2001). In (re)claiming the street, then, they demand the right to the city and articulate a vernacular critique of everyday violence and structural inequality.

As is clear from the images around La Candelaria, though, many also extend this critique to recognise others in urban society who are marginalised and excluded, and in doing so they draw attention to the political relationship between aesthetics and public space. One of the reasons that graffiti and street art offer such a perspective is that artists position themselves in the public spaces of the city, which provide a vantage point from which to appreciate the complex urban dynamics of everyday violence, particularly as it

⁶⁵ My italics

manifests itself through visible signs of poverty and social exclusion. For Toxicómano, painting on the street opens up new ways of seeing everyday violence:

[T]he artist starts to question himself, question what he didn't before when he just went out and only painted his own ego, his own name, his punks. He starts to think, and also seeing the street and saying, well, there's no one in the street but look at that displaced family, it's three in the morning, they're on the corner. I'm tagging this wall, but they're suffering through the cold... So he starts to perceive other dynamics, to become more aware of them.

[E]l artista se empieza a cuestionar, lo que antes no se cuestionaba y salía y pintaba solo su ego, solo su nombre, solo sus punks. Empieza a decir también bueno, y viendo en la calle también sabe y dice uff, en la calle no hay nadie, pero vea esa familia desplazada, son las 3 de la mañana, está en una esquina. Yo estoy rayando una pared, pero ellos están aguantando el frío... Entonces empieza a ser perceptible de otras dinámicas, hacerse sensible a ellos.

Notably, some of Toxicómano's recurring images and text include ironic phrases such as 'we're all equal but some of us are more equal than others' (*'todos somos iguales pero hay unos mas iguales que otros'*), and 'we're not painted on the wall' (*'no estamos pintados en la pared'*), which I have seen accompanying a close-up of a screaming face (figure 55). For Toxicómano, the use of public space to do graffiti and street art leads to the visibility of other uses of public space, which expose the realities of everyday violence. In the above example, the artist is forced to confront the fact that forced displacement has led to people having to sleep on the streets of major Colombian cities. Indeed, the urban landscape communicates meaning not only by the visual signs left on its surfaces but by the practices and uses of public space that reflect social, political and economic dynamics (Sassen, 2013). Public space can also lead to new encounters. For Crisp, there is an exchange that goes on with the people who are on the street:

I think you get a more intimate view of the city coz you are spending time, more time on the streets and with the people in the streets as well so you meet a lot of people that you normally probably wouldn't talk to. I find especially homeless people and recyclers and people whose lives and work are on the street, they

stop and talk to you and ask you questions. Whereas, you know, if you're just living a life where you're going to work and going home and stuff you're not normally approached by those people or only when they're, you know, asking for money etc.

He describes these social interactions as distinct because they are contextualised by the fact of painting on the street, which attracts a different kind of attention from others who are also spending their lives in public space. For many in Bogotá (and especially in La Candelaria), the realities of structural violence might be visible on the street, but the subsequent interactions with those who are homeless or destitute are almost solely based on transaction or refusal. For graffiti and street artists, however, these are the people who will stop and chat to you about your work, who will warn you when the police are nearby and who will even protect your work from getting tagged or painted over.

These encounters with, and in, public space contribute to the interpretations of urban violence that were articulated in the graffiti and street art in and around La Candelaria, and by my research participants in interviews and conversations, in that these forms of everyday violence were what they saw in the city. However, the claim to the right to look at, and recognise, the fundamental violence of such inequalities is further emphasised through their critiques of dominant imaginaries of violence and public space. To return to the displacement of street vendors and performers at the beginning of Peñalosa's term in office, it is worth highlighting DjLu's critique of urban aesthetics:

[I]t's also a subjective perspective. For him, the city looks prettier without street vendors. For me, the city is prettier with street vendors. When I go to a city I always want to be where the marketplace is, where it's shambolic, I love those places. I go to a city, I go to the centre of Munich and I think it's awful. It looks like a city made of plastic, of Lego, it doesn't tell me anything. So they are ways of seeing the city. And you can't assume that the ideal city is Munich because it's clean, because there are no street vendors, no.

[E]so es un pensamiento también subjetivo. Para él la ciudad es más bonita sin vendedores ambulantes. Para mí, la ciudad es más bonita con vendedores

ambulantes. Cuando yo voy a una ciudad siempre me quiero meter adonde esté el mercadillo, el despelote, me encantan esas zonas. Voy a una ciudad, voy al centro de, de Múnich, y se me hace terrible. Se me hace una ciudad de plástico, de Lego, que no me dice nada. Entonces son maneras de ver la ciudad. Y uno no puede asumir que la ciudad ideal es Múnich porque es limpia, y no hay vendedores ambulantes, no.

He insists that the perception of an ordered or beautiful city is subjective and challenges the very notion of what and who make a city beautiful or not by explicitly contrasting his interpretation of beauty to that which he associates with Peñalosa. For him, the idea of a quiet and ordered space is 'terrible', and he contradicts the dominant imaginary of European cities as being desirable because they are free of public disorder. Furthermore, he incorporates his subversive imagination into his artwork. DjLu explicitly seeks out those who are rejected or ignored in society, and paints them as a way of celebrating the people who use and inhabit the spaces that are avoided by others:

I started to be interested in street vendors, refuse and recycling collectors, people who do circus tricks in the street, the crazy guy, the local crazy guy who wanders the streets. Because they were all also representative of the characters who inhabit the street, who really understand public space. This public space that is more and more uninhabited because more and more people want private space, from the shopping centre to their home, in their armoured car. So, I like those people that interact with and make the city, that construct the city.

Empecé a interesarme en vendedores ambulantes, recolectores, recicladores, gente que hace circo en la calle, el personaje loco, el loquito del pueblo que anda por allí en la calle. Porque todos ellos además eran una muestra de, de personajes que habitan la calle, que entienden muy bien el espacio público. Que ese espacio público cada vez está más deshabitado porque cada vez más la gente quiere del espacio privado, y del centro comercial a su casa, en su carro blindado. Entonces, me gusta esa gente que interactúa y que hace ciudad, que construye ciudad.

Thus, by spreading their portraits around the city with his stencils, DjLu celebrates those

who inhabit public space and the fact that, according to him, they make the city what it is. Again, he compares them favourably to *'la gente'* in general, those who try their best to avoid public space, who seek out the private space of shopping centres and armoured cars. Furthermore, he implies that the violence woven into urban imaginaries of public space manifests itself through the rejection or avoidance not only of public space, but also of the people in that space. In a very literal example of wanting to 'not see' violence, when I asked whether there was a lack of awareness in Bogotá, one of the members of Machete responded:

No, I think that there is indifference to violence. I don't think there is a lack of awareness because people know it's there. The people who live in the north, after seeing a family begging or asking for help by the traffic lights, and you're capable of winding the window up so they don't even approach you, seems the most chaotic form of indifference. Right? So there isn't a lack of awareness about the problems, there's an indifference on the part of the people.

No, creo que hay una indiferencia de la violencia. No creo que haya desconocimiento porque el conocimiento está. La gente que vive en el norte, después de que ve a una familia parada en un semáforo, pidiendo un auxilio, y que seas capaz de levantar la ventana en tu carro para que ni siquiera se te arrimen, parece lo más caótico de la indiferencia. ¿Sí? Entonces no hay desconocimiento de los problemas, hay indiferencia de las personas.

Everyday violence does not stop at the fact that people have to live on the street, it also includes the process of ignoring their cries for help. While the structural problems of poverty and homelessness will not be solved by giving someone a few coins, it is the symbolic gesture of winding up the windows that this artist condemns as a sign of *'lo más caótico de la indiferencia'*. This is what graffiti and street artists are talking about when they are encouraging people to pay attention in public space. It is not the street as such that represents a threat to city dwellers but the suspect, undesirable and 'dirty' social subjects who, by inhabiting the city in this way, transgress social norms (Douglas, 2005). The imaginary of 'undesirables' or *'desechables'* highlights the urban dynamics of second-class citizenship that are present throughout Latin America, where people are forced into precarious social positions with limited rights, be it in relation to informal

housing and employment, exclusion from access to justice and political participation or they are routinely criminalised (Holston, 1999; Caldeira, 2000; Koonings and Kruijt, 2007). Stinkfish argues that graffiti itself is closer to this 'other' reality of the street, the one that people normally ignore:

[Graffiti] is closer to all the stuff that happens in the street, like these street vendors, right, like all of the life that is in the street, that for a lot of people is something very distant, prohibited, dirty, ugly, illegal, it's something that is closer to us, right? So that's why I say that graffiti is self-sufficient, away from art, from design, right? The life of an artist in general, or a designer, is closer to that legal world, right? We are closer to the people who sell things in the street, to people who put up posters, to everything that can happen in the street, which supposedly doesn't comply with normal rules.

[El grafiti] es más cercano a todo este montón de cosas que pasan en la calle, como así los vendedores ambulantes, sí, como toda la vida que está en la calle, que para muchas personas es algo súper lejano, prohibido, sucio, feo, ilegal, es algo más cercano a nosotros, sí? Entonces por eso te digo que el grafiti es autosuficiente en lejos del arte, del diseño, sí? La vida de un artista por lo general, o de un diseñador, está más cercano a este mundo legal sí? Nosotros estamos más cercanos a la gente que venden cosas en la calle, a la gente que pega carteles, a todo lo que puede suceder en la calle, que supuestamente no cumple con ciertas normas.

For Stinkfish, graffiti and street art are defined by their proximity to the street. He argues that graffiti and street artists are positioned (or position themselves) alongside the urban 'others' who are using public space in subversive ways, which are often driven by the violence of structural inequality. This means, though, that they are closer to the world of illegality and supposed disorder than they are to the legal art world. They are part of, and celebrate, the dirty and illicit underside of urban space precisely because they transgress the visual order of public space. Indeed, by appropriating public space in unauthorised and prohibited ways, Ferrell argues that what graffiti and street artists are actually doing is making visible and questionable the norms that are taken for granted (Ferrell, 1996; Ferrell, 2001). Such subversive critiques of the dominant norms of urban

public space can be framed through the recognition that the very notions of visual contamination, disorder, destruction and disrespect are positioned within a normative framework of socially produced meanings. Thus, against the visual order of the urban landscape, where public space, its appearance and the uses of it are regulated by the local government and their allies in law enforcement, commercial enterprises and institutionalised public art, the right to look disrupts and disorders. Indeed, it is through the appropriation of public space that graffiti and street art challenge the visual orders that fix it as a place that rightly belongs to the middle classes and citizens who behave according to the dominant norms. By reimagining and reframing public space as a space of participation, they encourage alternative ways of seeing it, what it can be used for and by whom (Mirzoeff, 2011, p. 477). In particular, this appropriation of space explicitly critiques the fundamental distinction that is ever present in the public space of La Candelaria and the centre, which is that some people have a right to the city and others don't.

6.2.2 Aesthetic hierarchy

Despite these narratives of transgression and disorder, in many ways graffiti and street art are, of course, celebrated in Bogotá. La Candelaria is symbolic of their changed status and throughout my fieldwork, the frequent references to the tour and the graffiti and murals in and around the city centre suggested that urban art has become legitimate in the city. There are the large-scale, funded murals, but there are also more accessible walls that are made available for people to paint on and many of the shops, hostels, cafes and other small businesses are painted by local artists. Thanks to the graffiti law, it is easy to get permission to paint on a wall in La Candelaria, you just have to negotiate with the owner of the building. Indeed, many artists explained that they often show their designs to people who might initially question what they're doing and persuade them to agree by describing what they want to contribute to the city through their work, and so some of the oldest and most traditional buildings in the city feature graffiti and street art. The colonial architecture and sites of cultural heritage sit alongside these new

aesthetics – mostly happily, although sometimes there is friction.⁶⁶ Consequently, the cultural capital of graffiti and street art actively contributes to the trading value of La Candelaria as a unique and creative neighbourhood, specifically in the form of tourism (Harvey, 2012). Some would argue that this recent legitimization necessarily entails a distinction to be drawn between the transgressive graffiti that remains illicit and the urban art that is widely accepted and acceptable (Silva, 2013). Rather than distinguishing between that which can authentically be called graffiti and that which refers to less illicit urban art, though, I am more interested in how this context of legitimacy affects the extent to which the audience engages with what graffiti and street art might be communicating. Indeed, Araya López argues that the initial recognition of the practice as something that has value, that has meaning, can lead to a closer engagement with the specific demands of those who are doing it:

If the discourses of said media (in this case, the press) present a social practice in a stereotyped or incomplete way, or criminalise those who do it, the possibility of generating substantial change towards the democratisation of space is reduced. However, when there exists a debate about the legality or right to the appropriation and use of space, it's more hopeful that the rights of particular populations will be visibilised and even recognised.

Si los discursos en dichos medios (en este caso, la prensa escrita) presentan una práctica social de forma estereotipada o incompleta, o “criminalizan” a sus productores, la posibilidad de generar cambios sustanciales hacia una democratización del espacio urbano se reduce. Sin embargo, cuando existe un debate sobre la legalidad o el derecho a la apropiación y uso del espacio, es posible esperar que los derechos de ciertas poblaciones sean visibilizados e incluso reconocidos (Araya López, 2015).

Although he is talking about media reports of graffiti and street art, the point is that the hegemonic narratives used to describe practices like graffiti and street art can shift the ways in which they are interpreted and, consequently, the people behind such interventions might be heard. If the right to look is claimed by graffiti and street art in La

⁶⁶ <http://cartelurbano.com/noticias/adios-los-murales-de-la-candelaria>

Candelaria, this context potentially represents a closer engagement on the part of urban society with the subversive imaginaries of violence and public space that are described above, and the right to the city that they articulate. Given that the graffiti law recognises all forms of graffiti and street art as cultural expression, the potential seems to be there for diverse artists to be recognised as political actors participating in the production of urban space, which could contribute to public discussions about the everyday violence that they depict, in the same way that Calle 26 is seen by urban audiences to encourage public discussions about, and recognition of, political violence.

One of the problems with this theory, though, is that the autonomy that Mirzoeff attaches to the right to look is difficult to extricate from the complex of visuality, meaning the processes that reproduce dominant and hierarchical worldviews. In particular, the complex of visuality is based on the process of classifying the social world, defining and categorising it in particular ways, followed by the segregation of different groups, organizing and controlling them by keeping them separate from one another, and then finally aestheticizing the distinctions so that they are taken for granted as the way things are (Mirzoeff, 2010; Mirzoeff, 2011). As I discuss at the beginning of this chapter, the aesthetic value of La Candelaria seems to be contingent on what (and who) is deemed acceptable in public space, and this visual order extends to graffiti and street art, despite their cultural capital. Firstly, graffiti and street art are subject to a process of classification. DJLu argues that there is an increasing tendency to distinguish between different forms of graffiti and street art:

I think that, I think that is one of the things, one of the problems, let's say, with the visibility and the legalisation of the practice. That in this kind of institutionalising of a wild practice [...] you start to see curatorship, you start to see division, you start to see stratification. So that's kind of what is happening now. People are starting to take sides, to say this I like, this I don't like. This is valid, this is ugly, this is illegal, this they should ban, this they should support. And, ultimately, this is something that is reinforced by the institutions and by the media, more than anything. [...] It tends towards demonising graffiti and tags, while worshipping urban art and muralism. And you have to understand that it is

not that one is good and the other is bad. They are totally different. And in my opinion, they're both awesome. They're both fucking great.

Creo que, creo que eso sería una de las cosas, de los problemas digamos de la visibilización [sic] y de la legalización de la práctica. Que en ese tipo de institucionalización de una práctica salvaje [...] empieza a ver curadurías, empieza a ver segmentación, empieza a ver estratificación. Entonces eso es un poco lo que se está dando ahora. Que la gente empieza a tomar partido, a decir esto me gusta, esto no me gusta. Esto es válido, esto es feo, esto es ilegal, esto lo deberían prohibir, esto lo deberían apoyar. En últimas, eso es una cosa que está reforzada por las instituciones y por los medios, sobre todo. [...] Va en el sentido de satanizar el grafiti y el tag, y adorar el arte urbano y el muralismo. Y hay que entender que no es que sea uno bueno y otro malo. Son totalmente diferentes. Y a mi juicio, ambos son del carajo. Ambos son bacanísimos.

As a direct consequence of the legalisation and increased visibility of graffiti and street art, then, DjLu argues that these aesthetic practices are forced into categories that attempt to define them according to a more institutionalised set of criteria, rather than recognising that they started out as wild practices. As he argues, the distinctions tend to be drawn between the 'demonised' tag and the 'adored' muralism and urban art, and the implication is that these aesthetic hierarchies are reproduced and reinforced externally. Graffiti and street art are classified and judged by the public, by the media, and by the local authorities, but not as much by the artists. Indeed, most of the people I spoke to within various subcultures respected and celebrated the diversity of urban expression in public space whether or not they themselves participated in that subculture or style. Street artists DjLu and Toxicómano argued that tags are great, while Skore admired the socio-political content of some of the stencils in the city, Cest described an idea for a *pinta* that he was toying with, both of whom are graffiti writers, and one of the members of Machete took great delight in examples of playful vandalism that had been painted over other street art. It is also worth pointing out that set definitions of graffiti and street art are hard to find, and especially amongst the artists I spoke to in Bogotá, people were very careful to insist that their definitions were their

own and that the important thing was that people were out painting, not what they called it.

Despite this rather romantic vision of unity and mutual respect within the world of graffiti and street art, there are also subtle signs of fracture in the urban visual landscape. These fractures suggest that even if it is the audience that insists on the classification of graffiti and street art, the effects are felt by those who produce different forms. I used to walk past a huge mural in Chapinero, which was painted by Birdy Kids in 2016 and depicted a colourful array of pencils lined up along the lower half of the image while a balloon bear floated away into the clouds above them. After leaving Bogotá, I came across an image of it on Facebook, this time showing that ‘colonisation’ (*‘colonización’*) had been sprayed across it (figure 56).⁶⁷ It appears that some graffiti and street artists are pushing back against the colonisation represented by the growing trend for large-scale, expensive murals, whether they are the result of a competition, a commission or simply when permission from the owner of the building has been granted. The clash of subcultures can also be seen through another example, this time of a mural by Cacerolo, an artist who made the transition from the gallery to the street rather than the other way around. His signature motif transforms cultural and political figures into ‘Jokers’ from Batman, adding a lurid leer to these recognisable faces. One such image was of Gustavo Petro and was painted in the northern neighbourhood of San Martín, alongside a main road where the walls are generally considered to be a free space for graffiti and street art. Graffiti writers bombed the mural, painting pieces over the top and claiming the space (figure 57). Interpretations on social media immediately assumed that this was a political act and people were offended by the characterisation of Petro (both those who assumed that it criticised Petro and those who assumed that it praised Petro). However, it seems that it was simply a case of reclaiming a wall that had ‘belonged’ to the graffiti writers whose work was there before Cacerolo came along and asked permission from the owner of the building to paint the mural. The transience of graffiti and street art is part of the process of painting freely in urban space, but there are subcultural rules when it comes to painting over someone else’s work. Indeed,

⁶⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=1106072072769365&set=pb.100000997493929.-2207520000.1499245269.&type=3&theater>

particularly in the case of subcultural practices, there are distinct emic and etic interpretations of the meaning of graffiti and street art. The decoding of different examples of graffiti and street art within the subcultures specific to them will include a critique based on a specialized set of criteria: with graffiti writing, for example, there are innovations related to the stylistic elements of the letter forms, or the spaces within which they are placed, which might be unknown to the broader public, or, indeed, the artists who come along and fail to appreciate the respect due to new work in spots that have already been claimed. This is why, for Toxicómano, being a street artist is not about the form or content of your work, nor how legitimate it might be in the urban imaginary as the trend moves towards bigger, more elaborate murals, it is about the experience of being on the street and taking it seriously:

That is, it annoys me, what I was saying, that the person who paints very well but has never painted on the street, suddenly gets the opportunity to paint a wall and then they, like, represent that dynamic but they still haven't, they haven't taken note of everything that comes with it, that painting on the street isn't climbing scaffolding, putting headphones in and not seeing what is happening below. No, painting on the street is knowing what is happening in the neighbourhood and being part of it.

O sea, me molesta, lo que te decía, de la persona que pinta muy bien pero nunca ha pintado en la calle, de pronto tiene la oportunidad de pintar un muro y ya entonces, como que asume esa dinámica, pero todavía no ha, no se ha dado cuenta de todo lo que hay alrededor, que pintar en la calle no es subirse a un andamio, y ponerse audífonos y no ver qué se sucede abajo. No, pintar en la calle es saber qué pasa en el barrio y estar integrado.

In other words, you have to learn your craft. Knowing the space, knowing the people, knowing the context is part of graffiti and street art. In the context of the developing aesthetic hierarchy in Bogotá, this encounter is significant because it is used to distinguish those who have recently entered the world of graffiti and street art but gained immediate access to the large-scale and funded projects, from those whose roots are in the streets even if, like Toxicómano, they are now part of the graffiti and street art elite.

These fractures and tensions are further important because they allude to the inequalities embedded in the development of this aesthetic hierarchy. Germán Gómez, a director for the Secretaría de Cultura, Recreación y Deporte, contributed to the creation of the graffiti law of 2013, and he argues that the message has been miscommunicated:

When you describe something as artistic, people assume, generally, that the more artistic are the big murals on 26, or the more recent ones in the city centre, you know? So you see that there does exist a hegemony, in public opinion, in what is considered good graffiti and bad graffiti. And that was a mistake on the part of the local government, not transmitting the information properly and not establishing that graffiti, that is, the responsible practice of graffiti, doesn't have anything to do with the aesthetic quality of graffiti. Rather with whether or not permission has been granted. [...] In a detrimental way, this has also affected other kinds of graffiti, like tags, like writing, like the political. [...] Then, there is a symbolic violence because those who practice other kinds of graffiti feel excluded by those same administrative or local policies, right?

Cuando se manda como artístico, la gente asume, en su sentido común, que el artístico son los grandes murales que hay en la 26, o los que se han hecho últimamente en el centro, no? Entonces fijate que sí existe una hegemonía, en la opinión pública, en lo que se considera buen grafiti y el mal grafiti. Creo que eso fue un error de la administración, no haber transmitido adecuadamente la información y plantear que el grafiti, digamos la práctica responsable de grafiti, no tiene que ver con la calidad estética del grafiti. Sino si tiene permiso o no tiene permiso. [...] En detrimento de eso, se ha afectado otro tipo de grafiti, como el tag, el writing, el político. [...] Luego ahí también hay una violencia simbólica porque los practicantes de otros tipos de grafiti se sienten excluidos por las mismas políticas administrativas o distritales, no?

Ultimately, the resulting law recognises all types of graffiti as legitimate forms of cultural expression so long as they are not being used for advertising and are in permitted spaces. Nevertheless, the assumption that some graffiti is art and some is vandalism remains strong. As Gómez explains, there is a widespread perception that art refers to something aesthetically elaborate, to something that has a legible message, to the large-

scale murals rather than to the tags, writing and political inscriptions. Even during the graffiti tour, the less aesthetically elaborate tags, *grafiti de barrista*, *pintas* and slogans that we passed were largely ignored. They were, however, used to explain why some people in La Candelaria will allow graffiti and street art to be painted on the walls of their homes and businesses, because a more elaborate and 'artistic' mural is less likely to get tagged and so it serves to crowd out the individual and less appreciated forms of intervention. Clearly, this trend has not gone unnoticed, and criticisms of the tour include the ways in which political positions are side-lined in favour of beautification, the theory that local artists are displaced by established or international artists, and discomfort at the way in which the city's trajectory of graffiti and street art that developed in multiple neighbourhoods ended up being summarised in one very central tourist attraction. Furthermore, broader criticisms of the local government's support for graffiti and street art included complaints that only the most famous street artists won the commissions for the big murals, while a group of *barristas* in Kennedy argued that the graffiti writers in their neighbourhood were given preferential treatment, whereas they faced rejection.

As Gómez points out, that leads to the subsequent exclusion of other graffiti artists. By describing this exclusion as symbolic violence, he reflects the language of the right to the city where people are alienated and excluded because they are not involved in the production of urban space and in the decisions made about the city. Furthermore, he shows how that is related to visibility and recognition. Denying the legitimacy of people's right to express themselves in public space is part of denying them the right to the city. In other words, the claims to the right to the city that are articulated in graffiti and street art, and their call to imagine ways of seeing that take seriously and revalue public space, not in spite of but because of the life on the street, are constrained by the structuring effects of urban imaginaries. Araya López highlights the importance of having a space to debate what graffiti and street art mean. In Bogotá, I argue that this debate exists but has also led to a process of stratification that classifies different kinds of graffiti and street, and distinguishes between them according to what is legitimate or not.

6.3 Complexities and contradictions

In the following pages, I expand on the relationship between the complex of visuality and the reception of graffiti and street art. The classification of different forms of graffiti extends to a process of segregating what is legitimate from what is illegitimate. Indeed, the interpretations of authorship, motivation and message were deeply dependant on the form of graffiti and street art. More traditionally artistic forms of urban intervention are given greater consideration and greater respect than less elaborate writing on the walls. By framing this through the language of aesthetics, of what is beautiful or ugly, what has meaning or what doesn't, the symbolic violence behind such distinctions is normalised. Furthermore, I argue that this aesthetic hierarchy is not just about art, but about social status and citizenship. The details of the developing aesthetic hierarchy reveal the complex and contradictory relationship between violence and aesthetics, reinforcing and expanding upon the critiques of public space described by graffiti and street artists. Beyond avoiding or being fearful of public space and public 'others', the discussions of what graffiti people liked or didn't like revealed that they distinguished between different social identities and the extent to which they are perceived as worth listening to or not. Moreover, it is not just that people like different forms of graffiti and street art, it is that there is an intensity to their dislike or fear of particular forms, which extends to the people doing them. The consequences of such an imaginary not only undermine the complexity and imbrication of different forms of violence, as well as different forms of graffiti and street art, they also risk legitimising direct violence targeting those who do not have the right to the city.

6.3.1 Aesthetic distinctions

Rather than insults shouted out of windows or being chased away from sites where you're painting (or at least alongside them), many of the interactions between graffiti and street artists and the wider public were described to me as friendly moments, as opportunities for dialogue. However, even during these encounters the classification of different forms of graffiti and street art were brought to the fore. One of the artists from Machete described their experience of this process, laughing while they told me of one

older man approaching them to pay a compliment to their graffiti while simultaneously insulting graffiti writing:

'This yes, this yes. Why all of those bastard letters that no one understands?'

'This yes, I congratulate you', right? He said 'I congratulate you'. But he was all happy and joyful, but at the same time he was calling the ones who do writing bastards. It made me laugh a lot.

'Eso sí, eso sí. ¿Por qué esos hijueputas letras que uno no entiende?' 'Eso sí, la felicito', ¿no? Decía 'la felicito'. Pero estaba todo feliz y alegre, pero a la vez estaba hijeputando los que hacen letras. Y a mí me daba mucha risa.

Thus, this member of the public took great joy from the graffiti that they were producing, so much so that he wanted to approach them and congratulate them. However, his praise was offered in direct contrast to the '*hijueputas letras*' that he did not understand, and to which he clearly took offence. Such distinctions are common, according to Skore:

It's funny that when I'm painting, when we're painting a block on the street, murals or whatever, people say 'this is pretty, not like those shitty tags blablabla', and they're pointing to a tag that I did the night before. I go along with it, like 'yeah, those bastards' or whatever. I don't try and defend my other tag because they're never going to understand.

Es chistoso que cuando estoy pintando, pintamos cuadros en una calle, murales, lo que sea, la gente me dice 'eso sí es bonito y no como esos tags de mierda rarara' y están señalando un tag que hice la noche anterior. Les sigo el juego es como 'sí, sí esos malditos' no sé qué. No me pongo a defender mi otro rayón porque no van a entender nunca.

Again, the friendliness of the interaction was framed through the distinction between what they saw as being his work, and what they saw as being the inscriptions belonging to someone else. The irony that Skore was responsible for both the graffiti and street art that people liked as well as that which they didn't like is pleasing to those in the know, and reflects the difficulties of distinguishing between who paints what on the walls in

Bogotá, given that artists work legally and illegally. Furthermore, these two quotes reveal that the process of evaluating the work relies on a comparison that favours one form of graffiti over the other. During the focus groups and interviews on the street that I conducted, the question that I would often open with, and to which people would return throughout the conversation, was ‘what do you think of graffiti in Bogotá?’ Initially, almost all of them would begin with a confirmation that they liked graffiti, followed by an explanation of what they didn’t like. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the graffiti that received the widest condemnation were the less traditionally artistic examples of tags, *grafiti de barista*, slogans and *pintas* (figures 58-60). The reasons that they gave for not liking them, though, are revealing. They were identified as a ‘mess’, or ‘*mamarrachos*’, as ‘scrawls’ (*‘rayones’*) and vandalism. They were described as ‘things without meaning’ (*‘cosas sin sentido’*), that are ‘unintelligible’ (*‘no se entienden’*), ‘don’t transmit anything’ (*‘no transmite nada’*), ‘aren’t constructive’ (*‘no construyen nada’*), and ‘don’t have any meaning’ (*‘no tiene significado’*). The aggression and condemnation implicit in these aesthetic judgements, which are mirrored in the ‘*hijueputas letras*’ and ‘*tags de mierda*’ described above, are not incidental. Rather, they characterise the process of not only classifying different forms of graffiti and street art but segregating them so that they seem to be completely different things that do not speak to each other (Mirzoeff, 2011).

In particular, the segregation was enforced through the presumed identity of the social groups behind different forms of graffiti and street art. Indeed, as the discussions continued, the question of what they represent was elaborated upon. Sometimes, that included a deeper consideration of what they might mean to the people who do them, and a recognition that people do have a right to express themselves. At other times, the negative judgements were framed through an identification of the kinds of people who produced such graffiti, revealing the internalized, elitist rejection of particular social groups that emerges unreflexively, even automatically, in such aesthetic judgements. For example, pointing to the image of *grafiti de barrista*, one focus group participant at the Universidad Cooperativa said: ‘For me, that’s a scrawl. A *chav* did that. At least, that’s my understanding, right? That is, a *chav* – who cares what they think?’ (*‘Para mí es un rayón. Eso lo hizo un ñero. Pues, a mi concepto, ¿no? O sea, un ñero, ¿a quién*

importa lo que ellos piensen?)⁶⁸ On La Séptima, one man said ‘this isn’t a protest, it’s people without work, people who don’t have anything to do’ (*eso no es una protesta, es gente sin oficio, gente que no tiene nada que hacer*). Others described those who do such graffiti as ‘badly adjusted’ (*desadaptados*), who are showing a ‘lack of respect’ (*falta de respeto*), and ‘a lack of sense of belonging’ (*falta de sentido de pertenencia*). Even on campus at the Universidad Nacional, a site that is renowned for its politicisation and its political graffiti, a young man in a group of students specifically referred to *grafiti de consigna*, or the names and slogans of different political movements, when he said that ‘messages that are just vandalism pretending to spread a message look ugly. That’s why they damage the city, they damage the university’ (*mensajes que ya son solo vandalismo de gente pretendiendo difundir un mensaje se ve muy feo. Por eso daña la ciudad, daña la universidad*). In the same group, another student commented ‘no one has ever moved the masses scrawling on a wall’ (*nadie ha movido masas rayando una pared*). At the very least, one student at the Uni Militar said, ‘it would be good if these people could realise that they should try and better express their ideas’ (*sería bueno que esas personas se concientizaran mejor para tratar de expresar sus ideas*). These responses reveal the contours – and processes – of hegemony as the boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate forms of expression are tested. The idea that they damage the city, that despite their claims they are ‘just’ vandalism, has the effect of criminalising them. The disparaging remark about graffiti failing to ignite a revolution depoliticises the writing on the walls. Even the attempt to understand the motivations of graffiti and street artists and recognise their right to express themselves comes across as patronising, because, ideally, the form of expression should fit better with the audience. Rather than being meaningless, then, the graffiti now represented signs of disorder (*desorden*), visual contamination (*contaminación visual*), which are not ‘healthy for society’ (*sano para la sociedad*). Around the world, graffiti and street art do seem to elicit intense reactions, and anti-graffiti sentiments are particularly marked by the associations with dirt and disorder that are applied to graffiti. Schacter argues that such disorder is represented by the unauthorised presence of graffiti in public space

⁶⁸ ‘Chav’ is my translation of the insult ‘ñero’, which in Colombia is a derogatory term laden with lower working class-notations and used to describe people as vulgar or uncouth, and particularly related to urban youth and street-style aesthetics

(Schacter, 2008, p. 44), but I would argue that the repulsion revealed in the anti-graffiti sentiments described above speaks less to the idea that public space is inviolable and more to the urban imaginaries of the social subjects behind different forms of graffiti. Indeed, taste is situated within a social framework of meaning, there is no pure aesthetic critique (Bourdieu, 2010). Furthermore, it is not only situated within a social imaginary, it also helps to construct that social imaginary. Thus, these aesthetic perceptions of graffiti and street art reveal more than just interpretations of beauty, they articulate value judgements that reproduce the segregation of different forms of graffiti and street art based on the social subjects that are associated with them. This is a way of not only classifying different forms of graffiti and street art, but separating artists into two distinct groups of people, which designates those who are fit to express themselves in public (space), and those who aren't (Mirzoeff, 2010, p. 18). The less aesthetically elaborate graffiti was interpreted as meaningless, or the meaning of it was interpreted as an aggressive and insulting attack, and *specifically* as the visual expressions of disaffected youth who were failing to conform to society and to express themselves in 'proper' ways (unlike the artists who created beautiful graffiti).

These responses reflect a more general trend in urban imaginaries of graffiti and street art, whereby the discussion fails to move beyond either celebration or condemnation and towards a deeper consideration of their meanings in the wider context of everyday violence and public space. Despite the recognition of multiple realities of violence and inequality in Bogotá, which I show throughout the empirical chapters of this thesis, people repeatedly failed to question why people should conform, why they should respect the historical monuments and public spaces that actively exclude them. Of course there are aggressive messages embedded in graffiti and street art. Violence is part of everyday life for many people, and the continuum of violence can lead to cycles of aggression (Bourgois, 2003). Dismissing such signs as mere vandalism or cleaning it off the walls, however, replaces a more fundamental questioning of what people might be saying through such graffiti and ignores the unpleasant realities of violence that are imposed from above: the unemployment, the stigmas, the exclusions (Wacquant, 2008). Furthermore, it is worth remembering that for many of those who do graffiti and street art a lot of it is about the enjoyment they get from painting the spaces around them, of

leaving their mark and of thus appropriating the city. Cest argues that doing graffiti is an opportunity to explore urban space in depth and connect to it in a personal way and says that 'graffiti has helped me to inhabit the city, to know the city, to appropriate spaces in the city and above all, to create an identity here' (*'el graffiti me ha permitido habitar la ciudad, conocer la ciudad, apropiar espacios de la ciudad, y sobretodo tener una identidad también acá'*). For Saks, doing graffiti is a private means of self-expression that opens up new ways of seeing the city:

Graffiti became a tool that I could use to say many things, my way, related to what I was thinking, what was happening, and to protest [...] the interaction with the street became very strong, right? Like I have a perspective on lots of things in the street that normally people don't see.

El graffiti se volvió esa herramienta donde yo podía decir muchas cosas, sí, a mi manera, acerca de lo que pensaba, lo que estaba sucediendo, y protestar [...] la interacción con la calle se hizo muy fuerte, sí? Como que ya tenía una, una perspectiva para ver muchas cosas en la calle que la gente del común no ve.

Furthermore, while aggression has frequently been associated with different territorial claims to the city, in Bogotá this is not always the case. The graffiti writing of *barristas*, for example, treads the line between intimidation and appropriation. On the one hand, it is used to demarcate invisible boundaries between groups of football fans. As such, it is an example of territorial graffiti that can lead to outbursts of physical violence. On the other hand, it is also being used in non-violent ways to celebrate the shared culture of football amongst fans and the affection they feel for their cities – a more 'public-friendly' appropriation of territory (Castro Pulido, 2012, pp. 44-45). Thus, in these examples the act of appropriating urban public space is experienced as a meaningful interaction with the city. By claiming their right to the city, then, graffiti and street artists are not rejecting the city, they are fortifying their sense of belonging to it: '[g]raffiti [...] can be understood as an expression or embodiment of Lefebvre's cry and demand for the 'right to the city', the right to appropriate, appreciate, know and use its spaces and places' (Zieleniec, 2016, p. 10). These nuanced interpretations of what it means to do graffiti and street art reveal the flawed arguments in the responses of the public, because they show that you cannot just assume what such graffiti and street art

represent. Instead of being open to the multiple possible meanings of graffiti and street art, though, the audience of city dwellers, media outlets and even the government implicitly reproduce the process of classifying and segregating that which is acceptable and that which is not. As I argue in the next section, the notions of acceptability and legitimacy are also aestheticized, in that they are seen as normal and unquestionable, which completes the complex of visibility rather than gaining the right to look.

6.3.2 The violence of aesthetics

Despite the widely-mediatised narrative of graffiti and street art as cultural capital in Bogotá, then, what my research actually revealed was a process of delegitimising some forms of graffiti while celebrating others. The aesthetic hierarchy embedded in the reception of graffiti and street art reveals that people might talk about everyone's right to self-expression, but in fact there is a much more complicated and tension-filled imaginary of not only what should be seen in public space, but of who has a right to be seen in it.

In La Candelaria, this aesthetic hierarchy is visible through the ways in which institutions are trying to negotiate and appropriate graffiti in line with the political project of recuperating and revitalising the city centre. I attended a conference organised by the Secretaría de Cultura, Recreación y Deporte and the Instituto de Patrimonio Cultural, entitled 'Revitalising heritage: the appropriation of cultural heritage and the responsible practice of graffiti' (*'Revitalizando el Patrimonio: apropiación del patrimonio y la práctica responsable de graffiti'*). While there were a number of speakers representing different approaches to graffiti and street art, including Armando Silva, Catalina Rodríguez from Idartes and street artist Cheche, the main thrust of the conference was on how to preserve cultural heritage and how to control graffiti. Thus, they described projects where temporary walls had been placed in public space to allow people to paint on them, where communities had participated in schemes to repaint the houses in their neighbourhoods and they described the painstaking process of restoring historical buildings that had been damaged by their exposure to graffiti and other elements. Combined with the public's desires for graffiti and street art to be aesthetically pleasing and to transmit a message that the audience wants to hear, these approaches suggest

that their interpretation of the graffiti law and its status as cultural capital is less about recognising the expanded rights to the city of those who want to express themselves through these cultural forms, and more about the ways in which these people and their expressions can be brought under control.

Indeed, aesthetics here does not only refer to art or the way things look, it also refers to the process of controlling what looks right or wrong, what is acceptable and normal, and what is abnormal and must be policed. If the right to look is about disrupting the distribution of the sensible, then graffiti and street art are limited as forms of political art by the continuation of a framework of meaning that specifies the appropriate contexts in which their messages can be recognised and heard (Rancière, 2009).

Perversely, the celebration and endorsement of particular forms of graffiti and street art at the expense of others seems to be one way in which these limits are enforced, as around the world murals are directly used to replace graffiti (Schacter, 2014). Schacter provides a particularly scathing critique of urban art and its appropriation by corporate elites and state institutions when it is used to sell space through creativity because '[i]t provides an aesthetic of transgression – the transgression that all innovation must be borne of – whilst remaining perfectly numb to the social realities it occludes' (Schacter, 2014, p. 165). Thus, graffiti and street art are celebrated as cool and innovative forms of cultural expression, but only when they are controlled and conform to the hegemonic vision of aesthetic acceptability. Stinkfish seems to share this disdain, as he argues that the distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' graffiti are situated within a capitalist system that decides what is legitimate or not based on exchange value:

Where there's this logic that what is free is dirty, where if someone does something off their own back, it's not worth anything. If I'm taken to a wealthy area, I've got scaffolding that's paid for, someone's taking photos of me, then everyone in the neighbourhood comes out and it's like 'oh, who are you? You're filming something for the television'. Meanwhile, if I'm doing it on my own, which happens all the time, that I go, I paint walls, I take my things and don't tell anyone, it doesn't have anything to do with anyone else, everyone stops to ask who is paying me, is it the government or the owner of the house? Or, what are you doing that for? Where did you get the money from? [...] So I think it has

more to do with this kind of logic where if you're not getting paid then it's something strange [...] suspicious, not done.

Donde tienes unos – unas, una lógica de vida donde lo gratis es sucio, donde si alguien hace algo por su cuenta, no vale. Si a mí me llevo a un barrio de dinero, y me pagan una grúa, y me toman fotos, así se salen todos los del barrio, muchos del barrio, como ahh ¿tú quién eres, estás grabando algo para la televisión? Mientras si yo lo hago por mi cuenta, que pasa todo el tiempo, que voy, pinto paredes y llevo mis cosas no lo digo a nadie, no tiene que ver con nadie, todo el mundo para y preguntan, ¿pero quién le pagan, o si lo paga el gobierno, o el dueño de la casa? O, ¿usted por qué hace eso, por donde usted sacó la plata? [...] Entonces yo creo que tiene que ver más con esa lógica de que si no estás recibiendo dinero, es algo raro [...] sospechoso, mal hecho.

When you are clearly endorsed by some higher power, surrounded by cameras and scaffolding and definitely getting paid for it, people take an interest in what you have to say, in what you are painting on the walls. Otherwise, you and your actions are suspicious. Significantly, it is not necessarily the graffiti that is being judged according to this aesthetic hierarchy, but the person behind it and the extent to which they can be clearly identified as someone important, someone who might be worth paying attention to. Skore also draws attention to the different ways in which you are treated depending on what you are painting, where and how:

So normally people thank you when you're painting legally, something colourful, maybe more aesthetic, with an idea, sort of, thought-out. But it's ironic that in that moment they maybe feel authorised to say, I don't like that, or change that, or why don't you do something pretty. But when you're bombing and they see you doing tags in the street they respect you too much, or they're scared of you, no one says anything, so that's kind of funny and controversial. As if when you're painting something pretty for people, and no one is paying you, then they criticise you. And when you're destroying the city, in inverted commas, they fear you and respect you.

Pues normalmente una gente le agrada cuando pinto pues legal, que son colores, quizás más estético, más una idea, pues, pensada. Pero es algo irónico que en ese momento ellos quizás se sienten con autoridad a decir, no me gusta, o cámbielo, o porque no hace algo bonito. Pero cuando uno está pintando bombing que te ven haciendo tags en la calle, te respetan demasiado, o te tienen miedo, nadie dice nada, entonces es como chistoso y controversial. Como que cuando uno está pintando algo bonito para la gente, que nadie le está pagando a uno, y sí critican. Y cuando uno está destruyendo la ciudad, entre comillas, te tienen miedo y respeto.

The social interaction is decided by who they think you are and what you represent. While the audience might not be explicitly criticising the graffiti artist for ‘bombing’ the city (aiming to cover the city with their tag) in the moment of that social encounter, the fact that they will approach Skore in one context and not in the other suggests that they do think of them in very different ways. The implication is that he should be avoided when he is doing something less aesthetically elaborate, when he is tagging the city, but when he is painting a mural, he is an acceptable and approachable member of society, someone to whom you can even give advice. The denigration of the tags, *pintas*, and *grafiti de barrista* that I describe above can thus be contextualised by Skore’s quote, revealing that what people are fearful of in the moment of seeing such graffiti, or specifically those producing it, is the threat of direct violence, of an attack or an act of crime. Indeed, the fear that they expose by not approaching him corroborates the imaginary of graffiti and street artists as one example of violent and criminal urban youth (Morrison, 2016). Thus, when I pushed him on the stereotypes that are associated with graffiti and street artists, Skore responded:

Yeah, people associate them with delinquency, with thieves, with armed groups. I don’t know the first one with those characteristics. Maybe that’s why it’s controversial, like I said, that when you go out bombing people respect you and fear you. But it’s a social imaginary. It’s not true, it’s just fear. Like I said at the beginning, people here tell you that there are loads of thieves, but it’s a social fear that anyone who asks you the time is going to rob you. That’s it. And it happens to me, sometimes I’m like ‘have you got the time?’ and they say ‘no,

no', or 'excuse me, where is such and such a place?' and 'no, don't know'. And they close themselves off.

Si la gente los asimila con delincuencia, con ladrones, con gente armada. No conozco el primer que sea con estas características. Quizás por eso lo que te digo que es lo controversial que cuando salgo a hacer bombing la gente te respete y te tiene miedo. Pero es por un imaginario social. No es cierto, es como un miedo. Como te dije al comienzo, que la gente te dice que acá roban un montón pero es un miedo social que, cualquier persona te pide la hora, te va a robar. Así. Y me pasa, yo a veces soy '¿tiene hora?' y dice 'no, no', o '¿disculpe, dónde queda tal cosa?' y 'no, no sé'. Y se encierren en su mundo.

He suggests that people associate graffiti and street artists with delinquency, theft and even armed groups, which are extreme forms of violence compared to the act of painting on a wall. Moreover, he argues that these stereotypes and fears are representative of urban social interactions in general, rather than belonging to the particular characteristics of graffiti and street art in Bogotá. Skore's interpretation of such social encounters is significant because he situates it within a broader urban imaginary of diffuse and generalised fear and anxiety, reflecting the imaginaries of public space explored above, and bringing together the fear of public space with the fear of urban 'others'.

The processes of aestheticizing, or normalising, the distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable graffiti and street art are interwoven with imaginaries of violence. This relates to the structural violence of inequality, whereby you are only accepted if you are surrounded by cameras and scaffolding. It also relates to violence of stigma, where your actions are associated with criminal behaviour if you do not conform to the dominant image of an artist as one who produces aesthetically elaborate murals. A more direct risk of violence is threatened through interactions with the police, and I argue that this interaction is also deeply dependent on their personal interpretation of the legitimacy of graffiti and street art(ists). Indeed, the interactions with the police that were described to me by various graffiti and street artists reveal a complex picture of everyday violence, but they also suggest that the police have taken up the role of urban curators. Thus, artists have to negotiate the threat of corruption and physical violence, depending on

whether or not the individual police officers like what they are doing, or dislike the look of them. Machete described a variety of interactions with the police:

[W]e have had clashes with the police, when they have seen you painting, they immediately turn to violence, they don't even ask you why, or if you've got permission, no sir. They immediately act violently towards you. I have also met police officers who have said 'wow, great, cool'. That's the way it is. I don't know. The way I see it we've had as much of one as of the other. Although it's more bad than good, right?

[H]emos tenido fuertes choques con la policia, cuando uno se ha visto pintando, de una vez se van con violencia, ni siquiera te pregunta por qué, o si usted tiene permiso, no señor. Se dan de una vez con violencia contra ti. También he encontrado policías que a mí me han dicho 'uy que bueno, chévere'. Así es. No sé. Mi percepción es que hemos tenido tanto de una como de la otra. Aunque es más malo que bueno, ¿no?

In other words, there is no telling what the interaction might be. It could be bad, and it often is bad, but it could also be good, where the police will praise your work and let you get on with it. I was even told of a situation where a policeman asked to borrow a can of spray paint so he could touch up his motorcycle. Nevertheless, many of the artists I spoke to had direct experiences of police abuse or had heard stories about police violence. Crisp agrees that the personal perspective of the officer in question is what decides the outcome of the interaction, but police abuse is not uncommon:

I've had police stop me as well, they usually ask if I've got permission and if I haven't they'll tell me off, you know, basically tell me to get off and stop painting. Luckily I haven't been violently or physically assaulted or touched when I'm painting. I know some other local artists that have been hit with batons and been physically assaulted. Previously the law was that you could be detained for 24 hours, erm, and I've heard horrible stories of, you know, police and security sort of you know, beating people up and throwing them into those trucks that they put all the drunks and homeless people in, er, spraying the cans, emptying the cans out on their face and on their clothes. Then they're being robbed in the cells

etc as well without protection from the police. Erm, so yeah, I think it really depends who you're dealing with, or whose wall you're painting, or how you're doing it.

The rumours that Crisp relays here were repeated by a number of people I spoke to, and some also said that bribes were demanded by the police. In some ways, the ambiguity around the graffiti law is good because it means that people have been able to talk their way out of a fine, being moved on, or even arrested. In other ways, it means that the interaction will depend on how you and your work is interpreted, and the consequences vary from praise, to blackmail, to physical abuse and illegal detention.

Within the context of aesthetic hierarchies, the realities of police abuse are a reminder of the everyday political violence that is perpetrated by the state. It is worth exploring the case surrounding Diego Felipe Becerra in more depth to draw out the role of imaginaries of graffiti and street art in this instance. He was killed because his presence on the street was associated with criminality and danger, while the act of covering up the direct violence of the police officer who shot Diego Felipe reveals the structural inequalities of impunity and injustice. Furthermore, there is a cultural violence embedded in the representational practices that were deployed to justify Diego Felipe's death. The motivation for painting Diego Felipe as a criminal can be traced to the cultural violence that is woven into urban imaginaries of graffiti in the city. The state's representation of the crime relied upon an association of young working-class men with delinquency, an expectation that delinquency carries the risk of death and a society that agrees to these prejudices because they are entrenched in the social imaginary. Cest confirms this by describing the shift in public attitudes towards graffiti since Diego Felipe's death:

Before what happened to Diego Felipe, the actions of the police were supported by public opinion. So, if they caught a graffiti artist and beat him up, it was 'well done'. If they caught a graffiti artist and locked him up, 'well done'. If they caught a graffiti artist and cut his hand off, 'well done'. After what happened to Diego Felipe, I think there was a change, a rupture whereby the same people and public opinion started to look at our side. They started to support the graffiti community and question the actions of the police.

[A]ntes de, de lo que le pasó a Diego Felipe, [...] las acciones de la policía estaban apoyadas por la opinión pública. Entonces si cogieron un grafitero y le pegaban, 'bien hecho'. Si cogían un grafitero y lo encarcelaron, 'bien hecho'. Si cogían un grafitero y le quitaron una mano, 'bien hecho'. Después de lo que pasó con Diego Felipe considero que eso fue un cambio, una ruptura para que la misma gente y la opinión pública empezaran a mirar más hacia este lado. Entonces [...] que empezaron a apoyar un poco más [...] al gremio de grafiti y a cuestionar la actividad policial.

Indeed, it was only through challenging the narrative that Diego Felipe was a criminal that the media and the public began to listen to his parents and their demand for truth and justice. As Cest reveals, the image of graffiti and street artists as citizens who have rights, as people who are expressing themselves, is what shifted in the urban imaginary. Butler argues that the frames through which violence is comprehended are culturally constructed and, although they should not be reduced to determinism, these frames should be contestable because 'the effective regulation of affect, outrage, and ethical response is at stake' (Butler, 2009, p. 78). It is, therefore, important that aesthetic judgements and interactions with the police still depend on how they value the social identity of 'graffiti artist'. While the shift since Diego Felipe's death is remarkable, young people are still being killed in the street (by police, by security guards) and the crimes remain in impunity. So, while graffiti and street artists have gained some right to the city through the law and the cultural capital represented by the celebration of the graffiti tour, the aesthetic limitations that are placed on them should be recognised as a form of violence and a denial of their right to the city. Significantly, graffiti artists were specifically encouraged to attend the conference I describe above by Catalina during one of the *mesas de grafiti* in order to make sure that their voices were heard. I discussed this with a graffiti artist friend who came to the event and he confirmed that she was one of the people within the state who explicitly stood up for them and supported them, especially in places like the conference where the narrative was surely going to be anti-graffiti. Indeed, during the conference Catalina reminded the audience and other speakers that the reason it was important to take graffiti and street art seriously was so that people's rights and their lives could be respected. The supposed autonomy of the

right to look is constrained not only by the complex of visibility, which continues to classify and segregate different forms of graffiti and street art while masking the symbolic violence of such distinctions through an aesthetic visual order, but the threat of coercive measures to enforce the dominant order are ever-present in Bogotá.

6.4 Conclusion

Who, then, has the right to the city? La Candelaria and the surrounding centre are places where heterogeneous social groups come together, and the visual landscape offers an insight into the violence of such encounters. Artists respond to the structural violence of exclusion and alienation, demanding their right to paint the city and depicting the violence of poverty, social isolation and homelessness. By depicting urban 'others', those who are even deemed '*desechable*', in their artworks and interacting with them in a 'different' way, they insist on the right to look at the structural inequality embedded in the urban landscape and they highlight the cultural violence that attempts to keep such inequality invisible, critiquing the symbolic violence of indifference and the fear of public space. However, in this chapter graffiti and street artists do not only reflect and critique imaginaries of violence, rather they are also shown to be the object of violent imaginaries. Aesthetic hierarchies classify and segregate different forms of cultural expression, insisting on the deleterious effects of some, while celebrating the vibrancy of others. These judgements extend to the artists who produce such work, and they subsequently have to negotiate societal expectations related to whether they are an 'artist' or a 'vandal'. The consequences of such distinctions are not limited to the aesthetic preferences of what is painted on the walls, as different opportunities in terms of funding and legitimate claims to the city are offered to different graffiti and street artists, and they face ambiguous interactions with the police.

Alongside the symbolic violence embedded in such distinctions and hierarchies, graffiti and street art are situated within a broader politics of aesthetics where the visual order of the city is at stake, and of central concern to the state. Indeed, Gómez described the meetings with graffiti and street artists as a turning point in the local government's approach to the graffiti law. His initial intention was to try and get the participants to stop bombing the city and instead produce more aesthetically pleasing work. The graffiti

and street artists responded with: ‘Who are you to tell us what’s pretty and what’s ugly? Who are you to tell us how to behave when the local government robbed the 26’? (*¿Quiénes son ustedes para decirnos qué es bonito y qué es feo? Quiénes son ustedes para decirnos cómo nos comportamos y ustedes como alcaldía se robaron la 26?*).⁶⁹ By drawing attention to a corruption scandal that surrounded the former mayor, Samuel Moreno, and led to his imprisonment, these graffiti and street artists turned the question of appropriate behaviour and urban citizenship on its head. Instead, they questioned the legitimacy of the state to speak with any authority about what is best for the city, pointing to the government’s own ‘undesirable’ behaviour. This interaction exposes the core contradiction at the heart of the discussions around public space and its aesthetic desirability. More than offering graffiti and street artists the chance to express themselves, the initial process of creating the law was to control how these young people were choosing to express themselves. Indeed, despite the binary distinctions that are drawn between politicians, like Petro and Peñalosa who are deemed to be working either for ‘us’ or for ‘them’, the reality is that they continue to delimit what and who is allowed to be seen in public space, in other words defining the acceptable limits of self-expression.

Thus, the right to the city is constantly being fought over, and the dynamics of graffiti and street art in the centre offer one example of how urban imaginaries of violence are marked by the ‘need to ignore’. The visibility of structural inequality as an everyday reality is policed through the control over what can be seen in public space, and how the visual landscape is interpreted – what it should reflect, who it should reflect, who should be in it. Everyday violence manifests itself through the need to ignore the more structural, endemic violence of inequality by depoliticising, criminalising, ignoring or even abusing those who represent such danger and abnormality. In the following chapter, I conclude the thesis with a reflection on the multiple ways in which my findings show that violences remain hidden, ignored or reproduced in urban imaginaries in Bogotá and the implications of this for approaching cultural representations of violence.

⁶⁹ The construction of the Transmilenio along Calle 26 was part of a wider embezzlement ring by the local government and associated construction companies under Samuel Moreno’s term as mayor.



Figure 42 Nuestro norte es el sur



Figure 43 100% Poder Latino!



Figure 44 Mujer indígena



Figure 45 Somos memoria



Figure 46 No más desplazamiento



Figure 47 Homeless



Figure 48 Abandoned children



Figure 49 Circus tricks



Figure 50 Street performers



Figure 51 El beso de los invisibles



Figure 52 Santos rata



Figure 53 Bogotá mejor para quién?



Figure 54 Sin pan para el rico



Figure 55 Todos somos iguales

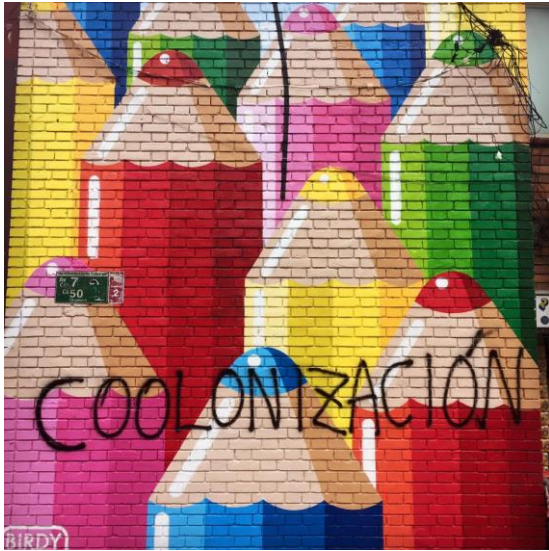


Figure 56 Coolonización



Figure 57 Cacerolo



Figure 58 Barristas en el Campín



Figure 59 Enkapucharte!



Figure 60 Plaza Bolívar

Chapter 7

Conclusion

'A la gente le incomoda que le recuerden sus muertos'

Dexpierte⁷⁰

'En este país no se puede decir las mierdas porque lo tapan a uno'

BeligerArte⁷¹

In this thesis, I have explored not only the ways in which graffiti and street art offer an insight into urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá but also the ways these practices themselves are framed within social imaginaries, in which violence plays a significant role. By focusing on the production and reception of different forms of graffiti and street art in specific spaces of the city, I show that there are multiple ways in which violences are negotiated, critiqued and reproduced in everyday life through the space of the imaginary. Moreover, I relate these discussions to broader perceptions of social and political realities of violence in Bogotá. In particular, I argue for a recognition of the complexities and contradictions that are embedded in ways of seeing violence in the city, which reveal the politics of representing violence, the socio-spatial dynamics of violence and the violence embedded in social interactions and perceptions of different social groups in public space. In this final chapter, I reflect on the key findings of the thesis, discuss my contributions to the literature, and offer some avenues for further research.

7.1 Summary of findings

This thesis set out to explore how graffiti and street art offer an insight into urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá, guided by the following research questions:

- *How is violence represented in graffiti and street art?*

⁷⁰ 'People don't like to be reminded of their dead'

⁷¹ 'In this country you can't talk about the shit because you'll get covered up'

- *How do people interpret graffiti and street art in relation to their perceptions of social and political realities?*
- *What perceptions of violence are suggested through these interpretations and discussions?*

In each empirical chapter, I situate the analysis within a particular neighbourhood in Bogotá and discuss how the graffiti and street art in that area engage with urban imaginaries of violence. The findings suggest that there are diverse forms of violence sewn into everyday life in the city and that graffiti and street art represent one of the ways through which people express their perceptions of violence. However, these claims merit further discussion because there are complex layers of meaning embedded within them, which were identified through the specific set of methods that I used to conduct the research.

My primary motivation in collecting the data presented here was to explore how people interpreted graffiti and street art, and violence, in Bogotá. This follows the call to understand how people map their own worlds and, more to the point, to take those mappings seriously (Crehan, 2002, p. 7). Thus, the focus groups, interviews, vox pops, visual analysis and ethnographic methods that I employed were understood to be providing an insight into the complex ways in which people theorise in the vernacular. I was specifically interested in listening to those who produced different kinds of graffiti and street art, and to those who might encounter them in everyday life. However, the principal objects of such vernacular analysis from all sides were not only graffiti and street art, but also violence and urban space because I wanted to explore the relationships between these fields. By taking such an approach, I was able to produce a set of data that offers a nuanced and complex reflection on the ways in which graffiti and street art reveal urban imaginaries of violence, which in itself offers an insight into broader understandings of violence in Bogotá.

Throughout the empirical analysis, I indicate the contradictions that emerged. In chapter 4, the production and reception of graffiti and street art on Calle 26 illuminates the politics of representing peace and conflict in the city. The reception of graffiti and street art appraised the representation of conflict and peace as signs of criticism directed at

the state, particularly in relation to the commemoration of victims and the recognition of the state as a perpetrator of violence. An almost contradictory interpretation was provided by some graffiti and street artists, though, as they questioned the political significance of narratives of violence that fell in line with those of the state. In chapter 5, the motivations and constraints of graffiti and street artists reveal the need to negotiate spatialized violence. Beautification projects were praised by locals and provided important opportunities for community engagement, serving to destigmatise areas that have more to offer than criminality. Nevertheless, the limitations placed on what forms of violence could be depicted in such graffiti and street art, and the continued need to negotiate threats of violence, were a reminder of the complex realities of state absence, corruption and repression. In chapter 6, the focus on the reception of graffiti and street art exposes the everyday reproduction of social hierarchies. While some forms of graffiti and street art were widely praised as cultural capital and endorsed by the local government, the media and the wider public, others were denigrated, dismissed and delegitimised.

The complexities and contradictions within these discussions are representative of the some of the wider ways of seeing social and political realities in Bogotá, which illuminate the broader dynamics between violence, aesthetics and urban space. Indeed, the image of the '*bosque de narrativas*' ('forest of stories') that I refer to in chapter 4 exemplifies the state of ambivalence and confusion in relation to violence as it is perceived and imagined in Bogotá (Cabrera, 2006). The multiplicity of violences, the implicit acceptance of the state as a perpetrator of violence and the extent to which violence is represented in everyday life, either through news, popular culture or simply talked about (without necessarily much depth), seems to lead to an obfuscating sense of banality and inevitability.

In relation to violence and urban space, the case studies of La Perseverancia and Ciudad Bolívar speak to the broader dynamics of social fragmentation in Bogotá, which is symbolised through its division into north and south, meaning rich/safe and poor/dangerous, respectively, but is also reproduced at a micro-level throughout the city. The *estratos* system illustrates the contradictions embedded in this distinction, as the identification of neighbourhoods according to the socio-economic status of

households ostensibly provides a fairer distribution of resources because poorer neighbourhoods are subsidised. The irony is that they become markers that allocate social positions according to the extent to which people are perceived as a respected member of society or as a problem, thus reproducing territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2008). Throughout my time in Bogotá there seemed to be a tension between romanticising or demonising marginalised neighbourhoods and the communities therein. This perspective reveals the place of uncertainty and ambiguity in urban imaginaries of violence, particularly as they relate to different spaces of the city and the ways in which people interact in and through them. It doesn't, however, provide a particularly realistic understanding of how people in those areas negotiate violence.

On the level of social interactions, the dynamics presented in chapter 6 were particularly representative of the discussions that I had around the city, but the case study heightens the role of public space as the site through which the tensions of everyday violence play out. In public spaces various social groups come together, but their interactions are limited by the symbolic violence of social hierarchies, which are enhanced by the fear of crime and aggression. Thus, people weave their way through a labyrinthine cityscape in attempts to avoid places (and people) that are '*feo*', a revealing metaphor for 'dangerous' that frequently refers to those areas that are more marginalised and hit by poverty and crime. These practices and narratives suggest that there is a 'need to ignore' rooted in urban imaginaries of everyday violence and, particularly, a need to ignore the demands of those urban 'others' who symbolise the more structural violences of poverty and inequality (Žižek, 2009).

These broader imaginaries of violence reveal the more pessimistic ways of seeing in Bogotá, highlighting the hegemonic effect of the chaotic confusion of common sense (Crehan, 2016) and the obstacles that problematize the notion of the right to look (Mirzoeff, 2011). The ambiguous impact of urban imaginaries of violence can be typified through the notion of *malicia indígena*, where the shrewd recognition of the power, violence and inequality in everyday life demands a cynical response: *no hay que dar papaya* (don't put yourself in a vulnerable position) because *el vivo vive del bobo* (the sly one lives off the fool). In some respects, such cynicism deflates the political significance of cultural representations of violence: the normalisation of violence reveals itself

through apathetic responses to peace on Calle 26, while in Ciudad Bolívar and La Perseverancia disenchantment is revealed through the disappointment of 'they painted but nothing changed' and in La Candelaria signs of self-expression are simultaneously criminalised and depoliticised through disdainful judgements of artistic worth. However, they also offer an insight into the everyday reproduction of symbolic violence, they point to the complicity of the state as a perpetrator of violence, or as violent in its absence, and they recognise the structural inequalities that undermine 'other' ways of seeing violence. In the following section, I show how these findings and reflections contribute to knowledge by suggesting some of the nuances required when approaching violence, aesthetics and urban space.

7.2 Contributions to knowledge

Rather than focusing on one or another of the different subcultures or forms of expression that fall under the definition of graffiti and street art in Bogotá, I contribute to an understanding of their collective dynamic. I show that writing on the walls in Bogotá is about appropriating the urban visual landscape and demanding the right to participate in the production of urban space (Zieleniec, 2016). The politics of the street involve pointing to the silences and omissions in everyday life, insisting that public space be a place for discussion and debate (Peteet, 1996; De Ruiter, 2015). It also means transforming the city and changing the meanings that are associated with particular places (Waclawek, 2011; Bengtson, 2013). In particular it reflects the diverse perspectives of city dwellers and encourages the collective construction of what it means to be part of Bogotá (Silva, 2006). Throughout the analysis, I explore the similarities and differences between distinct forms of graffiti and street art, but ultimately situate them together to offer an insight into urban imaginaries of violence. Indeed, in the introduction I claim to move beyond the dichotomy that structures graffiti and street art as either representing the popular, subversive voice of the people or state-sanctioned, appropriated public art. Accordingly, some graffiti and street art are shown to be transgressive despite being sanctioned because they subvert dominant narratives of violence by engaging explicitly with political violence or implicitly with the cultural violence of stigma (chapters 4 and 5). In other cases, graffiti and street art that

are recognised by law as legitimate forms of cultural expression are criminalised because they are associated with criminal youth (chapter 6). This recognition offers a more nuanced understanding of how graffiti and street art communicate meaning and justifies the inclusion of the reception of graffiti and street art in the study and the attention paid to the specific spatial contexts in which they are produced. While this perspective contributes to the field of graffiti and street art analysis, I also suggest that the analysis of these cultural forms has the potential to contribute to broader approaches to representations of violence.

The recognition of visual orders of violence as they are expressed through graffiti and street art contribute to the study of urban governance and the struggles over the right to the city that play out in the urban visual landscape. Each case study reveals the reproduction of a particular visual order of violence by drawing out the contradictions that undermine understandings of graffiti and street art as having the potential to shift social imaginaries. Moreover, I offer a visual spin on the right to the city and the symbolic violence reproduced through its limitations. Despite the graffiti law and the discourses of various urban governments who claim to address violence, the political imperative to manage self-expression and control ways of seeing violence remain. In particular, they show that there is a control imposed on those who don't conform to the hegemonic ideal of citizenship, on the framing of political violence and memory, and on the spatialization of violence.

The research also contributes to broader understandings of popular culture and the representation of violence through an exploration of both vernacular and official narratives, the boundaries between which are shown to be fluid. I argue that focusing on the production and reception of graffiti and street art offers a more nuanced insight into the complexities of how people in Bogotá experience, negotiate, critique and reproduce violence through the space of the imaginary. There are many representations of violence in Colombia, but they are frequently interpreted through either visual analysis or analysis centred on their production. However, how people critique them offers a deeper insight into the role of culture in everyday life and, specifically, how they engage with imaginaries of violence. I propose that it is by listening to people, by comparing different spaces of the city and by seeking an understanding of a variety of forms of

urban inscription that the cultural politics of representations of violence can be illuminated.

Indeed, to listen to those who read and (particularly) those who write the walls of Bogotá is to take them seriously as social actors theorising in the vernacular, in all of their complexity and heterogeneity. The artists whose words I bring together in this thesis have different backgrounds, different experiences of painting on the street and different motivations for doing so. Collectives like Subversión Visual, Dexpierte or BeligerArte sprang from university student groups aiming to bridge the gap between their academic interest in violence, memory and politics and their social and political engagement, seeing in street art a way of moving beyond the traditional and somewhat dated production of *pintas* as aesthetic political expression and instead wanting to engage in more public debates through being on the street, painting portraits and images that would draw people in. Others embark on more individual quests for self-expression, such as Stinkfish, Skore, Saks and Cest, appropriating the city not only by weaving through the streets and spreading their tags but also by reflecting their personal interests in their work, be it through portraits and abstract patterns or, in the case of Cest and Mocs, incorporating images of native flora and fauna into their throw-ups and pieces. When placed within the context of hip-hop schools and community projects in vulnerable neighbourhoods, like BogotArt and Museo Libre, these imperatives are inflected by the implicit political motivation to create a space for self-expression and self-reflection both on the part of young people in such areas and on the part of wider communities who both reject the stigma that comes with such spatialised violence. A further dimension of the heterogeneity of graffiti and street art(ists) can be glimpsed through the growing legitimacy of graffiti and street art. In their legal and illicit work, street artists with educational or professional backgrounds in visual arts, like DjLu, Toxicómano, Machete and Chirrete Golden, seek to find a balance between earning a living or participating in social and political movements, while still maintaining autonomous artistic integrity and their celebration of the unauthorised, uncontrolled space of the street as a landscape of independent urban aesthetics. Thus, by bringing together the different voices of Bogotá's graffiti and street artists, the thesis represents a call to not only take seriously the convergences and divergences between different

forms of graffiti and street art, but to recognise artists as diverse political and creative actors with their own personal, social and educational backgrounds and motivations.

Such an approach is based on the idea that they collectively reveal vernacular theories of the aesthetics of politics and the politics of aesthetics. Indeed, the similarities and differences between these artists are not conflicting. Rather, they represent the dynamic (re)production, negotiation and critique of imaginaries whereby different voices, perspectives and theories collectively construct urban imaginaries and offer an insight into how violence plays out through the possibilities and constraints of the imagination. Listening to them during my fieldwork led to the recognition of the multiple relationships between violences in different forms of graffiti and street art and different spaces of the city at the time. However, they continue to adapt to the circumstances and negotiate the developments in the field, through poignant subject matters such as the tragic abduction, rape and murder of Yuliana Samboní, returning to re-paint the bridge where Tripido was shot as a way of keeping the memory and the fight for justice alive, or the explosion of references to the social leaders who continue to be assassinated year after year since the signing of the peace accords. The way that they are able to respond to such social contexts as well as continuing their work is shaped by the urban political scene, subject as they are to the whims and priorities of different political leaders. Thus, for example, the graffiti law remains in place but much of the funding that was going to support graffiti and street art projects has been lost under Peñalosa. Likewise, since his election, artists have had to negotiate the new police code that gives more power to the police to control public space. These various adaptations, motivations and identities reflect the nuanced relationship between political activity and aesthetics, particularly as it relates to violences. Moreover, they show that urban imaginaries and imaginations are contextual and attention to the details of space, time and form are required.

Above all, the politics of representing violence, the negotiation of socio-spatial dynamics and the social interactions and perceptions of different social groups demonstrate the complexities and contradictions of urban imaginaries of violence in Bogotá. Without diminishing the importance of graffiti and street art as forms of political engagement and cultural practices that reflect and encourage critical ways of seeing, then, this thesis argues that the relationship between aesthetics and violence should be considered as

complex and nuanced. I show that there are still limitations on the right to the city for different social groups, that self-expression in the city is managed and that the potential for structural changes that would address the deep-seated inequalities in urban society is not even expected as a possibility by many. Thus, there is a need to problematise socialised spatial relationships, to be sensitive to the political context, and to remain critically attentive to narratives of transformation when approaching violence and its aestheticization. I propose that these findings encourage a more nuanced critique of post-conflict narratives and, more generally, of the aesthetics of violence.

7.3 Avenues for further research

This thesis not only contributes to existing debates but provides a number of potential avenues for further research, both within and beyond the Colombian context and the focus on graffiti and street art. Starting within the field of graffiti and street art in Bogotá, though, I would like to indicate an important area that is related to this project but merits further attention. The social dynamics that I explore in the thesis are largely related to structural inequalities related to class. While they raise important issues regarding the social structure in Bogotá, there is a need for intersectional analyses to consider the complexity of such socio-political dynamics, particularly in relation to gender and ethnicity (Cho *et al.*, 2013). Colombian society is deeply hierarchical and there are multiple direct, structural and cultural violences that are heightened for women and people of afro or indigenous descent. Graffiti and street art are fields that are traditionally associated with masculinity (Macdonald, 2002), but in Bogotá there are many women who write the walls of the city. I have included some of their perspectives here, but not in relation to the specific gender dynamics of either painting or of violence. Likewise, there are many examples of graffiti and street art that depict representations of diverse social identities, including ethnic diversity, but it would be interesting to analyse those images in comparison with people's experiences of, for example, racism in Bogotá.

Beyond the field of graffiti and street art, the relationship between violence, aesthetics and urban space offers a salient avenue for further exploration. Indeed, the need to unravel violence and show how it plays out in everyday life has guided this study but can

also be applied to other cities around the world. Such research would benefit from comparisons where there are both similar structures of violence and divergent manifestations of direct, structural or cultural violence. This could apply to the national scale, whereby different cities in Colombia could be compared, extend regionally or, indeed, globally. Similarly, the politics of urban governance and governmentality have been suggested through the thesis, particularly in relation to the politics of aesthetics and transformations in the visual landscape, but this would also be a fruitful development of the research. Finally, violence and aesthetics are deeply imbricated and a close analysis of the relationship can offer vital critiques of dominant narratives, particularly when there are political claims attached to them such as those of post-conflict and peace. These avenues would provide opportunities to extend beyond the research presented here while still insisting on the need to take seriously and try to understand what it means to live surrounded by (narratives of) violence. A recognition of the complex dynamics of violence around the world, the uncomfortable and unpleasant reproduction of violence, and the structural inequalities and forces that keep them hidden challenges morbid and exoticist fascination with violence and instead draws important connections between the violences that are present in everyday life in many countries, and the different ways in which people respond to them.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interviews and Focus Groups

Name	Relationship	Type of interview	Time	Date
Stinkfish	Graffiti artist	Semi-structured, recorded	01:18:45	31/08/2015
Skore	Graffiti artist	Semi-structured, recorded	01:09:25	27/10/2015
Lili Cuca	Graffiti artist	Semi-structured, recorded	00:39:47	22/12/2015
Cest	Graffiti artist	Semi-structured, recorded	02:08:27	04/01/2016
Saks	Graffiti artist	Semi-structured, recorded	01:24:27	04/01/2016
Chirrete Golden	Graffiti artist	Semi-structured, recorded	01:06:49	18/01/2016
Beligerarte (Emilio)	Graffiti artist (part of collective)	Semi-structured, recorded	01:59:35	20/01/2016
Guayra (Aitue)	Graffiti artist/muralist	Semi-structured, recorded	02:13:09	28/01/2016
Subversión Visual	Graffiti collective	Semi-structured, recorded	01:01:31	10/02/2016
Dexpierte	Graffiti collective	Semi-structured, recorded	01:10:23	11/02/2016
Machete	Graffiti collective (2/4 members)	Semi-structured, recorded	01:18:57	12/02/2016
Crisp	Graffiti artist	Semi-structured, recorded	00:39:36	14/03/2016
Toxicómano	Graffiti artist	Semi-structured, recorded	01:25:04	16/03/2016

DjLu	Graffiti artist	Semi-structured, recorded	01:11:57	07/04/2016
Sur Vano (Lucas and Wilson)	Graffiti collective (2/4 members)	Semi-structured, recorded	01:06:41	11/04/2016
Kno Delix	Graffiti artist	Informal interview		
Camilo Fidel Lopez	Leader of Vertigo Collective	Informal interview		
Franco	Graffiti artist	Informal interview		
Yurika	Graffiti artist	Informal interview		
Colectivo Atempo	Graffiti artist	Informal interview		
Guache	Graffiti artist	Informal interview		
Linares	Artist	Semi-structured, recorded	01:00:05	19/01/2016
Gary Drostle	Artist	Email interview	--	21/01/2016
Catalina Rodríguez	Idartes	Semi-structured, recorded	01:02:12	08/10/2015
Diego Laserna	Combo2600	Semi-structured, recorded	01:06:37	20/11/2015
Leonardo Párraga	BogotArt	Semi-structured, recorded	01:47:56	29/12/2105
Germán Gómez Jr/Eslava	Secretaría Distrital de Cultura	Semi-structured, recorded	01:02:34	03/02/2016
Gustavo and Liliana	Parents of Diego Felipe Becerra	Semi-structured, recorded	01:32:05	13/02/2016
Barristas de Millonarios (Kennedy)	Football supporters involved in community initiative	Semi-formal discussion, recorded	01:02:34	22/03/2016

Hip hop en los Andes	Graffiti (Lady Cristal), breakdance, rap, DJ	Conference, recorded		30/10/2015
Memoria y calle 26	Paolo Vignolo	Talk, recorded		31/10/2015
Graffiti y patrimonio cultural	Idartes, Cheche, police, patrimonio cultural	Conference, recorded		12/11/2015
Shadia Mansour	Hip hop al parque – peace debates	Conference, recorded		17/11/2015
La Nacional – Camilo Torres and student movements	Student representatives of different political movements	Talk, recorded		19/02/2016
Arte urbano	DjLu, Ceroker, Cacerolo	Talk, recorded		06/04/2016
Interview 1	DjLu mural (Carrera 7 Calle 51)	Vox pop	00:04:09	02/01/2016
Interview 2	DjLu mural (Carrera 7 Calle 51)	Vox pop	00:03:55	02/01/2016
Interview 3	DjLu mural (Carrera 7 Calle 51)	Vox pop	00:03:57	02/01/2016
Interview 4	DjLu mural (Carrera 7 Calle 51)	Vox pop	00:02:58	02/01/2016
Interview 5	DjLu mural (Carrera 7 Calle 51)	Vox pop	00:11:18	02/01/2016
Interview 6	DjLu mural (Carrera 7 Calle 51)	Vox pop	00:05:30	02/01/2016
Interview 7	DjLu mural (Carrera 7 Calle 51)	Vox pop	00:16:01	02/01/2016
Interview 1	La Perserverancia	Vox pop	00:04:11	02/11/2015

Interview 2	La Perserverancia	Vox pop	00:05:16	02/11/2015
Interview 3	La Perserverancia	Vox pop	00:17:16	02/11/2015
Interview 4	La Perserverancia	Vox pop	00:14:26	18/03/2016
Interview 5	La Perserverancia	Vox pop	00:16:15	18/03/2016
Interview 1	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:08:33	19/02/2016
Interview 2	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:11:20	19/02/2016
Interview 3	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:32:48	19/02/2016
Interview 4	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:17:32	19/02/2016
Interview 5	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:17:03	19/02/2016
Interview 6	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:09:17	19/02/2016
Interview 7	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:11:51	19/02/2016
Interview 8	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:41:19	19/02/2016
Interview 9	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:07:31	19/02/2016

Interview 10	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:23:49	19/02/2016
Interview 11	Students Universidad Nacional	Vox pop	00:12:03	19/02/2016
Interview 1	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:09:50	12/03/2016
Interview 2	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:07:21	30/03/2016
Interview 3	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:09:37	30/03/2016
Interview 4	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:01:03	30/03/2016
Interview 5	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:02:10	30/03/2016
Interview 6	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:10:59	30/03/2016
Interview 7	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:06:53	30/03/2016
Interview 8	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:04:30	30/03/2016
Interview 9	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:01:08	30/03/2016

Interview 10	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:02:47	30/03/2016
Interview 11	Jaime Garzón mural (Calle 26 Carrera 25)	Vox pop	00:07:03	30/03/2016
Interview 1	Vista Hermosa, Ciudad Bolívar	Vox pop	00:04:35	11/04/2016
Interview 2	Vista Hermosa, Ciudad Bolívar	Vox pop	00:04:09	11/04/2016
Interview 3	Vista Hermosa, Ciudad Bolívar	Vox pop	00:02:50	11/04/2016
Interview 4	Vista Hermosa, Ciudad Bolívar	Vox pop	00:03:05	11/04/2016
Interview 5	Vista Hermosa, Ciudad Bolívar	Vox pop	00:04:51	11/04/2016
Interview 6	Vista Hermosa, Ciudad Bolívar	Vox pop	00:34:57	11/04/2016
Focus Group 1	Law students Universidad Militar 6 th semester, aged between 17-21 years, day students, 4 men – 21 women	Semi-structured focus group	02:05:07	09/03/2016
Focus Group 2	Law students Universidad Militar 6 th semester, aged between 17-21 years, day students, 4 men – 11 women	Semi-structured focus group	02:04:41	09/03/2016

Focus Group 3	Law students Universidad Militar 5 th semester, mix of ages (mature), evening students, roughly 50/50 gender split, roughly 25 people	Semi-structured focus group	01:07:51	09/03/2016
Focus Group 4	Law students at Universidad Cooperativa	Semi-structured focus group	01:36:59	31/03/2016
Focus Group 5	Universidad Libre – various people invited	Semi-structured focus group	01:33:05	06/04/2016
Focus Group 6	Architecture and Design students Universidad de los Andes Mix of 1 st semester and 6/7 th semester Roughly 22 people, 50/50 gender split	Semi-structured focus group	00:55:02	08/04/2016
Focus Group 7	Architecture and Design students Universidad de los Andes Mix of 1 st semester and 6/7 th semester 4 women, 3 men	Semi-structured focus group	01:24:29	08/04/2016

Appendix B: Focus Group Images





