Abstract

“Caged” is an ethnographic investigation of intimate partner violence in Usme, a peripheral district of Bogotá, Colombia, where 37% of women report having experienced physical violence by a partner and 80% report some form of controlling behavior. The purpose of this research has been to understand the exercise of this violence through the lives and positions of those who survive it, those who respond to it, and most of all those who commit it. What their experiences from the margins of the city illuminate is that in the intimate dynamics of violence—the perpetrations of it and the resistances against it—are reverberations of the same spatial inscriptions and social logics that have shaped relationships of power and control from the municipal to hemispheric scales. The intricate webs of contradiction and paradox that this produces are what have provided the apertures for engagement, as well as the means by which to appreciate the tensions that cut across, connect, and constitute these acts of violence. In the context of ever-expanding legal apparatuses to address these forms of abuse, these junctures have become sites of rethinking sovereign relationships and the spaces that they have created, how consciousness emerges from them, and they have raised new questions about the place of subversion and aspirations for transformation of the self and society.
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To Nia-

For teaching me to ask the more beautiful questions,

and offering me the strength to answer them with greater care.
Acknowledgements

‘Authorship’ is the strangest of fictions, the true story of any ethnography is that which we bury here. Though I am the one who tapped the keys and filled the pages that follow, the ideas they represent have grown out from far deeper roots. Allow me then to breath some of this greater truth.

This study took place in the district of Usme in Bogotá, Colombia, and it was not just by happenstance that I ended up there. Dr. Andrés Salcedo Fidalgo, Chair of the Department of Anthropology at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia is the one who first took me to meet his contacts in the community, a point of departure that became the initial seed out of which the rest of this research eventually grew. Dr. César Abadía Barrero, a long-time mentor of mine in Colombia, as well as a student of his Dr. Guillermo Sanchez Vanegas, were responsible for giving me opportunities to work previously in Bogotá, as well as connect me to Dr. Salcedo in the first place. To these three I will always owe an unrepayable debt.

The very basis of this study though came from the generosity of all those that participated, in one way or another, throughout the course of my fieldwork. Their stories, their suffering, their sensibilities, hardships, concerns, aspirations, and joy form both the material and the continued inspiration for everything that follows from here. Through every conversation, every moment shared, every vulnerability that an innumerable number of people shared with me, they did far more than contribute to a study, they took me further along the path of becoming more human. I cannot call them by name here, I can only hope that along the way I have indeed begun the process of honoring the nearly unfathomable hospitality, a hospitality of the deepest sense, that I have been so privileged to receive. They include the survivors of intimate violence who shared with me some of the most painful moments of their lives, as well as imparted onto
me a continued sense of hope and an urgency to turn that into reality. They include the perpetrators of violence who allowed me to see some of their greatest shame and to engage with them in a protracted process of reflection, only asking me to treat them as human in return. They include the staff and administration of the Comisarías de Familia in Usme, who became some of my closest relationships throughout my research, who relentlessly pushed me to think deeper but also helped me to take breaks and have fun, reminding me that *la alegria* is essential nourishment for the spirit. The people that formed this study even included the staff of the public library, clergy in the local parish, rap artists on public transport, street artists who have painted Bogotá in their visually provocative poetry, even fellow bus passengers who shared their limited space and, sometimes, their thoughts with me during my many commutes.

Two people in particular I owe special gratitude, who over the course of two years became close enough so as to practically be family. In this thesis I have written their names as ‘Luz Elena’ and ‘Sofía’ (pseudonyms), but I will always know them as two of my dearest friends. My most cherished memories of Usme will always be our walking tours and breathless conversations (Usme is at 9,000 feet after all), the moments of speech and the moments of silence through which we shared our love of the land. If I can manage to even approach their subtle blends of criticality and generosity throughout the pages that follow, I will have done everything that I can.

I also have my biological family in Colombia to thank, especially my cousin Johann and my Tio Javier and Tia Rosalba. Indeed I have far more to thank them for than just housing me at times throughout this process and dealing graciously with my unpredictable schedules and presence. From an early age, my abuelos, primos, tia, and tio have helped me to cultivate a sense of the world that is not only larger, but one that needn’t be understood by the usual contours or
frontiers that we regularly impose upon it. If I have always been proud to be half-Colombian, it is surely because of them.

Beyond those in my family, I have also been immensely fortunate to receive tutelage along the way from the most dedicated teachers that I could find. In my very first semester of college, it was Dr. Atwood Gaines who introduced me to medical anthropology and the art of ethnography, using the books of my to-be graduate mentors, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture* and *AIDS and Accusation*, an introduction that would change my trajectory forever. Over the following years, Drs. Janet McGrath and Lee Hoffer grew that interest into something greater and my fellow students Kristi Ninnemann, Meghan Halley, and Aura Newlin convinced me that a PhD is in fact worth pursuing. Those vertical and horizontal mentorships have continued at Harvard, and sustaining me throughout these past six years has been the camaraderie and guidance, not to mention thoughtful feedback, from those whom I am proud to call my colleagues and my mentors, but most of all my friends: Matthew Basilico, Arjun Suri, Josh Baugh, Nworah Ayogu, Abhiram Bhashyam, Salman Bhai, Eric Lu, Vipul Kumar, Kim Sue, Amy Porter, George Karandinos, and Ethan Bagley. I am also especially grateful to Dr. Ajantha Subramanian and her proseminar course ‘Power’ that she guided our PhD cohort through, as well as of course my fellow cohort-mates in the Social Anthropology program who have pushed me to never settle on my ideas: Darja Djordjevic, Vivien Chung, Bronwynn Isaacs, Wirun Limsawart, Max Durayappah-Harrison, Adoree Durayappah-Harrison, Ekin Kurtic, Meghan Rogushka, and Jon Clindaniel. Dr. Kimberly Theidon’s course on ‘Gender in Conflict’ has been immensely influential in framing my research, and I am grateful both to her and those who made up our excellent seminar: Roxanne Kristali, David Francis, Kirin Gupta, Silvia Mejia, Ash Crane, and Sarah Bergman.
Academically speaking, no one has been of greater support than the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Arthur Kleinman, Dr. Anne Becker, and Dr. Byron Good. Each of them has been a guide to me since long before I actually entered the program, their unique combinations of scholarly excellence and humanistic concern providing me beacons to follow since the moment I entered this field. Their feedback, their uncanny intuition in pointing me where I wanted to go but did not yet realize, and their patience throughout my frequently long absences has made all of this possible. Most of all their encouragement and challenge has provide the basic tension out of which this scholarly pursuit has emerged. Helping me to get there has also been the ever-present instrumental support of Marianne Fritz and Amy Cohen, as well as the encouragement and wisdom of Dr. Paul Farmer and Dr. Salmaan Keshavjee. Together, they all made certain than when everything else failed, I was still able to get out the door thanks to funding from the Harvard University MD-PhD Program and the Crichton Fund.

As I come to the end, I find myself where it all began. My parents Fabiola and John, my sister Lara, my aunt Judith, my late grandparents Jane and Jack, and again all of my family in Colombia. Each person has played roles that no number of pages could ever contain. The words for them hardly exist. I suppose all I can say is thank you for putting up with me all of these years, especially the last few, and making certain that I always remember that, in the end, it comes down to love. And that is enough.

The dedication for this work is to my wife, Nia. Everything that my family has taught me, you have deepened. Whenever I have needed guidance, a vision of what it means to be fully human, you have been there for me. I can imagine no greater blessing.
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Introduction
Our saccharine black coffee, ‘tinto,’ cuts the cold just a bit. Sitting in Angelica’s living room, my very first day in Usme, I find my attention at times creeping out her front window, taking in the awesome sight of the impossibly green hills that lay beyond the valley. I was there at the invitation of a professor from the National University, an anthropologist working on projects with Angelica and her companions, each one an effort to stem the tide of environmental degradation against the ‘Páramo de Sumapaz.’ A high-altitude moorland, the páramo is not only the largest of its kind in the world, it is the tap of fresh water for the rest of the city and the lungs that breathe against its smog. Perched right up against its borderlands, we sit and sip our coffee as they conspire new ways to delay the southern migration of apartment complexes and the quarries that supply them. For a time the discovery of an ancient Muisca cemetery had done the job, but not even those burial grounds could forever fix the earth against the seemingly inevitable march of mining operations and construction.

As we pull up our collars and cinch our scarves, the professor begins to deliver his news about the recent rounds of proposals. Projects to build paths for hiking, resources to help bring community members together to organize around their land, each one rejected by the government. From Angelica to Alberto, the frustration is palpable, they had put great care into crafting each of those petitions. Not to be so easily discouraged, each person begins to brainstorm: what could they change, could they resubmit, what other agencies might they interest? Alberto in particular seems upset, with each word fuming a bit more than the last. Eventually, at a pause in the conversation, he says something that I will never forget. Even before I have told him that I am working in Usme to study intimate partner violence, to understand why those who perpetrate it commit that abuse, he looks at me and tells me:
“The government says ‘popular’ and ‘with the people’ but in reality they do not care. It is like a parent who hugs and kisses his children in public, and then when they are home hits them over the head.”

The stories that follow relate the experiences of partner violence—from the perpetrators to the survivors, those who respond and those who observe—but what are their stories about? Surely they are about partner violence but equally so they are about deep ambivalences and their creative contradiction. They are about not just being caught in the webs that we ourselves have spun but about being pulled apart by them and the daily, often violent work that gets done to try to bring them back together.¹ Most of all they are about the suffering that is endured throughout this, by survivors and aggressors alike. Admittedly, what I can present here is weighted to understanding the aggressors in this violence: their histories, worldviews, doubts and desires; their positions, priorities, and what is at stake from them through it all; but these are not ‘sympathy for the devil’ stories. Sympathy, like pity, is a response handed down from a position of assumed power and typically serves to apologize or excuse. It simply does not figure in here and neither do ‘devils.’ Empathy and people on the other hand do. Here we enter into the heart of intimate violence with the urgency to understand, to embrace the complex personhoods of both victimizer and victim because only by seeing people as ‘shot through by contradictions’ can we possibly envision ways to work ourselves out of these systems of routinized, daily terror.² It is therefore not my purpose to present an anatomy of partner violence either. Dissection of

¹ Paraphrased from Geertz’s (1973) assertion that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.”

² Dorinne Kondo’s (1990) notion of personhood as people “shot through with contradictions and creative tensions” has been particularly informative to me in understanding how to approach the complex personhoods of those whom I encountered. This perspective, that people are permeated by tensions that extend out into the social worlds in which they live, is also reflected in the Deleuze’s (1997) notion of ‘combating,’ which posits people as engaged in a continuous process of ‘becoming’ by wrestling with these tensions. This emphasis on living as ‘becoming’ puts this view of personhood, and its relationship to broader systems of power, into communication with a number of other philosophies and theories, a topic that will be explored throughout this thesis and summarized to an extent in the ‘Reflections’ section at the conclusion of Part II.
anything may help us to understand it better, but it leaves the subject dead, and violence is absolutely nothing if not very much alive.\textsuperscript{3} We simply cannot deign to understand it if we do not treat it as such, to look for the picture in motion, the push and pull, and not the cold still image.

Ultimately though this must all come in service of something, lest we fall into an indefensible ‘voyeuristic pornography of violence’ and I can only hope that this makes a contribution to the vast universe of work that is being done to address this form of abuse.\textsuperscript{4} The most important work done on partner violence is undoubtedly that which deals directly with those who shoulder the greatest burden of suffering, the victims of it, either by seeking to level the topographies of power or find alternatives to our current arrangements of gender relations. It is in service to this awesome work that I humbly proceed. By opening up the experiences of aggressors, it is my hope that we can continue our search for ways to ‘ping the bubble’ of partner violence, to disassemble from within the systems and social logics that drive its continuation and find alternatives that are in fact better for all parties involved. After all, as Martha Ackelsberg has said, “the exercise of power in any institutionalized form—whether economic, political, religious, or sexual—brutalizes both the wielder of power and the one over whom it is exercised.”\textsuperscript{5} In other words, ‘better’ need not be a zero-sum game.

There is always also a there to stories and, even though partner violence is unfortunately a global phenomenon, each experience of it happens in a particular place. Understanding that somewhere and its history first of all gives some sort of access to the phenomenology of

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\textsuperscript{3} André Maurois (Lyons, 1960), likened humor to dissecting a frog: “when you take it apart, you find out what it’s made of, but unfortunately the subject is killed in the process.”

\textsuperscript{4} For ‘voyeuristic pornography of violence’ see Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004).

\textsuperscript{5} Ackelsberg (2004). This notion also finds some semblance in the words of Nelson Mandela (1994) who stated that, “[f]or to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others,” as well as popular explorations of the negative aspects of coercive power such as the song ‘Ek Je Chilo Raja’ from Satyajit Roy’s (1969) film \textit{Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne}.  


inhabiting a particular place and time, how life is not lived in some kind of ‘Russian doll’ fashion but instead intricately woven into broader systems of relational power. It therefore opens up unexpected doors to understanding how motifs of power that are played out along other dimensions and scales of social relations are also manifested in the intimate violence of partner abuse. Doing so begins to reveal the multi-dimensional fractal of violence—the self-similarity across scales and the infinite frontiers that are created—illustrating to us how structures of social relations and their justifications mutually reinforce each other throughout society, as well as the vital contradictions that they create. If the social sciences are to maintain their relevance in the world, we must not only examine the maintenance of power and violence in our societies but we must also find critical vulnerabilities to them, ones that could offer hope for new realities. In the case of partner violence, however intimate in scale it may seem, it is only with this broader perspective that we have any chance to truly glimpse what these vulnerabilities might be. And so even as the rest of this thesis is dedicated to considering the specific issue of partner abuse, in order to properly hear the stories of those involved we must first approach them through a history of the place in which they happen.

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6 This focus on positions within multiple fields of relational power, and the particular phrasing adopted here, comes from Das and Kleinman’s (2000) formulation of subjectivity as “the felt interior experience of the person that includes his or her positions in a field of relational power.”

7 Fractals will be a repeated theme throughout this thesis, particularly because they serve as an apt visual metaphor for the repetitive emergence of particular motifs as we cross scales emergent systems, and societies are little if not complex systems of emergence. The analogy of the fractal is a useful one for two particular reasons. First, one of the key properties of fractals are self-similarity in form across scales. Attention to these similarities across scales of social relations, from the personal to broadest expanses of the social, makes possible analogic forms of organizing our understandings, and draws into focus potential tensions that might exist between these seemingly similar forms. This is means of analysis that was formally proposed by Durkheim (1898), and it is a topic that will be explored throughout this thesis. Second, fractals have the curious property of infinite perimeters enclosing finite spaces, something that we could take to analogically represent the potentially infinite frontiers of social difference and exclusion that surround (and permeate) social groups of finite size.

8 As proposed by Claudio Sopranzetti (2013) during his dissertation defense entitled “The Owners of the Map: mobility and politics among motorcycle taxi drivers in Bangkok.”
Along this vein, the stories told here take place in Usme, the fifth district of Bogotá, Colombia. *La Zona Quinta.* Extending away from the limits of the city, it is the capital’s southern reaching cone, a rapidly expanding, low-income, semi-urban, semi-rural peripheral contact zone. Straddling the margins of the city, Usme is also one of the districts of Bogotá with the highest levels of intimate partner violence. In one recent community-based survey of the twenty districts that make up the capital, Usme had the second highest rate of partner abuse with over 80% of women in a relationship reporting that their partner displayed some significant level of partner controlling behavior. Not surprisingly, in my experience this issue found resonance not only in numbers but also in the sentiments of community leaders, from the organizers of youth foundations to the Catholic Clergy, even public library administrators. But Usme is more than just a place where partner violence happens. Usme is an all too frequently silenced history, a shadow biography of sorts to the capital and, by extension, to the country itself. It is a place that is both complex and *complicado,* but most of all a place that I have come to love, populated by people whom I have come to immensely respect. To me Usme will always be the excoriated earth that burns cold like amber and an endless patchwork of motley green; sacred ground that rises against the tide and worldly rap lyrics that rise against indifference. Usme is bringing the harvest home at dusk and *madrugando* again for the 4 am bus back into the city. *Ahi vamos.*

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9 ‘The Fifth Zone.’
10 Profamilia (2011).
11 ‘Complicado’ is a word that on one hand means ‘complicated’ in the sense of difficulty to analyze. On the other hand it also carries the connotation of difficulty in the lived sense of the word, of a heavy or troubled state of affairs.
12 ‘Madrugando’ means to get up right at the crack of dawn.
13 ‘Ahi vamos’ is a saying that not only literally means ‘there we go,’ but is often used in a more general sense to convey a sense of perpetual motion, something that hopefully resembles forward progress. When talking with community organizers about issues they were confronting in their work, no matter how pessimistic or burdened with the talk of set backs they might have been at times, our conversations often ended with these exact words.
Usme: Ascent

Riding south bound through the core of the city I see tall office buildings proudly boasting the names of banks, quickly giving way to the crowded streets of the red light district in Barrio Santa Fe and the unswept roads of the Bronx. Parque Tercer Milenio lays as an open expanse to my left over what was not long ago one of the most crowded markets in the city, now obliterated in a project of beautification.\textsuperscript{14} The numbered streets begin to be labeled with the designation of ‘South’ as groups of ‘Lechonerias’—restaurants selling a typical rice dish from the Department of Tolima—line the street.\textsuperscript{15} San Cristobal, Rafael Uribe Uribe, Ciudad Bolivar, Tunjuelito. One by one the districts of Bogotá pass by and just as the city opens up and breathes for a moment, Usme begins. Capping this peculiar entrance to Usme are several interesting sites: the federal prison La Picota, a cement plant, a military base, a quarry and a brick-making factory. Each tells its own story about the history of Usme and its relation to the rest of Bogotá.

Seat numb, I hurry off the Transmilenio at the terminal station hoping that I can still catch the direct route to Usme Centro, also sometimes known as ‘Usme Pueblo.’ Making my way through the turnstiles I dart around the columns and to my relief find three small lines of people arranged as if about to board a phantom ‘alimentador’ bus. My relief is clearly not shared by those waiting. In a few short minutes I see two almost empty buses going to the closer

\textsuperscript{14} As Pérez (2014) has shown, this project was not just one of beautifying an area or even making safer what was regarded as an insecure part of town. This project of displacement was intricately woven into the project for national sovereignty, made important by its central location in the capital city.

\textsuperscript{15} An interesting discrepancy in its own right given that streets in the northern half of the city are not labeled as such, meaning that the north of the city is effectively the implicit referent when it comes to the constructed geography. We must be alert to the workings of power whenever any category is made to be the implicit reference, as in the cases where ‘Caucasian’ or ‘male’ are used as default referents in racial or gender descriptions. In the case of Bogotá, the southern half of the city is frequently regarded as the poorer, more dangerous region by those who live in the northern districts, and in fact in terms of income at least it is generally true that the southern districts are significantly poorer.
neighborhood of Marichuela depart the station, a sight to which I have become all too well accustomed. While I am inwardly pessimistic that I have missed the last bus, those around me seem to be increasingly outwardly agitated. One man yells down the bus line and waves a hand. Then, as if in progranmed unison, the back line of people steps out over the curb and into the road. Though barely five strong they successfully have blocked the span of the road and their stances, yelling, and whistling seem to say that they don’t plan to go anywhere unless it’s on the bus that they were promised. As if reluctantly cajoled out of a slumber, a parked bus labeled ‘in transit’ starts to slowly creep forward. Soon it’s upon the blockade and the tension growing in me tells me that it’s not slowing down fast enough. Hardly five feet away from the last man in its path the driver seems more concerned with flipping his hand at his antagonist than coming to a stop for him. Thankfully, the bus barely slows down in time and the man side steps it, though it seems to me like he intentionally drags his arm as if to shoulder bump the passing driver.

I step up onto the bus to hear the shouts between some of the male passengers and the driver of ‘hijueputa!’ ‘carajo’ and other assorted obscenities. The shouting dies down almost immediately and for the rest of the ride all parties involved seem happy to stew in quiet about what has transpired. All the while I can only think of sitting in Angelica’s living room last year and hearing her voice dissatisfaction over the quantity of rides coming out to Usme Centro, the peripheral part of a peripheral district. I feel that what I’ve seen was the everyday simmering anger at living on the margins, an anger that something as seemingly insignificant as a bus waiting to make its last scheduled departure can incite when that delaying is taken instead to be indifference. Small as it was, as ephemeral the rupture, and as relatively inconsequential as the little ’bloqueo’ might have seemed, I can’t help but feel the presence of deeper sentiments, expressed in the most quotidian manner.
As we ascend further, the vistas outside my window lure me out of my own head.16 Barranquillita, Santa Librada, Marichuela. By now the sun has been out long enough to start to clear the morning fog and break the chill, as shops welcome their first customers off of the wide and dusty paths that make up the sidewalks in these particular barrios. If I were to descend a block toward the river now I would come across the public library where someone has painted over its front façade ‘Bienvenido a Usmekistan’ and ‘Usmekistan es conciencia.’17 Behind me a woman erupts in a fit of sharp, barking coughing, and as I zip my rain jacket the rest of the way up and pull it against my neck I whisper a faint ‘salud’ back to her. My thoughts about health in the community draw my eye once again to the landfill Doña Juana, the only landfill for the entire city, which rises out of the ground beyond the River Tunjuelito below. Filling its part of the valley between the barrios and the surrounding hills, its open top makes it look like some bizarre snow-capped mountain whose slick features contrast with the jagged surfaces of its more natural neighbors.

As we jostle up and over the hills and play slalom with the potholes, I look back out my window and now see straight and narrow lines of crops breaking the texture of the green canvas in which I am enveloped. Punctuating these verdant hills are distant ‘invasions’ (‘illegal’ communities) and the exposed clay of some of Usme’s quarries. The further away toward the mountains that they are the less I can tell which is which, and I smile at the irony. As if beckoned by my thoughts, we cross into another neighborhood and now outside my window are stacks of bricks assembled in the lots of the ‘ladrilleros,’ brick makers, as well as the cantinas and homes

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16 Usme lies at an altitude between 300-700 feet above the rest of the city.

17 ‘Usmekistan’ is a jest that I have heard both in Usme and in other parts of the city, a reference to the relative geographic isolation of the district. On the library though, statements like ‘Usmekistan is consciousness’ ostensibly seek to take a pejorative moniker and reappropriate it as if to say that Usme may be removed, but it is through these experiences of marginalization that they are socially conscious where others are not.
that separate them. If these construction material enterprises constitute much of the new economy of Usme, the sheep roaming the front yards of small houses reminds me that this was not always the case and that agriculture is still alive and well.

These ruminations are abruptly interrupted by a sight that I still cannot fully believe. As I look back out at the now empty valley, hanging just above the Rio Tunjuelito, standing out against the lushness of the green ridge behind it, is a rainbow that I am actually looking down upon. Apparently the sun has not risen high enough yet to clear out the last moisture from this deep ravine. With the river, the ravines, the forests, the cliffs, the tartan patchwork of small plots of farmed land, and now this unlikely vista beneath me, I am left with one last thought before I disembark: Usme is, simply put, stunning.

Even from this briefest of tours down the road through Usme, already I was presented with a cornucopia of sights that begin to tell us of the evolving history of this district. Each is a material signifier that points us to current lived realities but also serve as anchors from which we can trace the historical threads that constitute the rich fabric of its history. Take for example the long row of lechonerías Tolimenses in the south of Bogotá. A full quarter of internally displaced peoples who have settled in Bogotá come originally from Tolima, a strategic department in the corridor between Bogotá and Cali where much of the conflict has been fought. Though people from Tolima can be found throughout the city, they have settled predominantly in the southern districts such as Ciudad Bolívar, San Cristobal, and Usme. The lechonerías themselves are but a benign reminder of this history of political conflict, restaurants catering to particular tastes and nostalgia for a land left behind. Less benign are the other daily reminders of this history of

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18 UNHCR (2003).
violence, reminders that often burst unexpectedly into the rhythm of everyday life: lost limbs from landmine amputations, the stories people retell to ask for money on the Transmilenio buses, rumors whispered about those who have been disappeared from either the rural areas or right out of the city itself.

More specific to Usme are the landmarks that flank the northern entrance to the district, and passing by them is a constant reminder of its marginality. Put together with characterizations like ‘zona roja’ and ‘Usmekistan,’ perceptions of insufficient public transport, or stop-and-frisk and document checks in the terminal station of the Transmilenio, these landmarks help to build a perversely rich experience of exclusion, one that is performed on a daily basis.\textsuperscript{19} La Picota, one of the city’s largest prisons, opens up right onto the main avenue and every Saturday and Sunday family and friends of prisoners line up for limited visitation hours. Along with the military base, these sites reinforce not only a geographic marginality but also a social one as a ‘red zone,’ zona roja. In this case the red refers to the left-leaning politics of the region, a reference to the Marxist guerrilla groups, some of which were formed not far from Usme’s borders, and confers a transgressive, dangerous reputation. The term is one that I heard often, from the first time that I stepped off a bus in Usme and a health worker gave me notice to guard myself, to whenever I told people elsewhere in the city where I worked. Notably, it is a term that I have never heard a resident of Usme use with any sincerity. Beyond the military base, filling the valley between Usme and Ciudad Bolívar, is the landfill Doña Juana that for a long time served as the only trash repository for all of Bogotá. In a material sense, Doña Juana is seen as a direct threat to the environmental integrity of the area, and with good reason after an explosion on September 27,

\textsuperscript{19} Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004) have promoted this kind of orientation to understanding marginality in \textit{Anthropology in the Margins of the State}, an anthology where they seek to advance a scholarship of the \textit{performance} of social frontiers as a means to appreciate the lived realities and experiences of exclusionary social arrangements. Doing so, as they point out, illustrates that frequently at the margins there is not an absence of the state, but rather an increased visibility of it as agents seek to make their respective apparatuses of it be seen.
1997 caused a major spill of its contents into the river Tunjuelito. On a more symbolic order, it is often seen along with ‘La Picota’ as an affront to the dignity of Usme’s residents, as proof that they are seen as the desechables, the ‘throw-aways’ of the city.

If the base, prison, and landfill are material signifiers of marginality, then the Transmilenio station, cement plant, brick factories, quarries, and arable land signal important ties that link the district to the rest of the city. Built around the turn of the millennium, the Transmilenio has undoubtedly made Usme far more accessible than it ever was previously. When residents perceive services as relatively deficient, however, like the mini blockade of the buses showed, this major means of connection becomes recast as yet another sign of their relative unimportance to the putative powers that be. Economically speaking, as a semi-urban semi-rural area, Usme’s relationship has historically been one of agricultural production that has literally fed the growth of Bogotá. This was especially true for the hundreds of years before it was officially incorporated into the city, when it was a changing mixture of Muisca settlements and haciendas growing staple crops like potatoes and beans or raising livestock for sale. Now the haciendas like ‘Marichuela’ and Muisca figureheads like ‘Usminia’ have become the names of its principally populated neighborhoods. Quarries, most of which used to operate illegally, have

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20 Secretaría Distrital de Hábitat (2011). It is also worth noting that the landfill was inaugurated in 1988 and originally slated to operate for twenty years, but in 2014 it was approved once again for another eight years (El Tiempo, 2014).

21 Personal communication with Dr. Andrés Salcedo (July 18, 2013), a Colombian anthropologist at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, who has worked for an extended period of time in Usme.

22 Brodwyn Fischer (2014) explicitly draws out this paradox in speaking about peripheral ‘shantytowns’ in Latin America. On the one hand, such settlements are magnetic to public debate because they contrast with normative visions of cityscapes and their proximity to controversial issues such as poverty, race, or governance make them symbolically central to radical critiques. On the other hand, informal settlements and their residents survive largely because residents of them are so adept at making them function, usually by tying themselves into broader schemes of power and profit. In other words, living on the ‘margins’ of the city is a deeply ambivalent experience, one of exclusion in multiple forms but equally one of intricate inclusion into broader systems of power relations.

begun to augment the agricultural industry and along with the production of bricks and cement are now one of the principal economies. These industries are essential to the massive construction enterprise that dominates the Bogotá economy, one that continually grows to try to meet the continued influx of citizens.

The combined effects of this changing productive landscape in Usme cannot be underestimated. First, these new construction industries are often seen as grave threats to the natural environment and even the identity of many of Usme’s residents, even as they come to form one of the major sources of employment in the district. Grievances over the changes they produce do not only emerge from the various environmental justice projects under development in the community but were also the daily bread of my casual conversations with residents. A perception shared amongst many people that I knew was that either the land was being stolen out from beneath their feet, was being poisoned slowly, or was being covered over by never-ending waves of new housing construction in the community. When the livelihood of so many is tied directly to a productive earth and the pride in one’s community tied to its natural beauty, the relevance of these changes to everyday life should come as little surprise. These two major industries, agriculture and the mining of materials, have also helped to define the very spatial distribution and built environment of the district. Over the course of the mid-twentieth century, the network of haciendas were taken back over to smaller land holdings and today these farms still constitute much of the approximate 85% of land area in Usme that is considered to be rural. The northern cone of densely populated urban space, however, has been the product of much more recent construction organized around accessibility to the mines, quarries, and other

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economic opportunities now available. For example, one of the major neighborhoods in this urban space, Marichuela, only recently celebrated its thirtieth year of legalization as an official community. These divergent and often conflicting changes have made Usme a veritable contact zone between the city and its rural surroundings, a complex social landscape of everyday encounters.

Despite their apparently different histories, however, each kind of commodity produced in Usme has carried into the current era its own means of connecting residents of the district to broader social processes: from global economies to the modern nation-building project of the Colombian government. Often when we look for the links between a person’s productive life and global markets we look for the production of commodities that may circulate widely, crossing even national boundaries. What then of potatoes, livestock, and construction supplies produced in Usme, ones that may never leave Bogotá? On the one hand many of the major cement companies like Cemex, Holcim, or Polimix are transnational corporations originating in Mexico, Switzerland, and Brazil respectively. On the other hand, scholars of political economy have shown how the physical construction of cities plays an instrumental role in the maintenance and elaboration of global systems like capitalism. These scholars have shown how construction itself has been used as a critical sink for ‘surplus capital,’ driving the engine of growth the world over during the past century. The case of Colombia’s economy in this has been no exception. In the case of Usme, its residents have not only provided the raw materials for this new urban environment, as well as the labor force to build it, they have also supplied the nourishment that

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25 The ‘District Diagnostic with Social Participation 2009-2010’ covers much of this history and its resulting spatial inscription within Usme (Secretaría Distrital de Salud, 2010).

26 In particular, Lefebvre (1970) and Harvey (2008) have argued how feverish growth of the urban built environment has been an intentional and effective pillar in the growth and further ascendance of global capitalist systems, in particular due to their use in serving as sinks for surplus product.
feeds those who come to reside in this ever-growing city. As a final point of connection, the physical growth of Bogotá has been used at vital moments in Colombia’s history as a key point for staking the social centrality of the capital city. In a country marked by intense regionalism, it has been an issue of nothing less than staking sovereignty in a deeply divided land.

Abusive Citizen, Abusive State: The Power of Analogy

“The government says ‘popular’ and ‘with the people’ but in reality does not care. It is like a parent who hugs and kisses his children in public and then when they are home hits them over the head.”

When I heard Alberto say this on the first day that I spent in Usme, I did not realize at the time that what he was saying, and how he was saying it, would be a consistent theme that I would encounter during my time there. Analogic reasoning, seeing the repetition of patterns throughout society, was simply common sense, a daily practice of engaging and understanding the world. In making his statement I do not believe that Alberto was proposing some causal theory of intimate partner violence, but his recasting of the common ‘state-as-family’ metaphor to the ‘state-as-abusive-family’ is striking nonetheless. When later in that meeting I did ask the group what they saw as the major issues currently facing their communities, Alberto was quick to add youth violence and gangs. When he stipulated that this problem fundamentally derived from parents’ failure to control their children, I was left to wonder what his analogy might then be if he reversed its direction. If proper parenting meant strict control, then what might count as good governance?

27 It is also of course not a practice unique to residents of Usme. In much of the legal doctrine in Colombia, the family is itself recognized as the basic nucleus of society, an assertion that frequently finds its way into the legal citations of orders of protection and other related documents drafted and signed through the Comisarías de Familia. In a related by partially inverted sense, we can also see the operation of such logical motions in the adage of some feminist movements that “the personal is political.”
The people that I knew in Usme have taught me much about the value of analogic reasoning and its potential to enrich our connection of the broader social historical context to the intimate present. Rather than seeking meaning only in the direct chains of causality, analogic reasoning opens up unique avenues of making sense of the world. Of importance are not just the strengths of relation along a unidirectional continuum of time but also instead the repetition of themes across scales and dimensions of relations. The greater the repetition of a particular motif or logic, the more valuable it is in organizing our appreciation of the world and our engagement with it. This is after all the basic purpose of any program of research just as it is what we do on a daily basis in order to take shape of the ‘shifting phantasmagoria’ of the lives that we lead.  

Even within the rigorous disciplines of the empiric sciences such a notion has finally taken deeper root, spreading through any field that takes seriously the frameworks of complex systems marked by emergent complexities. From the brain to society to whole ecologies, our great fractal existence continues to defy our comprehensive understanding, but at our disposal is the tool of analogy to at least call to conscious recognition the self-similarities that exist across it.  

All of this is no less true in the case of partner abuse, and to fully appreciate it we must draw the connections that tie these intimate acts into their broader social worlds, both analogically as well as materially. After all, partner abuse is nothing if not about power, and that is a kind of contest that is fought in every perceptible corner of human relations. Drawing common understandings of it, basic repetitive patterns that exist across these planes of relations,
recognizes this basic truth and I would certainly not be the first to do so. On the first day that I did fieldwork in a Comisaría de Familia, I witnessed a conversation between the intake psychologist and a citizen who was there to make a ‘denuncia’:

“Psychologist: was he ever verbally abusive? Calling you names?
Citizen: Name-calling and insults? Oh absolutely, that was my daily bread.
Psychologist: Was he controlling in other ways?
Citizen: Oh yes, he was like the Governor. He controlled everything...”

Concentrating and controlling resources, actively devaluing the ‘other,’ along with dispossession and paternalism these are motifs that the broader history of Usme has already repeatedly evidenced. Does this mean that people abuse their partners in Usme simply because other histories of power relations have ‘taught them’ those logics? Of course not, people are not just ‘cultural dopes.’

There are, however, non-trivial similarities in both justification and form between these collective histories and the smaller scale workings of partner violence. As such, these broader histories are not just contextual cues that illuminate the everyday insults to the personhoods of Usme’s residents, sources of anger and shame that in turn weave their way into intimate conflicts. They are also the bedrocks of the central social logics that I repeatedly encountered when listening to aggressors and survivors alike, and they are themes that will continually emerge throughout the course of this thesis.

In the case of partner violence in Usme, none of these are more deserving of attention than the ideology of paternalism. As explored further in the third chapter, understanding the many manifestations of an ideology like paternalism can help to open up for closer consideration how hegemonies are maintained, and even how the violence committed under such an ideology can, under certain circumstances, accelerate its own undoing. By examining the deployments of

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They do form an important component to understanding them, and as the Colombian scholar Gauta (2011) has noted any understanding of partner abuse on the high-altitude ‘mesa’ of Colombia must take into account both the legacy and the continuing role that colonialism plays in everyday life.
this ideology, we may even begin to grasp both the contradictions internal to it as well as the tensions that are created when that justifications becomes organizing features at different scales of social relations. This is true, for instance, in the case of the abusive partner who is subjugated under the actions of one paternalistic hierarchy, of either state or private control, but uses the same basic reasoning to legitimize his monopolization of resources and violence within his own home. Likewise it is also true when the agents of the Comisarías de Familia—the main government agency charged with responding to partner violence—slip into the same paternalistic dynamics with the people who come to them, as they seek to wrest control away from domineering partners.

The very existence of the Comisaría de Familia system must be understood within such political histories, even as the daily work done through them has consequences of the much more intimate variety. It was initially the militarized state violence of the 1970’s that provided the impetus for women-driven social movements in Latin America, ones that later matured into broader critiques of state authority. These mobilizations eventually matured into Feminist movements for gender equality itself, and over time led to the creation of legal sedimentations of these values. One such manifestation was the Comisaría system in Colombia, and since then it has played an instrumental role in shaping a context where survivors of partner violence have greater resources for recourse at their disposal. Not only have these means of support offered the option of escape where before there may have been none, within this context it is more likely that the escalation of violence becomes an actively de-legitimizing force in what are usually intimate relationships of male domination. If the pretenses of that power were staked in paternalistic terms, as they frequently were in my experience in Usme, it means that the very presence of the Comisarías, the simple possibility of an order of protection, can help to accelerate the undoing of
that more intimate form of paternalistic power. What began as collective resistances against abusive state regimes has slowly diffused into institutions and the intimate means of refuting the basis of masculine authority.

It is through the elaboration of analyses like this that the analogic and material can together be illustrated, and it is also how these stories of partner abuse come to meaningfully inhabit a particular place and time. In this case, that place is the district of Usme, whose rich history at the nexus of overlapping forms of violence makes it particularly germane to the issue of partner violence.

**Violence: Onward**

The stories presented here are therefore not just about a particular ‘somewhere,’ however important that setting may be, they are about one issue in particular: violence. And while I have no desire to propose a rigid definition of that important word, it would be irresponsible to proceed further without at least some kind of platform for departure. How else to begin to approach the lives and experiences of abusive partners and survivors in Usme? Violence has been called many things: slippery, nonlinear, productive, destructive, and reproductive; it has been said to be contextual and complex.\(^{31,32}\) All of these are of course true but saying that violence is a multiform and overlapping phenomenon does not bring us much closer to a meaningful synthesis. Context and complexity are not the end of the conversation but rather its beginnings.

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\(^{32}\) Lawrence and Karim (2007).
Hannah Arendt, who famously lamented the lack of specificity of the term, took to defining it vis-à-vis power, force, strength, and authority.\(^{33}\) Her particular notion of violence, however, was not only the result of a probing meditation but also a particular moment in history and the result of an interest in understanding a particular manifestation of violence. At the time when her reflections were published, the world was still reeling from the totalitarianism and previously unimaginable scales and methods of destruction that had taken place at the hands of authoritative state regimes; and it is in understanding this particular history of violence that her reflections are most useful. But what then of the intimate violence of partner abuse, how might we usefully proceed in order to shed light on this no less troubling topic? In some important ways Arendt’s insights into the oscillations of power and violence remain relevant to understanding it, an issue that will be discussed later with regard to the dynamism of the moral frameworks that buttress this abuse. In other ways though her formulation is overly restricting, making us unable to make use of the ideas that have gained momentum in the intervening half-century and to build an understanding of partner abuse as something that is intricately connected to other forms of violence in society. In this moment, with different interests in mind, we must find another bedrock on which to build.

In order to understand partner abuse then, I propose that we begin with a decidedly broad base and take violence to generally mean any thought or action that leads to suffering.\(^{34}\) In

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\(^{33}\) In Hannah Arendt’s (1970) *On Violence*, her primary intervention was to make the claim that violence was not the exercise of power, as many saw it to be, but rather the result of a loss of it. Power then was dominance that did not require the use of overt force, and violence was the *instrumentalized* force required when power failed. This dynamic of power and violence is one that was foreshadowed earlier in Gramsci’s (1992) theory of ‘hegemony’ and later recast under different terms by Bourdieu (1977) under his theory of practice and ‘symbolic violence’ as well as Jean and John Comaroff (1991) who preferred the terms of ‘hegemony’ and ‘ideology’ in order to convey a fundamentally similar insight.

\(^{34}\) Such a definition of violence is not totally unprecedented and bears similarity to the definition of violence used by Johan Galtung (1969) as quoted in the section on ‘structural violence’ as well as the definition proposed by Iadicola and Shupe (2003) of violence as, “violence is any action or structural arrangement that results in physical or nonphysical harm to one or more persons” (p.23).
talking about violence, the language of ‘means’ and ‘ends’ has often been invoked and under such terms this proposition could be understood of as a means that is defined by its ends, that in order for thoughts or actions to be considered violent they must by definition result in some form of suffering. If not suffering specifically, at least more generally some sense of injury or degradation of self. Under such an understanding, violence remains a means but is a means that cannot be understood, in fact it cannot exist, without an appreciation for its consequences. The implications of this I will address shortly. Such an approach may at first seem to be excessively broad, even to the point of losing all meaning or interest. Surely if any thought or action leading to suffering can be called violence then we are following a notion that precludes any meaningful insight. I believe instead that there is a rightful place for even exceedingly broad terms and such a move is far from unprecedented for both violence and other key terms in our lexicon. Culture has been usefully referred to simply as ‘moral systems,’ globalization has been considered a ‘respatialization of social geography,’ and if any concept is to take the privilege of a broad treatment then I can think of few better candidates than ‘violence.’

Speaking of violence in terms of means and ends is a common frame of interpretation, be it in lay discussions of ends justifying means or Benjamin’s (1921) “Critique of Violence” with his reference to natural law, positive law, and a violence of ‘pure means.’ In contrast to Benjamin’s critique of violence though, seeing violence as a means defined by its ends, in particular a necessary ‘ends’ of suffering, as proposed here, makes much more difficult the imagination of the particular kind of emancipatory violence, the ‘violence of pure means,’ that Benjamin and others have proposed (such as Sorel 1908 and Fanon 1963). Such an emancipatory violence would only be possible if we take to thinking of violence in the way that James Cone (1975) has, which is to also see it as any action causing destruction to violent social systems, a meaning that would have a mostly poetic connection to the use of ‘violence’ proposed here. What should not be lost in this distinguishing, however, is the very real and important role that resistance against violent social systems has in the liberation, materially and mentally, for people in subaltern positions, as well as the importance of maintaining the possibility of violently defending oneself against annihilation. As US lawyer and civil rights activist Pauli Murray (1987) said in her autobiography: “when I finally confronted my fear and took a concrete step to battle for social justice, the accumulated shame began to dissolve in a new sense of self-respect.” To see violence as a means defined by its ends, and to define those ends as the social experience of suffering, is most simply to say that violence can never be uncoupled from its consequences, intentional or not, and that we are always accountable to those consequences, whatever they may be.

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36 Evans-Pritchard (1950).
37 Lewellan (2002).
notions hold the most power for fundamental concepts, and this approach to violence has been reflected in a number of genealogies of thought.\textsuperscript{38} Today, such well accepted terms as ‘structural,’ ‘symbolic,’ and ‘everyday’ violence inherently challenge us to see the meaning of this word in a drastically broader fashion, or as Arthur Kleinman has stated, “violence, in this perspective, is the vector of cultural processes that work through the salient images, structures, and engagements of everyday life to shape locals worlds.”\textsuperscript{39}

Just because ‘violence’ has been defined broadly before though does not necessarily mean that this particular conception of it—one that holds it to be any thought or action leading to suffering—is useful. How then does this view of violence actually help us to understand it? First, it is difficult to imagine how we might otherwise reconcile such disparate ideas such as structural, symbolic, physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, domestic, political, and everyday violence. To those then that would criticize this approach, perhaps the most appropriate response is that we need not compromise. With theoretical tools such as the subtypes mentioned above, we need not worry that a broad definition of violence leaves us unable to use the term in practice. The problem at hand it seems is not specificity but instead generality, it is the problem of consolidating the mess that we have created for ourselves.

\footnote{38 For instance Jiddu Krishnamurti (1973) related violence as consequence of fear, itself a result of our orientations and fixations on the past and future, which he believed impeded a lucid appreciation of the present. Jacques Derrida (1976) saw violence as following from what he termed ‘arche-writing,’ itself a short-hand for indicating the move beyond a one-to-one correspondence of signifier to signified in language, or generally speaking the construction of abstract groups for the identification of people. Beatrice Hanssen (2000) has noted that following suite from Walter Benjamin (1921), the post-structuralist theoretical turn has conflated the distinction between power and violence in a way that “now includes such phenomenologically elusive categories as psychological, symbolic, epistemic, hermeneutical, and aesthetic violence” (p.9).

But why the emphasis on suffering? The most immediate answer to this is that suffering, I believe, is the most powerful reason why we care about violence in the first place. It is not in fact the acts that are so troubling but the wake of suffering that they leave that continues to haunt us and form the basis of our concern. This is typically true, if nowhere else, for the intimate terror in experiences of partner violence.\textsuperscript{40} If these acts did not lead to suffering then I am quite certain that we would still be interested in understanding them, but I found it doubtful that they would elicit the same kind of humane response that we reserve for addressing them. Beyond this, there is another imperative to me to define violence in terms of suffering because such a stance is by its own definition an interpretive one. Suffering, given that it is inherently experiential and a deeply social one at that, means that only those involved in such an experience can actually do the primary work of interpretation and justifiably label their experiences as such. If our definition of violence rests on such an interpretation, then it follows that only those who are affected by potentially violent thoughts and actions can be the arbiters of whether or not we call them violent at all. In other words, such a move helps to transfer the definitional authority of violence to those who have survived it and therefore makes our subsequent actions to address its consequences more dependent on the license of those who have been on its receiving end.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{40} It is difficult to in any way understate the severity of suffering that such violence can cause, in the many forms that it can take. From depression to suicide, substance abuse to future violent interactions, the multitudinous consequences of partner violence take on a ‘syndromic’ form best illustrated in the broad-reaching report \textit{World Mental Health} (1996, see in particular chapter 8 ‘Women’). Because of these incumbent effects, it is also why mental health interventions are some of the most critical points of first engagement for partner violence globally, where acts of caring in engaging survivors can be a critical first step in supporting survivors to initiate and drive any form of social redress that they believe can address the particularities of their situation.

\textsuperscript{41} I have no fantasies though that this represents some sort of panacea. The unfortunate truth is that in a system of unequal power, the reality would be that survivors of violence would instead be put into a position of having to convince people of the validity of their suffering, just as already occurs in processes of asylum seeking or survivors of rape in criminal justice hearings. Though being imperfect, my goal here is to propose a view of violence that would move the needle at least a little, shift the balance of definitional authority even if it cannot totally upend it.
The combination of a broad platform and the focus on suffering also conspire to what I see as one final advantage of this approach. If we are ever to more completely understand and redress violence and its consequences, we need to understand how many different forms of violence connect with one another and create this phenomenon that is productive, reproductive, and self-perpetuating. This means of course understanding all actors involved in violent social systems, even when seen from one perspective they may appear to be victims and from another appear to be the aggressors. Such ambiguous notions of persons and their roles in violence requires an appreciation for complex personhoods. Moreover, it requires a sensibility of engaging these issues with the goal of empathic understanding and not sympathetic excusing, in the case of the perpetration of violence, or simple one-sided notions of victimhood. This approach provides the basis for seeing many of these different forms of violence as interconnected and also postulates that suffering in its equally multiple forms provides a crucial connection between them. As an interconnected picture of violence emerges, we are pushed to think of phrases like ‘violence in war and peace’ as truly oxymoronic, as the line between the two becomes even less clear. We begin to see that what passes for ‘peace’ is simply the continuation of war by other means, namely as routinized violence, and it pushes us to see the

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42 This is not the first effort of course to try to glimpse the entirety of violence, however vain and doomed such an effort must inherently be. Ideas like the ‘continuums (Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2004) and ‘chains’ of violence (Iadicola and Shupe, 2003; Lawrence & Karim, 2007) have already sought to describe the connections between multiple forms of violence. Three of the most important categories of violence, beyond the more commonly recognized forms of outright physical aggression that these accounts have struggled with, fall under the rubric of ‘social violence’ (Kleinman, 1999) and include the structural, symbolic, and everyday violences previously mentioned. This trio of categories has been echoed across a number of frameworks, one of the most notable of which is Zizek’s (2008) tripartite scheme of subjective and objective violence, the latter of which he further broke into systemic and symbolic violences.

43 As will later be discussed, this direct opposition of violence and peace is a proposition that Johan Galtung (1969) explicitly proposed at the same time that he offered the concept of ‘structural violence.’ This is also not to misconstrue the intent of the book by this name, edited by Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004). The volume is dedicated to understanding how ‘peace’ is typically anything but, that violence pervades what we often take to be ‘times of peace’ and corrodes from within any significance that we might otherwise give to the word.
meaning of peace in a way that is more consistent with what graffiti artists have painted over their streets in Bogotá: “Paz es una vida digna” (“peace is a dignified life”).

**Partner Abuse in Usme: A Framework for Understanding**

Nowhere is such an approach to violence and peace more necessary than partner abuse in Usme. Such a connected view is the only viable approach to understanding this intimate violence *in situ*, in a place whose collective history is defined by various interweaving dynamics of oppression, and whose residents disproportionately represent one of the longest ongoing conflicts on the globe. Building such an understanding though is not just a matter of frame of mind, it is also a matter of practice, and if simplicity is the inevitability of description we only approach complexity when we more fully engage.

*Inquiry*

For this reason the fieldwork that I conducted was always oriented to building as inter-positional of a perspective as possible. The people that populate the following pages are therefore not meant to be representatives of all experiences of partner violence in a community like Usme, but they have been carefully chosen because they are all exemplary of particularly important issues that emerged in each area to which I was fortunate enough to gain access. For the early months of my research that broad engagement meant consulting city archives to gain a general understanding of the history of Usme, followed closely by several months of interviews and observation within the Comisarías de Familia. Within Usme there are two Comisarías

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44 The phrasing above is adapted and inverted from Carl von Clausewitz’s famous aphorism.

45 This notion of the ‘interpositional’ account is best illustrated in Kleinman’s *Writing at the Margin* (1997).
available, and by inviting me in to see the process of consulting them—from the first encounter with the receptionist to the lawyer who decided orders of protection to the social workers who followed up cases two years after their initiation—it was through working with the members of these institutions that I was able to build early frameworks for understanding the intricacies of partner violence in this setting. Though this study would go on to include over fifty interviews with service professionals and community leaders in Usme—a convenience sample of religious leaders, directors of community foundations, and public library staff to name a few—it was the staff of the Comisarías who remained some of my closest partners through the duration of my work.

It was also through the Comisarías de Familia that I began to approach both survivors and perpetrators of partner violence, and ultimately it was only through the Comisarías that I was able to identify abusive men who were willing to speak at length with me. In the end five men chose to do so, and that they volunteered to meet and talk about their lives, having been recruited through the Comisarías de Familia, also means that they cannot be taken as a representative sample of abusive men in Usme. That they wished to speak at all with a stranger about their lives, under no obligation, itself is an indication that their openness to reveal themselves, and encounter their own histories, was beyond that of many others. Nevertheless, investigations about the perpetration of abuse must start somewhere, and this referral sample is what formed the core of this study. Over the course of many months I would meet with these informants for an extended series of interviews—anywhere from two to six sessions, for a total of twenty-one interviews—before I could begin to follow them, if invited, into other aspects of their lives.46

46 This research was approved by the Harvard University Institutional Review Board (Protocol #IRB14-0718). While service professionals were identified and approached through their institutional affiliations, perpetrators of abuse were referred through the Comisarías using recruitment flyers. Some of the survivors of abuse interviewed were also referred in this way, through the comisarías, others were key informants that I had met through other
This meant spending time with them at their places of work, in their homes, walking around their communities, anywhere they were willing to bring me. For fear that the control that they wielded over their partners would obviate any meaningful consent for participation, I never directly recruited the partners of the perpetrators that I knew. That said, by being invited into the domestic space of one man in particular, Diego, I was able to begin to build a relationship with the person who had endured his violence, a dynamic that I will explore in much greater detail in Chapter Four.

Engaging with survivors of abuse was a far more organic process, requiring much less facilitation through the Comisarías, what came to be both a convenience and referral sample of women. In several cases it was women whom I had come to know through other capacities who would eventually confide that they had been victims of violence and suggested that we set aside a time and space to record in greater detail their experiences of it; chances to share both the violence that they had managed to survive as well as the wisdom that they had won through it. What emerged from all of this was a window into partner violence in Usme that centered on the perpetrators themselves, but found grounding and counterbalance from survivors of abuse, professional responders, organizers, and the deeper histories of the contexts through which each of these actors lived.

Integration-

It was also through these windows that the broader notions of partner violence, ones that I would like to advance throughout the many pages that follow, emerged throughout my ethnographic activities who subsequently revealed to me that they had experiences of partner violence and wished to conduct interviews about it. All interviews with people that were audio recorded—be it with service professionals, perpetrators, survivors, or anyone else—were first documented by obtaining written consent. All of the names used in this thesis are pseudonyms, and any other identifying information has been removed.
fieldwork. Theory should of course always follow from experience rather than precede it, and though every ethnographer enters the field with a litany of ideas already in the process of formation, it is that feeling of surprise that lets us know that we have begun to do our work responsibly. My objective from the outset has been to let these more abstract notions emerge from the experiences of survivors, perpetrators, and the others involved in their lives, and in selectively recounting particular, illustrative stories here, that desire remains the same.

Throughout the entirety of the theory that follows, two underlying schema persist. First, the sense of becoming encaged in some way, and pushing back against those enclosures, was one of the very few common threads that wove itself through all the experiences of the people that I knew and the stories that they told. To understand partner violence is not just to ask what are the webs in which people have suspended themselves, it is to ask how they have become ensnared within them, constrained and damaged by them, injured through their violent repair. For survivors of abuse this entrapment was the most self-evident, intimate constructions of isolation buttressed by multiple failures of social support. They were not alone in experiencing this, however, those who committed that very abuse felt it as well. Caught in the cycles of their own behavior, justifying their own social subordination through their rationalizations for their intimate violence, the perpetrators that I knew consistently demonstrated that just to exercise power over another is not to be liberated in any way in the process. Even those who responded to the crises of these violent relationships, the staff of the Comisarías de Familia, were not immune to this kind of experience. Endowed with incremental increases in legal power, the very tools

47 It is, however, not just that existing sources of social support, say family or friends, fail victims of violence in these moments of need. It is also that one of the many consequences of intimate violence can be what Das (2007) has called ‘poisonous knowledge’ for the survivors of abuse, knowledge that does not only harm the holders of it but continues to do damage to their social relationships, existing or potential, as well. It is a concept that bears important connections with what Dana Jack (1993) has called ‘silencing the self,’ a form of self-censure that has been documented to have sequelae such as depression and a sense of a ‘divided self.’
that gave them the authority and the means to intervene also frequently became constraining to the ends that they wished to achieve, made worse only by their still limited numbers in the face of overwhelming demand.

In addition to this sense of entrapment, cutting across all of the expositions that follow is the element of tension. These stories of partner violence, regardless of the angle from which they are told, are largely constituted by contradiction, but rather than be paralyzing, these paradoxes, these tensions are generative in the most severe ways. Throughout the chapters that follow these tensions will be given many names: unintended consequences, surrogate power, the dependence inherent to control, for example. What unites them is that in all instances these tensions are not just characteristic of the lives and relationships examined, on whatever scale that may be, these tensions are what give life to them. Understanding them more fully, seeing how they penetrate across and bridge scales of human relationships, connecting them in unlikely ways, requires a broader appreciation of the contexts in which this intimate violence is performed. It is also through the processes by which these tensions are engaged that the boundaries of social life are created at all: how the 'self' comes to mind, how spaces like the home are constructed, how national frontiers are erected. As these limits of the experienced world come to appear as increasingly inevitable and natural features, they not only become habit, they can become restricting and injurious even to those who lead the work of cyclically recreating them.

It is in this respect then that the first chapter deals with the history of Usme, outlining the major arcs of power and violence that have shaped the district. Tracing these faithfully requires attention to one issue in particular, co-production, the fact that not only has Usme been formed

\[48\] This general approach is best described by Butler (1993, p241) when she says that, “identities and difference are constructed in and through dynamics of our engagement with each other over time, not only in the service of oppressive relations such as racism or sexism, but also in the service of the contestation of such oppression.”
through the history of the nation of Colombia, through those many centuries of encounter the nation has just as equally been formed by Usme. Beyond this, the objectives of this chapter are both modest and ambitious. Modest because the questions guiding it are limited: what are the relevant spatial inscriptions of power and how have they been formed, from whence do centrally organizing logics of hierarchy, like ‘paternalism,’ come? It is ambitious because these historical narrations are ultimately of no use to us unless they can be connected meaningfully to the present, a ‘today’ that incidentally never takes place exclusively in the ‘now.’ It is on this general note that the chapter ends and gives way to the rest of the thesis, indexing only some of the possible connections between current partner violence in Usme and the historical legacies that are not really in the past. Is it the militarization of everyday life and masculinity, is it the creation of unsafe urban spaces and the alienating effects that they have? How have dislocations in the form of urban migration left some people more vulnerable to partner violence, how have those migrations also played into the perpetration of it? The beginnings of answers to these questions can only come in the long form of detailed engagement with peoples’ lives, the work of later chapters. Understanding them though is equally impossible without appreciating how these histories, and their multiple forms of violence, have ordered everyday life in Usme in both spatially and symbolically relevant ways.

So while such broad points of departure—conceptually with regard to the topic of violence and historically with regard to Usme—allow us the space to sketch these rough outlines of connection, it is still necessary to eventually ask a more specific set of questions in order to guide a lucid consideration of the actual acts of intimate partner violence. In this regard, there are by my account three central questions that we must pose. These questions, when asked together, allow us to momentarily tease apart and examine the composite threads of the fabric of this
abuse, without irreparably causing damage to our understanding of it. These three questions are: how it is possible for someone to continue to abuse their partner over time, what are the efforts to make it ethically permissible, and what is at stake for the perpetrators of abuse. These questions—‘Possible,’ ‘Permissible,’ and ‘Stakes’—form the overall structure of the first block of chapters, Part 1 ‘Abuse,’ and are the fundamental basis of insight into the kind of chronic controlling abuse that here is of particular interest.⁴⁹

One of the most common questions when it comes to partner violence is why do the survivors of it not leave the relationship, either earlier than they do or even at all. The mere possibility of maintaining a violently coercive relationship over months, years, or a lifetime is no trivial matter and understanding how victims are isolated into such situations is a critical first step to appreciating the dynamics of abuse. This is the focus of the first chapter ‘Possible,’ which is based upon the stories of three women. What their stories illustrate most of all is resistance, that survival is of course an intricately active endeavor, and in appreciating their various forms of resistance it is possible to begin to see the cracks in intimate forms of domination. What also emerges from their experiences is that chronic coercive partner violence is fundamentally a question of sovereignty on the intimate scales. That power over another, however elusive that may prove to be, can only be sought within particular spaces, in this case most often the ‘domestic,’ the violent fiction of the home. In fact, it is not only that power over the other is sought in a spatially inscribed manner, it is through the very construction of those spaces that any approximation of domination is achieved.

⁴⁹ In a recent proposal for a typology, Johnson (2008) distinguishes between four different kinds of intimate partner violence: 1) intimate terrorism, 2) violent resistance, 3) mutual violent control, and 4) situational couple violence. The first of these types of partner violence, intimate terrorism, is that which is characterized by a unilateral and chronic attempt for coercive power over a partner, it is the form that is globally most commonly perpetrated by men, and it is the form of partner violence on which this study was focused.
Isolation within those spaces is not just the result of the actions of abusive partners, however, survivors of gender-based violence live at the intersections of multiple overlapping fields of power—political, economic, racial, and otherwise—which combine to construct a multiply marginalized life. In resisting those violences, what two of the women in the Chapter ‘Possible’ illustrated is that independence from these regimes does not necessarily require autonomy from them, that it is instead achieving the ability to move between them that affords the possibility of personal liberation. It is a realization, born out of everyday practice, that holds significant implications for the underlying logics of many global campaigns for ‘empowerment’ and microfinance. What the third person, Carolina, illustrated is that even absent these possibilities of movement, resistance is nevertheless still possible. Though significantly more constrained in a series of intensely violent relationships, ones characterized even by reproductive coercion, Carolina still consistently found a well of self-worth from which she could propel herself forward. That well was her children, whom she called her ‘motor,’ and what Carolina therefore demonstrated is one of the central tensions in the exercise of power: unintended consequences. How unintended consequences defy the very notion of control as well as hold the possibility to lead to its self-destruction are topics that will be explored further through her story.

The third chapter ‘Permissible’ shifts focus from the survivors of abuse to the perpetrators. Here the focus is on the ideologies that the perpetrators of abuse, those with whom I interacted, drew on in order to legitimize the violence that they committed, at the very least seeking to rationalize it to themselves. And while it was impossible to discuss the existence of partner violence in Usme without raising the issue of ‘machismo,’ the perpetrators that I knew preferred to present their own actions differently. It was paternalism, more than machismo, that came through as the central feature in their worldviews and their framing of their own actions. It
is from this different point of departure that the notion of sovereignty, introduced in the previous chapter, is carried forward through the interventions of Weber, who saw sovereignty as the monopolization of the legitimate use of violence, and Schmitt who called it the ability to declare the state of exception. Under the rubric of paternalism, the perpetrators that I knew recast the violence they committed as states of exception to what they otherwise considered to be a benevolent system, an arrangement of provision and protection for the betterment of their children. Significant about this particular formulation is the non-trivial similarities that it bears to the logics of governing power that have pervaded the history of not just Colombia, from the colonial era to present day, but also the entire hemisphere through US-Latin American relations over the preceding centuries; histories that I retrace in greater detail this chapter.

For one this means that it is not an exotic or easily otherized cultural pathology that allows us to understand the violence that the perpetrators of partner abuse that I met in Usme commit. It also means that in committing that violence, abusive partners in the marginalized and historically exploited district of Usme are in some way aligning themselves with the very ideologies that have upheld their own subordination, their subjugation by other means. It is therefore the possibility of surrogacy in these broader ideological systems that perpetrators of partner violence incidentally align themselves with the very moral frameworks that perpetuate their own injury as well. And so at the risk of adding another term to an already crowded lexicon, I offer the idea of ‘surrogate power’ as a means of considering what it is to perform this uniquely paradoxical social position. Drawing from the lineage of ideas around the notion of ‘hegemony’—following from Gramsci to Arendt and eventually to Scott—what I argue is that by using these notions to justify their intimate violence, perpetrators of abuse do not only normalize to themselves the terms of their intimate relationships, they also significantly stifle their potential
for critique of other dimensions of power as well, such as political and economic ones. Whether or not this necessarily means that perpetrators are accomplice to the stability of these other systems of power, or if the paradoxes inhering to their practice allow for the possibility of subversion, will require more detailed consideration.

What it does mean is that, taken together, the questions of ‘possible’ and ‘permissible’ help to build a combined perspective on how the potential space for partner violence is opened at all. Just because partner violence can be made both possible and, to a certain extent, permissible, still does not mean than anyone would actually do it, there still has to be some kind of impulse for someone to commit that abuse. This is the basis of the fourth chapter ‘Stakes,’ where the lives of Diego and Jairo, two aggressors, are presented in greater depth in order to better understand what was at stake for them throughout the violence that they committed. In truth there were many issues implicated for both of them, and much of the reason for exploring the details of Diego’s life in particular is to begin to approximate the kind of messiness and complexity, the pervasive uncertainty that comes forth through engaging with the perpetrators of partner violence.

On the far end of that complexity though there is still reason to seek some kind of distillation, and for Diego especially what emerged from his experiences was the actual dependence, emotional and desperate, that he had on his partners. That dependence, as it appeared to be for other perpetrators as well, was perhaps the most shameful secret of his relationships, something that he usually attempted to either obscure through violence or recast in some other way. It points to a direct internal contradiction of control, that it is every bit as much a question of dependence, and adds another, perhaps the most severe, kind of tension relevant to partner violence. Faced with an order of protection and the permanent loss of his partner, Luisa,
Diego’s story was also one of crisis and the attempt for transformation in the shadow of legal consequences. So too was the experience of Jairo, who unlike Diego was able to achieve a more durable kind of change in the aftermath of his coming before the Comisaría. Understanding how he was able to do so, the influences in his life at the time and the contexts in which he realized those changes, points not only to what can be at stake for perpetrators of violence, but also how those stakes themselves are subject to change.

Given the role of the Comisarías de Familia in both of their trajectories, Diego’s and Jairo’s, their stories are inseparable from the kinds of social censure that exist against partner violence, the organized responses intended to curb its existence. The second part of this thesis therefore deals directly with these organized societal responses, either those that pertain specifically to this kind of abuse or to those that engage with it more obliquely. In the context of Bogotá, Colombia it would be impossible to think about this without foregrounding the Comisarías de Familia, a governmental agency created in the preceding decades as an organized first point of response for cases of partner abuse, child neglect, child physical abuse, or child sexual abuse. In conducting my fieldwork I spent a great amount of time shadowing and interviewing professionals in the two offices in Usme, attempting to understand how the governmental response to partner violence was formulated and actually effected in this area. The fifth chapter is a consideration of this central pillar in the societal response, its successes, its shortcomings, and its possibilities.

In particular it is a consideration of how the Comisarías de Familia represent a new kind of ‘public’ intrusion into the ‘private’ affairs of partner violence, a critical juncture at which the limits of previously distinct sovereign relations now come to collide. Key are the legalistic apparatuses to which that work is connected, a bureaucratized and rationalized form of social
support in the Weberian sense, an authority that is constantly reiterated through the documents that are produced through those interactions—such as orders of protection—and the frequent invocation of particular laws, by name and date, in these face-to-face encounters. These apparatuses are not only brought to bear by Comisaría staff to impinge on the local worlds that perpetrators have sought to construct, those very apparatuses can also be restraining to the survivors who seek their support as well as the very staff who are the most fluent in their employment. Looking at the Comisarías then also beckons us to ask how these frameworks, while useful and undeniably important in many ways, are also resisted and reformulated through the practices of all those who come into contact with them.

It is for this reason that the sixth and final chapter addresses alternatives to these institutional arrangements, either through the imaginations and desires of Comisaría staff or alternatives that have been realized in some of the social spaces that lie beyond their walls. From the Catholic Parish to the local public library, alternative logics and means of engagement are actively being experimented with in Usme, and over time their articulation with one another, not necessarily in a harmonizing sense, may be pivotal in their success. In addition to considering these existing efforts, this final chapter also provides a reflection on what these collected insights can mean for the future of other kinds of social institutions, in particular health care systems, in better engaging with these forms of violence in our societies.

This imperative to consider the relevance to action is the first and foremost reason that the schema of tensions in partner violence is maintained throughout the entirety of this thesis. From tensions like these come some of the most violent means of remaking the world, but in recognizing them we also afford ourselves the opportunity to engage issues like partner violence with the highest respect. That is to say that we can enter both empathically yet critically into
even the most damaging and seemingly intransigent situations, provided we remember that they are already constituted by elaborate arrays of ambivalences. And such engagement is hardly optional, hearing the experiences of those implicated in this violence is not a passive affair and neutrality is at best a fiction of which we may try to convince ourselves.\footnote{Theidon (2013) in particular makes a cogent argument for why this is true in research on violence, that one way or another any pretense to ‘neutrality’ is undone in the process of engagement.} All of those whom I came to know in Usme—from survivors to perpetrators to interested observers—wanted lessons to be learned from their own experiences, and I strive not to disappoint them here. It is my sincere hope that what follows can contribute to broader projects of transformation, personal or collective, efforts to make real a world in which we move beyond our current means of affliction. Onward, \textit{vamanos}. 
La Zona Quinta

“Perdóname si los ofendo
Vivimos en un país en la cual
Hay pocos buenos recuerdos
Bañados en sangre
Partidos inmortales
Explotación de petróleo
Ya si miento, lloro, flora
Y trata de mujeres
El descubrimiento de color, se ha repetido
Tengo raíces indígenas
Malicia indígena
Represento también
Los ríos, pueblos, y las veredas, ellos
Han sido olvidados, también obligados
A dejar sus cultivos
Después protestas para campesinos, todos ofendidos
Después oprimidos, por qué? (por qué?)
Por protestar en este momento, le recita
Calles calientes, rap quinta inicial”
-Quinta Inicial, freestyle51

51 Freestyle rap by ‘Quinta Inicial,’ a group whose members are all from Usme. Recorded on June 3, 2015 in the Calle 40S station of the Transmilenio bus system. Translation is: “Excuse me if I offend / We live in a country where / There are few good memories / Bathed in blood / Immortal [Political] Parties / Oil exploitation / If I mention it, I cry, flora / And women trafficking / The discovery of color, has been repeated / I have indigenous roots / Indigenous malice / I represent also / The rivers, towns, paths, they / Have been forgotten, also forced / To leave their cultivations / Later peasant protests, everyone offended / Later oppressed, why? (why?) / For protesting, I tell it / hot streets, rap quinta inicial.”
“Welcome to Usmekistan.”

So reads one graffiti tag on the public library in Usme. Next to it another person has written, “Usmekistan is consciousness.” In scrawling these messages, these clandestine pundits have taken a popularly demeaning term for Usme’s social and geographic marginalization, ‘Usmekistan,’ and turned it on its head. Usme may be marginalized, but out of that marginalization consciousness has developed. But consciousness of what? For one, Usme’s history is more than marginalization, it is a particular mixture of exclusion and exploitation, a process of constructing an intimate other to the capital city. If nothing else this ‘othering’ is part of that awareness, and down the road from the library another mural reads, “Don’t make our lives a part of your war.”

If only the discrepancies were so clear. Who is the ‘us,’ who is the ‘them,’ and where the front lines of social warfare can be found is hardly self-evident. In the pluralistic, and continuously pluralizing, district of Usme, a zone not just of contact but more importantly of production in the first place, the lines are continuously moving about a land that itself cannot remain grounded. This is, more than anything else to me, what is La Zona Quinta (‘The Fifth Zone’), Bogotá’s fifth district. If it is a place of consciousness, then it is so because it has been a place of encounter, a space of meetings through which collectivities have continuously emerged. Understanding their cultivation, and therefore what consciousness in Usme might mean, requires a longer history of the region.

Since the very founding of Bogotá and the colonial era of Colombia, Usme has lived in history as a shadow: close at hand, always present, silent. Unlike shadows, however, the history of Usme is one of a fabricated silence and one where the ‘shadow’ has also formed its host, not

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52 This kind of explicitly political graffiti is common throughout Bogotá, whose street art scene is one of the most vibrant in the world. Interestingly most of this kind of ‘graffiti conciencia’ was relatively scarce within Usme, especially compared to the downtown area along la septima (7th avenue) near the city’s main plaza, and along one of the main roads leading westward away from downtown, Calle 26. The kind of geographic distribution of this graffiti helps to tell a bit about who are its intended audiences.
just passively followed it. In line with what scholars of colonialism more broadly have advocated, modern Colombia was as much constructed by Usme as the other way around. Contrary to the still common myths of urban-rural separation, Usme is not a region ‘left behind’ in the modernizing ‘progress’ of Bogotá but rather was a driving force behind it. As for the silence to its role, if most of the official histories have forgotten it, at least many of the residents of Usme have not. In a project done by the office of the mayor of Bogotá to commemorate the bicentennial of the country, groups of community leaders from each of the city’s twenty districts were asked to reflect on the past, present, and desired futures of their communities. Here is what two representatives from Usme had to say:

“We lost much during the Independence of our country’s Republic. In this territory, more than any other, we lost, because part of the terrains destined for indigenous groups were ceded in these feats for independence, in all these fights ceded to the interior. Ceded to whom? To the big landowners, generals, coronels of this country, and the people were left in deficiency. For this reason Usme has been mistreated and this is how we proceed. I think that this is part of what should be given in this contribution to the Bicentennial: to say that we have nothing to celebrate.”

“We must begin to reconstruct history from the stories of actors themselves, who still have a clear way to identify ourselves, to sensitize ourselves, to make a counter proposal, because ultimately what we need to have is a real counter proposal, so first we need to know our history, not only from the perspective of the books, but from our own actors.”

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53 For a seminal work on the work of silencing of histories, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1997) *Silencing the Past.*

54 For examples of such scholarship with a global perspective, see Stoler (1995) and Cooper (2005).

55 In the Latin American context, Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1971) has most thoroughly deconstructed this myth in his *Seven Myths of Latin America.* His exegesis definitively shows that over the entire region, as has been true elsewhere in the world, cities were built out of long and vital ties to rural areas and that rural areas have not simply been left behind in the wake of urban progress as many might fancy.

56 Secretaría de Cultura, Recreación y Deporte (2010, p.86). It is also worth noting that the introduction to this commemorative book, written by the mayor, emphasized the project for continued modernization of the city.
Understanding this longer history of Usme makes evident the modes of power that have shaped this district, the city to which it now pertains, and even beyond to the rest of the country and neighboring continents. These dynamics—played out along the dimensions of ethnically charged and intensely gendered political economies and forms of governance—are part and parcel of the history of Usme over the longue durée and indeed serve as a microcosm for much of the history of Colombia as a whole. From these histories we may also begin to see motifs, patterns of power and control that also find resonance downward in the scales of human relationships, down to even the intimate dynamics of partner violence and its redress, issues that will thereafter be the main focus of this thesis. In my experience, many residents of Usme have been quick to draw direct analogies between these exercises of power, committed across scales and dimensions of social relations, and following that lead can help to coax a more broadly connected picture of violence into view. It can also help to bring into relief the deep contradictions that beset, and even drive, the uses of these various social logics of power, revealing the tensions that are created through their uneven employment. These tensions themselves may be sources of creativity and change, just as they may also provide apertures for empathy and new footholds for productively engaging the perpetrators of abuse in these intimately violent relationships. To even see these possibilities, however, it is again necessary to also be able to see a picture of greater historical depth and geographic breadth.57

Rather than present an unfocused historicizing of Usme, however, there are several particular questions guiding the pages that follow. First, how do we understand not just the social construction of a place like Usme, how do we understand the co-construction of space and the spatialization of relationships of power that continue into the present. Second, how have

57 To paraphrase Farmer (1997).
centrally organizing ideologies of hierarchical power like paternalism developed over time, and what relevance do they have in Usme today with regard to related notions like ‘participation’ or ‘peace.’ Ultimately, in the interest of the overarching interests of this thesis and the chapters that follow, some connection between these histories and the particular issue of partner violence must be made, and the first moves of stitching together this tapestry are the focus of the final section of this chapter. It is therefore for these reasons and more, not just some rote exercise of historical narration, that the history of Usme must be given here its own dedicated attention. Organized around eras of social subversion in Colombia and punctuated by critical moments such as the end of La Violencia and the adoption of the new Constitution of 1991, this is but a primer on the story of Usme’s shadow role in the building of modern Colombia.\(^{58}\)

The Uses of Usme: Bogotá’s Intimate Colony

Before there were social encounters there were geological ones, and it only seems appropriate that the area that is today called Usme sits at the transition point between the highland moors of Sumapaz and the high plains of the altiplano mesa. This juncture and its surrounding areas first became populated in the early Holocene era, though the groups that would later be known as ‘Muisca’ would not arrive until three to seven thousand years ago. With their arrival came the introduction of the Chibcha language, ‘Muisca’ being a derivative of ‘Moxca’ meaning ‘people’ in Chibcha. Also brought in with their migration was a transition from hunting and gathering to agrarian production, and with it new forms of social arrangement organized hierarchically under chieftainships. These legacies and their contemporary construal can still be seen today. Plants that were domesticated during this period remain as staples in the

\(^{58}\) La Violencia was a period from 1948-1954 when an estimated 250,000 Colombians (Safford and Palacios, 2002) were killed in a disseminated conflict fought ostensibly between the Liberal and Conservative parties.
diets of Bogotanos, everyday reminders of deep pre-Columbian roots. Outside of Villa de Leyva in the northern department of Boyacá, the solar and lunar calendars from this period can still be visited, intentionally phallic stone testimonials to the centrality of agriculture in that evolving social landscape.\(^5\) Closer to modern Bogotá is the Salt Cathedral, a conversion of a salt mine that began under the Muisca and played central roles in both commercial and religious life.\(^6\) Just beyond the central plaza in Usme is another living representation of a Muiscan past, an immense burial ground that was originally uncovered during the construction of a new apartment complex and for a time impeded the further expansion of housing projects.\(^6\) To see the hierarchies of the time, one only needs to follow the gold, in this case all the way to the Bank of the Republic’s Gold Museum in the center of Bogotá, a place where the golden adornments worn by Muiscan caciques have been collected and displayed. Today these works of art stand testament not only to the concentration of power and wealth that developed within Muisca groups, as well as the technological evolutions achieved during those periods, but also to the relationships that ultimately led to the removal and relocation of this gold into what is today a national museum.

These relationships of dispossession, and later exploitation, were of course those realized through the colonial encounter, or as Fals Borda called it the ‘colonial subversion,’ a period that

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\(^5\) The official interpretation presented at the site is that the columns were depicted as male phalluses to represent the role of the Muiscan in planting the seeds in the earth. The earth itself that is visible everywhere around the calendars is the testament to the female complement, a reminder that the Muiscan were always dependent on her provision.

\(^6\) The mine itself continues to be used for commercial exploitation and the part that has been converted into an underground cathedral is not the section that was originally excavated by the Muiscas.

\(^6\) Not only did this rediscovery indicate the central importance of the region of Usme in Muiscan religious life, the temporary success of its use in preventing the further expansion of housing projects has contributed to what some have called the ‘muiscanization’ of social resistance in Usme today. In other words, invoking Muiscan history and organizing around new amalgamations of indigeneity—such as through invocations of ‘pachamama,’ a term derived from Quechuan or Ayamara but with clear parallels in Muiscan history—in the interest of contesting, or at least stalling, the further encroachment of urban expansion.
proved to be every bit as productive as it was destructive.\textsuperscript{62,63} For one, when Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada first arrived in Muiscan territory, what his conquistadors and he encountered was not a unified Muiscan society. While tied together through a common language and shared histories, as a unified political organization ‘Muisca’ did not precede the Spanish conquest. Just as any sense of the ‘other’ did not precede those colonial encounters, they emerged directly through them.\textsuperscript{64} What existed at the turn of the 16th century was instead a vast population divided into loyalties between four confederations: Bogotá, Tunja, Duitama, and Sogamoso; and of these the Bogotá led by the Zipa and the Tunja led by the Zaque were the most powerful. Long tensions between these sovereigns had existed over land and tributes, and it was pre-existing divisions like these that the conquistadors attempted to exploit, historical divisions that the category of ‘Muisca’ today tends to obscure. Ultimately, through the all too familiar means of the killing of chieftains and the importation of foreign diseases, the Muisca did not prevail in their resistance and over the following centuries ensued a progressive overwriting of their social orders. Of particular relevance here were the transitions from a tributary system of agricultural production

\textsuperscript{62} Fals Borda (1969). Also, the term ‘productive’ here is not meant to connote that what was produced was necessarily positive in any moralistic sense, only that the power exercised in the colonial era was not just repressive but also wildly generative, the sum of which was a new social order.

\textsuperscript{63} The history that follows here is assembled both from Fals Borda (1969) and Usme: Historia de un Territorio (Metrovivienda, 2011).

\textsuperscript{64} Perhaps the most dramatic example of this in Colombia is the history of what is today the largest recognized indigenous group in the country, the Wayuu of the Northeastern department of Guajira (Hernandez, 1984). Prior to the Spanish invasion in 1499 there existed a number of distinct groups in the region and, though much of their history is lost today, what remains known is that all of these groups were distinct but economically connected to some degree. Upon arrival of the Spanish, all of these groups underwent profound and rapid transformations, particularly in response to the Spanish practice of selling members of these groups into slavery in the Antilles. In order to avoid complete incorporation into the colonial system, several major adaptations happened: ethnic divisions appear to have disappeared and a common identity known as the Wayuu was forged, a new and highly mobile lifestyle was adopted that included the incorporation of Spanish horses (today all-terrain vehicles) along with a pastoral means of subsistence, and finally the Wayuu established trade with non-Spanish counterparts. This last feature not only prevented a Spanish monopoly on trade but also facilitated access to guns for more militant defenses of social autonomy. Even today, the Wayuu have been able to maintain some degree of independence from the central state.
to the political economy of the *latifundia* hacienda system, as well as the supplanting of the
hierarchies created within the Muisca groups with a decidedly Catholic one instead.

The conversion to the new political economy happened in both fast and slow ways. Initially came the first wave of dispossession and redistribution of land into *encomiendas*, tracts of land parceled out to the various conquistadors that arrived first to the Andean region. By the conclusion of the 16\textsuperscript{th} century, those tracts had already been enclosed into the vast haciendas under which indigenous peoples were subordinated to work. What remained was either used for mining, again with the imposed labor of the Muisca, or created into indigenous reservations. The slower invasion of land was mediated over the course of centuries and primarily by poorer Spanish descendants, those who progressively migrated to Usme, mixed with Muisca peoples, and through *de facto* tenancy of land, slowly chipped away at what little had remained for the reservations. This individualization of collective land later allowed the large land holders to buy up new parcels and expand their territories, the result of which was the decline of the reservations in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century and their near total obsolescence by the middle of the next. Now nearly the sole model of political economic organization in Usme, the otherwise landless—Muisca, mestizo, poor Spanish—had little choice other than to sell their labor for wages and rent small pieces of land for their own subsistence crops, a nominally mixed-economy method of production that signaled clearly the early separations of capital. Beside producing new configurations of social relations, the hacienda owners, *hacendados*, also stood at the helm of producing much of the food required to feed what was at first the growing colony and later the independent nation, in particular its eventual capital city just to the north. The *hacendados* did so, unsurprisingly, under exacting demands and excruciatingly unequal relationships that allowed them to set the prices of commodities, charge fees for renters to have their own animals, and
even require that half of what workers grew for themselves, in addition to what they cultivated through their waged labor, be relinquished to them, the owners of the land. Producing not just the base materials for the population growth of the colony, what the history of haciendas and the enclosure of land produced most of all was misery, and it did so by regulating, in some self-limiting ways, the exploitation of land and people. As Alfred Hettner, a German traveller to the region at the end of the 19th century noted:

“Most of the area that makes up the mountains around Bogotá already has an owner... It is with the masters and landowners where lies the greater part of the responsibility for the social situation... because instead of lifting those under their command, today many still remained determined not to let it thrive in order to continue exploiting it for their own benefit. There are cases in which the owner is opposed to a tenant buying another head of cattle or cultivating over a broader surface of land. Small landowners, instead, are prevented from engaging in the production of exportable goods due to their unfavorable position of their lands in relation to roads.”

With these new stratifications of power came new problems. These institutionalized hierarchies that emerged through the evolution of the hacienda in Usme could not just exist nakedly as such, they had to be justified in some way. In colonial Usme, as it was for most of Latin America, much of this justification for social stratification found its home within the church. What Fals Borda makes clear in his narration of the history of Colombia is that what he called the colonial subversion was most of all a Catholic subversion, and at its core was the objective of the colonization of consciousness as well as the creation of a society organized around those principles. The conquest, he argues, was profoundly shaped by the piety of Queen Isabella of Castille who saw the opportunity for colonial rule as a mystic reward for those who had taken religion out of the monasteries and into the battlefield. It was a chance to create a new

65 Metrovivienda (2011, p.41).
world order constituted at all levels, from state apparatuses to broadly held beliefs, around Christianity. In a very physical sense this was enacted through the reorganization of social space, towns now built on a gridiron with a central plaza, and in that plaza always the main Catholic parish. Usme was no exception to this rule, and to this day the colonial church stands as the hallmark feature of the main square. These institutions became the central proponents behind the development of what Fals Borda argues are the two most important ideas to emerge during this period: first, a rigid division of labor propagated across generations as a morally justified pattern of living, and second, urban concentrations as the mode of civilized life. Taken together, these formed what he calls ‘caste urbanism,’ and what it amounted to was a very particular Pax Hispanica in which submission was the intended moral order. This is not to suggest that hierarchy was a new concept to the region, it had existed as well within Muisca groups prior to the arrival of the Spanish. But whereas sovereignty under Muisca chieftains had been mediated by agreement and a complex system of gift exchanges, under the new order it was to be sustained instead by presumptions of natural superiority. The very term ‘hierarchy’ even has origins within the Church, originally referring to a social stratification based on proximity to God, and these were the pretenses that were to proactively justify the organization the Catholic colonial order. Beyond the political, the class, and the ethnic enactments of this philosophy was also the crucially gendered aspect that this sanctified hegemony took. Given the doctrine of a ‘father’ above and the institutionalized privileging of men within the Church itself—themselves referred to as ‘fathers’—it takes little imagination to see how Catholicism played a role in establishing gendered regimes of power. Hardly relegated to the colonial past, these systems continued through to the nation’s independence, at which time Colombia was inaugurated as a decidedly masculine nation, a political collective organized under a self-fashioned paternalistic state.
Taken together, these two issues of political economic restructuring and the religious ideologies that justified it convey much of the significance of colonization and how a new, perversely generative, social order was arranged. Most of all it helps to understand who came to manage it. Even if Usme was not at the very center of what would later become the Colombian state, it was never far from it, and from the very early stages of defining Colombia, Usme was a centrally important space in which those broader social arrangements were negotiated and organized. Moreover, it was not only productive of these social relationships, it was productive of the very material goods that were needed to literally feed the growth of Bogotá, what would later become the new nation’s capital city. And so even if Usme itself has never really been the seat of sovereign power in Colombia, even these early beginnings show that it has always been a proximate, even if largely obscured, crucible in the construction of that cause.

**Gaitán, a New Urbanism, and Annexation**

If the productive role and colonial urban/rural construction of a place like Usme can be understood in this way, then understanding how it came to later be maligned as a *zona roja* requires picking up some threads that developed later into the 19th century and onward. By the 1930’s, Colombia had already experienced at least three quarters of a century under the split between the Conservative and Liberal parties, the ongoing manifestation of an incomplete social subversion of the colonial Conservative order. Solidified in the bloodshed of the War of a Thousand Days (1899-1902), this political divide continued to fester throughout the so-called ‘Conservative Peace’ until the upheaval brought by the onset of the global depression in 1929.

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*As Fals Borda (1969) has written at length about. Viewing the history of Colombia under this rubric, of a progressive accretion of variably complete subversions—from the Liberal subversion to later the Socialist and even later the turn toward decentralization—helps to clarify not only what the different models of social organization today are, but how they came to exist side-by-side with one another.*
This period between 1850 and 1930 was also a critical time of economic expansion and nation building for the Colombian state and the era in which key patterns of centralization and exclusion were forged. What emerged was an intensely fragmented state organized heavily around regional governments. Unlike the federalism of countries like the United States, these concentrations of governance were tied intimately to the large cities themselves, to the point where mayors of the major metropoles like Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín have enjoyed some of the greatest authority in the country and often go on to run in and win the presidential election. In trying to explain this particular geography of power, many have invoked the difficult terrain of Colombia as a primary barrier to the consolidation under a single national state.

Political scientist James Robinson, also following the program of thought previously laid out by Rodolfo Stavenhagen, has begun to question the sufficiency of this view considering the persistence of these patterns into the current era where the Colombian state has had the technical ability to build infrastructure around the country, the capital necessary to do so, and in many cases has already done so in regions that remain otherwise excluded from meaningful participation in politics at the regional or national scales. Add to this the significant role that paramilitaries played during the conflict, often under the secretive direction of the state military, as well as the fact that many national politicians have controlling interests in industries in these

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68 See Palacios (1980) and Safford & Palacios (2002).

69 Even a brief survey of even the English-language literature on Colombia reflects these internal divisions with titles like Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society (Safford & Palacios, 2002) or The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself (Bushnell, 1993).

70 See Bushnell (1993), Kirk (2003), Safford & Palacios (2002), and Tate (2007).

71 Stavenhagen (1981). For Robinson’s view on this, this was presented in a talk given at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies on October 10, 2013 in which he analyzed a meeting in the Northwestern region of Chocó between community members and representatives of the National Bank of Colombia. This view of a carefully cultivated ‘unregulated’ periphery is an idea still admittedly in development but is based upon years of his experience in the country and resonates the most with my own experiences in Colombia.
politically excluded areas, and a different picture emerges.\textsuperscript{72} What appears to be the case is that since the mid-19\textsuperscript{th} century, a particular kind of governance has emerged which is qualitatively different from the state as an all-seeing entity.\textsuperscript{73} This is a kind of governance that sees great advantages to marrying the continuum of political voice to the continuum of urban-rural spaces, all the while seeking management of those rural spaces through other means. It is a particular kind of ‘geography of management’ in which the ‘geography of imagination’ is constructed to create the image of rural political economic isolation while the reality is exactly the contrary.\textsuperscript{74} In the colonial era this was effected by giving the urban-dwelling hacendados authority to govern and shape their rural domains, during the period of 1850-1930 this meant the liberal expansion of rural industries outside the purview of the state but under the supervision of capital-owning classes.\textsuperscript{75} Throughout the political conflict of the second half of the twentieth century this meant the indirect use of paramilitaries to police and manage the peripheral but resource-rich areas of the country, still organized predominantly around the regional metropolitan cores. With the current coca cultivation in some regions such as Putumayo, the organization has even taken the general form of these older latifundia hacienda systems but now under the control of paramilitary or guerrilla groups.\textsuperscript{76} In other words, this regionalized and urbanized system of core-periphery has not been epiphenomenal to constraints of infrastructure development or insufficient inclusion into the modernizing nation-building project. It has instead been a carefully cultivated dynamic of relationships, of inclusion and marginalization, that have been created to simultaneously tie

\textsuperscript{72} See Hristov (2009), Kirk (2004), Lozano & Morris (2010).

\textsuperscript{73} Such as that portrayed in literature like James Scott’s (1999) \textit{Seeing Like a State}.

\textsuperscript{74} For the terms ‘geography of imagination’ and ‘geography of management,’ see Trouillot (2003).

\textsuperscript{75} See Palacios (1980) or Taussig (1980).

\textsuperscript{76} See Jansson (2006).
productive regions to areas of accumulation while at the same time preventing meaningful political involvement.

Only by putting this particular kind of core-periphery dynamic of governance together with the central role of cities in Colombian history and the Liberal/Conservative divide, it is finally possible to understand why the 1930-40’s was such a critical era and why the annexation of Usme and five other municipalities in 1954 was so central to national sovereignty in its aftermath. At the center of this period was a rising politician and eventual martyr of the Left, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. Still invoked in graffiti written around Bogotá, during rallies in the Plaza Bolívar, and by many of those that I knew in Usme, it is difficult to overestimate the lasting influence that Gaitán has had on Colombia’s politics and the organization of its capital city.\footnote{At the Museum of Gaitán in Bogotá there is a tree planted above his grave that has been described to me as the symbolic continuation of his presence, an indication of the desire for the tree’s roots to grow and eventually extend over the entire of the country. In this sense, Gaitán himself is posed as the symbolic core of country’s politics, an unfinished project that hopefully will continue to grow outward.}

Originally involved with the socialist movement and mobilization in the country’s periphery—such as the banana workers’ strike most famous for its commemoration in García Márquez’s \textit{One Hundred Years of Solitude}—during the 1930’s Gaitán made two critical changes in his tactics to transform the country.\footnote{Gilhodés (1970).} First, he would come back to Bogotá as the target of his efforts and eventually serve as the mayor of the city before his fateful run for President. While cities had long been sites where political maneuvering concentrated, Gaitan’s emphasis on managing a city as a means of political subversion and broader social change expanded the centrality of cities in the political life of the country. Second, he would join the Liberal party and seek to change it from the inside out. After three decades of political hegemony, the Conservative Party’s control of the national government ceded to a Liberal Party takeover that would last until \textit{La Violencia}. 

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In the run up to the presidential election in which he was assassinated, Gaitán was already known as ‘the people’s candidate’ and had mobilized voters from the rural regions around Bogotá in a manner never before seen. Along with the northern regions of Boyacá, this included the socialist bastion of Usme/Sumapaz despite the historic divisions between the Liberal Party and socialist movements in the early twentieth century.\(^79\) Following his murder and the riots of Bogotá (the ‘Bogotazo’), La Violencia commenced and the urban uprising spread across the country and out of the cities to again incite Liberals and Conservatives to kill one another on massive scales.\(^80\) During the early days of this conflict, Sumapaz (which at the time included Usme) was one of the principal sites to which Leftist militants retreated and organized before extending their actions to other regions such as the plains (llanos), Tolima, Antioquia, and Santander.\(^81\) In one way then, this southern finger of Bogotá was a crucial contact zone of the political conflict. In a war that was supposed to be fought in the countryside, Usme/Sumapaz represented a transgressive region that brought the violence too close to the sanctity of the capital.\(^82\) In other words, it breached the imagination of the urban/rural divide, one that had been up to this point carefully cultivated and reproduced through the management of the civil war as a rural phenomenon, events like the Bogotazo not withstanding. Even if their geographic proximity was in the first place itself the result of centuries of generation, their persistence as zones of


\(^{80}\) Why such killings took place around the country is a source for a vast collection of scholarship in Colombia and is far beyond the scope of what I can address here. In order to understand it, again we must go back to how these parties became split in the mid 19th century and trace not only the institutional organization of this schism but also the century of discourse that served to naturalize and justify this dichotomous split in Colombia (which like all dichotomies was of course a false dilemma as the socialist and communist movements of the early twentieth century made clear).


\(^{82}\) The urban guerrilla group M-19 would later completely disrupt such a notion, particularly when they invaded the supreme court in a hostage situation that ended in high casualties including several of the justices.
contact was also the result of the ongoing ‘performance’ of the city. As the use of terms like *zona roja* make clear, there is still an imagination of these peripheral districts that equates them with the ‘trangressive’ and ‘dangerous’ rural areas of the country, and these characterizations reinforce a marginalization that is performed daily through many small acts and habitual perceptions.

Given the history of the relationship between Usme and the rest of Bogotá up until this point, it may seem paradoxical that in 1954 it was made an official part of the city. All the same, barely after the resolution of *La Violencia* it was annexed along with the municipalities of Usaquen, Suba, Fontibón, Engativá, and Bosa to form the newly designated *Distrito Especial*, ‘Special District,’ of the capital city. The name itself provides much of the clue as to why Usme was brought into the legal fold of Bogotá at this point in time, despite centuries of political if not economic exclusion. Still reeling from the shock of the massive scale and widely disseminated nature of the killing in *La Violencia*, there was an imperative in the interest of national sovereignty and the maintenance of a tentative ‘peace’ that the nation’s capital become unique from the other cities that stood at the centers of their respective regions. Increasing the size, legal power, and formal designation under the new title *Distrito Especial* afforded Bogotá precisely this status, and annexation was a primary means of its accomplishment. If centralization and scale are, as some have claimed, the hallmark features of modernity, then we might even say that beyond contributing to the creation of a sovereign state, the annexation was

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83 For this notion of the ‘performance’ of the city, see Carrasco (1999).

84 A designation not unlike the ‘D. C.’ in Washington, D. C.

85 For this history of the annexation of Usme, its context, the motivations behind it, its consequences; Cortés Díaz’s *La Anexión de los 6 Municipios Vecinos a Bogotá en 1954* is particularly instructive.
instrumental in the re-creation of Colombia as a *modern* state going into the second half of the twentieth century.\(^\text{86}\)

The annexation though was not a hastily accomplished affair. Even if it is was fully consummated in the Decree 3463, the gradual incorporation of Usme was almost fifty years in the making, beginning with a series of laws that began around the time of Usme’s official designation as a municipality in 1913. If the ultimate annexation had to do with national sovereignty and modernity, this longer history related more to regional control. During the first half of the twentieth century, dispossession through the accumulation of land under larger agribusinesses had accelerated migration to Bogotá and its peripheral townships. As their populations swelled, anxieties in the capital grew regarding their expansion and proper planning. This series of laws then was meant to progressively expand Bogotá’s dominion over how this expansion happened over a protracted period of time. Usme’s role in the creation of a modern Colombian state was therefore neither an isolated event nor a practical inevitability of growth. It was a long evolution punctuated by rapid change, a process that had developed over a period of time but in the aftermath of a great crisis was quickly mobilized to new ends. Curiously if not surprisingly, following the annexation, Usme received comparatively little attention in the planned development of the city. Whereas the historical record shows that the other newly minted districts were the subjects of intense planning, Usme was noticeably absent from any such designs. While economically Usme continued to be a critical resource for the growth of the city, even under its official incorporation it still remained subject to the inclusive-exclusion core-periphery dynamics that had defined its relationship to Bogotá in the preceding centuries.

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\(^{86}\) See Herzfeld (1993, p.8) where he argues that, “what marks off the condition of modernity is not doctrinal impulse, but increasing centralization and scale.”
Renewed interest in the district would not really occur until another vital moment in Colombia’s history, around the time of the drafting and adoption of the 1991 Constitution.

1991 and the New Constitution

In the intervening period between these moments, within Usme there occurred a protracted process of power redistribution in the form of a changing landscape of land tenure. Beginning in the middle of the twentieth century and continuing through the subsequent decades was a gradual collapse of the hacienda system as lands that had once been dispossessed from indigenous groups and campesinos were in turn ceded to new immigrants to the district. That the hacienda system even existed up until this point differentiates Usme from some of the other areas in the surrounding department of Cundinamarca. Consisting largely of coffee cultivation, these other haciendas around Cundinamarca had met their end at the onset of the global depression in 1929. At this juncture, resident laborers in the coffee haciendas had been able to halt their production and live off of their planted subsistence crops, forcing the hacendados to default on extant loans to foreign creditors who were unwilling to renegotiate debts.\(^{87}\) Usme on the other

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\(^{87}\) The history of the collapse of the hacienda system for coffee production is a significant one in the history of Colombia, especially because of the central role that coffee played in the early development of its economy. Because the crop is not a relatively capital intensive venture it formed the basis of the initial capital accumulation in the 19\(^{th}\) century for more intensive industries created in the following century. A fuller history of this critical moment in its history would also have to include the roles of the Federación Nacional de Cafeteros (FNC)—the institution that since 1927 has controlled prices, promoted particular farming practices, provided loans to farmers, and positioned Colombia’s coffee as a global commodity—as well as the internal divisions on the haciendas, the failure of hacendados to achieve hegemonic control over their workforces, and the instrumental role of the mixed mode of production. The FNC for its part actually played a conservative role in this institutional change by perpetuating a system in which suppliers, middlemen, and exporters were all more generously rewarded than small growers (Bushnell, 1993). Also working against the overthrow of the hacienda system had been the internal divisions amongst workers between the permanent residents with their own plots of land, the day laborers, and the overseers; divisions that all also followed ethnic fault lines (Palacios, 1980). If the workers had been previously unorganized into effective coalitions, so too were the hacendados themselves who Jimenez (1995) argues failed to organize a discourse around a nation-building project and whose often contradictory roles as estate owners, merchants, and financiers further inhibited such organization. As Kutschbach (1995) illustrates, this meant that when the global depression created drastic changes in coffee prices and brought the hacienda institution to the point of crisis through the foreign debts still owed, the owners were not able to work together whereas the workers were able to fall back on subsistence crops allowed under the system of poly-cropping and further pressure the large landowners. Only in
hand was characterized by the cultivation of potatoes, beans, and other crops that were less directly tied to global markets and thus did not experience this transition until later in the century. When it did, it was because of the pressures of urban migration and the elaboration of the two fronts of economic production in the district: the existing agricultural cultivation and the creation of the more capital-intensive mining industries. The migration itself was not only a continuation of the rural dispossession that had helped to lead up to the annexation of Usme in the first place but was also now exacerbated by the simmering political conflict following La Violencia that forcibly displaced citizens and accelerated the growth of Bogotá as a whole. As the urban frontier descended from the rest of the city to the north down toward Usme, haciendas that had existed in this area were progressively taken over by those who would go on to work in the new industries and live in rented property. Further south in the still rural areas, other migrants helped to achieve the necessary critical mass to pressure and eventually dispossess the large landowning ‘latifundistas’ in favor of a system of agricultural production organized around the ‘minifundista’ smaller holdings.  

In this latter half of the century, forced displacement was not the only means by which the political conflict shaped the development of Usme and its broader perception. When the leftist militant groups that had established themselves after La Violencia survived, so too did the zona roja reputation. By the time that 1991 and the drafting of the new constitution came around, Colombia as a whole was reaching the acme of its crescendo of violence. Innumerable militant

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88 See Metrovivienda (2011).
groups between the leftist guerrillas, the paramilitary ‘autodefensas,’ drug cartels, and the national military were now all involved in a conflict characterized by increasingly complex fault lines and zones of engagement. It seemed that, if nothing else, what all of these groups had in common was the targeting of civilian populations as a means of fighting their war. In a conflict that had been previously envisioned as rural in origin and contestation, the operations of cartels in Medellín and Cali and the actions of urban guerrillas like the M-19 in their takeover of the Supreme Court in Bogotá had begun to disrupt this neat geography of imagination and cultivated new fears of urban intrusion. A sort of multi-faceted existential crisis characterized this moment in time then as a Constitutional national assembly was convening to imagine what a new Colombia would look like, the war seemed to be endlessly escalating, and alternatively either at the doorstep of the capital or already inside it. A better idea of what role Usme played in shaping this particular conjuncture, the formation of the image of Usme and the image of the rest of the city and country in light of it, can be gleaned from some of the articles in the media at the time:

‘Leadership and Solidarity’ 89
“It is a fact: the guerrilla has arrived in Bogotá. A criminal phenomenon that not long ago we thought was remote, peripheral, or residual now knocks furiously on the doors of the city...Acts as terrible as those in Usme, which have happened to hundreds of others and almost daily in the national territory should shudder and move public opinion for a long time.”

‘Cundinamarca: 30 Municipalities have a Guerrilla Presence’ 90
“Its strategic position, the proximity of the metropolis and its topography continue turning Cundinamarca into one of the corridors of guerrillas, paramilitaries and drug traffickers. This dramatic reality, contained in a recent report of the Administrative Department of Security (DAS), indicates that so far in 1992 the records outlined an alarming shift of guerrilla groups to peripheral areas of Bogotá, in a plan to integrate networks support and strengthen urban commandos...Reports indicate that part of that strategy has been driven by the

90 Miller (May 11, 1992).
FARC in Usme, Subachoque, Choachi, Pasca, and Guayabetal where they intend to establish militias."

‘The Guerrilla Has Crossed the Line: The killing in Usme shows the level of brutality that that the Guerrilla Coordination has come to’\(^91\)

‘The Fifth Zone [Usme]: A Quarry of Problems’\(^92\)

‘Putting the Brakes on the Invasions’\(^93\)

“The mayors of the districts and police inspectors have been given the faculty to order the immediate eviction of land invaders in any part of the Distrito Especial, without having to consult higher authorities.”

‘The Twentieth Century has not Arrived to Usme Yet’\(^94\)

“...In the urban area (15 percent), there are 105 neighborhoods of which only 68 are legalized, 48 do not have home telephone service, and 70 do not consume potable water. The zone is populated by stratuses one and two principally. It is not a zona roja, it is that Bogota has not been grateful for its pantry.”\(^95\)

‘The JAL of Usme: A Model for Organization’\(^96\)

“What can an ex-guerrillero dedicated now to graphic arts, an office equipment repair technician, a decorator, an employee, two vendors, the leader of a cooperative, and architect, and a peasant have in common? Superficially, nothing. But putting them together is one of the graces of the invention called the Local Administrative Board [JAL]. The other grace is to get them to agree and organize a development plan for an area like Usme.”

‘A New History for Bogotá’\(^97\)

“The hour has arrived for the administrative decentralization of the Bogotá. At the beginning of this July, Local Administrative Boards [JAL] will be installed in the twenty districts that make up the Capital District, as created in National Constitution.”

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\(^{91}\) Semana (December 1991).

\(^{92}\) Cabre (May 27, 1991).

\(^{93}\) El Tiempo (March 8, 1991).

\(^{94}\) El Tiempo (February 18, 1992).

\(^{95}\) In order to determine tax contributions, access to limited social services, or other distribution of resources, the System of Identification of Beneficiaries of State Subsidies (SISBEN) was created in Colombia and stratifies the population based on income on a scale of 1-6 with six being the most wealthy.

\(^{96}\) El Tiempo (May 11, 1992).

\(^{97}\) El Tiempo (July 1, 1992).
Put together, this brief collection of headlines and excerpts begins to build a picture of an ambivalent yet predominantly negative perspective on Usme. The first three refer to various acts of violence that guerrilla groups had begun to commit closer to the city along its Southeastern corridor and together they demonstrate a double meaning to the phrase “crossed the line.” In one sense the line crossed was a moral one. The attacks described in the article ‘The Guerrilla Has Crossed the Line’ related a case where FARC members had killed a resident of Usme and then planted explosives the next day to blow up the caravan of officials who came out to investigate the incident. While another journalist recognized that these kinds of acts and worse had been happening around the country, there was still a sense that the cold calculation of the attack had somehow crossed yet another threshold. Perhaps more significantly, the line crossed by these attacks was a geographic one. These recent acts shocked the urban consciousness in Bogotá to see the threat of militarized violence in the city as coming not only from self-fashioned urban groups like the cartels or M-19 but also from groups with a profoundly rural self-identification like the FARC. By operating in Usme, the FARC was crossing a geopolitical threshold that had been deliberately constructed over a long period of time. Remember that when Usme was officially annexed into the creation of the Distrito Especial in 1954, it became an integral part of a project designed to stake out the construction of a modern nation with Bogotá as its sovereign center. That these FARC attacks crossed into districts like Usme was therefore an affront to that very project, at a time when a new Constitution was being drafted in the same city no less.

When Usme was not being portrayed as an active threat to the security of social and political life, then the next few articles show it being cast as a collection of problems, even a “quarry of problems,” that required attention. What kind of attention that may be of course varied based on the problem at hand. Land invasions represented something of a less militant
rupture of the urban-rural separation with regard to the conflict, and the response was commensurately aggressive: police were given the authority for summary evictions without any other approval required. In the case of the absence of social services or infrastructure, the tone may have been more generous, even going as far as to argue directly against the zona roja stigma and accuse the rest of Bogotá of ingratitude. They nevertheless still cast Usme as the rural, backward ‘other’ that had been left behind in the 19th century, implicitly compared to modern and progressive rest of the city. Moreover, by making Usme into a collection of problems to be attended to through the generosity others, a history of extractive production and political exclusion was recast as simply a grave failure by the rest of Bogotá to reciprocate in a history of trade relations.

It was mostly in these ways that at the time of the drafting of the new Constitution that Usme and the rest of Bogotá, indeed in many ways the rest of the country, were mutually constructed in each others’ image. If Bogotá represented the seat of a sovereign nation, then Usme was its frontier zone with the dangerous and transgressive rural guerrilla. If Bogotá was the modernizing and progressive center of the country, then Usme was its ‘backward’ and problem-ridden neighbor, even if the truth was that Usme was already a part of Bogotá itself. Despite the predominantly negative gaze given to Usme though, there were some notable exceptions. This was the case with the Local Administrative Boards (JAL) and how they had been employed in Usme as a tool for greater local control over the allocation of resources. As the last two articles illustrate, this use of the JAL in Usme was not only a model for the development of others, something that was included in the new Constitution itself, but also reflected the larger impetus to decentralizing power that characterized this period. This was, if anything, the major philosophical ideal behind the political restructuring of the early 1990’s even if its actualization
in some forms achieved the exact opposite. Ever the microcosm, the developments in Usme up to this point illustrate these ambivalent tendencies through the use of the JAL and redistribution of land on one hand and the growth of capital-intensive transnational industry on the other. So what was this period of political change and what did the Constitution of 1991 really represent?

In many ways it is impossible to separate the Constitution of 1991, alternatively known as the ‘Constitution of Rights,’ from other concurrent or soon to follow changes in Colombia. These included the structural adjustment economic programs that were being imposed by transnational entities as well as the plethora of adjustments to social services such as the health care system (Ley 100) or the subsequent institution of new services like the Comisarías de Familia (Ley 294). The new Constitution itself was born out of an adoption of international rights discourses by political mobilizations in the late 1980’s that sought to increase citizen participation in politics as well as break the instituted administrative corruption that had accrued over a century of bureaucratic clientelism. In it, critical values like the preservation of a ‘dignified life’ for all citizens were declared and new legal tools like the *tutela* were instituted to ensure that citizens’ new constitutional rights would not be denied. In the case of access to the reformed health care system, the *tutela* has become one of the most used and effective legal tools at the disposal of Colombia citizens.98 Perhaps in a basic philosophical sense, the economic

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98 In the case of Colombia, this was also the basis for a major reform of the health care system that was meant to transition care from public to private provision with universal insurance coverage. Abadía-Barrero and Oviedo (2009) provide an excellent overview of this reform and its subsequent discontents. Under this proposed scheme, those with the fewest financial resources would be covered under a subsidized system that those with relatively greater resources, who would purchase insurance in the ‘contributory’ system, would fund. More than two decades on from its implementation the reform has struggled with the now parallel existence of the new system with the former public system of care, which was never possible to fully dissolve, as well as endemic corruption and imposed bureaucratic barriers to care. Particularly true for those in the ‘subsidized’ system, the reform has introduced inequalities in the access to care, and were it not for the advent of the *tutela* these might only be further exacerbated. One of the institutionalized inequalities is that the coverage amount per patient in the subsidized system is exactly half of that for those in the contributory. While this discrepancy was meant to be eradicated after a period of
structural adjustments that were also implemented in this period followed from a similar impetus of decentralizing power away from the central state. Rather than borrowing from a human rights discourse, however, these drew their inspiration from a neoliberal one that was being implemented in countries around all of Latin America. Instead of drawing their force from popular mobilization, the pressure in this case came from transnational institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, to whom Colombia and most of the rest of Latin America had defaulted on loans following the ‘lost decade’ of the 1980’s. The history of this transition and its effects on socioeconomic well being in Colombia and Latin America have been well documented and parallel the experiences elsewhere in the world of persistent or growing inequality along political economic dimensions of social life.

From this ‘lost decade’ and the subsequent neoliberal turn, another less likely series of transformations emerged—new and more complex collective mobilizations. Scholars of social movements and popular protest in Latin America, Colombia included, have also noted that the neoliberal turn had the effect of ‘thickening’ civil society and leading to the organization of more

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99 As Keshavjee (2014) notes in his consideration of neoliberalism and global health, neoliberalism under its construction by seminal thinkers such as Frederick Hayek was at its core an anti-totalitarian philosophy. It served as a response to the experience of authoritarian governance in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century but its elaboration into a set of more detailed economic policies has ironically also facilitated the concentration of power in society, albeit into other hands.

100 For global perspectives see for example Dying for Growth (Kim, Millen, Irwin, and Gershman, 2002) or Capital Resurgent: Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution (Dumenil & Lévy, 2004). For the Latin American context, see Understanding Contemporary Latin America (Hillman & D’Agostino, 2011). The Colombian context statistically is a bit more complicated. Over the period of 1990-2010, the GINI coefficient for the country as a whole went from 51.3 in 1990 to a high of 60.1 in 2006 and has since trended back down to 53.5 (World Bank, 2016).
diverse sets of actors in making claims on the state or other institutionalized entities.\textsuperscript{101} In the case of Colombia, this has been especially important for the mobilization of indigenous groups as the focus on the decentralization of power and ethnic pluralism that the neoliberal turn took in Colombia opened up new official channels for making claims while also making acculturation and assimilation less attractive options.\textsuperscript{102} Written into the Constitution of 1991, this framework has provided the context for a new kind of \textit{constitutionalism} and mobilization of collective identities among subaltern groups. While this does not detract from the host of negative effects that these political economic adjustments have also had, changes like these indicate that any critique of neoliberal restructuring must be sensitive to the complicated consequences of these transformations.

This process of decentralizing power was also carried out along profoundly gendered dynamics and as such was also the result of feminist movements that had long been developing in Latin America and Colombia in particular.\textsuperscript{103} The preceding feminist movements in Latin America had been heavily influenced by the histories of militarized political repression and many of the mobilizations grew out of previous social actions where women leveraged their roles as mothers, sisters, and wives to make claims on authoritarian regimes to return or acknowledge their disappeared relatives. These became the basis of regional movements that progressed to make more direct and subversive claims about gender norms themselves as well as admix with other resistance movements in creative ways. One major turning point for this transition came in July 1981 with the first ‘\textit{Encuentro}’ of the Feminist Conference of Latin America and the


\textsuperscript{102} Warren & Jackson (2002).

\textsuperscript{103} For both the history of this evolution of feminism in Latin America and its subsequent contributions to Marxist-Feminism more specifically, see Chinchilla (1992).
Caribbean, convened in Bogotá, a series of hemispheric conferences that continues to this day. By establishing in this first conference November 25th of each year as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the marker for addressing gender relations themselves was effectively set. The form of violence under scrutiny was no longer that of repressive state regimes but rather the daily abuse of women. Over the course of the ensuing decade these mobilizations would continue to mature and in the 1990’s also lead to legally institutionalized reforms such as the establishment of agencies like the Comisarías de Familia to address partner violence and the Secretary of Women (Secretaría de la Mujer) for programming of new economic opportunities and other forms of support.

At the same time that these Feminist movements were growing in scale and scope, Latin America was also collectively going through its ‘lost decade’ economically and the triumphant attitude of capitalist countries elsewhere was not similarly experienced in the region. One synthesis that emerged out of this juncture was the weaving of a new form of Marxist-Feminism that was built on more equal terms than the previous intellectual marriage between the two had been. In this particular Latin American revision, this became a synthesis where Feminist issues were no longer thought of as distractions to the ‘real’ economic causes of suffering and inequality. Instead it was argued that Feminist concerns could play instrumental, indeed indispensable roles in the subversion of power along many of its dimensions and that such

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104 The date of November 25th was chosen to commemorate the murder by Rafael Trujillo of the Mirabel sisters in the Dominican Republic in 1960.

105 As Heidi Hartmann (1981) had earlier put it: “The marriage of Marxism and Feminism has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English Common Law: marxism and feminism are one and that one is marxism...either we need a healthier marriage or we need a divorce.” Chinchilla (1992) provides a comprehensive overview of both this Latin American form of Marxist-Feminism as well as its major components.

106 As an extreme version of this earlier marriage between Feminism and Marxism can be seen in Alexandra Kollontai’s (1909) ‘The Woman Question’ where she makes the claim that private property is essentially the sole basis of gender conflict. In resisting these bourgeois institutions then, she claims that proletariat men and women fight together as a unified front and as such undo the antagonisms that political economies created between them.
resistances must necessarily be intersectional in their approaches. The enduring influences of this can still be seen today in Colombia, echoed in everyday expressions such as graffitied slogans in Bogotá like “without women there is no revolution” as well as the following media coverage during the 2014 International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women:

“The invitation is also that men participate in these mobilizations, to unite forces and understand that this fight is not just for women but also a joint effort. For Laura Blandón, to go out in the street ‘is an issue that concerns us as the people and as the popular classes in resistance. To denounce that we are exploited, marginalized, and impoverished.’ In addition, it is necessary to understand that, ‘the fight of women is the fight of the popular class, without the liberation of women there cannot be liberation of all the people,’ expressed Gloria Elena Román.”

Rather than placing the popular struggle before the struggle for gender equality, these comments reflect a view that they are interwoven and mutually reinforcing, that class conflict cannot be resolved without addressing women’s liberation as well.

**Participation in the ‘New’ Nation**

Taking all of these dimensions of reform together, the period of the 1990’s was a complex era where some of the previously constructed structures and logics of concentrated power were thoroughly questioned. Since the era of the colonial subversion, Colombia as a

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107 This argument for the necessity of women the recognition of gender relations in resisting capitalist political economies was primarily based in the previous notion of ‘third forces’ that would be required to glue together disparate elements of society into effective coalitional movements. Previous theorization of collective social action against capitalist systems had focused on the role of rural peasants who migrated to cities as providing crucial connections, but this new brand of Marxist-Feminism recast women and the resistance to oppressive gender relations into this role (see again Chinchilla, 1992).

108 Colombia Informa (November 24, 2014).

109 While neoliberal economics may be fundamentally based in a distrust of concentrating power into the hands of those who run state systems of governance, within the institutions of this kind of political economy one finds the very same concentrations and hierarchies of power. As such, it is hard to consider the neoliberal restructuring of financial institutions and government regulation in Latin America as a truly decentralizing set of reforms. More appropriately these might be viewed as reforms that sought to shift where power was concentrated and who had direct control over these institutions.
modern nation had been built around an idea of Colombia as a masculine nation and buttressed by a long history of justifying logics such as paternalistic benevolence. Perhaps of all the dimensions by which these concentrations of power were questioned, the contestation over gender relations made this most fundamental basis plainly evident and illuminated a broader scope of what was at stake in moving toward more decentralized systems of power. But what did these putatively decentralizing changes mean for the political position of Usme and the experiences of its residents? What did participation in this ‘new’ nation look like? To some extent this will continuously emerge in more intimate detail throughout the rest of this thesis, considering that how participation is actually performed gives a lived perspective on how social inclusion and exclusion more broadly are formed. In those encounters the intricate lines of friction come into focus, but in a preliminary sense the basic possibilities of what participation might have been intended to mean can be glimpsed from the reports of some of the various government agencies in Bogotá during that era.

Even such a brief survey proves ‘various’ to be the operative word. More than anything it builds an appreciation for how, like any system of governance, the district and national governments of Colombia are truly heterogeneous ‘States.’110 Built through the long and progressive accretion of incomplete social subversions—Conservative, Liberal, Socialist, Neoliberal, and other decentralizing movements—by this point in time governments like that of the Capital District had become motely collections of beliefs about what social participation really means. Take for instance the case of land invasion in districts like Usme and the various

110 Scholars such as Timothy Mitchell (1999) have argued that not only are all ‘States’ in fact profoundly heterogeneous entities, but that the dividing lines that separate them from the rest of society are equally complex. His statement that “the limits are internal to the network of institutional mechanisms through which a social and political order is maintained” indicates that the tidy frontiers that supposedly distinguish state/civil society relationships are themselves constructed illusions. This further complication of ‘State’ identities will be followed further in the fourth chapter on the Comisarías de Familia where the professionals themselves who make up these agencies constitute ambiguous dividing lines between the two.
state responses to it. On one hand the comprehensive planning of operations such as the 2006 *New Usme: Axis of Integration to the Llanos* demonstrates a sort of liberal middle line in official views on state/civil society relations and the role of local participation. In a tone reminiscent of the urban paranoias previously discussed, the authors of the report explicitly state that:

> “This zone is prioritized for its strategic access to the East of Colombia, for the pressure of actors in the armed conflict for control of this territory of the capital of the Republic, for its insertion into strategic ecological zones such as Sumapaz and the Eastern Mountains and given its heightened vulnerability to illegal urbanization encouraged by access to potable water guaranteed by the El Dorado Plant, its proximity to the Transmilenio transport system, and the presence of housing like the new Ciudadela Nuevo Usme.”

Whatever subsequent claims to any concern for the well-being of Usme’s residents, this statement makes clear that fundamentally at stake for this program was the maintenance of control over a strategically important territory, one that is close to home for the seats of the Republic itself. In maintaining this dominion, the role of the district government was formulated as the “regulator of the land market” that could effectively *outcompete* ‘urban pirates’ in the *generation* of grounds that were of better quality and price than illegal offers.

In contrast to this view of the State as market modulator and productive entity, consider later reports like the 2010 *Inspection, Vigilance, and Control of the Development of Illegal Housing* by the District Secretary of Habitat. Demonstrating even less concern for the safety of new residents or the supporting infrastructure available to them, reports like this express the imperative to exert aggressive and restricting control over monitored areas of intense ‘invasion’

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111 Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá (2006, p9-10).

112 This kind of a stance might be seen as similar to the Foucauldian claim that the power of entities such as states is not just accomplished through repressive means, but in more modern contexts through the exercise of productive discipline. That is to say, exercising power by structuring the frameworks of relations of production in order to control populations.

113 Secretaría Distrital del Hábitat (2010).
in a manner reminiscent of the conservative logics of the colonial era. Under this model there is little room for any active participation of new immigrants to Bogotá, whose ‘rights to the city’ are seen as effectively constrained to following pre-ordained distributions of urban development. There is no sharing of control over these decision processes as other entities like the JALs attempted to create for the use of fiscal resources. Considering that much of this urban migration is rooted in forced displacement from the history of political conflict, such ways of organizing the extension of the urban environment are troubling indeed. In the transitional justice processes that are currently underway in Colombia, much attention has been given to the restitution of rural lands. By contrast relatively little attention in these programs has been given to what rights new urban residents have in actively shaping the development of the cities in which they now reside. Perhaps it is time that these issues are registered on the agendas of transitional justice efforts and new residents of districts like Usme seen as more than just ‘invading’ threats to the city but rather as justified participants who have much to offer in the creation of a new national peace.

If the struggle over urban planning has been characterized by less than generous official stances, this has not been the case for all governmental agencies or all social issues. As already referenced, the creation of Local Administrative Boards was a move toward authentically redistributing control. While other agencies like the Administrative Department for Social Welfare (DABS) and the Veeduría may not have promoted such policies of radically decentralized authority, they did make room for other notions of citizen participation. The Veeduría for one might seem like a champion of decentralized authority with publications such as *The Social Control of the Public: A Right and Duty of the Citizen*, which outlines various instances of democratic participation in public ordinance. This is tempered, however, by the official charge of the agency to serve as the “control and preventative vigilance for the
transparency and effectiveness of public administration.”

What appears instead is not distributed control of public affairs, but rather an institution to promote the oversight of other organs of the state and to hear the feedback of the populous. Other departments such as the DABS have in this same era proposed different notions of what public participation might mean, particular to development projects in the southern peripheral districts of Bogotá. In one report, the authors proposed:

“\textit{In this perspective, the development must involve all of society (individuals, institutions, community), in an action of planning that does the same, a dialectic process in which all of the potential entities of the state and community interact to achieve higher levels of well-being.}”

If such a lofty model is the proposition of an influential state agency, then the question remains as to what has gone wrong, why are so many residents of Usme left with the impression that such visions have not been realized? It could be that the DABS is only one of many state entities and, as previously shown, not all representatives of the State share such desires for the participation of citizens like those in Usme. It could also conceivably be the ever-present issue of translating rhetoric into the kind of action that properly reflects those ideals, or even that such implementations have happened but have gone relatively unnoticed by the vast majority of people. Perhaps though the greatest culprit is the performed meaning behind words like ‘involve’ and ‘interact,’ seemingly generous terms that display much more than they were ever meant to offer, and appreciating this helps to see the significant narrowing of imagination on what ‘participation’ might practically mean. For me there was no greater illustration of this than one particular meeting, an event that brought forward the frustrations of community activists in Usme even more than that first living room encounter that I had with Angelica and Alberto.

\footnote{114 Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá and Universidad Nacional de Colombia Facultad de Derecho (2006).}

\footnote{115 Departamento Administrativo de Bienestar Social (1996).}
The meeting took place high up on the hill in the barrio Chuniza, in the auditorium of a community hall that overlooked the district. There members of the community were to meet with high ranking officials in Usme in order to talk peace. Peace though not between them, as if they were parties at openly declared war with each other, but peace for all of Colombia. It was to be a collective exploration of how addressing everyday violence within Usme could provide a path to dealing with the violent legacy that the country as a whole had suffered. To build a peaceful life in Usme was no less than to rebuild Colombia, and the meeting was to be a space in which to demonstrate various local successes in doing so. Angelica herself embodied one of those successes, she was a displaced victim of the conflict who had since taken to community organizing in Usme, and she was to be one of the main presenters that day. It was at her invitation that I attended at all, and barely had we touched cheeks in that auditorium that I began to see what a contentious affair this supposedly celebratory event was destined to be. As some of Angelica’s friends filtered in, city employees and fellow community organizers, we claimed seats in the otherwise empty hall and quickly set to gossip. “Did you know that [an elected official] never showed up to the meeting on Saturday?” one asked, “did you hear what happened at that other meeting with [Mayor of Bogotá] Petro?” Allegedly, in a high ranking meeting in Bogotá, one of Usme’s representatives had referred to social programming as ‘gifts’ to the public, to which Mayor Petro sharply quipped that those ‘gifts’ were paid for by taxes and were not ‘gifts’ at all, they were obligations to the people. In hearing this, the reaction amongst Angelica’s friends echoed the same belief, and the thinly veiled disgust with which they staked their indignation suggested that this was not an isolated occurrence. At the very least, even though all that we trafficked in during those moments before the meeting amounted to nothing more substantial than hearsay-twice-removed, everyone in our little group was eager to believe
it. That eagerness itself is what betrayed deeper reservations amongst those present, ones that would come back out again before the end of the meeting and breach the delicate decorum that had otherwise thinly covered its proceedings.

The meeting began in customarily late fashion, to neither the surprise nor the chagrin of those attending, and a steady trickle of people filtered in throughout it. A summary of a previous meeting in Usme, Angelica’s slideshow; in protracted but pleasant fashion the presentations carried on, quickly turning minutes into hours. The tone indeed felt optimistic until near the conclusion of the reunion when the Mayor of Usme stood up to give some impromptu remarks. Peace he said was like God, you may not see it but you can feel its presence, yet he wanted it known that he was a pragmatic man and valued concrete action. To the latter he saluted Angelica and her on-the-ground work, but despite this apparent amicability he seemed to be bracing himself for a storm. He continued. Peace must be achieved together, not by pointing fingers in instances of failure, it required respect for the ‘basic norms’ of society, government programs could not be seen as gifts to communities. At that, my recently acquainted civil servant friend reaches over and smacks my arm, shooting a knowing grin my way. Microphones get passed around, questions begin to be asked, immediately one particularly eager gentleman stands up to have his say. Silver-haired and tanned worn skin, from under a heavy leather jacket he begins his barrage, cutting quickly past any niceties. What of the community oversight of government programs that he and others had requested, he asks. Peace to him is community control, it is putting real power in the hands of the people of Usme, he challenges, it is not just listening to their voices. Almost nonchalantly the mayor deflects this, saying that this was an issue for another time, they were there that day to speak about peace, not politics, and this is a conversation carried over from a previous encounter. Clearly unsatisfied, the man continues to
press and together they spend much of the remainder of the question-answer session locked in a
duel without resolution.

Perhaps it would have been easier to celebrate achieving ‘peace’ through community
action in Usme if only there were a simple and unanimous notion of what ‘peace’ really means.
In this particular meeting though that was clearly not the case, and this conundrum was hardly
irregular. Is peace the cessation of violence in its most obvious forms or is it having a dignified
life? Is peace remaking a quiet life in Usme after surviving a series of atrocities or it is having
palpable control over the governance of that part of the city? At this particular historical juncture
in Usme, to ask what ‘participation’ means is to in some way engage these questions about
peace, and it is most of all to ask the question of who gets to answer them.\footnote{Not surprisingly,
these kinds of struggles over definitional authority were plainly evident throughout that meeting,
beginning with the early objections to what gets called a ‘gift.’ Sovereignty, so said Mauss, is the
refusal of the gift, but as Angelica’s comrades pointed out it is not just refusing the gift, it is
refusing the very designation of something as a one.\footnote{Social programs are not gifts, they
demanded, and by backtracking from the transgression of an earlier event, the mayor made all
outward appearances to agree. ‘Participation’ and its meanings, however, did not receive such
seemingly harmonious treatment. Depending on who was speaking, participation in this project
of peace might have meant engaging in the programming of civil society, mobilizing in the
community to address everyday forms violence. Alternatively, participation might have meant
the oversight of state endeavors, playing a role in governance not just by having a voice through
town hall meetings or public elections, but through some distribution of control over the actions}

\footnote{After all, participation is typically a question of how to proceed in the interest of some kind of desired ends, and
at this point in time ‘peace,’ in so many of its meanings, is one of the particularly salient ‘ends’ wavering ahead of
Colombian citizens.}

\footnote{Mauss (1925, p.71).}
of The State.\textsuperscript{118} Far more than just semantic quibbles, the acrimony of these verbal conflicts stood as a reminder that these debates had as much to do with who decided them as what was decided. They were lived indices of the broader contests for control over the direction of Usme, itself a microcosm for much of Colombia, as it continues to make its way into a very uncertain future.

**The Militarization of Everyday Life:**

Whatever the frictions that played out in that particular encounter, what remains of vital importance is the underlying premise of the meeting: that to build peace in Usme is to build peace for Colombia. Remaking Colombia in the aftermath of over a half century of open conflict requires not only the rightful restitution of rural lands but also rights to the city, it requires looking for the many ways by which this history of open and clandestine warfare has led to the militarization of everyday life. Globally this is a recognized phenomenon and one that has received a great deal of theorization. It is reflected in the abstract notion of the ‘continuums of violence’ through which the exceptional violence of warfare becomes woven into the mundane, it is what Carolyn Nordstrom referred to in saying that the “habits of war mark landscapes of peace.”\textsuperscript{119} In Usme the connections are often far more material. They are seen in the amputations from landmine explosions, they are heard when personal stories of the ‘disappeared’ intrude into daily rhythms, doing so either through tears that cannot be held in or through stories whispered delicately behind turned backs. They are felt in the paralysis of painful flashbacks that the

\textsuperscript{118} This discrepancy is highly reminiscent of Weber’s (1922) observation that in practice, democracy has not meant what is promised by its name. Rather than governance by the people, the demos, the truth of democracy has simply been a greater say by the demos in selecting those who do the governing.

\textsuperscript{119} For ‘continuums of violence’ see Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004), for “‘habits of war mark landscapes of peace” see Nordstrom (2004).
presence of the national police can trigger, they are evident in the milieu of retired soldiers that fill the ranks of private apartment security firms. To be reminded to ‘no dar papaya’ is to be reminded that many of the ‘demilitarized’ groups have become part of a new wave of organized crime, helping to make the urban landscape an array of unseen dangers to navigate.\(^\text{120}\)

The fault lines that have emerged over the course of this violent history have even inscribed themselves in the most physical sense upon communities, and nowhere was this more evident than the area of ‘Usme Centro’ where I lived.\(^\text{121}\) Within a kilometer of the main plaza, now nearly five hundred years old, was the arable land of small farmers, row houses joined tightly together, apartment blocks barely a couple of decades old, and most recently the rapidly constructed apartment complexes meant to absorb the continued urban migration. Both within and between these more obvious divisions, a finer handiwork of social differentiation could be found. Looked down upon most were the newest apartment projects—both figuratively and literally as they had been built beside the river at the base of the valley—and it was only by living in a sublet room of one of these apartments, for a significant portion of my fieldwork, that I learned that not all were looked down upon equally. On the one hand were the better-constructed complexes that lay closer to the plaza, on the other were the subsidized homes that got placed at the very end of the dead-end road. “Don’t ever go down there,” I was repeatedly told, often by those who lived in the older houses and farms, “that’s where the government placed many of the desmovilizados.” With an almost whispered quality, that last word,

\(^{120}\) Across the entire Latin American region, everyday insecurities in urban environments has received a great deal of attention. Some particularly illustrative volumes on the subject include *Citizens of Fear* (Rotker, 2002), *Cities from Scratch* (Fischer, McCann, and Auyero, 2014) and *Violence at the Urban Margins* (Auyero, Bourgois, and Scheper-Hughes, 2015). For the evolving landscape of actors and their urban involvements, see “Paramilitaries’ Heirs” (HRW, 2010).

\(^{121}\) Though so named, ‘Usme Center’ is near the geographic center of the district but at the very southern extreme of its densest populations, located right at the nexus between the more urban and rural zones of Usme.
‘demobilized,’ which generally referred to any non-state former combatant, carried the connotation of the ultimate transgression, the greatest threat of future criminality. To go around where desmovilizados lived was to invite trouble, it was to ‘dar papaya.’ Again though, not all are equal in Usme Centro, and this applied to the demobilized as well. As another confidant of mine told me while we were sitting in her living room at the edge of one of the older farms, there were the demobilized who had come from old families in Usme, the lineages that had long done the arduous work of tilling the land, and then there were the demobilized. The former were often quickly and quietly reintroduced into the everyday flows of life, the latter were seen as the unceremoniously discarded, a burden that had been placed on the community’s shoulders to somehow endure. The key was not so much the actions of one’s past as it was one’s sharing of heritage, inclusion into earlier collective memories and experiences, and from them the possibility of (re)integration into existing relationships. It was a question of comunitas, as well as an early insight to the problems and possibilities that may lie ahead if a final peace accord for the conflict can be achieved. So not all apartments were equally evil, not all demobilized were equally dangerous, and across the crucible of Usme it almost always seemed possible to find a new means of differentiation, a way to continue the work of elaborating the complex lines of fracture that spread within this space.

Most relevant to this study were those fractures that represent partner violence, and either indirectly through the milieus like those just described, or even more directly, these histories in Usme have one way or another woven their way into the dynamics that this intimate abuse takes. Just how such a thing might happen is a subject of much active debate. With regard to the legacy of the internal political conflict, this phenomenon of violence moving from spaces of open warfare into the spaces of intimate relationships is again one that has been observed across
contexts around the world. Post-conflict societies do generally seem to experience rises in intimate partner violence following resolution of the warfare. Some theories as to what forms this interplay focus on the communication between militarized conflicts and gendered identities writ large, the building of ‘militarized masculinities’ that creep from the more limited spaces of combat into more broadly held beliefs. Others, including Frantz Fanon, have focused on how male heads of household themselves carry into domestic spaces the experiences of their militarized lives, and in doing so more directly mediate that diffusion from combat to the quotidian. One of the most memorable reminders that I had of this during my fieldwork came on a home visit that I made with a social worker from the Comisaría de Familia. Following up on a case of child abuse, she was making a routine visit to inspect the conditions of the home and conduct a brief interview with the man accused. He had close-cropped hair, spoke in short, direct sentences, and always ended his responses with a respectful ‘doctora.’ As we sat with him in his bedroom, the social worker working her way through her list of requisite questions, he never lost his posture, his back always ramrod straight, eyes fixed straight ahead, and it was not until halfway through the meeting that I noticed exactly where his eyes had been fixating. Across from

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123 While not focusing directly on the perpetration of intimate partner violence, proponents of this perspective such as Enloe (2000) and later Belkin (2012), have been instrumental in demonstrating the intricate binds that tie processes of militarization to gendered identities more broadly. In a Latin American context, research in post-conflict Guatemala has suggested that notions of machismo became further elaborated and more deeply entrenched throughout the history of the conflict (Manjoo and McRaith, 2011), and Theidon (2008) has written extensively about how demobilization for combatants in Perú and Colombia requires an active process of reconstructing senses of masculinity as well.

124 Frantz Fanon (1963) in his famous The Wretched of the Earth, explored this issue briefly in his Case #5 of Case Series A, ‘A European police inspector tortures his wife and children.’ In a Latin American context, Theidon (1999) has called this the ‘domestication of violence,’ linking it closely to patterns of alcohol consumption after demobilization. More recently in the US context this has again become an issue of public visibility, with soldiers returning from deployments and the subsequent rises in intimate partner violence being commonly framed as connected to experiences of post-traumatic stress disorder.
him, hanging on the wall, was a picture of himself in camouflage fatigues, kneeling on bright green grass, with a grenade launcher gripped firmly between both of his hands.

Beyond the direct or indirect diffusion of militarized experiences, others have speculated that increases in the availability of small arms, a greater tolerance for violence in society, and the inundation of legal institutions may also play important roles in the migration of violence into more domestic spaces. In other words theories abound, and against them the stories of those who live in Usme highlight other possibilities as well: the role of dislocation from systems of social support and the isolating effects of everyday urban insecurity. What this means more than anything else is that partner violence in Usme is not just epiphenomenal to the political conflict in Colombia, some distal and persistent manifestation of it. To understand how partner violence happens in Usme requires understanding not just how it is intricately woven into this particular legacy but also the broader histories that have shaped Usme and the rest of the country as a whole. The connections are often non-linear and some may seem paradoxical, sometimes they have unlikely relevance to both the perpetrators and the victims alike. Regardless, appreciating the ways that these histories have worked their way into the dynamics of intimate abuse will require a much finer lens to the lives and experiences of both those who have survived it and those who have perpetrated it as well. It is through a selection of their stories, meant to be illustrative and exemplary rather than representative or exceptional, that a more intimate exploration of these connections can be made. It is to their stories that I now turn.

“No puedes comprar al sol
No puedes comprar la lluvia
Vamos caminando
Vamos dibujando el camino
Mi tierra, no se vende
(Vamos caminando)
Aquí se respira lucha (vamos caminando)
Yo canto porque se escucha (vamos caminando)
Aquí estamos de pie
Que viva la América
No puedes comprar mi vida”
-Calle 13 ‘Latinoamerica’

126 “You cannot buy the sun / You cannot buy the rain / (Let's walk forward) / (Let's go drawing the path) / You cannot buy my life / My land is not for sale / (Let's walk forward) / In here you can breathe struggle (let's walk forward) / I sing to be heard (let's walk forward) / Here we stand upright / Long live the Americas! / You cannot buy my life.” The song ‘Latinoamerica’—from the Calle 13 album ‘Entren Los Que Quieren’—was performed by Calle 13 and Colombian singer Totó la Momposina in 2014 in the Plaza Bolívar in Bogotá, and then again at the conclusion of the ‘March for Peace’ in Bogotá on April 9, 2015. The march in 2015 was dated to commemorate the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán and at its concluding concert Totó la Momposina again performed the song, but this time accompanied by two rap artists from Usme.
Today the parking lot is empty, its small and undulating hills of brick devoid of life.

One year ago when I first met Luz Elena, it was here on the tenth anniversary of the legalization of her barrio. In front of this packed row of residences, matches of micro-fútbol traded turns with semi-choreographed dances as ‘vallenato,’ ‘cumbia,’ and ‘salsa’ trumpeted out from a stack of speakers. She had taken me from here to walk around the community, down to the river and past the farms that lay just beyond the limits of the plaza. She taught me about the mining in the hills, what ‘avejas’ look like when they are still on the vine, and that Sundays are the best days to buy dried chocolate from vendors, when it is freshly pressed with ground cinnamon and cloves. A Scouts leader, community organizer, mother, seamstress, UNICEF field volunteer, impromptu caretaker of young children, she taught me more than just about any other person what it is like to live in Usme; lessons usually delivered on foot.

Today we are going to visit El Tuno, an area of recent urban settlement with which she herself is not familiar. Approaching her home, the only person cutting the vacancy of the lot is a woman, young, in her twenties, balancing an infant on her hip in front of Luz’s front door. After she sizes me up, she begins into a litany of enthusiastic questions just as Luz calls down that she is ready to leave. Before Luz is out the door, I barely manage to find out her name, Katerin, and that she recently moved from Medellín and is staying with her aunt, Luz’s roommate Angelica who herself was the first people I met in Usme. Luz introduces us again, and when Katerin asks how we know each other she gives her a measured look. A smile starts at the corner of her eyes, folding together familiar grooves formed over the better part of a century. Slowly that smile curls up the sides of her mouth. Pure mischief. With little more hesitation she leans forward and says matter-of-factly that she is my grandmother. Incredulous, Katerin eyes me again and when I confess that I am actually a student working in Usme, she laughs off the strange little ruse.
When Luz and I turn away and start down the street, she immediately becomes more serious. “John, she has me exasperated. She has three kids and sometimes she just lets the youngest one cry. Why does she have children if she can’t take care of them?”

I ask her why she left Medellín in the first place and when Luz tells me it was a problem with her partner, her inflection implies that it was more than just verbal disputes. We push up the hill, past the grinding of mechanics and the wafts of freshly baked bread, losing our breath to the altitude. As we make our way, Luz changes the subject to her neighbor’s son, a young man who is now in therapy six days a week for his autism spectrum disorder. After one year now he is already improving, but it has been a pyrrhic victory coming after too many years of bureaucratic grief to get him his care. As we roll past the last of the cantinas now, we make our way along the edge of the valley, onward toward the rest of urban Usme. Still, as we move forward, I keep thinking back to where we began, I am unable to let it go.

“Luz, why do think you never had problems with your husband, like Katerin has had?”

Without hesitation she explains to me how she never would have allowed it, that had her husband ever started to mistreat her she would have talked back or left. When I ask her why some people stay silent or do not leave, she looks away to the hills beyond, lost for a moment. When she turns back to me this time there is a new gravity in her look. She speaks slower, more deliberately, her brow furrowed.

“Economic independence is total independence, is it not?”

While there is more to understanding partner violence than economic independence alone, Luz’s summary cut straight to the heart of one of the main questions in understanding it: how is it possible, in the most basic sense, to commit that kind of abuse? In particular, how is it
possible to commit that abuse _chronically_, in a partner-controlling way, what keeps those who survive it from leaving? It is in asking this latter question that we find ourselves squarely in the realm of the kind of partner violence that is most unevenly gendered. Amidst controversy over studies that have shown a gender balance in the perpetration of intimate violence, some have argued that distinguishing between specific subtypes of violence can help to clarify these numbers, to make them intelligible in light of our common experience.\(^{127}\) And so while it is clear that simply gendering men as violent and women as victims is both inaccurate and unhelpful, in the case of _chronic_ and _coercive_ partner violence it is typically true, and so it was in my experience in Usme as well.\(^{128}\) When it came to that kind of chronic-controlling partner abuse, what some have called ‘intimate terror,’ it was indeed predominantly men who perpetrated it and women who either survived it or were killed in the process. Hardly unique to Usme, in a global sense the numbers behind this are staggering. The best current estimates put 30% of women around the world as having experienced physical violence at the hands of their intimate partners, and digging deeper into more local statistics presents a picture that is even more quantitatively alarming.\(^{129}\) Within Colombia, the most recent estimates are that 37% of women have at some point experienced physical violence by their partners, and 72% have experienced some kind of

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\(^{127}\) The same typology of partner violence referenced in the introduction (Johnson, 2008; Kelly and Johnson, 2008) was developed largely in response to this controversy. The argument is that while some types of violence such as situational partner violence may help to understand reports of gender parity in the perpetration of violence, forms like chronic coercive violence are still male dominated, consistent with common experience.

\(^{128}\) In the Colombian context, Jimeno, Góngora, Martínez, and Suárez (2007) have been influential in arguing against these oversimplified and misleading stereotypes.

\(^{129}\) These estimates come from a recent WHO (2013) review of existing data. Those regions with the highest prevalence where the African, Mediterranean, and South East Asian regions at 35%, with the Americas matching the global average at 30%. These statistics were based on a systematic review of available literature globally, but while rigorous there are still limitations in the potential accuracy of aggregating dissimilar studies. Of the limitations noted in the report, one of the most important is that these figures only refer to physical or sexual violence, and do not include others such as emotional, psychological, or financial.
controlling behavior by them as well. This is also the case for Bogotá in particular, and delving into district-by-district comparisons in the capital city indicates that Usme is unfortunately one of the worst areas for violence against women. As the district with the second highest indicators, in a recent community-based survey 82% of women reported some kind of controlling behavior by their partner and 47% reported some form of physical violence: 40% had been pushed, 32% hit by hand, 9% attempted to be strangled or burned, and 14% raped by their partners.

Against this daunting landscape, again where do we begin? How do we start to understand the bare possibility of abuse that leads to these kinds of numbers? While each person’s experience of partner violence is unique in its own ways, when talking about chronic coercive violence there is, almost by its very definition, a single common denominator: control. Interrogating that question of control can be our point of departure. This is does not necessarily mean that control is some rational or even intentional project on the part of those who commit this violence, they themselves may even feel trapped in their own behaviors and the abuse that they commit. Understanding the justifications that the abusive partners I came to know made for their violence, the paternalistic pretenses behind their abuse, the exceptions that they claimed to these legitimations, the desperation they also felt, these will be the topics explored in the following chapters. Here the question at hand is how the victims of violence experience that control, an experience that approximately four out of five women in a relationship in Usme has had. Going behind the numbers and delving into some of these experiences, what starts to come into focus is that this question of control is also more specifically a question of sovereignty on the intimate scale—how that domination over another person is sought through the construction

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130 Statistics according to the ENDS study by Profamilia (2010).
of particular spaces and frequently effected by trying to isolate the victims of that violence within them.\textsuperscript{131,132} To see partner violence as also a question of sovereignty is to then begin to understand as efforts at the architecture of space as much as the architecture of choice and, because these are only ever attempts at best, it is also to ask how these designs are contested. It is in the resistances against these intimate regimes that some of the greater realizations can be found, and it is for this reason that this chapter is organized around the stories of three different women: Luz Elena who avoided abusive relationships entirely, Sofía who expelled her husband years ago, and Carolina who was at the time that we met still surviving an intensely violent partner. Theirs are stories of survival if nothing else, and to begin to understand them is to begin to perceive different limits in the exercises of control, the paradoxes inherent to those very efforts. At their core, theirs are the stories of how sovereignty is contested on the margins of the city.

\textsuperscript{131} There are many terms used to describe power over others and the maintenance of that power, chief among them terms like ‘hegemony’ and ‘sovereignty.’ Whereas ‘hegemony’ has frequently been tied more to notions of social consciousness—in particular following Gramsci’s (1992) revisions of Marxist notions of false consciousness, ideas that were subsequently taken up and revised by interlocutors such as Althusser (1971), later Scott (1990), and with regard to gender most notably Connell (2005)—sovereignty, following from its own genealogy of ideas, has typically invoked a more spatialized appreciation of how power is sought and maintained. From Machiavelli (1532) to Foucault (1977), Weber (1919) and Schmitt (1922) to even the more common invocations of the term, sovereignty carries with it a sense of power over others \textit{in a particular space}. That space may have been the Italian city-state or more recently a country in a field of international relations, it could be more broadly conceived as networks of gift relations or debt (following Mauss, 1925). No matter how diffuse the field, sovereignty as a reference to the dynamics of power has in practice been shaded by a greater sensitivity to how human relations are formulated through particular spaces, as well as how those spaces are critical to understanding the topographies of power that those relations take. Both ideas, hegemony and sovereignty, will appear as useful concepts throughout this thesis, but it is the call to understand the spaces of power, and power within and in between particular spaces, that makes sovereignty an unusually useful concept to understanding intimate partner violence, what was previously referred to as ‘domestic’ violence. Rather than leaving separate these genealogies, however, those of hegemony and sovereignty, the notion of consciousness and how it emerges through particular experiences, events that happen within particular spaces, can become a bridge to connect the two. Bringing these together will be one of the objectives throughout this section ‘Abuse,’ but one that is ultimately only possible not by abstract comparison but by working directly through the lived experiences of survivors and perpetrators of abuse.

\textsuperscript{132} Isolation as a means of long-term control is a widely recognized means by which perpetrators of abuse maintain domination over their partners. This view has perhaps been most popularized by the Duluth model’s ‘Wheel of Control,’ a model firmly rooted in feminist theory.
Total Independence

From the very first time that Luz Elena invited me into her home and I saw the space devoted to her sewing machine, a full third of her own quarters, I began to appreciate what a central role needlecraft had played in her life. It was no coincidence then that after almost two years of knowing each other, when we finally sat down to record interviews that we would do so around it. She had already taught me much from this perch and its panoramic views across the valley. Like how the hills broke out in brilliant saffron at sunset, and the peace that such a simple experience could give no matter how many times before one had enjoyed it. Here she had shown me the gifts she made for friends at Christmas, the bulk orders she would fill when they came in, and the progress that she had made on her own jackets and pants. It was from here that we had departed on walking tours around Usme and the neighboring districts of Kennedy and Ciudad Bolívar, where we had talked about everything from families to current affairs, historical icons like Gaitán to her views on feminist politics.

As we left her home and entered others, traversed neighborhoods unknown to me and resurrected silenced histories, there seemed to be few boundaries that she was not willing to cross and fewer contours she felt obligated to follow. All of this time, her sewing machine never seemed to be left far behind, if at all. Making cameos at unexpected moments in her stories, it would intrude like an unexpected guest. Over time, I eventually came to understand that this vintage machine was never really apart from Luz, even when it remained at home it was never left behind. It was her independence, and that she always carried with her. It was the enduring emblem of her ownership of control over her own direction, economic or otherwise. And so we sat by it as we burned through afternoons, talking late into evenings retracing the stripes of her life. In these interviews she told these stories of her seventy-four year life quietly but with
confidence, punctuating them typically with her youthful laughter and that tight-lipped, eyes wrinkled mischievous look. Despite her usual mirth, her histories dealt more in resistance than they ever did in relief, and even after knowing each other as long as we had I still found myself occasionally stumbling onto painful experiences, accidentally at times making old scars sting.

The Bogotazo-

Luz was born and lived her entire life in Bogotá, something that seemed a rarity in a city that has absorbed so many migrants. The neighborhood of her birth, the Centenario, was during the time of her childhood on the outer limits of the urbanized area of the city. Within the walls of their property they had, as many did, some space to grow a smattering of crops, from fruits and vegetables to legumes, supplements to the groceries that they otherwise brought home from cash. She proudly told me how the neighborhood was built during the period when Gaitán was mayor of the city, part of a program that he had established to help ensure housing for residents. In her mind he had been a true politician for the people, his belief in justice and the role of women in achieving it still unfinished business in the country. When I asked her what she remembered most about her childhood, she said that two or three events came to mind, but ultimately she only retold the one that marked her most: the ‘Bogotazo’. The Bogotazo was one of the most singularly defining moments in Colombia’s 20th century history; April 9, 1948 when populist presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was assassinated in Bogotá. With the end of his life and his run for national office, the city was turned into a combat zone between protesters and police, eventually requiring intervention by the national army to quell the controversy. While the unrest within the city limits was ultimately subdued, it is commonly seen as the moment of departure in which sporadic political violence, which had begun since the end of the
‘Conservative Hegemony’ in 1930, began to evolve into the outright bloodshed of the period of ‘La Violencia.’ During this time, proto-elements of the enduring political conflict began to coalesce and mobilize, setting the stage for the ensuing decades of multi-polar civil war.

Even living on the outskirts of the city and away from the epicenter of the violence, what Luz remembered most about that particular day were the bodies of the dead, the guns, and the courage of her mother. With the clear and present threat of martial law, she and the rest of her siblings were confined to their house for the duration of the crisis. Even still, the walls of her own home could not protect her from looking through her window and witnessing the passing military vans full of soldiers. This in particular marked for her the rupture of the world that she previously knew and the inauguration of a new order. Before the Bogotazo, the police in the city had been ‘policia civica’ and to her memory had not even carried guns. Even fully automatic weapons have become commonplace since then for the police and military within Bogotá, and as this militarization of policing has lived on, so too have Luz’s deeply engrained fears and mistrust of these agents of the state. Even after nearly seventy years, she still felt its effects.

“This period marked me. It left me… if for instance a van of police comes close to me, I cannot move, I cannot move myself John. It gives me a lot of anxiety and I have not been able to get over it. I cannot get over it.”

Luz is certainly not alone in this, and seeing vans transport groups of soldiers or national police across the city is often a daily occurrence. Another woman in Usme that I knew had fled the province of Santander after she found her brother tortured and killed for refusing to pay a vacuna to a paramilitary group.\(^\text{133}\) Never knowing if or to what extent the group responsible had the blessing of the national army to operate, as many paramilitaries did, she too found herself paralyzed on an everyday basis by the presence of national police in the city that was supposed

\(^{133}\) Literally meaning a ‘vaccine,’ a vacuna is a payment given to an armed actor in the conflict to avoid being targeted in ensuing violence.
to be her refuge.\textsuperscript{134} For both of them though, these fears went beyond an immediate need for physical security; they formed a constantly re-lived foundation for questioning the legitimacy of the state apparatuses that these armed actors represent. For Luz in particular it ran deeper still, forming the basis of her penchant to consider carefully any putative authority, to always be wary of the kinds of abuses that any person or group might have the potential to commit.\textsuperscript{135}

Living through the Bogotazo for Luz though was about more than guarding her immediate physical security, it was also about being able to live out the following week. The day it happened was the last day of a bi-weekly pay period for her father, meaning that with the impending store closures, her family would not be able to replenish their dwindling food supplies with their normal Saturday of shopping. When her father finally arrived home that Friday night, he had brought back as much as he could possibly find, but it would not have been enough to last their family for the foreseeable shut down in the city. It was at this point in our conversation, quite suddenly in fact, that Luz did something that I had never before seen her do. She began to cry. When her tears subsided, she told me that what continued to affect her most of all was the loss of her mother. Confused, I waited silently. As the moment passed I asked her what made her think of her mother’s death, from what she had told me earlier her mother lived for almost three decades after the Bogotazo. She answered by telling me how her mother guided them, spoiled them, that she never mistreated them, and then she explained to me the connection still I could not yet see. It was her mother who went back out that night with two of her brothers to travel almost seven miles to Luz’s grandmother’s farm in the north of the city. Dodging the military the entire way there and back, they returned before sunrise with food not only to last their own

\textsuperscript{134} As previously discussed, collaboration between the national military and paramilitaries has been characteristic throughout the conflict (see for example Kirk, 2003).

\textsuperscript{135} Since I have known her she has never so explicitly said as much, but this key disposition of hers was always there in the background of her interactions with other people and in the narrative arcs of the stories she would tell me.
family but also those of their immediate neighbors as well, ensuring that none of them would need to risk their own lives until the end of the city shutdown. It was on this note that she ended her story of the Bogotazo, not on the dead, the guns, or the fear, but with a thin smile and an almost whispered “my mother was a spectacular person.”

The gendered juxtaposition that Luz offered was stark. On the one hand the terror of living in a crisis under a militarized state, on the other hand the courageous generosity of her mother within this context. One a heavily masculinized state apparatus, whose actions delegitimized it in her eyes, the other a female role model who defied that military by breaking curfew and leaving her home for the benefit of those around her. One associated with violence and fear, the other with love, caring, and reverence. This is not to assert stereotyped gender binaries, or to imply that Luz herself did. It is to remember that genders, like any other identity, are thoroughly relational constructs and emerge through political contest rather than existing prior to them. For Luz, her experiences during the Bogotazo were seminal events in her emerging consciousness of this, just as they were early departures in the development of her own personal life praxis. Through them she found inspiration in her mother who, even in fulfilling her socially prescribed role of caring for her family, defied state orders and broke curfew. But by providing the material goods for survival, and leaving her home while her husband stayed behind to watch the children, what Luz’s mother did in all actuality went well beyond those traditional roles. In a moment of national crisis her mother found great creative

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136 This entanglement between militarization and the construction of gender, in particular certain forms of masculinity, was discussed in the chapter ‘La Zona Quinta’ (see Enloe, 2000; Belkin, 2012).

137 Such is the assertion of Butler (1990) advancing an idea previously outlined by Foucault.
potential, and it was a lesson in subversive improvisation that Luz would carry closely with her throughout the rest of her own life.\textsuperscript{138}

As Luz explained it, her mother leaving their home in the late hours of April the ninth also foretold another rupture, one in the basic spatial inscriptions of gender in Bogotá at the time. When I later asked her about how the collective silence on partner violence was broken, she recalled that before 1948 few people would talk openly about what they knew, or at least suspected, happened behind closed doors. Few women could even leave the house. Again the Bogotazo stood out to her as a pivotal transition, one after which she remembers seeing women in the streets like they never had been before the riots. Over time this breach of space became the rise in gossip about partner violence, and as she remembers it, it was during the 1960’s and 1970’s that the taboo on this topic began to progressively weaken. Even with the intrusion of gossip, it would not be until the 1990’s that government agencies dedicated to intervening in these matters were instituted, or even that the issue began to gain significant traction in the published media.\textsuperscript{139} Whatever the time that it took to transpire, for Luz its beginning was squarely located in the rupture of the Bogotazo, one that would inspire her to always question the power that another person might wield over her, and it was on these terms that we continued with the rest of our first real interview together.

\textsuperscript{138} It is also curious to note how this particular experience of Luz’s reflected the broader arc of Latin American Feminist politics that followed in subsequent decades, as previously discussed in the chapter ‘La Zona Quinta.’ These later movements originally found purchase in women protesting the abuses of state militaries, but doing so under already socially-sanctioned roles as mothers, wives, and daughters. In protesting these state regimes, however, new assemblages were created, new spaces of interaction conceived, and through them movements eventually matured into more direct petitions for gender equality itself.

\textsuperscript{139} As will be discussed again in Chapter 5 ‘Comisarías,’ while this was mostly Luz’s personal experience and reflection on the historical arc of gender politics, there is concordance between her historical narration and other sources regarding the increased media attention given to partner violence, as well as the much more easily traced adoption of laws for gender-based violence, and establishment of institutions to enact them, in the 1990’s. â
As we continued to talk into the evening about her life, the sun plunging quickly and softening behind the hills in Usme, she continued on with this basic idea. For the next two hours I only listened, hardly ever intervening with a question, frightened that I might break the careful concatenation of stories that she was laying out for me. Through them, the thread that tied them together was always present in the background: freedom. Freedom from having to suffer the abuses of another, from losing control over her own direction, freedom from dispossession of whom she knew herself to be. This was her highest ideal, this was her philosophy of total independence.

Weaving Independence-

Her mother sewed. In fact her mother used for many years a machine very similar to the one that she would later buy, and she taught Luz the basics on it. After the Bogotazo had passed, her father’s work took him away from their home frequently, and looking back she saw the rest of her childhood defined by her mother’s instruction. When she finally completed her bachillerato then, to start generating an income she began working as a seamstress in one of the clothing factories within the city. Doing so put Luz once again at the intersection of changing histories. On the one hand it meant that she was generating her own income, finding some measure of self-dependency through one of the main routes of employment generally available to women at the time. On the other hand it meant that she was doing so at a crossroads in global economies. The jobs in clothing factories in Colombia had come about through a process of labor migration from the textile mills in New England to a rising industry of domestic production

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140 The completion of secondary school.
centered around Bogotá’s neighboring city of Medellín.\textsuperscript{141} Passing from the hands of capitalists like Draper to those of Echavarría, the national production of textiles, and their further refinement into finished products, was not just a consequence of labor disputes that had already gone from fomentation to fermentation in the United States. Jobs like these were also the product of a growing trend in Latin America to replace imported goods with national production, a process commonly referred to as ‘Import Substitution Industrialization.’ Doing so gave families like the Echavarrías the opportunity to upgrade from non-capital intensive ventures like coffee exportation to capital-intensive ones requiring industrial automatic looms, for Luz it was an early opportunity for having her own income. But by beginning her career as a seamstress on the periphery of Colombia’s capital city, Luz did not just begin weaving a livelihood for herself, she herself became woven into a fast evolving global system of production and trade.

When I asked her about her first job in a factory, a bit to my surprise she told me that she very much liked it, but stipulated that she only worked for a few people throughout her career. What defined that first experience for her was her boss, a man she described as a good and caring person, and for this she continued to work for him for fourteen years. This was the factory where she worked when she married her husband Raul ‘in the church’ at the age of twenty, and the same place she worked after she had her first child, her son Mateo.\textsuperscript{142} Even when Mateo became

\textsuperscript{141} For a more complete narration of these historical processes, see \textit{Linked Labor Histories} (Chomsky, 2008). In her historical reconstruction of these processes, Aviva Chomsky also draws attention to how the initial collapse of textile production was related to the insistence on overproduction by industry leaders like Draper, right up to even the major collapse of the economy in general in 1929. This kind of overproduction and global migration of capital is what geographer David Harvey has theorized in a more general sense, one of the spatial contradictions in the evolution of a global capitalist system, one driven by the tendency for surplus capital and labor to exist side by side without sufficient markets in which to sell those goods. Chomsky extends the ironies further in her historical reconstruction, describing how capitalists like Draper sought new opportunities in the aftermath of this collapse in textile production. In its stead they found new avenues for profit in the production of military arms during the post-WWII era, arms that would in part sold back to Colombia in the later years of its own domestic counterinsurgency.

\textsuperscript{142} There are three major categories of partnership in Colombia that are most often invoked: an ‘union libre’ (non-married partnership), ‘matrimonio civil’ (civil marriage), and being married ‘in the Church.’ Considering the
ill soon after birth and she took off several months, her boss guaranteed her a job when she
returned and paid her weekly with some extra groceries when she finally did. “This man was
very humane” she said, an air of dignified respect in her tone, but she would not be so fortunate
with her next company. There she worked under the supervision of a Frenchman, but it was not
long before an incident led her to quit:

“I didn’t last even a month there because one day, and I don’t know what
happened, I think I came in late, yes, I came in late. So he called me to his office
and he scolded me, but scolded me in a very ugly way. Not just grosero but in
French… So me, being spontaneous like I am, I can be very passive but when,
there are moments, I said that I am not dying of hunger, that I am taken care of
and I do not need your work. Thank you very much, and I put my meter and
scissors down on the chair and left.”

The sly smirk she flashes at ‘spontaneous’ fades into firm resolution by the end, a sober
testament to her will not to put up with being belittled before another person. But from whence
did this security come, what did ‘taken care of” mean for her?

At the time Luz was not yet sewing and selling her own goods. The support that
stabilized this transition for her from one job to the next, and allowed her to quit her job as
suddenly as she did, came instead from her husband Raul and her mother. Raul at the time was
also working and from his income paying for most of their housing and food, her mother lived
close enough to watch her son as she looked for and began her new job. With this net of support
she was not only able to find a new position, but as she began to recognize the quality of work
that she produced and the experience she had accumulated, also make demands at her new job.
With a fellow co-worker she secured both an early promotion in her new company as well as the
opportunity to go back to the state-run vocational school to learn how to operate newer

significant difficulty of divorce after a marriage in the Catholic Church in Colombia, many people have begun to opt
for one of the first two categories indefinitely.

143 ‘Grosero’ refers to not just ‘rude’ but also a sense of rudeness that is particularly crude or rough.
equipment. Even with their nearly impossible schedule—given where the factory was located she had to leave at four in the morning each day—she was able to make do with her mother’s help in seeing her children to school every morning.

Over time this small network became undone. First her mother died, leaving Luz to quit her job so that she could better take care of her sons. She found new employment as she always did, this time more amenable to her double-shift as a working mother, but by then her relationship with Raul had begun to deteriorate. While the romantic affection she had for him had already diminished, the reasons she told me for why she left him were far more fiscal and paternal. As she explained, he had bought a car and begun working as a taxi driver, staying out later and later into the night and even at one point failing to take their son Mateo to the hospital when he fell acutely ill. Over time Raul began to ask her to lend him increasing sums of cash, money that she said he never returned. “He knew that I had money saved, just not how much” she told me, referring to a separate bank account she had kept in her name throughout her years of employment. With that latent fund and her current job, one day she up and notified Raul that she would be leaving him and taking their sons with her to a new apartment, that he could see their children however much he desired but she would never ask him for a single peso for their care. Telling him that she was more able to ‘sacarlos adelante,’ they left for a new home and she kept true to her word.

Failing to be there to care for a child or partner when ill was a complaint that I frequently heard in the arguments over partner violence, in particular when survivors of violence were attacking their partners’ legitimacy as worthy heads of household. The justifications of violence behind paternalistic claims are a topic that will be explored more in the following chapter, and one of the common arguments against that paternal legitimacy was the failure to provide support during episodes of illness.

To ‘sacarlos adelante’ is to give children opportunities, to provide a means of advancement from impoverishment.
Given the almost insurmountable obstacle of getting a divorce after a ‘church’ wedding, Luz and Raul never officially divorced but their de facto separation was no less definitive. When I asked her how she felt at first about the separation she told me that emotionally she “never wanted to die of love for anyone,” but in a more practical sense was also not afraid to work hard, thanks especially to the early influences of her mother and father. Despite these lessons and the savings that she had accrued, without her mother’s or Raul’s support the months that followed presented new challenges. Ultimately it was creativity, not just hard work, which got Luz through them. Early on she used a portion of her money to buy her sewing machine and on weekends or after hours would fill orders of collars, belts, or whatever else shops requested. Beyond giving her more control over her working hours, this also replaced the other sources of financial security that she previously had to cover transitions should she lose, or quit, her company job. Even with this greater control she still had to devise a new system to look after her younger son Franklin while she was at work, and she would eventually rely on the support of close friends and her elder son Mateo. Not all social support was positive, however, and being a single mother at the time was not so generously regarded. Luz was the first single mother in her family and the topic was generally considered to be taboo, or at least relegated to gossip behind her back, but when people did break that silence to her she remembers them asking most of all if she was lonely. Adamantly not alone, she would say that she had her family, not the least of which included her sons, and give the example of how they had taken care of her when she had needed to be hospitalized. More to the point, this had been her choice and she would explain exactly that to anyone who asked, telling them, “I wanted to be single, I am living single, I like being single.”
During this period of separating from Raul, her development of her own system of mixed incomes had the further felicitous effect of propelling her down totally new directions in her life. Telling me that she wanted to give herself the opportunity to explore other interests, something that she had put on hold since she took that first job in a factory, within a couple of years Luz became a leader in her son Franklin’s Boy Scout troop. Doing so was the first indication of many that leaving her husband did not mark the end of a relationship for her as much as it was the first step of many in expanding her own horizons more broadly. Over the following twenty-eight years this would eventually lead her to work full-time with the Boy Scouts and leave behind working in factories all together, even going on to study and receive a diploma in sports and recreation from the National Pedagogical University in Bogotá. Through this new position she would become connected to other opportunities, like serving for a year as a field outreach worker for UNICEF in a project on the outer limits of the district of Ciudad Bolívar. Retired now, she continues to work with her local parish in ‘social pastoral’ work where she leads projects like ‘tejiendo redes’ (‘weaving networks), a program built on putting other community efforts into communication with one another. The one constant throughout this entire latter period of her life has been the work that she has done on her own sewing machine, the one that still looks out her window onto the valley in Usme. Regardless of her primary source of income, she has never lost control over her supplemental mode of production, using it to ensure that should she ever need to change direction that she will be able to live through the interim. Even today when she is pensioned by the government and receives extra subsidies for monthly groceries, she continues to thread and weave, closing any gaps that may appear in paying for rent, diabetes medications, or keeping food on her table.
For Luz this mechanical apparatus, this small piece of capital, is a paradox. On the one
hand she has used it to widen the purview of her life drastically, given herself possibilities that
otherwise would not have been possible. On the other hand it has increasingly become a
singularly central emblem of her identity, a core symbol of how she sees herself. As she says,
independence means not having to rely on another person, “to live out of their pocket,” and this
machine has consistently helped her to stake her independence in a number of relationships, from
her husband to any one of her employers. Independence though should not be mistaken for
autonomy, or worse for isolation, and from welfare to gifts or goods for consumption, so too has
her sewing been a means of forging deep connections to others. Ultimately though her project of
independence has not been of material production, it has been one of respect, above all respect
for herself, and it was on these terms that she finally ended our interviews, instructing me:

“One needs to have a moral, a respect for oneself. If you don’t respect yourself,
you can never respect anyone else, these are simple principles…it’s simple, if you
do not care for yourself, for your body, whom are you going to care for? Whom
are you going to respect? No one! No one. This is simple logic. And yes you can,
yes you can. Me, over twenty years single and si se puede.”

‘I never wanted to enslave myself’-

The only other person beside Luz that I came to know who embodied this ethos as
completely was Sofía. A single mother as well, it was one of her sons who introduced us, a
young rap artist in the community. She spent much of our first meeting sussing me out, making
sense of me as we sat through the rich late-afternoon sun and petted her ‘adopted’ dogs that
loitered in Usme’s central square. There in the shadow of the church, the mayor’s office, and the
police headquarters, she divined my intentions before allowing me to step into her world.

Sofía ran a small foundation for children, a program that on weekends hosted educational
classes on everything from personal hygiene to safety, and at the time that we first met still
included temporary housing for anyone who might need it. Every month she would also sponsor a food program for affiliated mothers, meetings that were one part distribution of food and two parts emotional support, as well as an exchange of community news between those present. Within the walls of her foundation, unmarked on the outside and on top of which she and her children lived, was a protected space for women and children to regroup and reorganize responses to the everyday struggles of making ends meet in Usme. While funded in part by the sporadic contributions of some of these members, when we first met in the plaza she told me of a farm a few hours walking distance away that also belonged directly to her foundation. There they grew potatoes, beans, vegetables, and other crops, most for selling and funding the foundation, others for their own direct consumption. That afternoon we talked about her foundation and more, touching on everything from our views on religion to the general strikes wracking the country that summer, Sofía informing me of the man who had been killed the previous night near the protestors’ barricade just past the plaza where we sat. For all that we covered that afternoon though, what she did not talk about then, what I would not learn about until much later, was how Sofía herself had survived years of abuse by her ex-husband. In the years that followed she did open up about those experiences of hers, the bad times when she had to scrape to feed her children, the really bad times when she had to try to hide her bruises from them. Eventually she would talk about how her children had known more all along than she had dared to realize and how, with their help, she went from hiding her abuse to throwing her ex-husband out of their

146 Through the summer of 2013, general strikes and widespread protest went around the entire country, with one epicenter in Catatumbo where farmers protested the forced fumigation of crops and other agricultural policies. In Usme, this led to some organized regulation of bringing crops into the city to sell, a barricade erected just south of the main plaza. As Sofía alleged, this barricade was also where a man was killed over a misunderstanding that he was trying to break the blockade.

147 As Sofía would explain to me, for much of this period of her life her primary priority was to keep her children from realizing what exactly was going on, to create a sort of fantasy world for them, what she likened to the movie ‘La Vita e Bella’ (1997).
home for good. Eventually she would trust me with knowing this and more, but on that first day that we met she did not delve into these most personal affairs. What she did begin to teach me about that day was her resourcefulness, her exceptional ability to generate a living out of seemingly nothing, a trait to which she gave the name ‘rebuscadora.’

As I learned, this term rebuscadora was more than just a statement of resourcefulness to Sofía, it was a statement of intent, her pre-emptive rebuke of the idea of ever working under somebody else. To be able to work as her own boss selling small goods was to refuse to subject herself to any abuse by employers, or to capitulate to what she saw as highly unjust wages. Working for a company was unthinkable to her, a self-betrayal, or as she put it, “I never wanted to enslave myself.” Instead of working for others, she learned early on from her father how to work herself between the seams of local economies and find the small holes of unmet need. Meaning anything from mattresses to mops or discount clothing, for the early years of her adulthood she was able to mobilize broad networks of connections and rely on these strategies to meet her needs. This became a bit more complicated once she started the foundation and had more mouths to feed, but when she first began sheltering homeless children from the downtown barrio ‘El Cartucho,’ she said a minor miracle occurred. Neighbors that she scarcely knew began to hear of her endeavor and, after coming by to see her arrangements, began spontaneously donating food, household items, even their own time volunteering. Over time the foundation

148 While this is a term that Sofía often ascribed to herself to articulate her ability for independence, it is not a term that she herself invented. Generally meaning making a living out of finding and selling small goods, it was a relatively common strategy of income generation that I witnessed during my fieldwork. Another woman, a member of Sofía’s foundation who contributed regularly to its programs, sold kitchen utensils out of her home, relying on a network of faithful clients that she had built over the years. Most rides on the Transmilenio buses included someone selling small comestible items, jewelry, or writing tools to make a living. In one encounter on a bus, a new mother outlined to me how she could make as much in three hours selling shoes to stores around the city as she would working under an abusive and under-paying boss elsewhere, and still have more time to spend with her infant son. What made Sofía so remarkable in this capacity was not only that she had been able to support five children with this kind of work, but that she had used these strategies to also run a small foundation for several decades.
grew, and somehow she was always able to keep it operating, even if just barely, weaving together whatever sales opportunities or philanthropic generosity she could find at that moment. The effort for her became all-consuming, and much later when Sofía did open up about her experiences of abuse to me she explained how instrumental the foundation became for her own well-being, both in terms of her own self-worth and material security. Through an uncertain smile, one that never quite reached up to her eyes, she confided that there were times even when she and her children effectively became beneficiaries within their own foundation. Living within the same walls as those that they sheltered, her own foundation for a time became her last refuge against the financial neglect of her ex-husband.

When resources for the foundation were plentiful enough, she acquired farmland in Usme and relocated the foundation along with her family. Living now on the border of urban and rural Usme, the reception she received from her new neighbors was everything and more than what she had experienced before. She recalled that on the peripheral seam of the city, her new neighbors adopted her as their own daughter and taught her how to plant and harvest the foundation’s land. Although she would still fill in the gaps with her rebuscadora work, this system was sufficient for the survival of herself, her children, and the foundation, at least until the general strikes in Colombia in 2013. The very same barricade on which a community resident was killed was also the one that kept them from selling an entire season’s crop, and with that total loss of income they were unable to re-invest in the materials necessary to plant their next rotation. Leaving their land fallow was the first major strike Sofía had experienced since she expelled her husband, but it was the illness of her eldest daughter that nearly brought her whole operation down. Hospitalized for severe kidney injury requiring weeks of dialysis, early diagnostic theories pointed to a life-long condition that in Sofía’s eyes would have required her
to permanently close the foundation and dedicate her time to generating an income and caring for her daughter. Even in this time of near total desperation, she was adamant about never seeking employment in a company. No matter the circumstances, she would never trust a corporation with the welfare of herself and her family. Instead, when we first met during her daughter’s illness, she was feverishly devising plans to sell health products outside the hospital—bandages, compression socks, orthopedic supplies—a plan she devised to be able to spend time with her daughter and bring in money at the same time. Ultimately her daughter’s illness spontaneously resolved, still incompletely diagnosed however, and in moving back to Usme she was able to reinitiate the process of staking out hers and the foundation’s future. Throughout it all she never buckled from her number one rule, she never worked under another person to survive, and when she took me during my last days in Usme to visit their foundation’s farm, it was instead visions of putting the farm to new uses that filled her mind and our conversations.

*Under no (one) thumb*

The stories of Luz Elena and Sofia are about, if nothing else, the possibility of charting a path despite living at the intersections of multiple forms of marginalization and exploitative domination. They are potent reminders that in order to understand the bare *possibility* of chronic-controlling partner abuse, we must pay heed to more than just how isolation and vulnerability in intimate relationships is maintained, we must see also how it is contested. This includes experiences like Luz’s where she was able to avoid the potential for abuse, as well as Sofia’s

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149 Interestingly, while Sofia herself would never work for another person, she was not so completely opposed to her children doing so. Working as sound engineers, hotel receptionists, and at times in clothing shops, those who had finished school also contributed substantially to their family’s survival. While certainly a bit of a paradox, my best understanding of Sofia’s view on this is that her children should follow whatever opportunities they could find, but she would always maintain a skeptical eye to who they were working for, as well as always seeking to maintain a safe haven of a home where they could find refuge should they need it.
where she was ultimately able to expel her husband from their home. Stories of domination are equally stories of resistance.

Although they articulated their philosophies differently, at the core of each of theirs was a basic struggle for independence, and in particular independence through ownership of capital and the maintenance of a variety of social supports. To Luz this meant self-reliance, the epitomes of which were her continued education and her ability to generate an income by using her personal sewing machine. For Sofía it was about always being her own boss, be it through the direction of her foundation or her *rebuscadora* work, any alternative to which would have been a form of ‘enslavement.’ Sofía’s principled stance against working for a company was nothing less that her sustained critique of iniquity, what she perceived to be unfair relationships within particular political economies. It was a statement that in our conversations she would follow with observations about what she called the ‘business’ churches in the city or any other instance where persons claimed too much wealth or attention for themselves. What she therefore made explicit was that her struggle for personal independence was ultimately about opposition to any form of monopolization of power by others. For Sofía then, as it was for Luz as well, it was fundamentally a question about control. Not just control of an income apart from their partners, however, but most crucially control over the capital means of production for that revenue.

To this ideal Sofía dedicated herself entirely, from her business of small sales to the ownership of the land on which, for a time, her foundation flourished. Even in Luz’s case, though she worked for companies for most of her career as a seamstress, she too maintained a supplemental source of income over which she had full ownership. When Luz left her husband and bought her sewing machine, she did so entirely with money that she had previously saved. From that moment forth there were no collectors who could wrest from her control over her
economic well being, dispossess her of her livelihood should her sales ever ebb. Over the course of time that she left her career as a seamstress and entered the Scouts, sometimes making forays into other ventures or going back to school, her sewing machine was there when she needed it and left unused when she did not. To own it free of debt was to keep at least a part of her life outside of a whole field of sovereign relations, a political economic order predicated on the maintenance of power through the lending of money.\textsuperscript{150} Had she instead bought that machine on credit, in leaving her husband she would have simply been trading one vulnerability for another, exiting one relationship that had the potential for abuse only to end up susceptible in another.

Luz also applied this logic to education. She was a staunch advocate for her sons to finish secondary school, and she herself voraciously sought out opportunities to expand her own knowledge along the way, either in her particular trade of textiles or by exploring new fields like child education.\textsuperscript{151} Her reasoning behind this, as she made certain to explain to me, was that at least no one could later take away from her the knowledge she had earned. For both Luz and Sofia then, independence did not just mean an income, it meant ownership over resources of which they could not be so easily dispossessed, resources that offered them much needed stability during important transition points in their lives.\textsuperscript{152,153}

\textsuperscript{150} While this notion that relations of financial debt can constitute systems of sovereign relationships has taken on new meaning, and interest, recently, it was again Mauss (1925) who most notably first proposed this idea. For a more contemporary interpretation of finance, debt, and sovereign relations, see Kapadia (2013).

\textsuperscript{151} This included at one point even telling off a music teacher who intended to hold back one of her sons on account of his attitude toward him in class. Though Luz was not quite so explicit as Sofia in talking about her rejection of strict hierarchies of control or authority, her actions always betrayed a deep disquietude and cynicism toward it.

\textsuperscript{152} Particularly in the context of Colombia it is worth always noting that ‘legal’ or ‘easily’ are not strict prohibitions from dispossession. Dispossession of land has been a main feature over the course of the political conflict, one of its most enduring consequences that has required great attention to the issue of land restitution in the ongoing process of demilitarization. This still is only on aspect of a broader and longer history of capital accumulation by dispossession, a topic that Eduardo Galeano (1971) and David Harvey (2009) have made clear on the hemispheric and global scales.

\textsuperscript{153} Attention to crucial moments within life histories, with emphasis on indeterminacy, innovation, and aspiration, has been further theorized by Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2002) as ‘vital conjunctures.’
If capital was one means by which they sought security and independence, then its accompaniment was their imperative for diversity. On the one hand this could be seen as diversity in their forms of income: Luz working for organizations and sewing on her own, or Sofía selling goods and, during the worst of times, living on her foundation’s farm. Their resources went beyond cash incomes, however, and when Luz put down her ruler and scissors in front of her choleric boss, quitting on the spot, she was not yet selling her own home-sewn items. It is true that she was also not dying of hunger, as she said, but at that time it was because of the financial support that she received from her husband Raúl, as well as her mother’s support in watching her children when she went to look for a new job. So too was the case for Sofía who has relied on clients from her business, the generosity of a evolving network of donors to her foundation, as well as her family where were most notably present during the recent illness of her daughter. To be independent therefore did not mean that they did not depend in some way on others, to the contrary both have always been intricately connected to, and in some ways counted on the collaboration of a great number of other people: family, friends, employers, and clients, to name a few. The instrumental realization for both of them was not how to somehow escape all the worlds of unequal power relationships in which they lived. Whatever their creativity they remained multiply positioned in political, economic, and gendered regimes in which they often found themselves subordinate. Relatively poor, living on the margins of the city, and women in a society that predominantly privileges men. What they did find was a way to control some resources whenever they could, and to avoid stagnancy between these various spaces of power by moving constantly between them, never committing themselves fully to one single resource. Independence for either one of them was not just the direct result of having an income or even ownership of some capital, it was what emerged from the ways that they wove together their
available resources. Doing so prevented them from merely swapping vulnerable positions, from breaking through the barriers of the space of the home only to end up trapped with no further options in a system of debt relations or corporate hierarchy. They may have found themselves frequently under the thumb of someone else, but they worked to avoid at all costs being under only one.

Under the tensions that existed between these seams of sovereign relations, both of them created hybridized responses that in some instances carried them off in totally new directions. For Luz, for example, home sewing originally provided the security that she needed to leave her husband, but it was in this act of leaving their home that she found the fortitude to leave her work in factories as well. This was a moment that would ultimately lead her to pursue new careers that engaged her more deeply, community work at first through the scouts and later through UNICEF and her local parish. It was a double move, and by not relying fully on the resources of any one set of relations, economic or intimate, it was eventually possible for her to work free of both of them when she so desired. From her movement between these spaces she created escape velocity from either, and herein lays the truly radical potential: to exist in any way outside of a given system of power is to challenge its legitimacy in the most fundamental way, by living beyond its borders one shows that it is neither a necessary nor inevitable arrangement of human affairs.\textsuperscript{154}

The creativity of Luz’s and Sofía’s means of pursuing their independence then is not just through their incomplete capitulation to any one relationship. It is how their movement between these spaces eventually opened up the possibility for them to leave them entirely.

\textsuperscript{154} This radical potential of existing ‘outside’ a given system of power is something that has been taken up in the exegeses of several scholars, most notably Benjamin (1921) in his \textit{Critique of Violence} and Derrida (1989) in his essay ‘Force of Law.’ What Luz and Sofia both illustrate is that ‘outside’ is usually both literal and figurative at the same time. Luz and Sofia did not just seek to live beyond the control of certain people, they both ruptured very physical frontiers in doing so. Luz walked out of offices and out of her home while Sofia kicked her husband out of theirs. Claiming to be ‘outside’ of a given system is as much a matter of spatial relativity as it is symbolic.
This is where I believe Luz and Sofia depart from many of the dominant discourses on female empowerment and microfinance. A broad discussion carried out on a global scale, it seems to follow at the least three basic genres: that the empowerment of women is the humanitarian crisis of the 21st century, that the full employment of women is a lynchpin for economic growth, and a variant of the first which is that liberation from abusive intimate relationships can be achieved through lending credit.\footnote{These three kinds of arguments are most epitomized in the widely read book by Kristof and WuDunn (2010) Half the Sky.} To be certain, there are truths to be found in the most careful realizations of each of these arguments, and taking issue with them should not be confused with their categorical rejection. One problem is that I never once received the impression from Luz or Sofia that either one saw themselves as subjects in need of ‘empowerment,’ especially by outside actors, so much as women who had found everyday means of contesting unjust relations—gendered, economic, political. To my understanding they desired more than to become vital pieces in the capitalist machinery of growth, and to the contrary many of their major life decisions were based around avoiding conformity to those very schemes. For both of them, escaping abuse in an intimate relationship by yoking oneself so singularly to another system of debt was no real liberation. Another problem is that when women like Luz and Sofia are cast as the subjects of humanitarian ‘projects of empowerment’ or as keys to economic growth, they not only become silenced within existing global relationships of power, we miss the opportunity to benefit from their guidance in more deeply rethinking our social worlds.\footnote{For the ‘projects of empowerment,’ in the worst cases this amounts to little more than programs of pity that are in fact aimed at the charitable redemptions of the powerful, or of the moral cleansing of abusive social systems. The ‘economic growth’ point is a variant of the argument that existing political economic orders are not themselves unjust, the only injustice is unequal access to their benefits.} We miss the fact that from their multiply subordinated positions in society, they have already found a means to stake their own independence and refute the most basic injurious

\footnote{155}{These three kinds of arguments are most epitomized in the widely read book by Kristof and WuDunn (2010) Half the Sky.}

\footnote{156}{For the ‘projects of empowerment,’ in the worst cases this amounts to little more than programs of pity that are in fact aimed at the charitable redemptions of the powerful, or of the moral cleansing of abusive social systems. The ‘economic growth’ point is a variant of the argument that existing political economic orders are not themselves unjust, the only injustice is unequal access to their benefits.}
social logics that have sought to keep them restrained.\textsuperscript{157} One such underlying logic will be the focus of the following chapter, a legitimization of hierarchy that I will refer to as ‘paternalistic hegemony.’ In countering this kind of logic, Luz and Sofia have shown that ‘empowerment’ in its most disruptive sense requires fostering a \textit{diversity} of resources, and unencumbered ownership over at least some of them, all in the interest of not just swapping one sovereign for another. To reconfigure unequal gender relations without simultaneously addressing other forms of hierarchical power is a falsehood, a shadow on the walls, and our discussions of the issue cannot abide misleading compartmentalization. To reiterate the words of one Colombian protestor, “the fight of women is the fight of the popular class, without the liberation of women there cannot be liberation of all the people,” or as one Bogotá graffiti artist more concisely put it, \textit{“sin mujer no hay revolución.”}\textsuperscript{158} For Luz and Sofia it may not have been a revolution, but it was at least a way forward.

\textbf{Reproductive Coercion and Its Discontents}

What happens when these strategies simply are not possible? What is the toll and how can survivors continue to mount a resistance? What could be its source? Enter Carolina, who despite living through a lifelong history of horrors had still found in herself a reservoir of fortitude, an unlikely ability to hold out hope. Unlike Luz and Sofia, Carolina and I first met

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{157} Another one of those injurious logics is the compartmentalization of ‘social issues’—such as gender or racial equality, the justice of political economic orders, or of citizen-state relations—and this is an illusion that Sofia in particular did not share. Sofia’s critique of the monopolization of authority was not limited to her relationship with her husband, it was one that she applied simultaneously to companies, religious institutions, intimate relationships, and ethnic discrimination; a common theme of injustice that to her must be simultaneously contested. In other words, she lived a truly intersectional resistance to domination.

\textsuperscript{158} “Without women there is no revolution.” Previously quoted in the introduction as a part of the consideration of contemporary representation of Latin American Marxist-Feminism, a form of synthesis that focuses less on the issue of private property as the source of gender antagonisms and more on the role of gendered subjects in coalescing broader coalitions of social change (see Chinchilla, 1992).
\end{footnotesize}
through one of the Comisarias in Usme. There she had presented to provide testimony in her own case of child custody, one where her ex-partner was accusing her of physically castigating their children. When we met it was not in her living room or through meandering walks around the district, but in a windowless study room in a public library outside of Usme. Away from the watchful eyes of neighbors and under the strictest promises of confidentiality, here she took me through the odyssey of her barely twenty-eight years, one that has frequently taken her, as she says, “from Guatemala to Guata-peon.” Hers is a life that stands testament to the persistent possibility of self-worth, even after having passed through the crucibles of continuous debasement.

Broken promises-

Carolina was not born in Bogotá, her family moved from the province of Santander to Boyacá when she was only one year old. So while she has no memory of her natal region, she does remember quite well what it was like growing up as a migrant farmer in the altiplano (high

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159 As I would learn later in our interviews, that former partner, like Carolina’s current one, had been intensely abusive toward her. That Carolina would later find herself before a Comisaria not for her own protection but rather to state her case for her continued custody of her children, against accusations that she was physically abusive of them, is just one example of the complicated nature of such relationships. On the one hand is the open question of whether or not Carolina actually was physically abusive toward her children, a matter that was investigated and ultimately left Carolina with custody of them. On the other hand, Carolina’s experiences, position, and alleged actions speak to the complex personhoods at stake in violent relationships, where simple categories of perpetration and victimhood are problematic at best and hierarchies of suffering become dangerous frameworks for any understanding. The potential implications of using hierarchies of suffering will be explored more chapter five.

160 This was in fact a conversation that we would have repeatedly, not just before we began the interviews but also in asking her permission to review her case file at the Comisaria and after the completion of the interviews in deciding how to talk about her life in any published work.

161 A frequently invoked play on words, meaning going from ‘Guata-bad’ to ‘Guata-worse.’ Similar to the English saying of “out of the frying pan and into the fire.”

162 Carolina never made clear to me under what circumstances her family moved from Santander, but given the history of the conflict in the region and her parents’ subsequent work as seasonal farmers, I often wondered if their migration had been forced in any way.
plains) just north of the city. She moved yearly until she was twelve years old, as her parents sought new employment seeding, cutting, picking anything available. Mostly they worked with coffee, and as she described it her parents’ employers were good to them, at least always providing a house in which they could live.\(^{163}\) Even still, she called the life terrible. For one the moving was difficult, often a multiple day affair in which they would have to carry their belongings on their back until they found a post to sustain them for another cycle. When they were not on the road, her parents were mostly in the field, Monday through Saturday, leaving her as the eldest of six children to play the primary caretaker. Between the frequent uprooting and the time that she spent in the daily care of her siblings, there was barely enough time to dedicate to her education, much less to making and keeping friends. “Soy solita” (“I am alone”) she told me, as we sat and talked about her life in light of those early years.

Despite covering more territory in her first decade than most of her peers, life for Carolina did not exist much outside of her string of temporary homes. Guarding the boundaries of those homes was her father, a protective figure who, as she put it, never let anyone else harm their family. Within those homes he less providing, never giving her or her siblings any help in buying clothes or school supplies, but otherwise treating them ‘well.’ With her mother he was terrible, she revealed, never hitting her but verbally abusive for as long as she could remember. When I asked if that left an enduring impression on her, she said it definitely had, that one reason she thinks she has been with abusive men herself is because her mother never talked with her about it. Carolina never speculated on why her mother did not speak with her about such things,

\(^{163}\) Seasonal work in coffee cultivation has been characteristic of it throughout its history in Colombia given the intensive work that must be done around the time of harvest. Even after the collapse of the hacienda system in the region, smaller operations have continued to rely on migrant help.
or exactly how that lack of communication led her to end up with abusive men herself, but what she was clear about is that her relationship with her mother has always been unique:

“we [siblings] would fight like kids…but now we are in contact with each other…my mother though was very tough with me, I could never tell her anything like if I had a boyfriend because she would hit me… I know that she loves me but I don’t feel it…my relationship with her is still different than for my brothers and sisters.”

The marks of it were still raw for her, and as we talked about her mother her voice strained, she paused, she hit a wall and asked that we move on.

At the age of twelve, just out of primary school, her mother sent her to Bogotá to work, but in reality her route would not end up being so direct. When Carolina quit school, it was by her account not because she wanted to, her desire up until the day we spoke was to continue studying and receive her high school diploma. So when she lived in the small town of Chiquinquirá for a year, working as live-in domestic help for another family, it was originally under the promise that she would be able to continue her studies. Not only did her host family fail to keep that promise, what she encountered went far beyond a lost opportunity. The house itself was ‘immense’ she laughed, and her dueña (female boss) was exacting in her demands. Between cleaning and cooking she also looked after their intellectually disabled daughter, a combination of obligations that would have her rise from bed at four in the morning and finish her day around nine at night. The work was fine if not exhausting, the pain of not studying far worse, but the real nightmare of it all was, as she put it, “putting up with” the dueño (male boss). She only got as far as calling him ‘dirty’ before she stopped. Pursing her lips she looked

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164 Andrés Salcedo in particular has studied urban migration in Colombia through an ethnographic lens and Carolina’s experience of arriving to the city resonates with other common experiences that he has noted (see for example Salcedo, 2008).
downward at the table between us. When I asked her if it was something that she wanted to talk about, she quickly shook her head. Again we moved on.

After that year she was able to leave and finally go to Bogotá, this time living with an aunt of hers and under a pretense similar to her previous arrangement: that she would be able to continue studying while helping around the house. Instead what she found was once again more of the same, working from six to ten and attending to her aunt and son, no time left for her to go back to school. The three years that she lived there she described as painful, again for the unfulfilled expectations but also for her aunt’s continuous verbal abuse and psychological degradation of her. Eventually she was able to leave and found work with a woman in the more affluent district of Chapinero, a position where she said, with a bit of relief, that she was finally treated with respect and able to go back and resume her studies. Over the next three years that she lived and worked in Chapinero, she was able to study up to the ninth grade and, in the process, she met her first partner. They met during a fieldtrip and quickly began dating, before too long after that she became pregnant with her first child. Slowly, the small dream that she had been building began to unravel. First came the panic attacks, fitful episodes in which she thought she would die, and although her boss helped to take care of her at first, she soon gave notice to Carolina that she could no longer continue working. A bit confused, I asked her if her dismissal was because of the panic attacks or her pregnancy, and she said that she was told it was her pregnancy in general, but still she did not quite understand why.

Left without income, she immediately moved in with her boyfriend who was working in a jeans factory at the time and living with his cousin’s family. In spite of the precarious situation, she thought back to that period positively, recalling how her partner cared for her throughout the rest of her pregnancy and even moved them into their own apartment before she delivered. Just
fifteen days into life with her healthy new daughter, everything changed. By the end of her pregnancy she was already sleeping in a different bed from him and did not want to be touched or kissed, but when she refused to have sex with him two weeks after she delivered, he hit her for the first time and then raped her. It would not be the last time that he sexually forced her either, over the course of their four and a half years together he would repeat it another three or four times as well as continue to hit her on a more frequent basis. During that time his violence toward her followed an all too familiar pattern of abuse and apology, isolation and deceit. In his apologies he would promise to do anything to take care of her and their children, and when they visited family it would typically be his. If she did visit her own family it was always accompanied by him, and during those trips he would become, as she would say, his charismatic self, charming her mother in particular.

In reflecting on those years, Carolina described her own process of consciousness as a protracted one, that it took her years of surviving his abuse to become fully aware of her situations and his recalcitrance to changing how he treated her. Their was a decisive moment for her though, it was when he hit her on the first birthday of their second child, her son, the point at which she made the resolute decision that he would never improve with her. Taking her children and leaving him was more than a question of consciousness or will, however, and it was only with her brother’s financial support in paying for an apartment that she was actually able to escape. Her brother too had migrated to Bogotá and found work, along with most of the rest of her family, and with his job was able to stake her in those early months that she moved to Usme. Even with his instrumental support though, Carolina never told him the specifics about her relationship, afraid that the information would reach her mother who up until the day that Carolina and I first sat down to speak, still wanted her to return to her ex-partner.
This moment of assistance by her brother, and how Carolina mediated it, is the instance that brings into tragic relief just how isolated she had previously been. It was an isolation that began long before the abusive control of her ex-partner, a process that Carolina described as reaching back into the relationships and resources that she had been unable to cultivate since her childhood. She recalled how her father had never been the most supportive figure and her relationship with her mother had always been characterized more by discipline and strict expectation than emotional nurturance. By the time that she was looking to leave her first partner, her lack of trust in her mother was so severe that Carolina even avoided disclosing details to her siblings for fear that it might trickle up to her. These early relationships of hers were not forged in a vacuum, however, they emerged in a context of continuous uncertainty in which Carolina and her family constantly found themselves vulnerable and on the road. It was because of the long hours of her parents’ work and their meager wages that her very first isolation within her own home began as the child caretaker of her siblings. Combined with her family’s perennial displacement, she spoke of how making close friendships had never come easily to her, and most of the social support that she had ever had came from within her own family. Her migration to Bogotá had also happened within this same context. Having barely finished primary school, it was again the basic material needs of her family that provided the pressure for her to leave and begin working in the houses of others. Leaving on her own, Carolina had her isolation within her family’s home traded for isolation within those of her employers. Through impossibly long hours, minimal pay, the broken promises of attending school, and worst of all the abuse that she endured, there was little recourse left to her other than to seek a new post when she could and hope for better. In fact she did eventually find ‘better,’ when she began living and working in Chapinero, but the threadbare contingency of her
existence was harshly exposed when she lost that job for the sole crime of being pregnant. With child and without income, this was the juncture where she ended up in the domestic space of a man who would ultimately become routinely abusive to her—psychologically, physically, sexually.

As Carolina retold it, much of that abuse was built through his progressive isolation of her within their home. And while she could list a number of ways that he himself sought to do so—control of their finances and lease, limiting contact with her family, leaving the care for their children solely in her hands—she was also careful to add that other aspects of her life compounded it. One of those was gossip. As she later explained to me, her difficulty with friends was not only a disposition that she adopted early in life, it was reinforced through a few key experiences that she had when making friends in Bogotá. In the few cases where she tried, and confided intimate secrets about her life, she repeatedly encountered betrayal of her confidence when those friends spread those details throughout the neighborhood. By the time we met, fearing friends had become for her another mark on a long list of whom not to trust, a list that included members of her family, employers, and partners as well. Fear and distrust were not the exclusive province of those she knew though, and like many citizens of Latin American cities like Bogotá, Carolina had learned to maintain a healthy respect for the streets in which she lives.

Citing twice being mugged and verbal harassment by men whenever she leaves her home, the

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165 In particular because of this history of gossip that she had experienced and the effect that it had on her opening up with others, we spoke at length at the conclusion of our interviews about her thoughts on my sharing her story with broader audiences. A bit to my surprise, her only condition was to use a pseudonym (standard practice as we had already discussed), and beyond that she felt comfortable for me to speak of any part of her story that she had shared with me.
quotidian logic of ‘*no dar papaya,*’ to always be on guard within an environment that feels pervasively violent, had only further bolstered her restriction within abusive homes.\footnote{Literally meaning not to give a papaya, *no dar papaya* is a very common dictum of safety in everyday life. It means not doing things that might put you at risk for trouble, such as going out alone at night, venturing into parts of the city or countryside that are not safe, or showing off valuable goods in public—such as jewelry, electronics, or placing your wallet in an easily accessible spot. The saying also has sexualized connotations of ‘not being easy’ or ‘not giving it up,’ and as such combines physical danger with sexualized transgression into a hybrid of racy behavior that also helps to put some of the blame on victims of violence when something bad does happen. If someone is assaulted, robbed, or otherwise harmed, there is usually the accompanying question of did they ‘*dar papaya.*’}

**Unintended consequences**—

J: “How have you survived this? How do you keep going forward, fighting, and living?
C: “For my children. I always have fought for them. They are the motor…everything I do is for them.”

As if it were possible, the second partner with whom Carolina ended up has been even more abusive than the first. She described the period between the two as one in which she traded the intimate terror of her first partner for the grinding abuse of working as an impoverished woman in the city, gone from seven to nine each day and hardly ever able to see her children. When she was free, she started to experiment with drinking and smoking cigarettes, new experiences for her with a new group of friends. In quick succession though she lost her job, began to realize that she was neglecting her kids, and tried to withdraw from her new social circle. By that time she had incurred a small debt to those friends, and when they threatened Carolina and her sister, coming at them with a knife, she used the last of her rent money to pay them back. Again without an income and now with two children, she moved in with a man that she had only recently met, her current partner. With him there would be no honeymoon period. Formerly in the military, he was at the time working as many men and women of the lower
classes do, as a security guard in the more affluent districts in the north of the city. Working two day shifts and two night shifts a week, Carolina spoke about the time that he was out of their home as a huge relief, and when he returned as complete hell. Whenever he was gone Carolina took care of her children, two more now from that current relationship, and dealt with his constant stream of texts and calls, checking on where she was and what she was doing. Early on in their relationship she had sold food on the street, a chance to get out of their home on some consistent basis, but after suffering two hernias she had been unable to continue doing any work on her own. Caught in a bureaucratic quagmire of medical insurance, denials of authorization for any of her needed operations, she was at the point of desperation by the time that we met. In the meantime, as she continued to search for new options out of her current conundrum, she left their house as little as she could manage. Mostly she tried to avoid as many problems with her partner as she could, always wary of the possibility that intruding eyes in her neighborhood could be keeping tabs on her movements outside of their home.

He first hit Carolina when she was four months pregnant with their first child. Their relationship thereafter she portrayed as a variable mixture of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. When he first hit her she did attempt to take her case to the District Attorney’s office, but clogged with an impossible caseload already, hers never meaningfully advanced and she lost

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167 Amongst all of the forms through which Usme and its residents contribute to the growth of, and service to, the city of Bogotá—such as the mining of materials for construction, construction labor, agriculture and food, domestic cleaning—the work as a security guard is peculiar. Service in the military or national police is obligatory in Colombia unless you can pay for an exemption, meaning that predictably those who swell the ranks of the nation’s defense come from poorer backgrounds. Those who find employment as security guards after their service essentially complete the rotating door of providing safety disproportionally to the nation’s wealthier classes. A peculiar political economy indeed.

168 Though the insurance company itself is not run by the state, the health system in Colombia is a state-regulated market of insurance companies that in the early 1990’s replaced what was previous a state-run system of hospitals. The system has been characterized as frequently leaving its poorest patients with years of paperwork and bureaucratic mazes to navigate in order to receive their needed care (Abadía-Barrero and Oviedo, 2009), a process that has been given the nickname of the ‘tour of death.’
hope for that avenue of recourse.\footnote{As discussed at the conclusion of the chapter ‘La Zona Quinta,’ one of the theories that has been proposed for gender-based violence in post-conflict settings is the general overworking of judicial systems, making legal recourse less accessible for cases of intimate partner violence. Whether or not in Carolina’s case this was the indirect result of political conflict-related cases in particular would be completely speculative, but what was clear in her experience was that inability of the attorney general’s office to keep up with their caseload had important consequences in her personal trajectory.} As with the case of her health insurance, she was again left to her own devices by the state. Too discouraged by her experience to want to try the Comisarias de Familia, she instead began to learn to dance on eggshells best as she could for the times that her partner would be home. By the time that we met, Carolina had survived this for four and a half years, and the cumulative toll of her life’s hardships showed whenever she spoke about herself. Though not suicidal at the time, she explained how in the past she had indeed wanted to die, and she repeated throughout our interviews a particular phrase: “I don’t matter.” After decades of surviving life at the extremes of violent degradation by others, the value that Carolina held for herself, at least that which she professed to me, had become all but totally debased. As she put it, she simply did not matter. And yet, despite all of her experiences, all of her misery and suffering at the hands of others, in between her narrations of her past she also spoke of hope. Hope that she could leave her abusive partner, go back to studying and, if she could somehow get the operations for her hernias, go back to work. In none of these dreams did she save the space for an intimate partner, her hope was not only to leave her partner but also to leave partnership itself.

How after all of her years could she still hold out for hope, something so potentially delicate and ephemeral? From earlier when she wanted to die, how had she begun the process of turning her gaze forward, of finding the fortitude to invest in herself? Through understanding how Carolina was able to do so, it is also possible to recognize one of the central paradoxes in
the exercise of power: the unintended consequences of control.¹⁷⁰ In particular, her history of partner violence was not only about coercive control in a general sense, it was about a particular version of it: reproductive coercion. The idea of reproductive coercion can cover a variety of issues, means of control that range from the manipulation of reproductive planning to outright rape, the isolation of victims within particular spaces through normative obligations of motherhood or the need for survivors to have greater financial resources in order to escape.¹⁷¹ The boundaries between these possibilities are typically porous and, in cases like Carolina’s where she has had children within two long-term relationships, both characterized by repeated rape, it hardly bears distinguishing neat lines between them. But if reproductive coercion is woven into the broader dynamic of intimate coercion and control, then it may seem to be a bit of a paradox to say that one of the unintended consequences of reproductive coercion could be the children themselves. And yet for Carolina, so it seemed to be.

If Carolina’s life has been in part defined by the consistent experience of isolation, she has also simultaneously defined it through her roles as a caretaker. In every instance that she has been dispossessed of command over her own life, her riposte has been finding purpose through the care of others. As a young child this meant playing the surrogate mother for her siblings, up

¹⁷⁰ One of the overarching theories of unintended consequences is Merton’s (1936) ‘unintended consequences of purposive social action’ where he enumerates several possible reasons for unintended consequences: 1) ignorance, 2) errors in analysis or applying patterns from the past that do no apply to current situations, 3) immediate interests, 4) adherence to basic values, 5) self-defeating prophecy. It is interesting to note a few issues that here have relevance. First, Merton’s first cause, ‘ignorance,’ is an issue widely reflected in various philosophical schools of thought (for instance one of the pillars of conflict in the absurdist dilemma), and as such speaks directly to the social positions and limited horizons that any social actor inevitably experiences, important in the very situated experiences of partner violence. Second, while Merton acknowledges a distinction between ‘purposive’ and ‘rational,’ his theory was constructed to apply to social action that implies a greater degree of control over one’s actions than many perpetrators of partner violence actually experience. Of particular interest in these cases of intimate abuse, especially Carolina’s, is not so much the precise pathways by which action yields unintended consequences, it is more so how those unintended consequences have the potential to undo overarching relationships of coercive control.

¹⁷¹ Control over reproductive health and decision-making within abusive relationships is a topic that is receiving more attention. Notably it was a topic of specific reference in the same WHO (2013) report cited earlier for global prevalence estimates on partner violence, though specific estimates for this kind of violence were not given.
until the point that she was expelled from her home to find waged labor. Even then she found employment for the following seven years in attending to the needs of others as a live-in maid. Her work as domestic help ended only when she became pregnant with her daughter, and from this point on her attention shifted from siblings or strangers to her very own children. It was within these more recent situations that she suffered the most extreme forms of violence, the most severe injuries to her very personhood and sense of self-worth, but through sustaining her children she also came to sustain herself. As we spoke about her second partner and she began to reveal her aspirations for a different kind of future, she told me about the decisive turning point for her in their relationship: when he began hitting her in front of her children and showed no remorse for the fact that they could witness it. Much like the case with her first partner who hit her on their son’s first birthday, this was a major moment of consciousness for Carolina. In particular it was one that she took as an impetus to begin extricating herself from a situation that she could not longer tolerate, even with her high threshold of endurance. As she said, her children were her motor.

In propelling her away from her abusive relationships, Carolina’s children have not just been a motivation for leaving. Her aspirations were not only for their education and advancement but for her own—she wanted to finish her studies, find work, and live independently. Despite her explicit insistence that she herself was of no value, her hopes for her own betterment fortunately told a more positive story. Against a continuous barrage of violence that had belittled and isolated her, her children had consistently been one of her principle means by which she resurrected and defended her own self-worth. Through her care for them she also cultivated a means of caring for herself, and as such the reproductive coercion of both of her partners had in fact been a source of their own undoing. Even as they sought to isolate her, limit her connections
to a world outside of their homes—bolstered in those efforts by the broader context of her migration away from family, history of continued material insecurity, the dangerous urban environment to which she moved, and even gossip among her friends—what they could not prevent was her connection to those who remained within those very spaces, her children. What Carolina showed therefore was, first of all, that her partners’ efforts at limiting her had in fact created her most powerful and continuously present basis of contest. Through her survival she showed that reproduction is not just a focus in the perpetuation of power, reproduction of the status quo, it is equally a major site of resistance. Pregnancy can produce more than just further isolation for victims of violence; it can also generate a reservoir of renewed potential for their subversion.172 In showing this, she also demonstrated one of the principal paradoxes of power, a central tension in its exercise, that the greater the influence the greater the unintended consequences. That those consequences are unintentional at all could be one of the most significant reminders to those in power of the very real limits to their actual potential for control in the first place. As will be explored more in the following chapter, those unintended consequences also have the potential to push abusive partners to escalate their violence, an unfortunately common response when survivors like Carolina seek to leave those relationships. Consistent again with the idea of unintended consequences, these violent attempts at reclaiming power can actually, under certain circumstances, only further accelerate abusive partners’ loss of control as their own actions delegitimize particular forms of authority that they have sought to construct.

172 This notion can apply to survivors of partner violence—as in the experience of Sofia whose children helped her to expel her husband or Carolina whose children helped her cultivate a sense of self-worth—but it can also be seen more broadly in any instance where agents of social change are motivated by leaving a better world for their children, as reflected for instance in the words of Frederick Douglass when he said, “it is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” While the control of reproduction intimately or on the order of whole social orders is an issue of immense interest for those in power, so too is it a site that can sow the seeds of transformation beyond their purview of control.
From the stories of Luz, Sofía, and Carolina, what comes across most clearly is that those who seek to maintain control over others must necessarily seek inscribe boundaries into the social geography of everyday life, and to break those boundaries or to exist outside of them is therefore to challenge those systems in one of the most damaging ways possible. Such was the case in Luz’s history of women leaving their homes after the Bogotazo, a primitive rupture that preceded feminist movements decades later, just as it was in Sofía’s experience of living within her own foundation to escape the abuse of her husband. Living literally outside the boundaries of control constitutes nothing less than a refutation of the sovereign power of others, both in their dominion over a given space as well as their legitimacy to define the contours of human connection. It is that connection with others that provides the basic experiential material against which consciousness emerges, and it is in this spatialized sense of power then that partner violence appears most clearly as a question of sovereignty: who has authority where, why, and how is that ‘where’ constructed in the first place. Carolina, however, breached the sovereign limits of her abusive partners’ control not by reaching ‘outside’ of the domestic space to which she became progressively confined, but through her relationships ‘internal’ to it. Despite her partners’ intense efforts to reinforce her isolation—physically, socially, financially, emotionally—what they were unable to account for were her own children. Infiltrating the limits of their assumed control, it was through her connection with her children that Carolina repeatedly cultivated her drive, her self-value, her very consciousness of her situation and what she might not need to endure.\textsuperscript{173} Even through their efforts to create separate ‘external’ and

\textsuperscript{173} This form of undoing though, and the role that her children have played in it, has hardly ever been an inevitability. Note how within Carolina’s life history, her children were at times her reasons for suffering through a tremendous amounts of abuse—they are one of the principle reasons that she had not yet left her second partner when we met—but they were also her impetus to leave her first partner and to begin planning to leave her second one. One of the points of inflection in each of these relationships has been her partners’ abuse of her children, or at least their abuse of her in front of them. When her safety and the economic well being of her children had been held in opposition, she directed the product of that tension toward enduring abuse directed at her, but when her children
‘internal’ worlds, it was what, or namely whom, they were unable to exclude from the ‘internal’ ones that ultimately undid their dominion over them.

What all three of them—Luz, Sofía, and Carolina—show is that to see the possibility of intimate control through the lens of vulnerability and isolation would be only to see the most obvious architectures of space and choice for those who are victims of abuse. Through their various forms of resistance, they have articulated creative tensions that penetrate the supposed boundaries imposed by perpetrators of abuse. Along the way they have also reconfigured them and revealed important vulnerabilities and contradictions that constitute those controlling arrangements. Their stories are not just about contesting power within given spaces—such as the home, the workplace, or public places—they are about the insights that they have created by living through the tensions that permeate these fields. They have shown that ‘empowerment’ must mean more than employment, that independence is about more than just swapping vulnerabilities, and that even the most domineering exercises of power—down to the dispossession of control over one’s own body through the act of rape—have the potential to lead to their own demise.

have become more directly implicated in that violence, she has directed that tension outward, toward leaving her abusive partners. What Carolina also shows is that children can be the motivators of seemingly antithetical results at different times, in contexts that vary only slightly, and change over the course of evolutions of even just one person’s particular history.
Permissible

“To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he’s doing is good, or else that it’s a well-considered act in conformity with natural law.”
-Alexander Solzhenitsyn

“Pensamientos encontrados
Pero que no comportan
Revolución mental
Lucha por autoridad
Dominio facultad para mandar o ejecutar...
Poder manipular centros nervios
Emociones de otro ser
Y así tener al imagen de cualquier tipo de situación
Éste es el objetivo de tanta revolución
Guerra mental guerra (guerra guerra)
Guerra mental guerra (guerra guerra!)”
-Alma de Negro ‘Guerra Mental’

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174 Excerpt from ‘Guerra Mental’ (‘Mental War’) by the Usme-based rap group Alma de Negro. The lyrics translate as: “Thoughts found / But don’t behave / Mental revolution / Fight for authority / Control of the ability to send or execute / The power to manipulate nervous systems / The emotions of another being / To have the picture of any situation / This is the objective of such a revolution / Mental war, war (war, war) / Mental war, war (war, war).” The name of the group is intended as a double entendre between ‘black soul’ (‘alma de negro’) and ADN (Spanish for DNA), the inseparable threads of spirit and body.
Isolation alone is not enough to understand partner violence and its perpetration; the mere possibility of exercising chronic control over someone does not mean that anyone will actually do it. Even if it works to privilege those who commit it—not to mention the work of privileging broader gender identities—violence rarely just happens, we need to either talk ourselves into it beforehand or at least justify it in some way afterward.\textsuperscript{175} How that is actually accomplished though is by no means an easy task, and for the perpetrators of partner violence that I knew in Usme, their attempts to do so often situated them uneasily at the nexuses of overlapping fields of power. In a dangerous sleight of hand they frequently found themselves borrowing legitimations from other situations, ones in which they themselves were the relatively disadvantaged ones, just to justify in some way their more intimate forms of violence. Beyond working to legitimate the violence that they themselves committed, moves like this also at least partially aligned them with core social logics of governance more broadly, stifling in turn their capacity for critique of those very systems in which they were also injured. These systems and their justification I will refer to as paternalistic hegemonies, the experiences of living within them, and through them, will be the focus of this chapter.\textsuperscript{176}

Now this might seem like a strange point of departure into the ideologies of male-perpetrated partner violence, particularly in a Latin American context where frequently it is understood through the lens of another word, ‘machismo.’ Indeed the specter of ‘machismo’ was

\textsuperscript{175} This notion that violence does not just happen, it must be justified as well, can be found anywhere from specific considerations of political violence (see Apter, 1997) to the very basis of the notion of ideology, at the very least when it is considered in relationship to violent systems, most notably here how it applies to gendered relationships.

\textsuperscript{176} The concept of ‘hegemonic masculinities’ (Connell, 1987)—applying the Gramscian notion of hegemony directly to gender relations—has been a guiding influence in the conception of this work. Despite its relevance, much of the use of the term has been made with regard to understanding how different notions of masculinity and gender compete for domination over one another, whereas this study is oriented largely to understanding the contradictions and tensions that emerge directly through their performances. As such, the focus on tensions and contradictions here follows more closely from the later update of ‘hegemonic masculinities,’ not its original formulation, where Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) encouraged future research to engage in the examination of the ‘internal’ contradictions of forms of masculinity, and to do so through attention to extended life histories.
pervasive in Usme, invoked everywhere from interviews to casual conversations, it was even raised in the chants of “forward women, back with machismo” that came from groups marching in the parade for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.\textsuperscript{177} From community residents to service professionals there was a general consensus that, more than anything else, ‘machismo’ was a major culprit for partner violence. Where there were higher rates of violence, so too must there be commensurately stronger beliefs in masculine roles defined as such. It was inescapable, and many people were careful to note that it was not only machismo on the part of men, but that women too could be ‘machista’ and help to co-create this damaging set of gendered expectations. But despite the undeniable salience collectively given to the idea of machismo, the problem was that none of the perpetrators of abuse with whom I spoke saw it in this way. Just as so many others had, the abusive men that I came to know equated machismo unilaterally with what they saw as negative qualities, traits such as image obsession, the assertion of dominance, and posturing violence.\textsuperscript{178} Most were careful to distance themselves considerably from them. Instead, the perpetrators of abuse that I knew preferred to see themselves, and even their violence, through a different lens, a lens that we might call paternalism. Clearly there is more than machismo at play.

Rarely was the actual term ‘paternalism’ used, however, and to begin to understand its role I first had to learn how to hear it in the first place. I began this learning process early on, when I was still reading government reports in the city archive, sifting through official documents that together told some of the history between Usme and the rest of the capital city. In

\footnote{While the parade was technically held on the Saturday after, November 25\textsuperscript{th} was a date set at the first ‘Encuentro Feminista’ (Feminist Meeting) for Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Bogotá in 1981. The date was chosen to commemorate the deaths of three Dominican Republic sisters killed under the dictator Trujillo’s rule.}

\footnote{Against such stultified trait models, other scholarly work, most notably Guttman’s (1996) \textit{The Meanings of Macho in Mexico City}, have revealed the actual performed complexity of such a gendered identity.}
between the lines of these pages emerged a history of promised benevolence, albeit a stern and forceful one at times, a regional stewardship that always presupposed the higher authority of Usme’s neighbor to the north. Not long after, when I began sitting in on audiences in the Comisarías de Familia, I would again hear the echoes of paternalistic pretenses but this time through the spoken words of the perpetrators of partner violence. During these audiences, when the lawyers at the Comisaría would adjudicate whether or not to grant a permanent order of protection, the survivors of abuse and those accused would both be allowed their constitutional right to speak. It was in these moments that I first began to learn how to appreciate the postures of accused men as well as the sometimes brash, sometimes subtle structures to the stories they told. Especially in the cases were men admitted to their alleged actions, or even chose to speak at all, I quickly learned that there was always much more to hear in the arguments they made.

It might be tempting to neglect their stories as vain justifications, minimizations that merit little more than disdain. We disregard them though at our own peril, tossing them pre-emptively to the waste bin prevents us from hearing at least the poetic echoes of how abusive men legitimate their own violence, not the least of all to themselves, and the struggles that to

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179 In particular, what I continually ran up against was an array of implicit logics of what governance and participation really meant, most of which have already been discussed in Chapter 1, ‘La Zona Quinta.’ Rooted in a longer colonial history of Catholic subversion, these more contemporary logics of governance were at times the stern hand of prohibition (as in the case of land piracy by urban migrants), at others it was a search for harmonization with ‘endogenous’ community efforts, providing assistance by bringing organic responses into the fold of institutionalized programs. Even when the intentions were most manifestly benevolent, in all cases it predictably presupposed the higher authority of the city’s government in providing for the well being of its citizens. Harmonization was ideal, but imposition remained a real possibility and participation typically meant voice for residents of Usme but not more profoundly distributed control and oversight. These limitations in the meaning of participation recall, as previously discussed in Chapter One, Weber’s (1922) admonition that the truth about democracy is not that its practice has meant governance by the demos so much as that the demos has simply had greater say in who governs them.

180 Both parties also had a constitutionally protected right not to speak, a right that was always carefully explained to accused perpetrators of abuse before their opportunity to tell their story.
them are nonetheless very real. Perhaps surprisingly, what came across most frequently in those pleas was that, one way or another, their abuse was related to their children, and in the months that I spent in the Comisarías I never once witnessed an audience in which children were not somehow invoked. In particular, the men accused of partner violence often cited them as the very reason for their violence against their partners in the first place. Though the details shifted based on the nuances of their situation, what remained consistent was the effort to present their violence as somehow related to their daily struggles, their efforts to give their children opportunities that they felt they did not have.

While paternalistic pretenses for abuse might have seem like a more palatable approach than appeals to ‘machismo’ as a masculine form, they do also create a paradox: how does a justification rooted in a presumption of benevolence then be made to justify violence in its most obvious forms? In particular, how does that become the pretense for justifying not just that use of violence, but its monopolization in an intimate relationship? Insight into how perpetrators of abuse might smooth over these seeming contradictions is of course not something that can be made evident just from observation, even in a space like the Comisarias de Familia. It was only through the invitation of a few particular men to let me into their lives that I began to appreciate

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181 ‘Poetic echoes’ is a term that Taussig (1980) uses to describe why examination of superstitious practices merits closer attention to the intricate symbolism of their work. Even if such practices follow the functionalist argument of providing reassurance in an uncertain world, to leave our analysis at that would be to miss the significance of what forms these superstitions take and what that can tell us about the life worlds of those who employ them. Such is the case also for the justifications of partner violence. Even if these justifications are meant largely to minimize and obscure, either from shame or an attempt to avoid legal consequences, closer examination of them helps to understand the ideologies of which abusive men at least convince themselves, as well as the broader systems of power in which they are implicated.

182 Intrigued by this shift of perspective, I began asking anyone that I could about what they thought paternalism might mean. Some described it in affective terms, the care that one might show toward one’s family, others saw it as simple biological parenthood. Those who characterized paternalism most clearly in relation to machismo said that both deal with or presuppose control by men, the difference being that paternalism has an air of benevolence, a positive connotation of providing, whereas machismo is that same core logic when it instead leads to suffering. While paternalism might foster vulnerability and dependence, machismo leads more directly to pain. Both then are ideologies of a gendered hierarchy, one the fantasy of benevolent male authority, the other a defense of force; both of them proactive ideologies of systems of masculine dominance, two sides of a common coin called ‘control.’
the simultaneously delicate and dire work that was done to build a life, no matter how precarious, in light of these paradoxes. One key it seemed was to maintain the pretense not just of paternalism, a promise of benevolent authority, but also the ability to exercise the ‘exception.’

**Great States of Exception**

In the previous chapter, told through the lives of survivors of intimate abuse, one organizing idea that began to emerge is that partner violence is in some way a question of sovereignty on the more intimate scales. As a question of sovereignty, however, partner violence is not just a matter of creating spaces through which one can maintain domination over others. Any power over others or violence against them, regardless of the spaces in which it is exercised or committed, must again be legitimimized in some way. It must be made, to some extent, permissible. Curiously, through the long and sustained deliberation on what terms like ‘sovereignty’ actually mean, there are in fact two other theories regarding that word that can help to clarify this intimately violent work. The first is Max Weber’s notion that sovereignty is the monopolization of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory; and while Weber was referring to the governments of nation-states when he proposed this, what his idea makes clear is that it is not sufficient to legitimize violence, one must also monopolize that legitimacy as well. The second idea is Carl Schmitt’s, whereby sovereignty is the authority to ‘declare the state exception.’ It is by putting these two ideas together that the possibility of justifying

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183 For a brief discussion of the relationship between ‘sovereignty’ and ‘hegemony’ and their uses throughout this thesis, please refer back to the footnote in the introduction of the previous chapter ‘Possible.’

184 Weber (1919).

185 Schmitt (1922). Note that while Schmitt’s notion of sovereignty as the ability to declare the state of exception has more recently been elaborated on by Agamben’s (1998) resurrection of ‘homo sacer’ and his attention to ‘bare life,’ the use of the idea here does not follow from Agamben’s further theorization. The invocation of Schmitt’s notion of
partner violence through the prism of paternalism begins to emerge—it is not that those
relationships are supposed to be manifestly violent, violence is its most obvious forms is only the
declared exception to the rule, that of benevolent authority, and because it is the exception it is
only in those moments that abusive partners might claim a monopoly on its legitimacy. Where
might that legitimacy come from? For the abusive men that I knew, most often it came from
what they saw, and what they believed others saw, as their responsibilities to their children.

Thinking about claims of legitimacy in such abstract and neat terms though comes at
great risk. Chief among them is failing to see how ineffective they often are. While this might be
most obviously true with regard to the survivors of abuse—who may have already rejected those
terms long before they actually leave such a relationship—it is also true for the perpetrators
themselves. To see violent relationships as rationally planned projects of domination would be a
fallacy, and while ideologies like ‘paternalism’ can reasonably be seen as preemptive
justifications for violence, in practice they can just as easily be hasty pretexts concocted to make
sense of one’s own actions. If the promise is benevolence but the method violence, how does
one reconcile that after the fact? Not even those who attempt to set the rules can always follow
them, and when someone fails to meet their own expectations, what is left? What come across as

sovereignty here is a return to his original conceptualization of it, the implications of which will be explored
throughout this chapter as well as the concluding ‘Reflections’ section at the conclusion of this part of the thesis.

As mentioned previously, paternalism could be seen abstractly as a proactive justification, a prospective ideology
of inequality. In fact, so fundamental is an ideology like paternalism in understanding inequality and hierarchies of
power that the core of the word can be found across lines of gender, nationality, and political economy: patriarchy,
‘la patria,’ ‘patron,’ and of course ‘padres’ within the Catholic Church. We might contrast it against more
retrospective ideologies of the same effect. Ideologies like paternalism have the ability to be preemptive in the sense
that they justify hierarchy often through appeals to ‘nature’ or ‘necessity’—either based on the presumed superiority
of one group over another (often the case for gender or race) or based on an appeal to the exigencies of urgent
situations (for example military hierarchies for clear chains of command during combat). Retrospective ideologies,
by contrast, may seek to justify inequality only after unequal relations have emerged into existence. Examples of it
may include beliefs of individuality or equal opportunity to justify the existence of income inequalities. Such
ideologies do not help to create in the first instance that inequality, but rather seek to rationalize its existence as
nevertheless defensible once it has come to pass. As is clear with justifications like ‘paternalism,’ ideologies cannot
in fact be so neatly categorized into prospective or retrospective, even the most naturalizing ideologies may only be
mobilized for hasty post-hoc use as well.
attempts for control can be every bit as much about feeling out of control; and what the stories and experiences of the abusive men that I came to know show is that actions that come across as purposive attempts for ‘sovereignty’ do not necessarily indicate the experience of mastery over oneself. In other words, even though they are the ones who are most significantly harmed, it is not only the survivors of partner violence that may feel trapped.

Sacandoles adelante—

“I arrived around three in the afternoon, I got back [home] when a neighbor told me, ‘don’t go to your house because people from Family Welfare are there.’ Yeah? How so? From Family Welfare? She said ‘yes, that truck over there, there’s a woman there with your partner.’ Strange. When her daughter saw me she cried to her mother, ‘mom, my papá has arrived,’ she calls me papá, ‘no mom, my papá is here.’ Hmm. All the sudden they took out a suitcase and some bags, so I said to her, where are you going Luisa?’ She said, ‘nowhere, nowhere, this doesn’t concern you.’ So she got into the truck and…”

He slaps his hands.

“…Ciao.”

“Where they went, I have no idea where she’s living. They say that supposedly she’s living in a house of ‘family protection,’ one run by Family Welfare. She’s there in a boarding house, I got myself in a situation with the Comisaria de Familia. So on the twenty-fifth of last month I went to their office, that’s when they gave me the little paper for this study.”

He laughs a little, nervously.

187 ‘Sacar adelante’ (‘Getting ahead’) was an omnipresent saying, one that everyone from survivors of abuse like Luz, Sofía, and Carolina to perpetrators of it invoked. Meaning ‘to get ahead,’ it generally referred to giving one’s children a good education and providing them the opportunities to succeed in life.
“So, well, I went to their office and a doctora told me that I, that I, how did she put it? That I had no obligation to know where Luisa was. So I told her, “how can that be? Even if she’s carrying a child of mine? I need to know where she is, what her situation is.’ She said, ‘Don’t worry, Family Welfare, that the Comisaría de Familia is waiting on her and taking care of everything. You can’t call her, you can’t talk to her, you can’t get close to her, you can’t know where she is.’ I said okay, because in the days before, after Luisa left, I had started to look for her everywhere. I looked and looked for her, called her phone but she didn’t answer, looked for her everywhere and even went out to Villavicencio to look for her there. I called her family to find out where she had gone, but she wasn’t with them either. I looked for her in the hospitals, I looked… I went to Family Welfare, asking them if they could help me. Nothing, nothing.”

He draws a long inhale and sighs.

“So one day arrived and I said, desperate, fed up, I told myself that I would go to the clinic where Luisa had been going for her [prenatal] care, to see if maybe I could find her there. So one morning I went to, what is that clinic called? Javeriana, the clinic of La Javeriana on Seventh avenue and forty-fifth I think.”

I ask him, “of the university? University of La Javeriana?”

“Of the university, exactly. So I got to the counter and I asked the woman there, ‘could you do me a favor? I want to know if there’s a patient here named Luisa.’ ‘Yes one moment’ she told me, ‘let me see if she’s in the system… yes she’s here.’ ‘Yes?’ How about that. So I asked, ‘can I see her?’ ‘And you are?’ ‘I’m her husband’ I told her. ‘Yes, okay, one moment. Visiting hours are starting just now so you can go up.’ So, they told me I could enter, so I did, but I didn’t know she had an order of protection or anything like that. So I asked what room, she said ‘302.’ So I went up.”

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He whistles and slides his hands together.

"When I got there, I went in and saw her lying down, she was eating an apple. I kept watching her until she got up. She stayed quiet until she said, ‘you, Diego?’ and I said, ‘yes mi amor, what’s been going on?’ So I went in to greet her and she started to cry. She cried and cried and cried and the nurse came in and held her. I asked, ‘what’s going on here?’ She said, ‘no, you can’t see, you’re not even allowed to know where she is.’ And I said, ‘why can’t I see her? Why can’t I know where she is? I’m her husband!’ She said, ‘no señor, she put an order of protection against you, you can’t get close to her.’"

"Did you know at that time about the order of protection?"

"I didn’t. I didn’t know anything about that, absolutely nothing about the order of protection. They sent me to talk to a doctor and he explained to me everything that was going on. He called me in and sat me down."

He sighs again.

"‘Don Diego, what is going on is that she has an order of protection against you and you’re not allowed to know where she is, you can’t see her, touch her, call her, absolutely nothing. ‘But why doctor?’ ‘Because you have been mistreating her.’"

This was the very first story that Diego told me. Before the long hours we spent talking about his growing up on a farm in Cundinamarca, coming to the city, and then meeting his partner; before we talked about his hopes, his fears, his frustrations, the things that gave him the greatest shame; before I took my first trepidatious steps into his home or followed him to his work; before I even had the chance to turn on my recorder during our first meeting, this was
what he wanted me to know. Diego was the first perpetrator of abuse to let me into his life, a connection made through one of the Comisarías in Usme, and when we first spoke on the phone his enthusiasm to meet and talk almost worried me. That excitement had not diminished in any way by the time that we first met at the public library, the bounce in his step and his boyish vim belied his forty years and the gravity of the reasons that had brought us together. In our conversations Diego was above all a storyteller and would spend hours at a time taking me step by step through the paces of his life. He did so openly, eagerly, an oral autobiography delivered calmly and punctuated more by his ready laughter and wrinkled brow than ever by anxiety or anger. And yet he rarely spoke directly about the violence he committed. Even though he sought me out, as he said, as a means of reflecting on his actions, even though he readily allowed me to read through his file at the Comisaría de Familia, it was only with great difficulty that he ever spoke aloud of the physical or verbal abuse that he had committed against his partner Luisa. In the few instances that he did, his whole manner would abruptly change. His gaze averted down to his lap, shoulders hunched, hands clasped nervously and one knee bouncing, those were the most labored moments of our relationship, the ones that he was only too keen to pass over quickly.

188 Because he first told me this story before I had the opportunity to begin recording our first interview—though of course after he had consented to the interviews themselves—the quotation provided here is actually from our second interview when we reviewed this story in light of a longer sequence of events preceding that particular one.

189 We met during the interim period after Luisa had left their home, it seemed as though the institutionally-backed loss of contact with her had triggered a crisis of reflection for him, something that he hoped our conversations might help facilitate. At that point I had been trying unsuccessfully for over a month to find abusive partners with whom to speak in depth about their lives, and time and again I had encountered either disinterest at the prospect or acquiescence under the misunderstanding that our interviews were in some way required for their legal process in the Comisarias. After discussing the reality of the situation and the voluntary nature of their participation, I had lost every potential participant and began wondering about the ultimate feasibility of the research. When Diego first contacted me, I was so alarmed by his level of interest that in our first conversation over the phone he almost became exasperated at my repeated insistence that his participation was in no way obligatory.
Peculiar then that this was the first story he told me, indeed insisted that I know before we could further test the waters of our new acquaintance. I say peculiar because in that story that he told, he was describing the detailed steps that he took in stalking Luisa after she left him. It was also not as though her flight from their home had been completely unanticipated, by Diego’s own admission it came at the end of a crescendo in his own violence, and in particular after the very worst of their fights. But if his other actions had brought him shame, this one in particular did not seem to do so. To the contrary it was a story that he displayed with pride, if not also with exasperation, a saga through which he exemplified by his estimation the kind of concern and attempts at protection that a good father should. In telling it he made certain to call my attention to particular moments, for instance his step-daughter’s insistence on calling him papá, and most of all that Luisa was pregnant at the time with their first child together. At the end of it all, when he finally appeared before the Comisaría to learn the specifics of the order of protection placed against him, this was his ultimate defense. It was his justification for his aggressive pursuit of her the previous weeks, from traveling hours out of the city to Villavicencio to arriving unsolicited at the clinic where she had been receiving prenatal care. “Even if she is carrying a child of mine?” were his words, as he retold them, his rebut to being told at the Comisaría that he would henceforth not be allowed to know where Luisa was living.

Whatever degree of justification Diego drew from this in his stalking of Luisa during the weeks before we met, this kind of behavior was never something that he was able to categorically endorse. Throughout every one of our subsequent encounters, in isolated interview rooms or out in the community that he called home, every time that he related a story in which he stalked an intimate partner he made certain to carefully legitimate why. Suspicion of infidelity constituted the first exception to his purported rules, acting in what he saw as the best interest of
his children was the second. In this particular case, that meant tracking Luisa down by any means necessary so that he could provide for her the kind of support that he felt she needed in the latter terms of her pregnancy. It was a kind of concern that pervaded much of Diego’s and my interactions up until, and even after, Luisa delivered the baby. Before the two reunited, whenever I would ask Diego what he was concerned about at the time, he would usually answer with some reference to their child’s and Luisa’s care. Even after the two began living together again, he would open our conversations with talk about Luisa’s condition and continually rehash with me their options of where to go for her labor and delivery. From Luisa’s pregnancy through to her delivery, and the child rearing that came after, the amount of worth that Diego found in his role as a father was difficult to miss. As I would later learn, this sense of importance stood in contrast to his otherwise dismal situation when we first met. At the time he was only newly re-employed and still reeling from his accumulated debts, feeling also the constant pressure of loneliness living in a community where everyday dangers left him with a sense of social isolation. And so even in those first few moments after we met, Luisa’s leaving him came across as nothing less than a crisis of self for him, the desperation he said he felt while searching for her matched only by his desperation at framing his subsequent actions to me as born out of paternalistic concern. It was that framing that was so necessary to his living with the consequences of his violence and his own responses to it. Even though the basic premise of paternalism implies a form of control through higher authority, stalking a partner was not something that Diego could normally condone. Against his own rules though there were exceptions that we was willing to declare, and if the well being a his child was at stake, then at least he could find some solace that what he was doing was only a temporary contradiction to his normal code of conduct.
This is not to say that paternalism and its exceptions necessarily provide an explanation for Diego’s more physical forms of violence against Luisa. In order to understand in greater breadth what came before and what happened after that final fight will require a much deeper history of Diego’s life and their relationship, something that will be considered more fully in the following chapter ‘Stakes.’ This broader picture was one that I only began to appreciate through a much longer engagement with Diego, one carried out over the course of the year that followed our first encounter. What was immediately evident when we first met was how important this paternalistic framing was to him in living with the immediate consequences that followed his violence and Luisa leaving. But even if Diego’s physical violence cannot be understood under the rubric of exception, the abuse committed by many other men that I encountered in the Comisarías did, a particular example of which I will describe in Chapter 5 ‘Comisarías.’ Though it was articulated in many ways, having taken place in as many different situations, one of the giveaways was whenever accused perpetrators of abuse finished a sentence with ‘sacarlos adelante.’ It meant that they saw themselves as somehow better able to get their children ahead in life, either because of their financial resources or their ability to foster certain values. The logic went that if it meant a better upbringing for their children, and so long as it was confined to discrete instances, violence against one’s partner could be justified as a regrettable consequence, the effect of defending one’s children from all perceived threats, those from both without and within the home.

Before the staff of a state institution charged with addressing partner violence, it would be difficult for aggressors to categorically justify their abuse, and indeed none of the men with whom I spoke in private ever did either. Absent such sweeping justifications, however, they could at least attempt to portray those actions as exceptions to their normal conduct toward their
Supported by a hierarchy of vulnerability in which children were imagined to require the greatest care, these moments of exception became the heated arithmetic of prioritization, of robbing the rights of one to pay another. But again, to view these as cynical and disingenuous claims made before agents of the Comisaría or an outsider would be to deny them of their full meaning and audience. As I came to know more intimately some of the men behind the abuse, and the intricacies of their reactions to their own violence, it became increasingly evident how one of the main audiences for these declarations of exception, indeed the primary audiences, were themselves.

‘I drink so that I can cry’

Justifications are not always successful, especially when those who make them have the greatest interest in believing them. Many times those in power do not even believe their own rationalizations, even when they are directed mostly at convincing themselves. When they are not, and when perpetrators lose the partners on whom they themselves have become dependent, what are they left with then? Frequently, as the case may be, they are left with alcohol.

The possible uses of alcohol are legion, the potential connections to partner violence just as many. Be it a means of social engagement or self-disinhibition, emboldening for posturing performances or coping with boredom and isolation, quieting painful memories or intrusive thoughts, even more simply a means of coping with chemical dependency, there are almost innumerable instrumental uses of alcohol as well as its unintended effects. Indeed many of these

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190 This is an important reminder that justifications must also always be understood in the spaces in which they are made. Perhaps for this reason, the legitimations that I was party to differed from those made on online comment boards, like the ones studied in ‘He beat her so hard she fell head over heels’ (Tolton, 2011). That these justifications of paternal obligation were made outside these spaces as well, such as in my interviews and observation of abusive men outside of the Comisarías, also means however that they are not so simply limited to those spaces of legal accountability.
were represented, some even plainly visible, in the quotidian rhythms of life in Usme. Down the road from Usme’s central square it could be seen through the open fronts of cantinas, gathering spaces where mostly men sought company, sitting for hours around small tables over-filled with emptied bottles of ‘Poker’ beer. In the more urban neighborhoods to the north it could be heard in the club music that blasted out from behind tinted windows and seen in the liquor ads that covered their doors. During the weekdays it could be heard in the lamentations of Comisaría de Familia staff, those who claimed that their workloads always seemed to swell after public holidays and the bingeing that they brought. All of these and more were daily reminders of the multitude of social uses of alcohol, but rather than create a comprehensive accounting of them I find it more helpful to examine one dynamic in particular, one that I was not expecting, one that I first began hearing of during my early months in the Comisarías. This was a self-reported pattern amongst perpetrators of partner violence, one in which they described how their alcohol consumption drastically increased only after their separation from their partner. These were insights that were not easily offered up by abusive partners though; usually the lawyers and psychologists on staff only extracted them with great difficulty. Alcohol as a legitimate excuse for violence had already lost its cache, at least within these particular spaces, and for the accused perpetrators there seemed to be very little attraction to further admitting their dependences. When revealed, these admissions carried with them a mark of desperation, a brief and tightly guarded window into the difficulty that that person might be having in coping with loss. No one illustrated more to me what this could mean than one man, Andrés, and over the time that he spent teaching me the details of his life he also began to elaborate on the many uses that alcohol had for him in dealing with its consequences.
By most accounts, Andrés has had a difficult life. In spite of that, he seemed to have little interest in excusing himself from responsibility in the abuse he had committed. When we met for the first time and I described to him my study, he told me that his situation “me está rompiendo la cabeza” (was making him go crazy), and unlike Diego who always shied from directly labeling his actions, throughout our conversations Andrés admitted openly, at times almost compulsively, the violence that he had committed against his former partner. ¹⁹¹ Mostly he wanted to be heard and understood, to share with me what he saw as a life characterized by extreme experiences, to provide a context for understanding his violence against his partner, to at least make it locatable in the longer arc of his life. The short story of his most recent relationship was that following years of his abuse against her, his partner had recently left him, aided by an order of protection at the Comisaría, and with her she had taken their three sons in the process. When we met, he appeared nearly at his ends. In fact, one month before our first encounter he had attempted to commit suicide, something that only the timely intervention by his mother had prevented and, with the help of the rest of Andrés’s close family, kept from repeating. Alive but far from any semblance of equanimity, it was in this state that he first began to reveal to me the longer path from whence he came.

As it turns out, his origins were rather close to where we met. Unlike many residents of the district, particularly those from the more urban neighborhoods, he actually grew up in Usme in what was at the time a newly developing area. Now one of the older urban settlements, named now for an hacienda that had once existed there, Andrés spent his earlier years with his two

¹⁹¹ I found his specific choice of words intriguing given that there is a Spanish-written text on the perpetrators of partner violence called El Rompecabezas (Lorente Acosta, 2004). What Andrés illustrated most of all was that partner violence can not only make victims of it feel trapped within a series of seemingly unsolvable problems, so too can the perpetrators of it feel enclosed within the conundrums that they have constructed.
brothers, his mother, and his alcoholic and intensely violent stepfather.\textsuperscript{192} Although he had no memories of his own biological father, who was killed when he was three years old, he had no shortage of memories of his stepfather. Several times a week he would physically abuse someone in their home, if it was not Andrés it would be one of his brothers or his mother. This violence would continue for years after Andrés left that home, and according to him it only ended when one day his two brothers and him beat their stepfather so severely, and threatened to kill him, that ever since he has had little other option than to desist. This only happened years after Andrés had already left the home, however, and long before that violent turn of events he had begun the process of emancipating himself from his stepfather’s domestic rule. Because of his stepfather’s refusal to share his income with the rest of the family, Andrés began working at the age of nine in the quarries and brickworks that surrounded their home. By the age of eleven he left his home entirely, along with a group of his former school friends, and began living up in the hills of Usme. During the day they would descend to work long hours in the brickworks, most of which at the time operated illegally with little outside supervision. Under bosses that he described as rude at best and exploitative at worst, they took in whatever sub-minimum wage they could manage to win.\textsuperscript{193} At night he would ascend back up into the hills with his friends, camping out with an accompaniment of alcohol, tobacco, and an ever evolving rotation of other drugs. Beside alcohol, Andrés’s drug of choice was basuco—a cheap but potent mixture of cocaine and other additives—and with it he said he felt powerful, able to do anything, even fly away from his own

\textsuperscript{192} In a study of male-perpetrated child physical abuse in Bogotá (Kleven, Bayón and Sierra, 2000), stepfather status was found to have one of the highest associations with child abuse. Abuse of children tended to happen with the mother present, and other significant associations included: lower level of education, perceived stress, substance abuse, lack of social support, history of own victimization, and unrealistic expectations of child behavior.

\textsuperscript{193} Curiously, when I asked him to compare his treatment by his bosses in the quarries as a child and later as an adult (in his twenties), he said that unequivocally his treatment as an adult has been far more respectful and humane than it ever was when he was barely an adolescent. It appears that in his experience there was no special moral consideration shown for children in the workplace, in fact it seems to have been quite the opposite.
self and for a few moments feel released from the burden of his thoughts and memories. With his friends, living in the hills and playing cards at night, making money during the day and providing for themselves, he said it made him feel like he was already an adult.

In the few years that followed, he continued to assume more of what he felt to be adult roles when, at the age of 16, he had his first child with his girlfriend at the time. It was at this juncture of his life, now with a son that depended on him, that several aspects of Andrés’s life changed all at once. First he moved down from the hills and returned to his family, where his mother was able to convince him to stop using basuco and other substances, everything except for alcohol which he admitted he could not stop drinking. After barely two months his girlfriend left him, leaving their son behind for Andrés and his mother to raise, something that he passingly attributed to his recalcitrant problem drinking. He continued working in the mining and making of construction materials, the unlikely common denominator throughout this entire era of his life, and within six months had already met his second girlfriend, Laura, with whom he now had three children. When speaking about their early years together there was a palpable relief in his tone, through his words he described how she, along with his mother, had given him the affirmation and strength he felt he needed to navigate on of the more difficult transitions in his life. For the better part of a decade they remained together, but with his alcohol abuse continuing to wax and wane, so to did his degrading behavior toward her. Eventually that came to mean beating her as well, episodes that he followed by drinking even more than his usual amount, what he explained

194 This quick transition from puberty to what he felt like was becoming an adult is particularly notable considering that, in anthropology, adolescence is often considered to be the period between the onset of puberty and the full assumption of adult roles (Schlegel and Barry, 1991). One question that I asked all perpetrators of abuse was when they believe they fully became an adult, the circumstances of that time, and what being an adult meant to them, the responses to which were often greatly illuminating. Notable in Andrés’s experience was that for him there were two periods in which he felt like he ‘became an adult.’ The first was after leaving his home and living in the mountains, where adulthood meant to him providing for himself and having the freedom to do with himself, with his own body, whatever he so desired. The second was when he had his first child and had a dependent for whom to care. In this instance adulthood meant the responsibility for others, of sacrifices of oneself in the interest of another.
as his cyclical response to recognizing that he had come to repeat most of what he deplored about his own childhood. I say most because he ardently insisted that he had never beat his children, a line that he could never cross no matter what his other faults. Amidst his shame and self-loathing, his love of his children and his desire to provide them with a better life was one of the few positive attributes of himself that he wanted me to see.

As it were, Laura continued to bear the brunt of his fear and emotional dependence until, three months before Andrés and I met, he raped her. He maintained that he does not remember very well what happened in the preceding moments, only that he saw her and ‘went crazy,’ but he believed without reservation that what she claimed was true. The moments afterward he does remember, that he left their house to buy a drink, and that it was in the store that the police found and arrested him. For reasons that were still not clear to him, Laura did not press criminal charges and have him sent to jail, but she did finally leave him and take their children with her. It is difficult to understate how emotionally dependent on her and their children Andrés had become. Beyond what he conveyed directly throughout our interviews—focusing on the affirmation he felt from Laura and the importance he derived from providing for his sons—it was his actions after losing his family that told the most compelling story of how dependent on them he in fact was. To some extent it is a dependence that he previously sought to conceal though his violence. But without them, without basuco to help him feel ‘light’ again, with the shame of recognizing the violence that he had inflicted upon Laura, and bereft also of a justification for it that even he could believe, Andrés quickly began a precipitous fall into an ever-deeper well of alcoholic consumption. Even with the help of his family around him, he began drinking more than ever before and within a month attempted suicide by consuming a household poison. Fortunately for him, his mother had been there to make him vomit out the lethal dose and watch
over him during his ensuing hospitalization, also ensuring over the following months that he did not repeat his attempt.\textsuperscript{195}

As he recovered, Andrés encountered a new problem in his life: the crippling silence of his empty home when he came back everyday from work before the rest of his family. When we first met he told me about this with a sense of desperation, how he had fallen into a routine of filling this time by drinking in order to avoid stubbornly intrusive thoughts. Most of all he found himself ruminating on the things that had happened to him as a child, the things that he had since done to others, and about his constant worry for his children with whom he no longer had any contact. Consumed by these thoughts, he also told me that he drank ‘so that I can cry,’ a means of allowing himself a space to express his feelings, even if it that was alone at home within his own private room. During our first encounter, the stoicism that he had maintained outside of our private meeting space quickly eroded once the door was closed. When only he and I remained, his despondence became plainly evident to see, most of all when he spoke through choking tears about not knowing the whereabouts or situation of his children. His greatest fear he told me was that Laura would find another partner, that that man would abuse his children just like his own stepfather had years before, and that he would have no way of stopping him. Over the following months, as we continued to meet, he seemed more relaxed during our interviews and told me about how his mother had helped him to cope with the aftermath of his relationship. He also admitted, almost sheepishly, that he had begun to see another woman but was afraid of hurting her, so he was trying to take it slowly and limit their time together to once a week. Such

\textsuperscript{195} This was not the only time that Andrés’s mother had cared for him during a hospitalization. Years before he had had an almost fatal accident with industrial machinery at his workplace. Suffering almost a year of incapacity, his mother had been there not only through his multiple surgeries and time in critical care, but also throughout the rest of his prolonged rehabilitation. Examples like this, of the support of others during hospitalizations, were an especially important form of care that people used throughout my fieldwork to illustrate the importance of someone in their life. Contrapositively, if someone did not help during a time of hospitalization, it was often used as a means of illustrating the negligence or lack of care that that person had for him or her.
optimism could not last forever, unfortunately, and by the concluding months of my fieldwork he
began to feel consumed again by the emptiness in his home. Once again he found himself
ruminating alone in his room, helped only by some music to break the silence and some alcohol
to either disrupt his thoughts altogether or at least allow himself permission to express his
emotions in solitude.

The notable thing about Andrés’s use of alcohol is that he never used it to justify the
violence he committed against Laura. From the Comisarías to the homes of survivors, something
that I frequently encountered was that alcohol was no longer considered a socially accepted
excuse for partner abuse, though barely twenty years prior that might have been the case. This
may have been true during Andrés’s childhood when his stepfather would routinely beat them
behind closed doors, but anymore abusive men could no longer find *ipso facto* validation behind
an alcoholic façade. Instead, Andrés’s more intentional uses of alcohol seemed to come in the
aftermath of violence, a dangerous means of coping both with that which had been done to him
as well as that which he himself had done. Following his liberation from his home as a child,
alcohol provided the way for him to both momentarily subdue the memories of his abuse as well
as mimic with his friends what he imagined adulthood to be, a means of separating himself
temporarily from his past and sharing experiences with those around him in the present. Later
when *he* became the one who battered, and even raped, when he was the one who had to live
with the recognition of his own violence, alcohol again became his means for forgetting, but it
also became his means of coping with the boredom and isolation that he felt during the empty
periods of the day within his family’s home. There in the solitude of his own room he was
continually confronted by the fact that forgetting would always be an impossibility for him, and
confronted by that fact, confronted by his continued ruminations on what he had done, alcohol
provided him the exception for adhering to dominant masculine norms. As he himself said, he drank so that he could cry. Even in the secluded space of his own room, alone without so much as his family nearby, it was still only in an intoxicated state that he could allow himself to express his sadness, his shame, his desperation and fear, to let himself do the one thing that to him men are never supposed to do: cry. When repression, even to one’s self, is not successful, exception may be seen as one of the few avenues of recourse left. And so to think of physical abuse in partner violence through the rubric of states of exception does not refer only the violence done against others. For perpetrators of abuse like Andrés, it has just as much to do with the states of exception declared with regard to domination over one’s self.

**Paternalistic Hegemony and Surrogate Power**

When it comes to partner violence in Usme, there is clearly more at stake than ‘machismo.’ The instrumental role that children play in the life worlds of abusive men beckons us to recognize that masculine domination is not so singularly upheld by beliefs about machismo, we need to at the very least allow room to recognize the significance of the ideology of paternalism as well. Children and the imagined paternal role can be central features in intimate partner violence, particularly when perpetrators of it declare them their primary purpose and, through their prioritization, a valid state of exception over the humane treatment of their partners.

The problem with states of exception though is that not everyone believes in them equally, and when they are used to validate violence against others there is no guarantee that survivors of that abuse will any longer believe in the legitimacy of their partners. This is the self-defeating trap

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196 This if of course not to actually reinforce a false dilemma, in truth there are many other possible avenues such as contrition, reparation, transformation, and compassion, not least of all to one’s self. The point here is that when one’s sense self and relating to others is tied to a very particular set of arrangements, false dilemmas like these can appear like the only options that exist.
into which many abusive men fall, and why it is so critical to understand masculine domination as a multifaceted object of control. Viewed from some angles it may appear as paternalism, the ideology of benevolent authority, from others as a more plainly violent system of dominance, either case indicative of the parallax inherent to these situations. This was the contrast that some people in Usme expressly made when comparing the two, paternalism and machismo: both are core features of a system that privileges men, but paternalism pertains to the provision for others whereas machismo is that same system when it instead leads to suffering. In both cases they are ideologies in the interest of hierarchy, justifications for the stratification of power in society.\footnote{197}

Hegemony fundamentally refers to how power over others is maintained, and Hannah Arendt famously proposed that violence is not the tool of its maintenance but rather a reflection of the loss of control.\footnote{198} That the intensity of violence in abusive partnerships often escalates when survivors attempt to leave would certainly seem to support this idea.\footnote{199} There is however more to the picture than reactive violence, violence itself can drastically accelerate that very loss of control, and it is in understanding this dynamic that the view of an entangled paternalism/machismo is most useful. Paternalism is not only a fantasy for benevolent authority, it is the search for legitimacy in intensely unequal relationships, and as such it is also an attempt to efface from view the violent potential of machismo. The escalation of violence in partner abuse, from psychological to physical and sexual forms, is therefore not just a reflection of the loss of control, it is itself a counter-hegemonic practice. It is the undoing of the intimate

\footnote{197} The only exceptions that I encountered to this were the few articulations of paternalism as nothing more than demonstration of affective caring for loved ones. Only under this understanding could paternalism be imagined as an idea in the interest of anarchy, the flattening of hierarchical relationships.

\footnote{198} Arendt (1970).

\footnote{199} In a general sense of power/violence, this is precisely the relationship that Arendt (1970) proposed. For partner violence in particular, this relationship of escalating violence in chronic-coercive relationships with the threat of separation has documented across contexts and disciplines (see Kelly and Johnson, 2008 or Dobash \textit{et al}, 2007 for a general overview; and Jimeno, 2011 for an ethnographic example within Colombia).
hegemony that paternalistic justifications, and their related states of exception, sought to achieve. Such was the case in the experiences of all those whose stories have been covered so far—Sofía and Carolina from the previous chapter, Diego and Andrés from this one—indeed in my experience it was generally the escalation of violence that was the primary reason for people to present to the Comisarías de Familia in the first place. In a context where victims of abuse have the ability to find support or a means of escape, violence is the force that rotates the object of masculine control and widens the parallax between the people involved. What perpetrators desperately seek to justify as valid exceptions to the rule, those who bear the brunt of it more easily discern as de-legitimizing practices and, if they can, often refute those arrangements by leaving them entirely. In leaving, everything that abusive partners sought to maintain is undone, and for them what is left in its wake is often intolerable. No one made this clearer than Andrés, and that alcohol consumption can markedly increase after survivors leave is only one indication of just how emotionally dependent perpetrators can become on those they abuse.

Finally, what an eye to paternalism helps us to see is that the ethical and logical systems tied up in partner abuse are not so easily ‘otherized’ to areas on the margins of society. What this means is that just because an area of a society has higher rates of violence—as is the case for partner violence in Usme—we cannot so easily assume that it is because of some peculiar cultural pathology, an implication that many try to implicitly or explicitly convey when invoking the term ‘machismo.’ The moral frameworks implicated in this violence are not ‘backward’ philosophies alien to the ‘contemporary’ centers of society. On the contrary, they cut to the core of them. The first implication of this is that paternalistic partner violence in Usme actually

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200 One could easily say that this is only true when sovereignty is not fully consolidated, that per Weber (1919) sovereignty is by definition the monopolization of the legitimate use of violence. Sovereignty, however, like hegemony, is never truly a fait accompli, it is always under contestation and never a pre-given certainty. Legitimacy, like any form of power, must be continuously renewed and therefore is always subject to creative contestation.
adheres to broader moral systems, ones that are played out on national and international scales. What it also means though is that in using these justifications in their intimate relationships, abusive partners on the margins of the city are capitulating themselves, at least in part, to ethical systems that are central to other forms of their very own subjugation. By borrowing from these social logics and substituting their positions within them, they become active surrogates in these broader systems. It is not just a question of the domination of one person over another, but how that intimate domination plays a role in stabilizing other systems of power—political, economic, or otherwise—systems in which abusive partners are not only implicated, they are also frequently subordinated as well.

*From margin to center*-  

As previously discussed in the history of Usme, there persists a certain ‘geography of imagination’ in Colombia, indeed in the rest of Latin America and the entire hemisphere. As the imagination often goes, at the cores are cities or powerful countries, and at the margins is violence. At the hemispheric scale, Colombians have lived this for quite a while now, plagued still by the ignominy, the ‘*mala fama*’ of a supposedly distinct ‘culture of violence’ vis-à-vis their neighbor to the north. As a half-Colombian growing up in the United States, I was made only too aware of this anytime that I discussed my dual heritage. From elementary school assemblies to medical school seminars, encountering the presumption that Colombians are somehow preternaturally disposed to an exotic and pathological ethos has been a sadly consistent experience of mine. This exotification is not just a product of crossing national borders though,

\(^{201}\) The term ‘geography of imagination,’ along with its accompanying concept of ‘geography of management’ are attributable to Trouillot (2003).

\(^{202}\) Literally ‘bad fame’ but more approximately ‘infamy.’
within Colombia itself these kinds of imagined geographies have also been major influencing features from colonialism to the present day.\textsuperscript{203,204} The continued labeling of Usme as a ‘zona roja,’ a racey and transgressive area within the limits of the capital city, is only one of the many indications of it.\textsuperscript{205}

That sense of otherness is not neatly restricted to the terms of political insurgency and civil war though; when ‘machismo’ becomes the oft-invoked explanation of an uneven epidemiology in partner violence it carries the implication of cultural lag, that the values in one place fall behind the currents of progress elsewhere. Moreover it belies a deeper belief in difference, in the separation of values from one area of society to another.\textsuperscript{206} By seeing partner violence also in terms of paternalism we help ourselves us to see beyond these false distinctions. The purpose is not to deny an uneven distribution of violence in society, but to recognize that the ideologies that lie at the core of intimate abuse on the margins of Bogotá continue straight to the core precepts on which broader social relations have been built. In the most obvious sense this has been true in terms of political economy, from the hemispheric histories of primitive

\textsuperscript{203} In neighboring Perú, this kind of phenomenon was also made evident in a famous report written at the onset of the domestic political conflict in that country. The report was drafted by a commission led by Mario Vargas Llosa, convened to study the deaths of several journalists on a trip to the rural department of Ayacucho. What came from it was what critics called an essentialized depiction of rural poverty, one that depended on the assumption of distinctly separate indigenous or campesino societies, whose exclusion from the mainstream was cited as the fundamental reason for the violence (Theidon, 2013).

\textsuperscript{204} It is also worth noting that the term ‘exotification’ is often taken to mean the sexual fetishization of someone based upon their ethnicity, race, or some other aspect of their heritage. The sexual connotations of the term map uncomfortably well onto the history of feminizing Latin America under the US gaze, as well as the broader issues of the gendering of violence and the violence of gendering.

\textsuperscript{205} For a more complete history of this geography of imagination, please refer back to Chapter 1 ‘La Zona Quinta.’

\textsuperscript{206} So critical has this organization been, and so persistent the myth of their separation, that Rodolfo Stavenhagen (1981) made this the central feature of his Between Underdevelopment and Revolution (specifically in his chapter “Seven fallacies about Latin America”), which detailed both the connections between these putatively separate areas of society and their continued misrecognition as such. On an even more global scale, scholars such as Cooper (2005) and Stoler (1995) have advanced the view of colonial co-creation, that colonial powers themselves were shaped just as much by colonial encounters as the colonized, a theory that fundamentally contradicts the illusion of separation.
accumulation around extractive industries to the control of rural haciendas by urban elites.\textsuperscript{207,208}

And while the urban or imperial concentration of economic resources and capital is clear, the same geographies of management can just as easily be held for systems of legislative or technocratic governance. In all cases, the creation of ‘peripheries’ required the creation of ‘cores’ and from the moment of their inception they have been inextricably linked to one another, the lines between the two nothing more than imagined distinctions. As with the intimate cases of partner violence, these core-periphery separations of power had to be justified in some kind of way, and paternalism has been a consistent theme all the way down this fractal of abuse.

Beginning with Usme and working our way back, we can see just what that has actually meant.

As a peripheral district of the federal capital itself, the history of Usme is a bit unusual in how directly it is tied to both municipal and national politics. For the geography of political management within Colombia, one thing that the history of Usme illustrates is that the maintenance of cities themselves, Bogotá in particular, has been a central feature in establishing national sovereignty in an otherwise frequently contested land. When Usme was annexed in 1954 along with six other municipalities, it was more than a question of local urban management. At stake was the creation of the largest city in the nation, a capital district without equal, one whose exceptional status could allow it to continue to serve as the seat of control in Colombia’s ongoing nation-building project. Considering that this was accomplished at the tail end of the massive shock that was the \textit{Bogotazo} and \textit{La Violencia}, doing so was no trivial matter. Yet despite the

\textsuperscript{207} Most notably see Galeano (1971). The term primitive accumulation is a Marxian term referring to the initial creations of capital ownership, the separation of control over the means of production. As Marx asserted, and Galeano illustrated in the Latin American context, “if money, according to Augier, ‘comes into the world with a congenital blood-stained cheek,’ capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt” (Marx, 1867 chapter 31).

\textsuperscript{208} For the geography of management of the hacienda systems, in particular with regard to coffee cultivation, see again the historical narratives of Palacios (1980) and Bushnell (1993).
importance of Usme at that juncture, it did not mean that residents of this municipality-cum-city district were treated any more as social equals. As the history of Usme outlined in the chapter ‘La Zona Quinta’ shows, what happened was more or less a continuation of the part exploitation, part neglect, part infantilization of its people. Again, much of this had been forged in the colonial era, what Fals Borda referred to as the ‘Catholic subversion,’ a reminder that conquest during the colonial era rested not just on seizing the institutions of state governance, but also on the pedagogy of and proselytization to the indigenous and rural poor. Considering the role that the Catholic Church played during this era, perhaps it is little surprise that a system of governance emerged that was predicated on the presumed intellectual and moral authority of those higher on the hierarchy of power. Given the Catholic origins of the very term ‘hierarchy,’ the doctrine of a ‘father’ above, and the institutionalized privileging of men with the Church itself, it takes little imagination to see how Catholicism played one role in establishing gendered regimes of power that continued through to the formation of the independent Colombian state. When that state became imagined as a national ‘family,’ the power within it and the obligations to protect and provide also took with them the notion of a paternal legitimacy.

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210 Despite the general truth of this, it is worth noting that, like all sweeping generalizations, there have been critical counter-examples to this. Chief among them are the strands of liberation theology that radically sought to reorient the fundamental theology of the Church, in Colombia most notably through Camilo Torres Restrepo’s efforts to reconcile revolutionary Marxism with Catholicism. Though not nearly as radical, sympathies like these even had a place under the priest who ran the main parish in Usme during the period of my fieldwork there.

211 The centrality of the family in the legal imagination of the Colombian state, as well as its role as a basic building block of that society, is evident even in the 1991 Constitution. Orders of protection given at the Comisarias de Familia themselves remind citizens of this, saying that, “One cannot forget that 5th and 42nd articles of the Constitution have defined the family as the basic institution and fundamental nucleus of society.” This broader tendency to imagine the nation as family (‘blood’) has received a great deal of attention across contexts, one notable example being Herzfeld’s (1993) consideration of what he calls ‘social theodicy.’ In his examination of blood as a metaphor for biological kinship, he also notably draws connections between blood and ‘masculine pursuits of violence.’
Far from a relic of the past, such symbolic roots continue to reach into the present in a multitude of ways. In perhaps the most banal sense this is seen in the limits of what participation in the political control of the district really means, limits that are most clearly displayed in encounters like the community meeting previously discussed in Chapter One. Such attitudes are demonstrated in other ways though, ones that despite their apparent usefulness still indicate the continued justification of unequal power through ‘benevolent’ exercises of authority.\(^{212}\) For instance, on one of my meandering walks with Sofía—the children’s foundation organizer discussed in the previous chapter—we passed an old hacienda house that had since been converted into a meeting space for campesinos in the community.\(^{213}\) As we passed by and I made a comment about how I found the reappropriation of space interesting, she told me with a wry smile about how that was the building that they used for educational workshops for farmers. Amused, she pointed out the irony that she saw in government representatives teaching farmers how to grow their crops or protect natural water supplies. As she saw it, it was campesinos who were fighting in the first place for the preservation of arable land and protection of the paramo that supplies their farms, and the rest of Bogotá, with fresh water.\(^{214}\) Fighting against the continuous encroachment of housing construction projects and the erosion produced by the

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\(^{212}\) Not all exercises of power have been so benevolent unfortunately, one of the most high-profile examples of this has been the case of the ‘falsos positivos’ (the ‘false positives’). The scandal involved members of the national military who killed residents from the poorer districts in Bogotá, clothed them in the uniforms of guerrillas, and brought their bodies to the countryside where they could be used in inflate the statistics of the number of combatants killed. In the context of an ongoing political conflict, one might argue that the actions at the heart of this scandal themselves constitute a state of exception to the normal paternalistic obligations of the state, even if the actions were initially made secret to the public. That they were committed at all indicates both an exception to the public rule of protection, one that was concurrently fulfilled by positioning military bases on the outskirts of Usme to prevent further incursions into the district, as well as the prejudices that shape who is most harmed when such states of exception are declared.

\(^{213}\) This community meeting space was far from unique, and from La Lira to Requilina, old haciendas in Usme have been preserved and converted into meeting spaces or community centers like a state-run art space for children.

\(^{214}\) A ‘paramo’ is a high-altitude moorland. A particularly interesting read on the history of the Paramo de Sumapaz that surrounds Usme is *El Gran Misterio del Páramo de Córcega* by Luis Antonio Guzmán Celis (2003).
quarries dug to provide the raw materials for them, it was her belief that the campesinos
themselves should be the ones teaching the government representatives about the ‘real’ farming
issues in Usme, not the other way around. Instead, educating people about a vocation that they
have long held displays a striking presumption of superiority in knowledge, even if that has since
changed from the religious bases of the colonial era to the techno-scientific rationales of
contemporary agriculture. The very act of teaching fits only too well into the self-prescribed role
of inculcating and providing for one’s dependents, a responsibility incumbent upon any self-
fashioned paternalistic system. As Sofía pointed out, this is particularly noticeable when those
who are being educated already know a good deal about the issues facing their community and
have alternative proposals at the ready.

   To further add to the irony of the situation that Sofía illustrated, such programs are not
unlike what has constituted the long history of Colombia’s relationship with its neighbor to the
north, the United States of America. The main distinction between these experiences has been
that in these hemispheric relationships, it has been the Colombian people, and by extension its
government, that has typically been treated as the infantilized ‘other.’ The history of the US’s
presumed exceptionalism and general superiority is a long and storied one, and its emergence
and maintenance depended heavily upon its relationship with the Latin American states with
whom it shared its hemisphere. Since the founding of the United States, its political leaders
have traditionally adopted a downward gaze toward their immediate neighbors, best epitomized
by the words that John Quincy Adams wrote in his diary, at the age of 12, saying of Hispanics
that, “they are lazy, dirty, nasty and in short I can compare them to nothing but a parcel of hogs.”

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215 Two particularly comprehensive histories of this are Schoultz’s (1998) Beneath the United States and Loveman’s (2012) No Higher Law. Hunt’s (1987) Ideology and US Foreign Policy also contributes meaningfully to this understanding, including the racialized and gendered shaping that this took.
His views had scarcely changed by the time that he was Secretary of State, and when it came to recognizing the newly liberated Gran Colombia in 1820, he took again to his diary to declare that, “there is no community of interests between North and South America.” Whether or not this turned out to be true depends on our definition of a ‘community of interests,’ but either way the subsequent centuries were characterized by the intricate involvement of the US in Latin American politics, organized ostensibly around the principle of stewardship toward greater democracy in the region. As the self-fashioned guiding light of liberty and good governance in the hemisphere, by the end of the 19th century it was increasingly clear that the US had taken on this mission under the precept of the ‘white man’s burden,’ as educator to nations that were frequently portrayed as younger, racially inferior, and generally less capable in their self-determination. Even just a couple of cartoons from the period are enough to illustrate the overwhelmingly paternalistic tones that this outlook took:

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216 Both quotes from Schoultz (1998, p.1)

217 It is little wonder in light of these kinds of attitudes that one of the leaders of the new Gran Colombia, Simon Bolivar, was exceedingly wary of the possibility of a meddling and disproportionately powerful United States. Because of those fears he argued at the inception of the newly liberated South American states for regional cohesion in the face of such a prospect, going so far as to prophesize that “The United States seems destined by Providence to plague America with torments in the name of freedom” (Bolivar 1824, quoted from Holden and Zolov, 2010 p.18).
Figure 1. “School Begins.” Published in *Puck* January 25, 1899. In the front row are the Philippines, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, in the back a Native American sits in the corner and an African-American washes the windows.

Figure 2. “Wilson Teaches Latin America.” 1914 Political Cartoon in which President Wilson educates Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Mexico on the meanings of good governance.
If many in the United States saw their country as exceptional, and by that perspective a legitimate authority in the region, then they also rarely hesitated to invoke states of exception to that putatively benevolent guidance. Hemispheric sovereignty was staked not just under paternalistic pretenses but also on the employment of violence and its incumbent justifications.²¹⁸ For Colombians this become all too clear in the US-backed secession of Panama, when the ‘big stick’ portion of Theodore Roosevelt’s foreign policy was employed to ensure the realization of what he deemed to be an economically necessary project, the construction of the Panama Canal.²¹⁹,²²⁰

²¹⁸ Perhaps there is no greater example of the US’s pretensions to sovereignty in the hemisphere than the Monroe Doctrine. The doctrine, beginning in 1823, not only envisioned the hemisphere as a political block vis-à-vis Europe, but one in which the US was the self-declared supreme protector and authority. That it has been invoked from the Monroe to Roosevelt to Reagan presidencies is evidence of the longevity of this general policy of the US toward regional affairs. Though declared officially ‘dead’ by John Kerry in 2013 (Johnson, 2013), the contours etched by nearly two centuries of its existence continue to shape regional relations, even under the Obama administration (see Weisbrot, 2011).

²¹⁹ Others who have written about the canal have also noted how the construction of it was itself a project of demonstrating US superiority, particularly in the scientific expertise required to successfully carry out an endeavor of such scale (Greene, 2010). Personally obsessed with rugged masculinity himself, Roosevelt was keen to photo opportunities placing himself in the massive machinery used to dig the canal, and in doing so made it evident that the project was also one of staking a masculinized view of US superiority in the region. In this light perhaps we can make more sense of the portrayals of Latin America as an exotic and feminine ‘other’ during this period (see Hunt, 1987 or Greenberg, 2005), that even on the scales of international relations and national identity, gender is a relationally constructed concept.

²²⁰ The case of the Panama Canal is of course by no stretch an isolated or unusual event the history of US-Latin American relations. Though not an exhaustive list by any stretch, other notable examples might include: the Bidlack Treaty with Colombia (then New Granada) that in many ways preceded the intervention for construction of the canal, the Mexican War and the cessation of half of Mexico to the US in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the Bay of Pigs, Operation PBSUCCESS, Operation Condor, the Iran-Contra Affair, and Plan Colombia.
Figure 3. “The World’s Constable.” Published in *Judge* magazine 1905. In it Roosevelt is portrayed as a strong but benevolent policeman, a play on his earlier position as New York City police commissioner.

Figure 4. “The News Reaches Bogotá.” Published in the *New York Herald* 1903. Depicts Roosevelt’s response to the Colombian Senate’s rejection of the previous treaty offer.

Just as the logic of paternalistic governance ‘internal’ to Colombian affairs has continued into the contemporary era, US paternalism toward Colombia and the rest of Latin America has as well.\(^{221}\) Similarly, the US has also had to continue this program of hemispheric dominance under

\(^{221}\) See again Schoultz (1998) for a more thorough illustration of this.
the more ostensibly beneficial logics of providing: techno-scientific advice giving, material aid, and training of other forms. One example of this was the intervention of US scientific advisors—and later institutions such as the nascent USAID and those that would eventually merge into the World Bank—in reshaping the modes of production for coffee cultivation after the collapse of the hacienda system in Colombia during the post-Great Depression era. In collaboration with the Federación Nacional de Cafeteros (FNC, ‘The National Federation of Coffee Growers’), they succeeded in promoting mono-cropping of coffee and more capital-intensive practices such as fertilizer and pesticide use. Beside re-yoking coffee farmers to systems of international debt through the use of these tools, these projects have had the additional effect of reconsolidating much of the previously redistributed land into progressively larger operations, ones that could sustain such those new forms of cultivation. Beside coffee, cocaine has been one of the continued reasons for US interest in Colombia, and the waging of the ‘war on drugs’ has to a great extent been exported internationally. When absolutely necessary, it has even been

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222 Retracing the broader arcs of changes in land tenure and agricultural methods of coffee cultivation are the works of Safford and Palacios (2002) and Roseberry (1995), whereas Hough and Bair (2012) provide an overview of the role that US foreign policy played in this from the 1960’s onward. For further illustration of this intricate involvement, particularly illuminating moments are: Kennedy’s (1962) address to the Organization of American States in which he argued that the stability of coffee prices needed to become a major focus for regional development, the involvement of the US Department of Agriculture in developing technical guidance for this (1968), the eventual reflection of these changes in official publications by the FNC promoting these practices for coffee growers in Colombia (FNC, 1979), and eventually the involvement of the World Bank to leverage more durable institutional changes to promote this kind of agriculture (Thomas, 1985). Peculiarly, given this history, it is also interesting to note that just under twenty years later, the World Bank began turning to coffee cultivation in Colombia explicitly as a model for building ‘peace’ through political economic intervention (World Bank, 2003).

223 When the hacienda system collapsed initially, as discussed previously in Chapter One, it was in part the ability of resident farmers to cultivate multiple crops that allowed them to survive prolonged strikes and leverage the collapse of those institutions. The change to mono-cropping, far from a mere technical distinction, is of great importance to the vulnerability of coffee farmers during periods of global price instability, and a transition therefore with surprisingly deep historical roots.

224 Admittedly, in light of the accumulated failures of this approach, the discourse on the means to address illicit drug use has begun to change, and a wide variety of Latin American leaders and influential thinkers have played central roles in that process (see for instance the Global Commission on Drug Policy, 2011).
possible to validate direct military collaborations as states of exception to the sanctity of Colombian sovereignty, as was allegedly the case with the manhunt for Pablo Escobar.\textsuperscript{225}

On a more regular basis, contemporary US involvement in Colombia has been characterized by the provision of material support and military training. In the year 2000, the initiation of Plan Colombia to curb the exportation of drugs and the activity of militarized groups made Colombia the greatest recipient of US aid in the Western Hemisphere, second only to Israel more generally.\textsuperscript{226} Rather than dispatching its own clandestine operatives, the US has more typically engaged in training Latin American special forces, particularly Colombian ones, through an institution known as WHINSEC (Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation). Formerly known as the infamous ‘School of the Americas’ (SOA), in the first decades after its founding in 1946 it was repeatedly accused of teaching otherwise prohibited military tactics, ways of mounting ‘dirty’ counter-insurgency efforts against leftist guerrilla groups. How were those contradictions maintained? Mostly by exporting the training to liminal spaces of US governance. Founded originally at Fort Gulick in the Panama Canal Zone—a territory that simultaneously pertains to the US without being fully incorporated by it—the Canal Zone in this instance served as a sort of space of exception to normal codes of conduct. Just as Guantanamo Bay has more recently provided a space of exception for torture or detainment without \textit{habeas corpus}, so too did the Canal Zone with regard to military training. Outside the official borders, the Canal Zone provided the perfect space for US policy makers to attempt to

\textsuperscript{225} During the manhunt, operatives of the DEA and Joint Security Operations Command were allegedly dispatched with full operational license (Naylor, 2015).

\textsuperscript{226} Kirk (2003). Subsequent evaluation of the program has revealed that regardless of any changes in the total cultivated area for coca, the program has failed to limit the production of the coca crop in any way, but it has created a number of undesirable consequences in attempting to do so (see Steiner and Vallejo, 2010). Fumigation has caused health and economic problems in affected populations, the cultivation has simply become more widely distributed, dispersed amongst existing crops, and the presence of US agents has continued to foment anti-US sentiments. Most recently this manifested in the 2013 national strikes in Colombia in which farmers in Catatumbo initially protested the killing of their crops as a part of anti-coca cultivation programs.
contain the exceptions that they made, contradictions against what was otherwise the officially promoted project of fostering democracy and good governance in the region.227

‘Surrogate power’ and the undoing of hegemony-

What these histories of paternalism combine to tell us, from their logics of benevolent authority to the violent states of exception made to them, is that violence in Usme is not just the product of some exotic or in any way discrepant ethos. It pertains directly to the core justifications that have upheld governance at the municipal, national, and international scales of social relations. If not so easily ‘otherized’ though, what can we make of the uneven epidemiology of the more self-evident forms of violence, the more physical manifestations of it? In particular, where does the abuse of intimate partners in Usme really fit into this broader picture? Viewed from one direction, it helps to clarify the social positions that abusive partners in Usme occupy, the historical justifications for them, and therefore a starting point to understanding what the stakes are for them in the abuse that they commit. While partner violence is often discussed in terms of the control exercised within an intimate relationship, what other research (and to some extent common sense) shows is that those who commit the abuse often relate it to their very lack of control in other aspects of their life; that it is when they feel most out of control, the most belittled, that they become the most violent in the few situations in which

227 Anthropologist Leslie Gill (2004) has written most extensively on the history of the School of the Americas, from its formation to its teaching methods and the effects that it has had on target countries. Through her analysis she has shown that the indoctrination of students at the School of the Americas in many ways reflects what is actually mainstream US policy, such as the promotion of consumer societies and the exportation of the ‘war on drugs.’ What is ‘aberrant’ from those mainstream policies are primarily the actual military tactics that have been taught or otherwise promoted, inclusive of but not limited to torture, disappearance, and other forms of violent repression. As such, the SOA stands as an intriguing example of how the US was able to partially transfer culpability for war crimes in the hemisphere to the domestic governments of the countries in which they were committed, and in doing so partially preserve the appearance of benevolence in its continued project for regional hegemony.
they still can exercise control. This is to say that paternalistic legitimations of power can be damaging not just because they seek to justify the superiority of some, but because they seek to naturalize the inferiority of the rest. In light of this, some of the most promising programs globally to address partner violence are those that directly address these broader experiences of power and powerlessness, programs such as those in South Africa and New Zealand that directly work through experiences of apartheid and colonialism. None of this is intended to advance a facile appreciation of partner violence in Usme whereby the ‘real’ culprits for it are those who wield power on a hemispheric scale, nor is it an attempt to find some compromise on a continuum of culpability between the agency of social actors and the putative structures in which they live. Adjudicating that particular kind of blame is simply not as important when the potential to engage exists, and the purpose here is to begin to do so by first seeing the resonance of core social logics like paternalism up and down the scales of human relations of control.

Doing so instead offers a space to appreciate the precarious and paradoxical situations that many abusive partners in Usme inhabit: using those frameworks to justify, at the very least

228 Faludi (2000, p.9) captures this sentiment best of all, based on her observation in batterers’ groups, she comments that, “there was almost something absurd about these men struggling, week after week, to recognize themselves as dominators when they were so clearly dominated, done in by the world. ‘That wheel is misnamed,’ a laid-off engineer ruefully told the counselors. ‘It should be called the powerlessness and out-of-control wheel.’ The men had probably felt in control when they beat their wives, but their everyday experience was of being controlled—a feeling they had no way of expressing because to reveal it was less than masculine, would make each of them, in fact, ‘no man at all.’”

229 Some of the most exciting interventions for partner violence globally are those that directly address experiences of racism or colonialism, such as the Men as Partners program in South Africa that deals directly with apartheid and the work of Sharon Spencer, a Maori woman who has built a curriculum in New Zealand that directly addresses colonialism and its cumulative toll (both programs cited in Greig, 2007). This view also concords with the observations of Colombian scholar Gauta (2011) in relating partner violence on the altiplano of Colombia to experiences of colonialism, as well as work conducted in the United States within Native American groups that have developed frameworks built around the concept of ‘historical unresolved grief’ (Brave Heart and DeBruyn, 1998; see also Shkilnyk, 1985 for an ethnographic illustration of a similar context).

230 Taking such a view is perhaps the most disrespectful stance possible considering that it effectively denies the existence of any creative potential for those who inhabit such social positions.

231 Of course doing so also does not write off the imperative of accountability, that those who commit abuse against their partners are accountable to that violence and to the people upon whom they have inflicted harm.
to themselves, their exercises of power over their intimate partners at the same time that they are also marginalized and exploited under them. There is a profound tension here, one that can be productive of a great many different ends. While one of them is the instigation of abuse against their partners, there is reason to believe that another consequence is a relative stabilization of how some abusive partners criticize these other political or economic systems of power. As such it is a question of hegemony in the Gramscian sense—the maintenance of power by cultivating justifications into which the subaltern can at least partially invest themselves—but not just at the smaller scale of abusive partner relationships.\footnote{This basic insight is something that finds echoes throughout a number of theories, albeit under a different set of names. Under Gramsci’s (1992) original formulation, hegemony was maintained, if not ever fully achieved, by manufacturing the ‘spontaneous consent’ amongst some of the subaltern, a view that has its roots in Marx’s (1867) notion of ‘false consciousness.’ That is to say that relations of power cannot be maintained only through coercive means but also require the elaboration of a set of ideologies that people can buy into and thus support the system of relations as the natural order of things. The major contribution of Arendt’s (1970) On Violence was to propose that power did not require the instrumentalized force of violence because true power was dominance that did not require ‘violent’ maintenance. What Arendt was proposing though, was basically the same notion as Gramsci, only trading the term ‘hegemony’ for ‘power’ and therefore showing that overt violence by state systems reflected a loss of power and legitimacy. Later, Bourdieu (1977) would offer a similar set of insights in his theory of ‘symbolic violence,’ which referred to the many ways by which unequal relations of power were made to appear routine and even natural. The Comaroffs (1991), in their revisitation of Gramsci’s original texts, made more explicit the difference between ‘hegemony’ and ‘ideology.’ In their dissection, the former referred to ideas that were made so ‘natural’ so as to remain uncontested, whereas the latter referred to ideas that had once again become critically examined. While each of these theories uses slightly different terminologies and leaves room open for theorizing the bases of social contestation in slightly different ways, they are all fundamentally similar ideas that are based in a notion of collective consciousness and unconsciousness where the more unconscious the logics of power remain, the more stable that system of power. Of further note is the influential theory of R. W. Connell regarding ‘hegemonic masculinities’ (2005) that directly ties this lineage of Gramscian origins to understanding power in gender relations, as referenced earlier in this chapter.} Even the most meager allowances for this kind of hegemony, such as Scott’s critique of this lineage of ideas, allows for two possible instances in which power can be maintained through the crafting of such ideologies: first, when people are denied any possibility for social interaction with one another, and second when there exists the possibility of future advancement within that unequal system.\footnote{The more over-determining theories to which Scott was responding are those that are either rooted in a very orthodox Marxism based on the one-sided manufacturing of ‘false consciousness’ or some of Marx’s and Gramsci’s subsequent interlocutors such as Althusser’s (1971) notion of ‘Ideological State Apparatuses,’ both of which left almost no room for conceiving of social contestation. While Scott has convincingly argued against the most extreme versions of these theories, it is worth noting that his critiques should not be understood as rigorous refutations of the}
What the interpretation of partner violence presented here allows for is a third possibility: surrogacy. This means that these kinds of ideologies can be effective—they can strengthen hegemonic positions—when some of the people subjugated under them can co-opt them, using them to their own advantage in other aspects of their lives. This has nothing to do with delayed gratification, of holding out hope for future advancement within a given system, nor does it depend on social isolation. What it means is that when perpetrators of partner violence, those who live on the margins of social orders, use paternalistic pretenses to justify their intimate abuse, they invest themselves in a core social logic of power played out on a grand scale. By doing so they may hinder their capacity for more fundamental critiques of those systems in which they themselves are also subordinated. Through each daily exercise of intimate violence, perpetrators of abuse like Diego and Andrés find themselves more intricately entwined in these systems of paternalistic hegemony, surrogates within broader arrangements of power. But surrogacy does not imply passivity, rote mimesis of abuse. Surrogacy by contrast is an active role, and in performing these arrangements, perpetrators of intimate violence like Diego and Andrés experience first-hand the paradoxes inherent to the positions that they have also tried to

Theories of Gramsci, Arendt, Bourdieu, or others. With regard to Gramsci in particular, it appears that Scott has grossly misread his notion of the idea. Though in *Weapons of the Weak* Scott (1987) acknowledges that his critique may be more directly applicable to later works such as Althusser’s, this nuance is absent from *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (Scott, 1990), which represents his major theoretical intervention. Scott appears to have misread Gramsci in two critical ways. First, Gramsci’s notion of theory was that it must always be historically located in a particular moment and must be accountable to that context alone (see Hall, 1986). In this sense, theory to Gramsci was not a search for transcendental truth but rather a means to abstract and understand particular moments in human experience. As such, his notion of hegemony was not meant to apply to slavery, feudalism, or any other political economic system than capitalism and the struggle against it. Nevertheless, these other systems are some of the core bases of Scott’s criticism. Given this misreading, it is less surprising that Scott actually unintentionally endorses a Gramscian view of hegemony when he outlines the conditions for a ‘paper thin hegemony.’ In this situation, Scott argues that hegemony could only be achieved in the extremely rare circumstances where communication between subjugated people is not possible or in a situation where one had the ability to advance enough in the system so as to justify buying into it. What Scott has missed is that the myth of social advancement and of opportunity is one of the foundational myths of a capitalist system, the situation in which Gramsci developed his theory. Second, Gramsci argued that hegemony was always a struggle and not the kind of fait accompli that would preclude contestation. This sensibility about the degree of colonizing consciousness largely renders moot Scott’s questioning of how such a theory could allow for social change.
create. It is in the uncertainties inherent to these webs that they have attempted to spin, and their confrontation with some of their consequences, that their potential also for creative transformation may be found.

Notably absent from my conversations with Diego and Andrés, indeed any other perpetrator of abuse that let me into his life, were the kinds of incisive criticisms that had become the common substance of my discussions with people like Luz Elena and Sofía, whose stories of resistance were discussed in the previous chapter. Even after the extensive hours of our interviews, after Diego had allowed me into his home, taken me to his place of work, shown me around his community, when I prompted him more directly and asked him about what ideas like ‘injustice’ meant to him, the responses that he gave were still considerably constrained. In them he would talk about situations in which he had been given good advice and had not followed it; he would turn back to stories he had told me about the times when he had been treated disrespectfully at work or in some other way had not been properly valued. The views that Andrés shared were remarkably similar. He too would focus on the treatment his bosses gave him when he was a child laboring in the brickworks in Usme, the verbal abuse and general disrespect that they would show him and his friends, the unfair and frankly criminally low pay that they would give them. Even in spite of a near-fatal workplace accident that he had sustained, Andrés adamantly maintained that his treatment as an adult had been far better and that he felt properly cared for in his current employment, his minimum wage and long hours not withstanding. Displays of disrespect and low wages, this was about as far as any abusive partner that I knew went in speaking about what was unfair in their lives.234

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234 Perhaps the furthest that anyone person went was when Diego and I spoke about his hopes for his own future. Working as a driver in the public transportation system for Bogotá, he was at the time driving the smallest kind of bus available and as such making the lowest wage possible for his position. When I asked him if he wanted to work his way up the ladder, move up to positions with better salaries, he told me that the difficulties of the job had him
Unlike the critiques by Luz and Sofia, these complaints were thoroughly lodged within the logics of those economies, they did little to rethink them. The problem it seemed was not that their bosses had institutionalized power over them, the problems arose only when that power was abused in some way, either through verbal offenses or unfair pay. By contrast, what Sofia and Luz spoke of was the iniquity of the concentration of power in the first place, and they repudiated the fundamental bases of those arrangements through both their explicit philosophies as well as their everyday praxes of self-protection. Just as Sofia vowed to never again ‘enslave herself,’ Luz made certain through the diversification of her resources that no one person could ever hold determination over her fate. This difference in word and practice from Luz and Sofia to Diego and Andrés is a significant one. Even though early iterations of social contest are often articulated within the logics of those existing systems, at some point viable alternatives do need to be proposed. Without them, any lasting or fundamental change would seem to be unlikely.

It is in this aspect in particular in which men who abused their partners seemed particularly limited. Through their capitulation to paternalistic justifications, used to privilege themselves vis-à-vis their intimate partners, they significantly constrained their imaginations for a more broadly different world. Straightforward criticisms of inequity—confined to discontent over low wages or verbal belittlement in the workplace—is not the grounds on which more drastic social change is built, and it is in this respect that those who had been most multiply marginalized, such as Luz and Sofia, showed the greatest creative potential. Their critical

fed up and that what he really wanted was to stick it out long enough to save up and start his own little neighborhood store, to just be his own boss even if it meant a meager income.

235 As justification for this, Scott rightly offers the example of the Russian revolution in which early articulations of dissent against the Tsar were not made on Marxist grounds, but rather that the Tsar was failing in his own self-prescribed duties. Early on it was not that the premise of having a Tsar was faulty, but rather that the Tsar that they had at the time was a bad at being one. While this is certainly a reasonable argument, it does miss the fact that at some point fundamentally different alternatives do need to be proposed, and that those who lodge those early criticisms may not be the best equipped to have developed them.
imaginations, the alternatives that they proposed, were born out of the crucibles in which they had lived, forged in the urgent practice of self-preservation against the overlapping regimes of power that they had learned to simultaneously contest.\(^{236}\) It is not simply that Luz and Sofía were marginalized along a number of dimensions of power, so too were Diego and Andrés. It was by not co-opting those ideologies into a means of violent control in their intimate relationships that they avoided surrogacy to social logics like paternalism. In doing so they left themselves open to cultivating both the insights and practical knowledge of how to effectively evade and even undo these abusive systems.\(^{237}\) They did not just avoid the material ‘enslavement’ by others, as Sofía put it, they avoided the ‘enslavement’ of their minds. Through their everyday practices they made real a set of vital refutations against these violent forms of domination, lit beacons in the fog for others to follow away from the mutually abusive logics that uphold them. But lead away whom? In the most unlikely sense, that could actually include the perpetrators of partner violence themselves.

The supposed strengths of a given system of power can also be its greatest weaknesses, in fact it might be because of their very importance that they are such vital points of vulnerability. For paternalistic hegemonies this means perpetrators of abuse like Diego and Andrés, those who occupy considerably unstable nexuses of power and experience first hand the contradictions that exist at the overlaps between these regimes. Just as their violence against their partners had

\(^{236}\) It is in this respect that Luz and Sofía also both illustrated most clearly the potential meaning of the term ‘third forces’ in the Latin American development of Marxist-Feminism. It is why experiences of suffering are so vital under this concept for social actors to be able to coalesce broad and diverse coalitions in the interest of change.

\(^{237}\) That includes over their children. In a number of instances I witnessed the survivors of intimate abuse articulate surprisingly similar views on authority, the logics under which they were themselves victimized, with regard to the violence they had committed against their children, actions that had required the attention of the Comisarias de Familia for redress. It is also because of instances like these that the creation of ‘hierarchies of suffering’ is such a potentially dangerous game to play, by doing so we run the risk of disregarding the vulnerability and violence committed against victims of partner violence in light of the abuse that they in turn may have committed against their own children. It is a game that no one wins and one that ironically recapitulates the logics that man abusive men mobilize to justify the abuse of their partners in the first place.
progressively woven them more deeply into these arrangements, given them active roles in their maintenance and invested them with surrogate power through their performance, so too could their very experiences from those positions propel them to turn against those legitimizations entirely. The men who elected to open up to me about the abuse that they had committed did so for a reason. In large part it was because, faced finally with the full force of the negative consequences of their actions, their ambivalences over the basic precepts on which they had built their lives had deepened considerably. Faced with crisis, they chose to seek a space in which they could reflect on those underlying assumptions. By calling critical attention at such moments to these basic justifications of power, and providing opportunities for abusive men to realize new forms of self-appreciation and respect, it may even be possible for men like Diego and Andrés to become the most unlikely of accomplices in projects to rework our social worlds. Doing so will only be possible though by working directly through the justifications that they make for their violence, not reflexively dismissing them instead.
“Ya es anunciado una batalla
Como todos los días
Solo hambre, guerras, muertes
Que acaban con la vida
Como en busca de poder
El hombre se auto-destruía
Como se acaba el mundo
Entran visión y avaricia”
-Alma de Negro ‘Profecías’²³⁸

²³⁸ Excerpt from ‘Profecías’ (‘Prophecies’) by Alma de Negro that translates as: “A battle is announced / Like every day / Just hunger, wars, death / That end life / As in the search for power / Man self-destructed / As the world ends / Enter vision and avarice.”
There was a dead dog in the road. Right there, a few months back, lying motionless in the median of the main boulevard in Usme. Dead, just dead. And I never did learn why.

All I knew is that it lay there for the better part of the day, from when I got to the Comisaría early in the morning until sometime late in the afternoon when I passed by that spot again. By then it was gone, vanished like nothing strange had ever happened, wiped away amidst the perpetual motion of the community around it. To be fair it was about the most exciting thing that I had ever seen on that stretch of road. Never before had it been anything other than the bustle of open shops, old men sitting down to ‘tintos’ and bread rolls pulled fresh from the oven. But why had there been a dead dog in the road? Of course chances were that it was nothing more than someone’s dead pet that had met its inevitable end, or a street dog that had died and been moved to the concrete island of that avenue, one way or another ending up where the rest of the neighborhood’s refuse got thrown. But then again it had been right in front of the Comisaria, no more than fifty meters from its front door. Was it collateral damage? A casualty caught up in an intimate war, a bizarre instrument of intimidation against someone who might come to place a complaint? It all seemed far-fetched but for some reason the coincidence of it, and the uncertainty that it brought, kept nagging me, buried like an irritating grain of sand in some recess of my mind. And today in particular, as our packed bus wheezes and struggles past that spot on the hill, I find myself fixating on it again. That uncertainty. Just something else now miring my thoughts as we make our final climb. Only today I can’t afford it, today I visit Diego in his home for the very first time.

Isolation and machismo, two of the three main kernels out of which most of my conversations on partner violence in Usme arose. The third was jealousy. It too was everywhere,
from the incessant phone calls to partners, checking on where they were at all times, to the obsessive paranoia about infidelity. But what is jealousy and from whence does it come? Unlike envy, the desire for the things that others have, we might say that jealousy is the fear of losing those things in our lives that we think we possess. Possession though is a troubling concept, particularly where human relationships are concerned, so rather than seeing possession as ownership, perhaps it would be better to think of it here as a kind of straining, a perpetual reaching for control. That is to say that possession, like power of any kind, is never a state of being so much as a continuous struggle, an effort for an ever-elusive *fait accompli*. Frequently it is a desperate effort as well. For most of the perpetrators of abuse that I came to know, that desperation was a hallmark of their violence, and while its urgency and necessity were its most telling features, they were also usually the most obscured. Such acts of obscuring can happen for any number of reasons, what matters most is striving to appreciate as nearly as possible the totality of what is at stake for perpetrators in doing so. That requires a deep engagement with the lives and experiences of abusive men, and with those that I knew, that kind of engagement consistently pointed in one direction: behind every act of control was an equal measure of dependence, and that dependence was not something that was easily admitted.

The purpose of this chapter will be to explore this contradiction—the connection of control and dependence—and to do so primarily from the perspectives of those who are committing the abuse, in particular two men, Diego and Jairo. Introduced in the previous chapter as the man who stalked his partner all the way to her prenatal care clinic, Diego was the first perpetrator of abuse to speak openly with me about himself and, after we finished our series of interviews, he also became the first to invite me into other parts of his everyday life. It was a kind of relationship that I would similarly repeat with Jairo, and although he too had abused his
partner, Jairo took a markedly different trajectory in the extended aftermath of receiving his order of protection. Engaging them affords us the opportunity to see through the windows that they opened to their lives, begin to appreciate their worldviews, their fixations, their obsessions, their awareness of their situations; how they created, experienced, and dealt with this tension of dependence and control, how they evolved in the aftermaths of their crises of power. To entertain their stories is to critically consider what is consciousness in the face of intimate violence.

On Desperation and Disconnection- Diego

I get to his front door and scarcely have an opportunity to knock before he has opened it and invited me in. Coming in from the late morning sun, the kind that weighs down heavily with palpable force, his living room is dark, still cool like the dew that started this day. As my eyes and skin adjust, Diego steps around excitedly, telling me where to put my bag, asking if I want to take a seat, introducing me to Luisa, his partner, and her daughter Diana. Luisa pokes her head out through the narrow door of their galley kitchen and greets me with reservation, Diana hiding but smiling at me from behind her mother’s leg. I walk over and thank her for having me in her home; she nods and gives me a calculated smile, then turns back and focuses intently on the arepas frying on the stove. Diego now wastes no time in showing me around their house, the rooms on their first floor and various home improvement projects that he has underway. I find myself eyeing instead a meticulously crafted model of a DNA spiral sitting on their table with Luisa’s name on it, wondering how she had made it so neatly and noting that by the date she must be still keeping up with her night classes. Soon he is leading me up the back steps of their narrow shotgun-like house to a partial second floor where a single bedroom sits, from the looks of it recently vacated and not yet put to other use.
As we continue up to the rooftop, Diego starts to fill me in on the story of the sub-letter who had stayed in that room for a brief stint. She was a friend of Luisa’s, one that she made at the refuge house when she originally left a few months back with the help of the Comisaría. Up on the terrace a translucent sheet of plastic shades us, protecting us from the sun and shielding the laundry hung up around us from the inevitable rain that invades life in Bogotá. Amongst the drying clothes and odd tools lying about, Diego gazes off above the surrounding rooftops into the resplendent hills, squinting into the sharp rays that the landfill retches back our way. His face is calm, relaxed in a way that I actually had never seen before, devoid now of the nervous energy I had come to associated with him. Here he seems composed, and with a sigh he begins again into the story about their sub-letter, Luisa’s friend.

“She wouldn’t do anything, que pereza, so lazy,” he tells me.

When I ask him what he means, he tells me about how she had moved in with her two small children for several weeks after leaving the refuge house, emphasizing to me his willingness to let her stay in their home. The one condition that he put, he explains, was that she could not at any time have her ex-partner come over to the house. He did not want any ‘drama’ with a man that sounded to him to be particularly mean. Once she was there, their cohabitation sounded more like mutual neglect, each keeping to themselves, always using shared spaces like the kitchen at different times.

“She would not get out of bed until 11 in the morning, when were her kids going to eat? How could she let them starve like that? And when she did cook she would let her food spoil, leaving it out on the stove, not even bothering to reheat it everyday to preserve it.’’

I realize that what I hear as something akin to depression, Diego saw as simple laziness, a sort of ineptitude at life in the face of what he presented as his own industrious nature. When I
ask him about this, if perhaps all of this was because she was depressed in the wake of
everything that had recently happened to her, he gives only a small shrug and lets the
conversation go with an air of indifference. Still peering off at the hills, he finishes his story by
telling me that after she did call her ex-partner and he came to the house, a violent and mean
guy he repeats, he was forced to have her leave. After helping her move her few belongings to
her brother’s house, he lost track of what happened to her and had little interest in finding out.

We check the hour and realize that we are almost running late, given the unpredictability
of traffic we have to leave early otherwise he faces a heavy fine. Making our way out he grabs
his work jacket and, after saying goodbye to Luisa and Diana, we’re off at a quick clip.

“I like your home, it’s good to see that you’ve been able to start those projects you were
telling me about” I offer.

He goes on to explain that he is building on it slowly, arranging what he can and saving
to add another floor on top, slowly building their home as everyone else in Usme does, story by
story. While he seems proud of being able to do so again, thanks to his new job as a bus driver
he is no longer behind on things like utility payments, he does lament how thin the walls are
between houses. It seems to him to be the one irreparable part of his home.

“Everyone can hear everything that goes on, they’re like paper. We don’t have any
privacy,” he complains.

Suddenly his consternation is interrupted and his gaze shifts to the community church
that we are passing. He tells me that only a few days ago a young man was killed outside of
there, but when he sees my surprise (I had not yet heard the news) he adds that I shouldn’t be
worried, that the really dangerous part of the neighborhood is further down the hill toward the
river. As we wait for and pick up the bus, he changes the subject to an earlier conversation of
ours, the travails of his job and the many ways that his superiors could dock his pay. While we jostle down the narrows streets, gears grinding as we wind our way to the Avenidad Boyacá, Diego enumerates all of the ways that he can be punished at his job: if he arrives late at his final stop, if he detours from a traffic jam without clearance, if he looks at his cell phone, if he takes a drink of water, if he responds negatively to an irate passenger, the list goes on and each offense carries a potentially hefty dock from his pay. The sum total of it, he says, is that he has no desire to work his way up to driving larger buses or taking on managerial roles. Mostly he wants to keep his post long enough that he can pay off debts and possibly save up enough to open his own store in his neighborhood.

As Diego looks out the window, living for a moment this daydream, another group of passengers climbs up into the bus, one by one paying their fares. Then the mood changes. Just before the young man starts speaking, a strange quiet falls over the bus, as though each passenger has kept doing whatever they were doing before, only now a little more intently. He begins his speech benignly enough—he is in between jobs but believes in God above, so instead of turning to crime he goes on buses and hopes for whatever little money people can spare. No one responds, no hands go outstretched. His voice dips lower, everyone else gets a little more intent on doing nothing. He says that before he was working in the family business, but now his father is in jail, that he hurt a man real bad, and while he says that he himself would never do the same, something in the way his voice cuts the air seems to intimate a different story. Hands start to go into pockets now, grasping for whatever change they might find, and just like that he leaves as quickly as he mounted the bus, barely waiting for it to stop. The strange little episode, another moment where you just aren’t entirely sure what is going on, what threat there is, if any, is over. Everyone goes back to actually doing nothing, Diego and I go back to chatting.
Eventually we get to where his company stows their vehicles, right up against the very limits on the west of the city. Unlike Usme where the transition to the countryside is gradual, where barrio fades into farm and farm into forest, here there are apartments and there are fields, beyond one there is only the other. No sooner do we walk past the rusted metal that encircles the lot that Diego spots a friend and co-worker of his and we’re drinking sodas, smoking a cigarette before his shift starts. They compare schedules, talk about who got the better routes, complain about traffic and how unruly passengers are getting, Diego asks him about how his ‘mujer’ and he are doing. The timer is running down though, we have to be off in less than ten minutes, so we bolt down the rest of our bottles and make the rounds over Diego’s vehicle, checking for any damage he might have to declare. Prep work done, Diego registered in the onboard system, we climb up, his friend and I picking the choicest seats in the empty bus. We lurch forward with a hearty belch of diesel, and as we pull out into the city I catch a glimpse through the rearview mirror of Diego behind the wheel. Eyes squinting against the sun but face slackened, he has donned the same calm that I had just seen earlier on the roof of his house, a kind of composure that until today would have seemed so unfamiliar.

Before Diego invited me into his home, before I met Luisa and could not just put a face to but also hear a voice behind the other side of the story, he and I met for an extended series of interviews at the local public library. In this somewhat neutral space, tucked away in an unused event hall, it was there that he first opened up our conversations by telling me about his odyssey to stalk Luisa, eventually finding her at the prenatal clinic where she had been receiving her care. From that very first moment, jealousy and his desperate fear of loss became, sometimes intentionally but most often not, the common thread that wove itself through all of his stories;
histories that he would gladly spend hours walking me through so that I might better understand his life. The purpose at the time though was not for Diego to have a space in which he might simply justify himself, narratively reassure himself of his violence against Luisa. We had discussed these meetings as providing a space for reflection—though emphatically not a psychotherapeutic process—and over time they became a place where he could tell his story as fully as possible, bringing forth and finding connections to his violence that he may not have previously seen. Such was one basis of his interest in speaking with me, and what was true then is also true now. It is never passive, listening to the stories of perpetrators of abuse for context, for how they too are complex persons formed through extensive lived experiences. There is always a purpose, and in this case it is not to apologize but to better understand where Diego’s jealousy came from, what drove it and what was at stake for him throughout his continued violence against Luisa. By doing so it just might be possible to uncover points of purchase, fulcrums for transformation in light of his experience and those of others.

Founded in fear-

Diego was not born in Bogotá, he grew up in a small town in the department outside of the city, Cundinamarca, the youngest son in a family that not only possessed their own land but were relatively well off compared to other members of their community. Though not wealthy,

239 As previously referenced in the Introduction, Theidon (2013) has argued convincingly on how it is impossible to maintain a ‘neutral’ position while engaging with experiences of violence. Speaking from her own experiences working on the legacies of the political conflicts in Perú and Colombia, she asks how it is possible to remain within a community, after the soldiers leave, if one tries to maintain a detached stance during moments of crisis. While her work relates more directly to militarized violence, her observations on neutrality remain relevant here for partner violence as well. One could similarly ask how it is possible to honestly engage survivors of abuse throughout the course of a research project if one has also engaged perpetrators of violence in an uncritical manner. This is not to imply that one must take an antagonistic stance towards perpetrators of partner violence, but if those encounters serve mostly as opportunities for self-affirmation and the continuation of justification, rather than opening a space for honest reflection, then what has really been accomplished? What has even really been learned in the process?
they did enjoy the security of growing both their own crops for subsistence and coffee for generating an income, a kind of system that put them squarely within the bounds of the post-hacienda era of coffee production. So they were not the hacendados of the bygone era, but with their possessions they were able to cultivate a stable situation and even a place of leadership amongst their peers. This early period of his life was one that Diego always spoke of with a bittersweet nostalgia, recalling how his father had become a de facto director of the coffee trade in the area, organizing other growers to collect the fruits of their labor to sell in larger quantities to the traders who would take those goods global. It meant that his father was often travelling or working off of the farm, a place that his mother and older siblings took charge of, but to Diego his father’s absence was more than compensated for by the times when he would return. Despite being one of the youngest of his siblings, he always felt as though he was his father’s favorite, and whenever his father would return from trips he always brought him a special gift, unique from the ones that he gave to his other children. On one occasion, Diego beamed to me, his father even told him that he was his favored son.

The joy that he showed recounting this to me was quickly tempered when he told me that, when he was seven years old, his father was killed. Unlike many Colombians who have lost loved ones at the hands of another, Diego’s father was killed by accident when a truck he was riding tipped over on a country road. Though others riding in the vehicle were only injured, his father was crushed and quickly succumbed to the damage done to him. The damage done to Diego however would not be so brief, and that his father’s death was an accident and not the result of some intentional harm did little to mitigate his grief. Even thirty-three years later, Diego immediately withdrew inward when recounting this to me; shoulders collapsed forward but eyes turned upward, it was the only moment that I ever saw him close to tears. In the wake of his
father’s death he found himself living in a family that seemed inhospitable, indifferent at the very least. It was his mother who carried on the family business in the aftermath, but as a woman in a male-dominated community she was denied the central and privileged position that her husband had attained. As their income suffered for it, Diego’s older siblings became even more important in their continued solvency, doing their best, together with their mother, to avoid selling off any assets that they owned. In these lean times, the scarcity that Diego recalled was more than material. Speculating that perhaps because of his father’s favoritism, following his death Diego felt that his relationships with the rest of his family were unusually frigid and strained. This apparently continued for some time. When we first met and I asked him how those relationships with his family currently were, he said that there was only one brother that he might call just to talk to, but the others, including his mother, would only ever contact him if they needed to borrow some money. And so this was the basic state of affairs that he remembered for the rest of his time in Cundinamarca: chores and school, some time with friends, but a considerable degree of loneliness in the presence of others. This was at least up until he had his first romantic relationship, a classmate of his in secondary school. For a brief moment his eyes brightened while telling me about her, a sense of excitement showing through in an otherwise muted part of his life, but again the joy instantly faded. Within a year of when they met, she died of cancer.

Her death triggered for Diego a vital juncture in his life, it was the moment that he decided to move to Bogotá.\footnote{Arguing against a life-stage form of analysis, Jennifer Johnson-Hanks (2002) has argued instead for an orientation to ‘vital conjunctures.’ Highlighting the fluidity and indeterminacy of important events, she argues for a focus on aspirations rather than the events themselves as a means of interpreting how personal trajectories change at particular moments, and how this helps us to understand the interconnection of the ‘personal’ with the ‘social’ in non-reductionist ways. This general orientation to analysis has already been evident in the earlier consideration of Luz Elena’s life in Chapter Two, focusing on particular moments such as the Bogotazo and her quitting one of her first jobs, always with attention to how relational constructs of gender were shaped in these moments or how her desires affected her evolving sense of self throughout these crucial experiences. Here with regard to Diego, again} Like many others, this was a gradual process of transition and not
a migration made all at once. Having quit his schooling early, both to support his family and to leave his town, his options were moderately limited. He was nevertheless able to find a position as an assistant in a grocery store, making sales and stocking shelves in a town just outside of the city. When he finally did make the final move to Bogotá, seeking better prospects for employment, what he found instead was a total shock. What he remembered most of all about arriving to city was the constant fear he felt: fear of being hit by a car, fear of getting robbed, fear of not being able to make it. Though he had since acclimated to life in Bogotá, learning to appreciate what it means to ‘no dar papaya,’ that sense of wariness toward any stranger, has never left him. And so when he arrived, though he found a modicum of connection through his new place of employment, again working in a grocery, he quickly found himself isolated from the rest of the world around him, a world that he found to be increasingly hostile. In this unfamiliar sea, his first life raft was his boss at the grocery, a middle-aged man that he still remembers fondly as a friend first and employer second. In learning to navigate this strange and new social terrain, his boss was a friendly provider of helpful advice, understanding whenever Diego requested any absence from work. According to Diego, he infrequently made these requests during the beginning of his time in Bogotá, but after he met his first partner Yesica, they became a more common occurrence in his life.

When I asked him what it was like for Yesica and him in the beginning, he sighed deeply and smiled, looked off somewhere beyond the corner of the room and into a buried recess of his mind. The tenor of his voice lifted and his muscles relaxed, relieved from the accumulated stress of retelling the loss of his father and its aftermath. In the beginning, he told me, everything was wonderful. I cringed inside. I had heard this trope too many times before from survivors of this approach proves useful, finding moments of great transition in his life and looking to how and why he mediated them in the ways that he did.
abuse, I had become only too familiar with where it typically led. What was most wonderful, he elaborated, was the affection they shared, the intimacy of their connection in a world where he otherwise perceived a threat in almost any other person that he encountered. When exactly his interest became fixation, when fixation became dependence was never entirely clear, but after knowing each other for about a year they found an apartment and moved in together. I asked him when their relationship began to change, when did they begin to have problems; his answer: when she began to get ‘restless.’ In a calm and measured voice, he told me about how he was working long hours at the grocery, trying to bring in as much money as he could to support the two of them in their new home. With his frequent absence, he began to worry that maybe she might become ‘bored,’ and with all the patience of a carefully reasoned conclusion, he told me that one day he decided that it might be best to ‘give her a baby.’

I was never able to ascertain what kind of level of coercion might have accompanied that decision of his, but what was clear was that Diego believed with no small measure of certainty that their having a child would help to keep them together. Read another way, it would help to keep him from losing her. During her pregnancy he began to ask for more small breaks off from work, a few hours here and there to go back home and bring Yesica food or anything else that she might need. After their son Eduardo was born, those visits continued but the reasons he gave for them were now to check on Eduardo and to make sure that Yesica was taking proper care of him. Their first major fight that he told me of was on one such occasion, he had come home in the middle of the day to find Eduardo alone in his crib, Yesica visiting a male neighbor of theirs in the building. Though he denied any kind of physical violence toward her, he made clear that it was after this encounter that his jealousy began to take full force, and from the sound of it his employment did not help. Rather than his obligations at work putting some limits on his keeping
tabs on her, it was actually his boss who would encourage and facilitate Diego making surprise mid-afternoon trips back home. Thus became a pattern of suspicion, stalking, and constantly devolving jealousy, a period that Diego alternately described as either motivated by fear of her infidelity or as justified under his paternal obligations to protect Eduardo from harm throughout it. Regardless of what the reality was in the beginning, if Yesica initially had other romantic relationships or not, their fighting became more frequent and likely continued to push her away to the point where, having followed her all the way to the North end of the city, Diego ultimately found her meeting with a boyfriend of hers. Even though he meticulously related this history of stalking her in great detail, what he presented as a sort of odyssey of victimhood in an attempt to discover the truth, he never admitted to physically harming her in any way. Devoid of other resources or histories at the Comisaría that might tell another story, I was never able to learn if that indeed was the truth. What did seem certain was that after that the two split up following that revelation, Yesica left him, took custody of their son Eduardo without needing any formal order of protection, and began living a life outside the sphere of Diego’s influence.

Losing Yesica from his life, as well as his son, was devastating to Diego. In the time that followed their separation, he began drinking more than usual and even left his job at the grocery to go back to Cundinamarca and live with his family. If Diego’s story is about intense and desperate jealousy, it is largely so because it is first and foremost about loss and isolation. And even though isolation is frequently an issue associated with victims of abuse, Diego’s experiences show that it can be every bit as relevant to perpetrators as well. What following the long arc of those experiences tells us is that these losses are not just elemental fixtures of

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241 Once while conducting fieldwork in the Comsaria de Familia, I was party to an audience that dealt with a particularly violent accused perpetrator. When I later expressed surprise that the survivor’s daughters had played active roles in facilitating that abuse, the psychologist who had conducted the interviews explained that the survivor had been accused of infidelity and, as she believed, in Colombia infidelity is often considered to a worse offense than partner violence.
childhood, ones carried into the present through memory and habit. They are losses that can propagate in chains, that isolation must always be contextualized because the question is isolation where and from whom, that it is not just a state of being but instead a perpetuating process of dislocation and disconnection. Violence always happens somewhere, and both the somewhere and the path to there matter. It would be too easy to point to his early losses of his father and his first girlfriend and link them abstractly to his obsessive preoccupation with Yesica’s fidelity, his attempts to control her as means to avoid experiencing the loss of another affectively important relationship. In between those points in time he had also migrated to an unfamiliar city in which everyday fears for safety and the learned lesson of ‘no dar papaya’ shaped his general avoidance of most others. Combined with his dislocation from the town where he grew up and most remaining family support, it is not difficult to see how Yesica became to him an uncommon human connection in what he saw as an otherwise hostile and lonely world. And so it was not just a primitive experience of loss but the chain of dislocations to which it contributed that informs us of what was at stake for Diego in his violence, what helps us to see it as the consequence of many junctures and their enduring influences.

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242 It is worth also noting some peculiar parallels between Diego’s experience, as presented here, and that of Carolina, who had survived two intensely violent relationships, whose story was discussed previously in Chapter 2 ‘Possible.’ First, both of their experiences of migrating to Bogotá were indirect ones, more protracted processes than sudden relocations to the city. Second, it was their move to Bogotá that contributed to their further social isolation. On the one hand this meant the geographical separation from family supports that were already tenuous at best, and in both cases this was even true with particular regard to their affective relationships with their mothers. On the other hand, in moving to the city, they both found themselves in a new and frightening environment, one in which their early internalizations of the imperative to ‘no dar papaya’ and experiences of gossiping neighbors left them unwary of others and only exacerbated their social disconnection. In Carolina’s case this was all further compounded by the purposive isolation that both of her partners sought to effect, but the parallels between hers and Diego’s stories are still non-trivial. What is remarkable is not just the similarities between them but the very obviously different consequences of them, in Diego’s case it was an important basis of what was at stake for him in committing partner violence, in Carolina’s it was crucial in understanding her vulnerability to it.

243 While Diego’s original experiences of loss were not intentional machinations, for many in Colombia they have been. For the millions of Colombians who have left their homes and ended up in districts like Usme, it has not been incidental loss so much as violent dispossession leading to dislocation. Even for those not directly affected by the political conflict, dislocation and loss too frequently are the violent consequences of human machinations. This was the case for Andrés who grew up in Usme, discussed in the previous chapter ‘Permissible,’ the person whose
It is also what helps us to begin to appreciate Diego’s violence as a reflection of his emotional dependence on his partners, in this case Yesica. The apparent paradox of it is that abusive relationships of chronic coercion are presumably about control, but what Diego illustrated is that they are every bit as much about the dependences that perpetrators have on those that they seek to dominate. For abusive partners this may be one of the more shameful secrets that they desperately seek to maintain. With regard to Diego, it is what helped me to understand why he always assumed an excessively calm and measured tone when telling me about arguments that he had with his partners. Related with paternalistic overtones that suggested that he knew best, carefully summarizing the reasons why he was right and they were wrong, these were stories in which Diego misdirected away from his own fears, vulnerabilities, and intimate dependence by fashioning himself to be a detached and rational benefactor instead. Understanding the intricacies of this contradiction though, how someone like Diego sought to navigate it, will require delving deeper into the nuance and evolution of his relationships.

Compared to his relationship with Yesica, one that I only ever learned of through Diego’s own recollection, it was through his relationship to his current partner, Luisa, that I came to appreciate this best.

‘El respeto se gana, no es exige’.’

Diego only ever met Luisa because he began to work for the public sewage system. It was dirty work, but work nonetheless, and having left his family a second time, returning to

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stepfather had dispossessed him of any sense of belonging or security within his home long before he ‘voluntarily’ left it at the age of eleven. If it is possible to see partner violence as itself a form of dispossession against those who survive it, then seeing these broader pictures can help to reframe it as one fixture within much longer chains of dispossession, ones that do not have their beginning and end within confined spaces like the ‘home.’

244 Written along a concrete wall just outside of Usme, translated it means: “respect is earned, not demanded.”
Bogotá, it was the only opportunity that he could find in order have an income. At first it was simple work, maintenance of tunnels around the city, but with his growing experience he was soon asked to take on more independent jobs. This new role would take him outside of the city again, only this time for short assignments between which he could come back to his home in Usme. It was on one such trip out to the Pacific coast city of Buenaventura that he met Luisa. With a bit of sheepish grin he told me about how they met in a bar, how he had almost been too shy to approach her, but with the days counting down on his assignment how he had found the urgency to go talk to her. Within only a couple of weeks not only was Diego returning to Bogotá, so too was Luisa and her seven-year-old daughter Diana, and that she would upend her life so quickly perhaps speaks to the uncertainty of her own situation at the time. As I would later learn from Diego, as well as their case file in the Comisaría de Familia, Luisa’s life in Buenaventura was not just a matter of making ends meet through sex work, she also ‘ran errands’ for some illegal groups and by the time that she left had begun to worry for Diana’s and her safety.

Whatever her precise motivations to leave Buenaventura and come to Usme with Diego, what Luisa found at the end of that journey was no safer than the situation that she had just left behind. Even by Diego’s recounting of the bare year that they had lived together, it was a general devolution of escalating fights, the details of which were difficult for me to elicit. Talking about the actual events of those conflicts were unquestionably the most belabored moments of our relationship, when Diego would transform from his usually eager storytelling and draw inward. Leaning forward with his eyes down, one knee nervously bouncing and arms clasped across his chest, he only reemerged when he began talking about their fights from a more detached position. Finding his voice by explaining to me the content of what they fought over, not how he did so, he was only able to reassume his calm fluidity when enumerating to me the reasons why
he had been right in whatever disagreement they had had. Inevitably these were explanations that betrayed the presumption that he knew best, that one way or another he could not always trust Luisa or her judgment. More than just superficial veneers though, thin façades for justifying or obscuring his violence, these expositions of his became his way of communicating to me his deepest fixations and, over time, even speak directly about the things in his life that gave him the greatest shame.

What he repeated the most to me was his preoccupation with what those around him saw and thought of him. For Diego the specter of gossip was both omnipresent and terrifying, and it showed itself in his anxieties over what Luisa did in public, how thin the walls of his house were, and the ignominy of having utilities companies post notices on his front door. With regard to the first fixation, one of the more common stories that he repeated to me was the frequent case where he would give several thousand pesos to Luisa and Diana for taking public transportation, only to find on their return that she had not spent it. What bothered him, he said, was not that she had not spent it, suggesting maybe that she was saving money somewhere that he did not know. What bothered him was that if she had not spent money on a bus it meant that she had probably found transportation by hitching a ride in the cabin of a commercial truck, one making its rounds

245 The role of gossip in partner violence here also bears a sort mirror-image reflection to the stories told by some survivors of abuse, not the least of which was Carolina whose isolation was further maintained by her fear of gossiping neighbors and friends. Gossip as a key preoccupation and limiting feature in the lives of survivors of abuse has been reflected in other research on intimate partner violence, for example Bhadra’s (2012) examination of partner abuse, self-silencing, and depression in a Punjabi community near Vancouver, British Columbia. This preoccupation with gossip on the part of perpetrators of abuse was also a feature that became familiar to me during my time working within the Comisarías de Familia, a consistent theme that emerged in the audiences that involved abusive men. Between the stories of Carolina and Diego, gossip is only the second main parallel, the other is the history of social isolation through migration to the city. In equal yet opposite ways, the isolation that they experienced—rooted in fear of others, mistrust of others for reasons such as gossip, geographic distance from family, among others—played into their respective experiences with partner violence. For Carolina it was a principle shaping of her vulnerability to it, for Diego it was a central feature in his stakes in committing it.
within the city. As he explained, his fear was based in the fact that she had previously made a
living through sex work, but it was not that he was afraid that she was continuing to make money
in that way so much as he was afraid that others might see her and think that was the case. It was
never evident who exactly those other people were, or how they might possibly know that Luisa
had previously been a sex worker, but what was clear was how salient this fear was to him in his
everyday life.

Equally present were his preoccupations with what others saw or otherwise perceived to
happen within their house. On the one hand this came through in his repetition to me about how
thin the walls of his house were, and especially in the row homes that predominate in his
community how easily it was for neighbors to hear what happened in each other’s homes. It was
a theme that he would bring up throughout our discussions of his and Luisa’s fights just as it was
his ready retort when I visited him and commented on his home improvement projects. Of all the
features of his home that he dreamt of repairing or renovating, this was the one that seemed most
resistant to his efforts. Less persistent but no less troublesome to Diego was his other
preoccupation, what he told me when one day I asked him directly what gave him the most
shame in his life. With a lengthy sigh he relaxed back into his seat and told me about how during
his previous period of unemployment he began to feel increasingly isolated again and would
resort to drinking alone in his house. Wasting the little money that he had left, he quickly found
himself behind on his bills and taking on debts that he was still paying back when we first met.
Further compounding these residual debts was the more recent loss of his job, his employment
with the sewage system, at a time where he was financially supporting not just himself but also
two others, Luisa and her daughter. The low point for Diego in all of this though was not just

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246 Finding transportation like this is not a totally uncommon means of getting around the city, and in my experience it was usually women and their young children that I saw riding in the passenger seats of such vehicles.
when he began getting harassing calls from a friend who had earlier lent him money, it was when the utilities began posting notices of the cessation of his services on his front door. His period of unemployment might have injured his self-respect, the resulting debts might have given him chronic anxieties, but it was the publicly visible notices that he said actually brought him shame.

It was in this context that ‘the fight’ happened, the big one after which Luisa went to the Comisaría, took out an order of protection against Diego, and fled to the refuge house. The fight took place during the period when his debts were continually mounting and happened when he came home one day and asked Luisa if she had some documents he had asked for her help in finding. As Diego told it, when he saw her in bed and she did not respond he asked her again, and when she barely responded the second time he became angry and a fight ensued. At some point, as Luisa became more vocal and began raising her voice, using his hand Diego covered her mouth to keep her from yelling. He admitted in hindsight that he could see how that would be a frightening experience for her, and considering that she was pregnant how that could be an especially dangerous thing for him to do. Even still, he maintained that it was something that he did not out of direct aggression to her but out of his fear that the neighbors would hear their commotion. To him it was less about the intent of harm and more about secrecy, that whatever transpired between them stayed within the boundaries of their home. Against this version of what happened that afternoon are Luisa’s words, as she formed them on the day she sought the order of protection, and they are worth quoting at length:

“The day before at 9pm I was in my house, where I live with my partner, when he came home and became infuriated because I had not found some documents of his. He started to say ‘where are the fucking papers’ he needed, he repeated it a

247 In other contexts it has been found that strangulation is one of the highest predictors of escalation to partner homicide (Campbell et al, 2007). While Diego was not strangling Luisa in the typical sense, the general feature of asphyxiation, intentional or not, certainly would seem to indicate that his physical violence toward her had escalated considerably and to a very dangerous degree.
number of times and when I did not answer him he began to treat me badly saying bastard, bitch, did mice eat my tongue or was something else keeping me from talking, and he grabbed my arms and twisted and put his fingers in my mouth to open it saying he would find where the papers were by hook or by crook. [Three days before] he also mistreated me, called me a fucking bastard and he tried to suffocate me.”

Luisa also noted in the many check boxes that followed that causes for Diego’s violence included poor communication, economic difficulties, and alcohol consumption. When asked if there was any kind of dependence in their relationship, her response was clear. For her part she felt no particular dependency toward him, but on Diego’s behalf there was, and off the side she wrote just one word to describe his: emotional.

Several things happened in the period immediately after when Luisa first went to the Comisaría. For one, she and her daughter Diana went to live in a refuge house for survivors of abuse, a place where they traded safety for the stringent rules that governed seeking shelter there. Soon thereafter Luisa returned to the Comisaría, this time with a lawyer from the refuge house in order to give a more extensive recounting of Diego’s violence and receive an official order of protection. In that meeting she expanded on what had happened that night, saying that after Diego calmed down, he lay down in bed with her, began touching her in a sexual way, and would not let her get up to leave. When he asked her in the morning to forgive him she told him ‘no’ and decided in that moment to go to the Comisaría. Though she stopped short of accusing him of penetrative rape, Luisa did go on to say that on other occasions he had twisted her arms and legs, even bit her face, called her names such as ‘bitch’ and ‘prostitute.’ Beyond acts of control these were also actions of degradation by Diego, ones that even included calling her the very thing that he feared other people around them might think: prostitute.

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248 Here I mean vaginal or anal penetrative rape. Though Luisa herself did not label Diego reaching his fingers into her mouth as penetrative rape, one could certainly say that by breaching the boundaries of the body, it could qualify as such.
If leaving Diego and speaking openly about what he had done was an act of rebellion by
Luisa against his control, for Diego it was a complete crisis, a confrontation with the unintended
consequences of his control over her. In seeking to contain her he had instead pushed her
away, he undid whatever pretenses he had made to have a position of power in their relationship.
Unemployed and again without the most important human connection he previously had, he fell
back harder on the same solution that he had found many times before, he drank even more.
Diego described this period before he once again became employed, this time as a bus driver for
the public transit system, as a period of loneliness more than anything else. There were a few
people with whom he might meet up and share a beer or two, a friend who lived in another
district or even occasionally a brother of his, but most of the time he found himself emptying
bottles of ‘Poker’ or ‘Club Colombia’ beer with nothing but his empty apartment around him. In
that silence his desperation only grew, detached from Luisa he either began hatching plans of
how to track her down or found himself paralyzed in his own ruminations and regret. As the
overdue bills continued to accumulate and more utilities notices shut him in, he would continue
to play over those last moments with Luisa, alternatively berating himself for crossing another
line or planning what to do differently should she ever return.

This was the juncture where I first met Diego and eventually entered into both of their
lives. Off and on over the course of two months, we met a half dozen times in public libraries,
often for hours on end tracing through the broad arcs of his life and the minute details of how he

249 It is worth noting also that it was not just the bare fact of her leaving him, but the very visible manner in which
she did so. If it was one thing for neighbors to see utilities companies post notices on his front door, it was another
for the Comisaria de Familia to show up in a truck and have his neighbor inform him of what was happening. This is
especially true given how careful Diego had been in trying to keep neighbors from even hearing any of their fights.
As will be explored further in Chapter 5, it also has to be noted that this is a powerful indicator of the kind of
presence that the Comisaria system has in intimate relationships and the kinds of new possibilities for survivors of
abuse that it helps to open. Bereft of alternatives, it is unlikely that partner violence could be its own undoing, as
discussed in previous chapters, and that the Comisaria system opens up new avenues of support for survivors is a
contribution that again cannot be underestimated.
experienced it. Even during this relatively short period of time, the first of several major transitions happened: Luisa moved back from the refuge house and into their home. Her move was nominally voluntary, after the incident at the pre-natal clinic Diego had not had any more contact with her or her daughter Diana, and the refuge house had not ejected them for breaking any rules or running out of available space. Her voluntariness has to be understood though in the context of living a highly regimented life at the refuge house, a place that even those who work in the Comisaría readily admit is hard to tolerate for extended periods of time. Once out of the shelter, Luisa was sufficiently estranged from her family so as not to fall back on their support, and also insufficiently prepared or connected to quickly find work. Edged out of these other possible paths, she returned ‘home’ to live with Diego, and for a time it seemed that the situation she returned to was not so hostile as before.

As Diego explained to me, his desperation at losing her and their unborn child was matched only by his relief at her return, and it appeared that from that relief followed a period of quiescence all too familiar in the cyclical patterns of partner violence. If fear and shame had previously played roles in his violence against Luisa, for the moment at least they instead put a thin lid over it. Diego also once again had a job, and with it a stable income with benefits, allowing him not just the opportunity to resume repaying his debts but also a window of opportunity to begin to mend his own self-regard. Within this window some new possibilities began to emerge. Soon after Luisa’s return, he began bringing up in our conversations her desire to go back and finish her secondary school studies, hopefully even receiving her diploma before their son was born. With tones that echoed his preoccupation those many years before about his partner Yesica being ‘restless’ in their home, Diego sounded hopeful about this possibility.\(^{250}\) He

\(^{250}\) On the one hand this seems optimistic, that compared to before when he was in this situation and thought that impregnating his partner was the solution to his dilemma, this time he directed his response to that tension in the
thought that perhaps getting her degree was the kind of thing to occupy her and give her some fulfillment, implicitly it seemed also making it less likely for her to leave again in the future. Even if I could hear Diego searching for ways to avoid repeating the recent rupture in his world, without first upending his entire understanding of what caused it, Luisa going back to school sounded like a positive step. At least, as other survivors of abuse I had met had said, education was something from which no one could later dispossess them, and I in turn also encouraged Diego to support her in her endeavor.

Whether or not my words carried any weight, Luisa did go back to school through an extension program just a few blocks from their house, and over the course of the spring finished all but the equivalent of her last year’s worth of studies. It was during these months that I first began visiting Diego in their home, taking tenuous first steps into that contentious arena, one of continued danger to Luisa, and incidentally began to build a connection directly with her. It surprised me how quickly she relaxed her defenses, even though I only visited every several weeks, by the second time she already began joking with Diego while I was around. Wagging a finger or shooting a glare, she would admonish him for offenses both past and potential. Once early on I asked Diego generically just ‘how things have been.’ Poking her head out from the next room, she quickly chimed in.

“Oh he knows he can never do anything like that again, if he even tries I’ll be out the door. I have a bag almost ready and everything” she winked vaguely at Diego.
“Oh, I know, you have it all planned out” Diego lobbed back, rolling his eyes. Laughing all the while, she retreated back into the other room.  

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direction of supporting Luisa in continuing her education. Of course, the counterfactual is impossible to answer: if Luisa had not already been pregnant at the time, would his response have been the same?

251 That Luisa was able to confront Diego critically about his abuse, within their home, and in the presence of an outsider, I took to be a significant marker. Even if she did so through the means of humor, which almost always relies on a fair share of truth, I took this to signify, at least however temporarily, the intervention of Luisa’s order of protection had been shifting the balance in their relationship.
Luisa was also at the time in the late stages of her pregnancy, and within a few short months of when I began visiting them, she gave birth to their son Luis. When I saw them in the days after they returned home from the hospital, Diego explained that the name was intentionally a derivation of Luisa, that he wanted him named after her even if he could not explain exactly why.\(^{252}\) It was the happiest I had ever seen either of them, Luisa beaming through her exhaustion, Diego regaling me through an interminable smile all the details of how quickly Luis was already growing and putting on weight. Whether beknownst to them at the time or not, in their delirium they were already passing through an inflection point in the diminution of Diego’s violence. Like the experiences of other survivors of abuse previously discussed, it was in the period following Luis’s birth that problems again began to appear on the horizon.

I caught the first intimations of this a few bare weeks later when I returned to visit them. Greeting me at the front door this time was a fully encumbered Diana, Luisa’s daughter, bent backward she seemed about to break under the weight of her infant brother. Beyond her I caught the sight of Diego waving me in, and as I stepped through the door I shot a quick “hello, how have you been” out somewhere into the dim living room beyond. Before my eyes could even acclimate, I heard Diego approaching me with an audible ‘ooooof!’ that told me I was about to hear a story retold in dramatic rendition. “Difficult,” he said. Just two days before he had come back to the house to find that Luisa had gone to the store nearby and Diana had carried Luis out into the alleyway of where they lived. “What if one of the neighbors saw her and called Family Welfare? What would they think of us as parents?” he asked. Clearly he was not worried about Diana carrying Luis, she was doing that the whole time that we spoke. What worried Diego was

\(^{252}\) While the names here are pseudonyms, their son’s name was in fact a derivation of Luisa’s real name, and the idea for that appeared to be Diego’s. That Diego was so eager to name their son after Luisa was interesting in and of itself, something that could have spoken to any number of feelings of guilt or desire for symbolic reparation.
that someone else might see her carrying him around, away from the house, and judge them as a result. In his worst-case scenario he envisioned this even instigating a series of events that would see him having his newborn son taken from his arms. “I came so close to hitting her,” he told me, only this time he was not referring to Diana. By ‘her’ he meant Luisa, for leaving the two children unattended and for permitting Diana to in some way, as he saw it, put them all at risk. On that particular occasion he had managed to step outside and calm himself, a strategy he had discovered in the preceding months, but his worry that he might not succeed the next time was plainly visible. As he paused, Luisa interjected, stepping fully into the living room and standing resolutely upright, facing both Diego and I simultaneously. What worried her most of all, she said, was that Diego might “return to his old ways [of physical violence],” but it was not until the next time that I visited their house that she elaborated more on what that fear actually meant to her. For the moment she too left her words hanging in the air and quickly we found ourselves talking more about Diana—how she was adjusting to having a little brother and coping with the loss of attention. As we chatted, the three of us sat down and settled into the sweetened coffee that Luisa had prepared us, steaming cups of instant Colombian honey, a gracious invitation against the drizzle that had begun outside. Nestled into our chairs, we never returned to the topic of abuse the rest of the afternoon.

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253 It bears noting that once again the perpetration of partner violence here, or in this case at least the imminent specter of it, is being rationalized by Diego as the an undesirable but necessary means of action in the interest of a child’s welfare. It harkens directly back to the consideration of paternalistic terms of justification explored in greater detail in the previous chapter.

254 In situations like this, my tendency was to follow the lead of survivors of violence like Luisa, to take their cues on where our conversations led, where or not we revisited topics relating to violence. My general approach was to ask questions that could be used as an invitation to revisit these topics, but could also be used to follow more banal lines of conversation. Most of all, my assumption was that survivors of abuse were the most adept at assessing the risks of raising these issues, at what times, in what company, and to follow their lead was to avoid unintentionally triggering dangerous situations for them. The downside to such an approach was that, by not provoking talking about such issues more frequently, that I was also implicitly contributing to the maintenance of silence regarding them.
Over the following month and a half, I lost touch almost entirely with Diego and Luisa when the phone number that I had for them became inactivated. I had been careful never to visit their house uninvited, but in desperation, my days in Usme nearly numbered, I found myself knocking at their front door unannounced. This time an unfamiliar face was on the other side, an elderly woman who peered back at me puzzled, confused I imagined as to what a gringo was doing outside of her door. Behind her Luisa appeared and exuberantly welcomed me in, introducing me to her mother and her sister who were visiting from out of the city. 255 No sooner had I made their acquaintance than Luisa was ushering us back to the room to check on Luis, and once with him in arms we started into small talk about life with their infant son. Repeatedly though we hit a wall, the shadow cast across it the question of just how ‘stressful’ it all had been recently, had Diego ‘gone back to his ways’ as Luisa had worried about before. Eventually her mother and sister moved into the kitchen to clean the dishes leftover from lunch, and with a hushed voice, and Luis still in her arms, Luisa began to speak a bit more freely. “He hit me again, twice, over the head the other day” she whispered as I nodded quietly, “I don’t know what to do, I know that he has been under a lot of pressure and there are things that I should have done to be more helpful…” she tapered off. Almost under my breath I told her that I do not think that anyone deserves to be treated that way, to which she looked down silently at Luis. “What do you hope can happen? What are you afraid of most?” I asked her. What she told me then spoke volumes about the complicated situation in which she remained, one that even in the close presence of her own family she felt she had to keep hidden just in order to maintain some minimal control over it. Her biggest desire, she replied, was simply that Diego stopped once and

255 One of the reasons why I tried to never arrive unannounced, beyond the more obvious issues of courtesy, was to avoid risking a scenario in which I would arrive when Diego was not home, possibly creating a scenario that would appear improper and, in doing so, could cause danger for Luisa. The only reason that I did not quickly excuse myself on this particular occasion, considering that Diego was not home at the time, was that Luisa’s mother and sister were present, and as such the risk for any sort of misunderstanding seemed very low.
for all. She did not want to lose him, she just wanted him to stop the violence. Her biggest fear was that she would report him to the Comisaría and they would take him away to jail, against her will. “I know that I have to report him, we have a meeting this next week and I know that I should report what he did. But I depend on him now more than ever” she told me. I asked her if she meant ‘dependence’ in the financial sense, now that Luis was born and they had new expenses to bear, but to my surprise she only dismissively agreed. More than anything else, she said, she depended on him emotionally now too.

Before Luisa could elaborate, we heard her mother and sister come in from the kitchen and suddenly her voice took on its normal pitch. Sitting down, we all continued with our pleasantries as Luisa rocked the baby back to sleep, Diego arriving just a short while later. Even with him home, we never revisited the topic of violence. With Luisa’s family still present, any chance of that seemed to be a foregone conclusion, and even had they not been there I am not sure that Luisa would have broached the subject again. As it stood, she was looking down the barrel of a momentous decision: to report or not to report Diego. A few days later, the day before that meeting, I left Bogotá.256

Coda-

How does one summarize the intricately complicated reality of an abusive relationship, is it possible or even fair to survivors to try? Given Luisa’s predicament at the time that I left the field, perhaps the only thing that can be said with some measure of certainty is that ‘fairness’ did

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256 One of the biggest ethical considerations in conducting this research was how to respond to disclosures of continued partner violence, not child abuse but violence between adult partners. As many partner violence organizations counsel, I followed the path of supportive listening and helping if desired, but avoiding at all costs acting on the impulse to push victims into any particular kind of action. Doing so carries the grave risk of recapitulating the actual dynamics of abuse that victims are already facing, of coercing rather than serving as accomplice to efforts of resistance.
not figure much into her situation. Her frustration at feeling that her options amounted to little more than a series of false dilemmas was palpable, one endured beneath the same weight that muted her voice. And yet to elude analysis would be a dereliction in duty. Moreover it would be entirely unhelpful, and ungrateful, in light of the way that both Diego and she opened their lives to me. Ultimately though I knew them both first and foremost through Diego, from his retracing of his own past to the details of how he carried on in his current life. What Diego reaffirmed to me, intentionally or not, is that chronic coercive partner violence is fundamentally a question of sovereignty, and that the search for that kind of control over another person is about if nothing else the desire for boundaries. For Diego this was centered on his home, it was reflected in his desire for thicker walls, for protection from prying eyes and ears, his preoccupation with gossip and what others might think of Luisa and, by proxy, of him. This creation of limits though goes beyond the bare necessity of creating a space over which one can preside; it extends also to the complicated feelings of shame and fear that are woven into that search for power, and how that search for power leads to the construction of violent fictions like ‘the home.’ Shame in particular has to do with being seen, especially being seen when one does not want to be, and it beckons the question of why someone would so ardently desire that kind of privacy and go to such violent lengths to defend it. What all was Diego really trying to hide? Examining this again takes us back to the most shameful secret about control. That is that control is really about

257 The pursuit of creating these boundaries is also what gives rise to the limits of the violent fiction called the ‘domestic’ which, as is the case at the international scale of relations as well, not a pre-given but rather the product of what is often violent contestation.

258 Drawing on a long career working as a psychiatrist in the US prison system, James Gilligan (1997) has written extensively about the role that shame, and shaming social systems, play in interpersonal violence. In particular, Gilligan draws notice to the idea that shame is not just about error or fallacy as it applies to our personal character, our identity, but that shame is fundamentally about that shortcoming being seen by others.

259 Milan Kundera (1999, p.254) has echoed this perspective of the central role that being seen has in the experience of shame, saying that “the basis of shame is not some personal mistake of ours, but the ignominy, the humiliation we feel that we must be what we are without any choice in the matter, and that this humiliation is seen by everyone.”
dependence, and for Diego it was the shame of that reality that only further fed the desperation of his violence, not only to contain his partners but to conceal his reliance on them as well.

It is possible to understand Diego’s experience of this contradiction between control and dependence in at least two ways. First, it was his intense emotional dependence on his partners, Yesica and then Luisa, that provided much of the impulse for him to attempt to control them in the first place. The recognition of this emerged throughout our interviews and other time spent together, just as it as connection that Yesica herself noted when she first presented to the Comisaría de Familia. The chains of loss and isolation that brought Diego to those junctures made his partners more than companions, it made them life rafts of connection in what he perceived to be an otherwise hostile world. Jealousy for him was not just a fear of loss but an almost totalizing preoccupation, and against the intolerable possibility of losing Luisa he sought to control and contain her instead. This also meant limiting what others outside of their home saw for fear that they might report him, that their knowing might accelerate that loss, yet ironically it was through the violence that he committed in pursuit of this secrecy that he ultimately pushed both Yesica and Luisa away. Second, in seeking that position of domination he found a means to recuperate some modicum of self-respect in the face of other experiences of shame in his life: notices on his front door, his debts and failures to provide, his unemployment. It came through for instance in the way he spoke to me about his fights with

260 It is also worth adding the shame of committing the violence itself and the potential ignominy of being seen as someone who abuses his partner. This of course does not help to understand why he was violent toward Luisa in the first place, but it does help to understand one of the means of its perpetuation.

261 Diego’s shame in light of these experiences is predicated on a very particular notion of respect, a conditional one in which respectability is made contingent on achieving a certain kind of life. We could call this situation an experience of shame within a particular ‘economy of respect,’ a term that we can furthermore take to have two meanings. On the one hand, Diego’s poverty and prior inability to save money was not just the result of wasteful spending, it was also the result of his living within a political economic system characterized by a particular ‘moral economy.’ Moral economy in this sense refers to how E.P. Thompson (1971) and others have used the term: as a question of ‘just price,’ who gets paid how much, and why. Diego’s debt and relative material insecurity in other words is inseparable from the broader political economic system in which his starkly inferior income has been
Luisa, retelling them calmly as rational arguments in which he was simply trying to use his superior knowledge and industry to get them all ahead in life. He might have been minimized and injured by his position in other parts of his life, but at least within his home he could stake some recuperation of his self-value through his intimate domination over Luisa. By staking that recuperation in his control over her, however, he actually became dependent to some degree on domination itself: his identity became intricately entwined with, and dependent upon, his position of intimate power. Again the problem with this is that to be in control, to exercise power over another, is not supposed to also mean being caught in a web of dependences, and yet for Diego it certainly seemed to be. Masculine domination, patriarchy, is not supposed to have dependence at its core. And yet it does.\textsuperscript{262} That direct internal contradiction, that shameful driving tension, has the potential to produce a great variety of consequences. What Diego continued to create from it, first with Yesica and later with Luisa, was violence of the most intimate kind.\textsuperscript{263}

\textsuperscript{262} It can actually be generally said that any relationship of control over another is by its own definition also a relationship of dependence. The position of any person or group in power is necessarily dependent on the maintenance of that relationship of domination, it is a key defining aspect of its identity. Unsurprisingly, this basic notion is reflected throughout a number of social theories such as Derrida’s (1992) elaboration on the violence of hierarchies and binary oppositions, as well as Marx’s entire formulation of class relations and conflict. As the intimate experiences of partner violence make clear, gender-based violence is no exception.

\textsuperscript{263} The control/dependence contradiction might have been the most significant and repeated tension in Diego’s intimate relationships, but it was not the only one. It could also include the control/unintended consequences tension, examined in previous chapters, where the violent exercise of power not only reflects a loss of control, it can actually accelerate its loss. Understanding his violence as itself the product of tensions can also help to understand the particular forms that his abuse took. For instance, we might understand both his covering of her mouth during fights as well as his psychological degradation of her (calling her a prostitute, among other things) as coming from the articulations between his fear of losing her, his desire for valorization relative to her, and his preoccupation with
Return to Center- Jairo

The picture painted by Luisa’s and Diego’s story is a frustrating one, and unfortunately an all too familiar representation of how intransigent, albeit periodically fluctuating, violence in abusive relationships can be. It is what makes chronic-coercive intimate partner violence such a frustrating problem to engage—from professionals in service-oriented work to the perpetrators themselves when they also seek to change—as well as such a perpetual terror for its victims to survive. But are there other ways? What can we learn from the experiences of those who have instead experienced a more durable transformative process?264

Against the experiences of Diego and Luisa were those of another man, Jairo, someone that I also initially came to know through the Comisaría de Familia. We first met in the immediate aftermath of the audience that decided his order of protection, a meeting that he attended in unison with his partner and during which he implicitly admitted to the violence he had committed. His enthusiasm when we first met was almost startling, a bit like it had been with Diego, and from that very first moment onward I began to appreciate the energy that he brought to seemingly all endeavors in his life. And though over the course of nearly a year I would see that vitality everywhere from our closed conversations to the mobile locations of where he worked, unlike with Diego I never met with Jairo in his home. That place, his home, was still clearly in its own way a central pole in his life, but for Jairo social life did not just exist in reference to it. His attention was frequently focused elsewhere, on places and people unfamiliar what others around them thought. It may also help to understand the positive actions that he took. For example, his encouragement of her returning to night classes to finish her education as coming from an articulation of his fear of losing her and the care for her that, even in spite of his serious violence against her, still existed in some capacity.

264 ‘More’ is the crucial modifier here. Just as with any hegemonic project where power over another is never totally realized, processes of transformation away from committing partner abuse hardly preclude the possibility of relapse.
to him, the settings for the kinds of new experiences that he obsessively sought. If anything, this was the unifying motif that permeated our interactions. It was also part of the central tension between his partner Valentina and him, a key feature to understanding both the genesis of their conflict and Jairo’s transformation in its aftermath. Just as with Diego, in order to understand why this was so important to Jairo, what was really at stake for him throughout his violence against Valentina, we have to at least briefly glimpse backward at the longer arc of his life in order to see what preceded it all.

Like so many other people, Jairo also did not grow up in Bogotá. His birthplace, and where much of his family still resides, was in a small rural town in the department of Meta just to the south and east of the capital city. Like so many other departments—Tolima, Guajira, Putumayo, and Chocó to name but a few—Meta has enjoyed its fair share of ‘mala fama’ on a long and nebulous list of ‘hot zones’ throughout the political conflict; lists that are want to change from Colombian to Colombian, international observer to international observer. To whatever degree this gloss has been accurate, Jairo always portrayed his childhood in a more idyllic hue. The specter of the conflict was there to be sure, he recalled, a shadow lurking somewhere beyond his immediate horizons; but seen again through the prism of his memory, his enduring impression of his youth was that it was a tranquil one. More relevant to him than the specter of armed actors was the threat of chores and homework, the joy of long afternoons spent playing by the river, and the absence of his father, to whom he gave a sort of conspicuous indifference. He knew who his father was, he could point to him as a member of their community and would run into him from time to time, but he never had a relationship with him. It was his mother, he explained to me, who played all roles as his parent, who cared for him, who

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265 Literally ‘bad fame,’ it could be translated to either infamy or ignominy.
taught him discipline and the value of hard work, who instilled in him a strong desire to learn.\textsuperscript{266}

It was through these sorts of small moments that he remembered his childhood, not through the seismic shifts of catastrophic loss or victimization from overwhelming experiences of violence.

When I asked him when he thought that he became an adult he paused, intrigued by the question, and then, as if by revelation, told me that he felt he became a full adult only when he did his time of obligatory military service.\textsuperscript{267,268} If his mother was disciplined, he said, the military was strict in the most scrupulous sense, and if his mother had brought him through childhood then it was the military that brought him into adulthood. Joining the military was not only the time when he began to fully assume adult roles, however, it was also the first time that he ever travelled away from his hometown, and after it there was never really any going back for him. Though Jairo spent a few short months back with his family, regrouping after his release from the army, he did not linger long and soon found himself moving to Bogotá and enrolling to

\textsuperscript{266} The complex gendering of ‘social learning’ (Bandura, 1971) and its relation to partner violence was driven home to me by a psychologist that I knew in Bogotá who practiced ‘logotherapy,’ a therapeutic approach created by Viktor Frankl (for an overview of logotherapy see Frankl, 1967). In one conversation with her, she described to me a client of hers who was extremely possessive of his partner, obsessively inserting himself into every aspect of her life. When she asked him why he thought he did this, he related his treatment of his partner to how his mother and elder sisters had cared for him when he was young—intricately and assertively involved in all of his business. To him, ‘caring’ meant ‘being on top of’ another person. The purpose of noting this is neither to acknowledge this as an excuse for such possessive control nor to shift the ‘blame’ for partner violence to the influential role of female figures in the lives of abusive men. It is instead to note how the social learning of abusive behaviors is gendered in complicated ways, and that partner violence is in no way reducible to one particular ‘pathological’ masculinity.

\textsuperscript{267} Asking him when he became an adult was quite intentional and something that I asked all of my participants. The impetus for asking it was that adolescence in anthropology is commonly universally referred to as the period between the onset of puberty and the full assumption of adult roles. Understanding when perpetrators of abuse feel they left adolescence and entered adulthood, the circumstances and relevant influences on them at the time, can potentially be just as helpful in contextualizing their worldviews and acts of violence as understanding early childhood experiences of loss or suffering.

\textsuperscript{268} As explored some in the chapter ‘La Zona Quinta,’ militarized forms of masculinity work themselves out of those particular institutions and into the forms of masculinity represented in their broader societies, a process that has been thoroughly documented by a number of commenters (see again Enloe, 2000 or Belkin, 2012). It is a process that we could perhaps see as a specific instance of a broader one, one by which militarized practices of all sorts work themselves into the fabric of societies at large. This is what Schepers-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) referred to as ‘continuums of violence,’ what others have called ‘the militarization of everyday life’ (seen also in Schepers-Hughes 2014), and to what Nordstrom (2004) was referring when she said that “habits of war mar landscapes of peace.”
study to become a nurse. It was a profession on which he would go on to build the rest of his career, contracting himself out to corporations for extended field deployments on large-scale operations. Combined with his military experience, his degree in nursing helped him to easily find positions as a field paramedic/nurse for anything from mining to petrol to infrastructure development projects all around the country. As with Diego’s experience with working for the sanitation department, these positions would take him away from Bogotá for weeks on end to a constantly changing array of disparate locations. Jairo however never seemed to mind. To the contrary, whenever he spoke of his previous work to me he would always emphasize how much he loved every bit of it, relishing the opportunity to continually meet new people, see new places, satisfy a deep-seated urge of his to strike out beyond his current horizons.

This seemed to work well for him for over a decade until he met Valentina, and together they had their first child. Her pregnancy had not been planned, according to Jairo, in fact at the time neither one of them particularly wanted to have a child nor were they certain about what they wanted their future together to be. As we talked about their relationship he made it clear that one of the major reasons that they had stayed together at all was so that their son, and later their daughter, would have both a maternal and paternal presence in their lives, something of which he himself had been deprived. For another ten years Jairo tried to live both lives, still working as a field nurse on repeated deployments but now returning to a home in Usme that he shared with Valentina and their children. It was a balancing act that carried its own significant difficulties:

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269 The insistence on the necessity of the presence of both a maternal and paternal figure for the psychological and emotional well being of children was a topic that frequently came up in my conversations with everyone from perpetrators of abuse to survivors of it to other members of the community. It was also a frequent topic to come out in my conversations with those who worked in the Comisarias de Familia and, as will be explored further in Chapter Five, formed the basis of what I came to know as the ‘normative violence of conciliation.’ Ironically, the insistence on conciliation, intended for the ‘normal’ development of children, often played a role in perpetuating violent relationships between partners that, among many other things, negatively affected the children who were witness to them. While this was a consistent theme throughout my fieldwork in Usme, it should also be noted that this is hardly unique to that context and reflects a form of normative violence found in many other places.

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infidelity, absence, guilt, returning to a home where his lack of presence undermined the authority that he wanted to have as a father. One might think then that when he was fired from his contracting service and returned home on a more indeterminate basis that the tensions behind these difficulties would have resolved and life would have become much easier. If anything, it all became much worse.

Jairo’s permanent return to Usme was a transition with dire consequences. As a psychologist involved in the aftermath of the order of protection against him would note, with his unemployment and increased time at home Jairo began fighting with renewed urgency for authority within his family.\textsuperscript{270} Ultimately there was one episode in particular that prompted Valentina to seek the order of protection, but as she noted on that initial encounter at the Comisaría, it was not the first occurrence. As she indicated, Jairo had already been very controlling before, but his violence had been following a crescendo ever since he lost his job several months prior. Even his violence though was not unprecedented and, according to her testimonies at the Comisaría, nine years earlier just after their daughter was born, he had hit her as well. On this most recent occasion, their fight began after Valentina interjected into an

\textsuperscript{270} The title of ‘return to center’ is meant to reflect this transition for Jairo, what became a violent sort of reclamation of a ‘core’ aspect of his legitimacy, his paternal role, a kind of reclamation that also bears eerie similarity to what happened on a national scale fifteen years earlier in the city of Bogotá. The motif is this: as Jairo’s attention and energies continued to expand beyond the space where he based a core aspect of his identity (his home, his identity as a father), his authority within that core space continued to erode, and with it went his sovereign control over that space and the people within it. The analogous piece of history in Colombian politics was when the national government, via the national police and military, razed a large informal marketplace in the very center of Bogotá, ‘El Cartucho,’ some fifteen years earlier. The area had long ago been where the wealthiest citizens of Bogotá lived—it was located just a few blocks from the central plaza of the city where all three branches of the national government are represented—but as elites moved away from the city’s center it became the focus of ‘urban decay’ and occupation by the homeless and informal businesses. As part of a plan to ‘recuperate’ Bogotá, El Cartucho was demolished and a park was built in its place. Other commenters (see Pérez, 2014) have noted that the reclamation of El Cartucho really was about re-staking national sovereignty by regaining official control over the very core area of the capital city. As was true in a different way for the annexation of six municipalities in 1954, control for Bogotá again became a proxy for control over the country in its entirety. At the core of both Colombia’s and Jairo’s stories is again the question of sovereignty, power over others within a given space. What they both illustrate is how the abandonment of a center of social life, especially one in which an aspect of one’s identity has been founded, can often lead to violence through the attempts to (re)assume sovereign control over them.
argument Jairo was having with their son about watching TV and not doing homework. While she remained adamant throughout all of her testimonies that Jairo had never hit their children, on that night he did grab her by the hair and hit her head against the wall. Though neither Valentina nor their kids moved out of the house in the months that followed, she did visit the Comisaría de Familia, the attorney general, and the department of forensic medicine in order to document what he had done. At their joint audience two weeks later, Jairo did not contradict a word of what she said.

It was at this point that Jairo and I first met, what was emotionally speaking an especially ambivalent time for him. On the one hand it was a new low for him as he tried to reckon with his most recent violence, and even though Jairo did not turn to alcohol in the way that Diego had, it was still clear that his own actions had taken a toll on him as well. Early on when we first began talking he would repeatedly comment on how incongruous his actions were, contrasting them against either the love and respect that he had for his mother who single-handedly raised him or his role as a caregiver through his work as a nurse. Pursued constantly by these ruminations, he one day showed me how he found some solace from them, using a very peculiar device that he had contrived. Pulling out a small change purse from his pack, he explained to me that in that small bag he kept all of his worries. As he would reflect on those challenges that he was facing, and eventually find a means of working through them, he would ‘take them out’ one by one from his purse, usually to replace them shortly thereafter with some newer concern.

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271 Once again, this kind of circumstance and pretense underscores the relevance of paternalism and fatherly roles as a means by which aggressors justify their violence against their partners.

272 That Valentina worked in the Secretary of Social Integration, the government department under which the Comisaría de Familia system is held, likely had a multitude of influences on both her taking prompt action and knowing how to do so effectively within a potentially complicated system.

273 Rarely have I ever heard of such a literal representation of what Wilfred Bion (1962) referred to as the ‘container’ and the ‘contained,’ concepts that are still today important in psychodynamic therapy.
he said, figuring out why he hurt Valentina was taking up most of the room in his bag. Buoying him to some extent throughout all of this was the fact that he found a new job just recently after we met, and the excitement of this new outlet injected him with renewed optimism. His new posting put him with a public health outreach group, and after a couple of months of interviews he began inviting me to follow him around with his team, an opportunity that I eagerly accepted.\textsuperscript{274} The project he worked on was a novel one for Bogotá: provide mobile health services to the city’s most marginalized, people such as the homeless, street recyclers, drug addicts, and sex workers. For Jairo it was everything that he had loved about his previous employment, but with the added benefit of taking place within the city where he lived, allowing him to continue his work as an outreach nurse and still be closer to his children.

Walking with him one Saturday morning, we were on our way to a meeting hall where his team was about to host a forum for parents in the community on the topic of adolescent drug use. We had left with plenty of time to spare, but one by one the street-side shops began opening their shutters for the day’s work and every block Jairo would find one to duck into, saluting the owner as if he had chanced upon a long-lost friend. In between them, as we hustled on to make up for lost time, he extolled the work of his team and especially the leadership of its founder, someone who had used her high-reaching political connections to create the program in the first place. When we finally arrived at the hall, almost late, I saw that esteem once again in action. Compared to his ebullience earlier, Jairo had become more subdued, eager to engage the parents who came but always displaying a certain deference to the doctor and director above him, both women. He worked quietly in the background, moving from group to group, when two parents became overwhelmed telling the story of their addicted teen son, he consoled them and walked

\textsuperscript{274} It is worth noting that before I actually was able to shadow Jairo and the rest of the outreach team, he and I discussed and decided on a suitable way to present our relationship, how we met and the pretenses of my research.
them to another room, leaving their side only when the team psychologist arrived. It was a picture seemingly at odds with that of a man who committed the kind of violence that Jairo had against Valentina: caring, gentle, not just deferential but reverent to female superiors. And while that is precisely the dissonance in many cases of partner violence, what victims experience and what others are privy to, seeing Jairo at work beckoned the question of whether or not there was indeed some kind of deeper change underway for him, one that exceeded a mere pause in his violence.

By Valentina’s account, there had been a change. Three months after Jairo slammed her head against a wall, she came back to that same Comisaría de Familia where she had first sought support, this time for an individual follow up. When asked about her situation, she told the social worker that after the order of protection everything had changed. Jairo had found work, and through his job an opportunity to reflect on his family, there was harmony, they were working to come to agreements, there was no more yelling, no more violence, he was helping her in what she needed around the house. She felt calm. At the half-year mark she returned, this time for a routine series of questions meant to gauge the likelihood that Jairo would return to any of the forms of violence that he had previously committed against her. Again, across the board the picture that she painted was positive: there was still no more violence, in its place there was dialogue, and through therapy Jairo had continued to reflect on himself. Even almost one year after she took out the order of protection, there was still no indication that Jairo had changed for the worse.275

275 There are few certainties in cases of intimate partner violence. On the one hand this could refer to how the details of an incident or a relationship are reported, by any person involved. What information was included, what was excluded, was that done intentionally or not, what do we even call certain actions, thoughts, emotions? On all sides we are confronted at the very least by the uncanniness of language—its insufficiency, its inability to capture such profound experiences in all their depth and intricacy, thus rendering it at best a familiar yet strange expression of what we have lived. This is of course to say nothing of the more deliberate exclusions that are made by survivors or perpetrators in talking about those experiences. On the other hand is the ever present question of permanence: even
What happened? Why, when so many other perpetrators of intimate violence repeat cycles of abuse, was Jairo able to avoid doing so for so long? For one, they had found a way to flip one of the main tensions that had earlier led to so much conflict: now home on a more permanent basis, Jairo’s desire to reinsert himself into the lives of their children was constantly counterbalanced by his persistent desire to also get out of that very home and continue exploring outside of it. Previously that tension had created for Jairo a particular urgency, a need to reassert his paternal authority within their home whenever he was actually in it. After the order of protection, Jairo began bringing their children outside of their home to explore around with him, showing them parts of the city he had come to know through his work. In doing so he was able to fulfill what he felt were his paternal obligations to them, not by fighting Valentina for authority within their home but rather by taking them outside of it and introducing them to the broader worlds around it. Additionally, Jairo and Valentina had also gone to therapy, something that was frustratingly uncommon according to those who worked in the Comisaría system. For a transformative process to work though, in this case one defined under a particular ‘therapeutic’ paradigm, there must be a window of opportunity for it to be effective, a context in some way permissive to the difficult work of critical self-reflection. Frequently the basic willingness of a person to engage in such a process is considered to be one of the most influential of these, and to

if perpetrators of violence stop being violent, even for extended periods of time, who is to say that they will not do so the next day? More to the point, who is to say that anyone, regardless of their personal precedent, won’t inflict violence against another person in the near future? In other words, just because Valentina repeatedly reported that Jairo had not committed any more violence against her, and even though my own relationship with him led me to agree, does not mean that we can be certain that it is true, even if Valentina has full definitional authority over what constitutes violence against her in the first place. She may believe that Jairo has been violent against her again, but for any number of reasons not disclose that to any another person, even actively misdirect away from it. Furthermore, even if Jairo had in fact not been violent toward her for that year, there is no certainty that that would be true for one year and one day. This is not to pose partner violence in the way that some portray addiction—once and addict always an addict—nor is it to imply an immutable drive to violence as an essential element of ‘human nature,’ whatever that even means. It is simply to recognize that even if we recognize violence to be a consequence, one with a great many influences, that there is always the possibility that someone will find themselves at the articulation of some unfortunate set of tensions, ones that they animate in the direction of intimate abuse.
be certain Jairo had all the appearances of willingness from the very beginning.\textsuperscript{276} Even still, it is worth asking if there had been anything else that had opened up that aperture of opportunity for him, why might Jairo have been ‘willing’ at all in the first place?

For Jairo it came down to one thing most of all: conociencia (‘consciousness’). It was only toward the end of my fieldwork, when we were taking an aimless walk around his neighborhood, that he directly laid out for me how that change had come about for him. Ambling down the hill from the main avenue, cutting through a playground, I had asked him simply how his work was going. Nothing special, just a reflex of sorts to get us talking. Work was uncertain, he told me, with elections coming around in the fall there was never any promise that the program he worked for would even exist past the New Year. Still, he continued, in the short time that he had been on the team it had already made a significant impression on him. Surprised, I asked him why. Pointing back at the children running around the playground, he explained to me how though his job was to provide care and health education to the homeless and children in school, it was actually he who had been affected most of all, he who had learned the greatest amount throughout the process. It was the stories of those for whom he had provided care that stuck with him, especially the stories of those who came from homes characterized by violence, the stories of those who had fled their homes and found drugs as a way to escape their memories of them. Their stories made him fear that that was precisely what he was doing to his own children, that if he did not change, quickly, they too might follow a similar path. And so even if much of Jairo’s violence against Valentina was again organized around the framework of paternalism—evidenced by his general quest to regain his paternal authority as well as the fact that their worst

\textsuperscript{276} For the importance of motivation and psychotherapy effectiveness, see for example Hoglend (1999) or Ryan \textit{et al} (2011). Other factors typically considered to be important are the therapeutic relationship itself (the ‘therapeutic alliance’) and the mode of psychotherapy employed.
fight involved a disagreement about their son doing homework—it was also Jairo’s concern for his children that prompted him to stop. It is not only alternative models that check ideologies like paternalism, through the contradictions in its practice paternalism sometimes even checks itself. As Jairo put it, “it is a question of consciousness,” and as Valentina herself explained during a follow up meeting of hers, it is a consciousness that emerges in particular places.

For Jairo that was his place of work, and given his job description that meant a multitude of spaces out in the community, from schoolyards to underpasses, all of them far beyond the walls of any clinic in which he was either practitioner or patient. Instead of walls, in his job Jairo had around him a multi-disciplinary team, one in which not only the majority of its members were women, but those at the top of the ladder were as well. It was not just mere exposure to the life stories of other people, it was face-to-face encounters with them, in unfamiliar spaces and with a particular cadre of colleagues around him at the time. These were the experiences in which he found himself destabilized, in which he found the vital material against which his consciousness could continue to emerge. Consciousness can be fleeting though, and where we find ourselves during its brief moments can drastically shape where we go in response to it. In Jairo’s case he fortunately found himself bolstered not just by being employed again, but also by having a role in which he was able to care for, able to serve others. It was at this peculiar juncture, this unlikely articulation of circumstances, that the change that Valentina observed began to happen. If psychotherapy did also play a role, then at the very least it cannot possibly be understood outside of this context. Just as our understandings of the violence committed in the

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277 This primacy of the face-to-face is crucial to the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1979).

278 While there is a long history to investigating the vital role that group dynamics can play in reformulating entrenched patterns of thought, one particularly notable recent example is the work of Communities Engaging with Religion and Difference (CEDAR). Working with community and religious leaders from around the world, they have explored the vitality of the group as a means of engaging violence rooted in deep-seated prejudices, unexamined biases, and intolerance of indifference (see Seligman, Wasserfall, and Montgomery, 2016).
first place cannot be divorced from these broader connections, our assessment of possible routes of redress cannot be either. Metamorphosis is possible, but as Diego and Jairo showed, it is earned with only the greatest of difficulty. Ultimately we will only ever approximate it when we start treating the consciousness of abusive partners as something more than mere awareness, and instead begin to cultivate it as the complex social experience that we know it to be.\textsuperscript{279}

\textsuperscript{279} This of course carries with it the implication that doing so will require critically engaging the violence that perpetrators of partner violence themselves have experienced. That to engage in the transformation of one’s perpetration of violence requires engaging both one’s encounter with broader systems of violence as well as the ordering of the systems themselves.
Reflections: Vital Tensions

“Violence can only be concealed by a lie, and the lie can only be maintained by violence. Any man who has once proclaimed violence as his method is inevitably forced to take the lie as his principle.”

-Alexander Solzhenitsyn
Life is not just characterized by tensions, tensions are its basic constitution. Life is tension. When I first began conducting my research I found myself repeatedly coming up against a wall, a wall whose question was ‘why does it feel good to be powerful?’ In trying to understand what kind of motives there might be for the exercise of intimate abuse, what might be ‘at stake’ for the perpetrators of it, I kept trying to think about it in terms of how such a thing could be desirable in some way, a felt motive beyond the more self-evident interest of material privileging. What I fortunately soon realized was that I was asking the fundamentally wrong question. What I should have been asking in the first place was simply how did it feel to exercise such power. How do we understand impulses to interpersonal violence in non-reductive ways? Had I asked that from the outset I would have sooner realized that, like any human action, the act of intimate abuse is a deeply ambivalent affair. Quickly I began to see the tensions everywhere, all of the time, tensions that shot straight through the supposed thresholds that beset the ‘person’ from ‘society.’ The question was no longer if tensions existed that could help to understand the perpetration of abuse, the question was what exactly was in tension, with what, and why.

Curiously, I found myself remembering my lessons from biology of all things, the generation of the action potential for neurons to be precise. This miniscule example reminded me that what is actually important about tensions is not just the poles that pull away from one another, it is not even the resulting midpoint on that continuum between them. What matters most of all is what do those tensions produce, and what they produce is often something that

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280 This focus on tensions and their creativity is reflected broadly, and what I want to highlight here is the indeterminacy of the directions of those products, the multitude of possible vectors. Dorinne Kondo (1990), as previously noted in the Introduction, has advanced a notion of personhood as not only ‘shot through with contradictions’ but that these represent ‘creative tensions.’ Their creativity is reminiscent of Deleuze’s (1997) ideas of ‘combating’ and the process of personhood as ‘becoming’ through the articulation of forces that cross the self; a framework that itself I hardly new to Deleuze’s particular formulations. Of particular interest to me with regard to these contradictions and their creativity has been the notion of ‘han’ that Korean author Pak Kyongni (1994) described as “…both sadness and hope at the same time. You can think of Han as the core of life, the pathway leading from birth to death…Life for all living things is full of contradictions.”
shoots off perpendicular to the line between them, even orthogonal to the plane on which they exist. When taken to higher levels of complexity, such as the mind of a person or the social worlds in which they live, these directions become even more indeterminate, less predictable to us. When I began to see partner violence through this kind of a lens, the social fabric that I had been trying to dissect finally disappeared. In its place was a vast vibrating web, unfixed, reproducing, shifting, pulsating electric strands articulating and repelling, sending off new strands from their moments of contraposition. Though it is tempting to think of things like ambivalences and tensions as paralyzing, holding us trapped somehow between opposing forces, the truth it appears is rather the opposite. They are instead profoundly productive, a common generative motif played out at all levels on the great fractal of life itself, from the biochemical to the personal and broadest scales of the social, vital in every sense of the word.\textsuperscript{281}

In the end it was only on these kinds of terms that I was really able to begin to understand the perpetration of partner violence and engage with those who committed it. To be able to enter simultaneously empathetically and critically into the lives of abusive men, I had to understand it as the product of rearticulating tensions; as a series of contradictions that not only beset but also continuously put into motion those who committed this kind of abuse. Their very existence was one of the only reasons that as a researcher I was able to engage perpetrators at all, and moreover to do so in a manner that promoted at least some amount of reflection, not just self-reassurance for my informants. By working directly through those tensions, those that will be discussed presently, we have the potential to not only engage productively with abusive men but also to begin the process of undoing the underlying ideologies that perpetuate harmful relationships. In doing so, if tensions are indeed some of the most basic constitutive motifs of life, then we must

\textsuperscript{281} Framing this as a motif played out at various scales is intentionally meant to index an orientation to complexity and emergent systems, a perspective that automatically rules out any sort of reductionist framework.
realize that the goal is not to categorically resolve tensions so much as it is to help perpetrators of abuse articulate new ones in their lives, ones that generate less violence against themselves and their partners. In other words, when we see this intimate abuse as the violent means of stitching back together the webs in which people have spun themselves, then the question becomes how do we engage in the work of articulating new strands. What follows here is my effort to bring together, in light of all this, some of the latent themes that cut across the preceding chapters. By giving them the explicit attention that they deserve, I hope that I can better explain what this logic of tensions might actually mean.

**On Power and Personhood**

The genius of ideas like Arendt’s appreciation of violence is that it frames this unfortunately common human experience as effect and not some basic cause. Unlike the tendency to see violence as some essential element of ‘human nature,’ an instinct, a hydraulic force in the elaboration of human affairs, such theories of violence-as-consequence allow us the much needed space to open up the phenomenon and try to understand it, all the way from its generation to its most reflexive self-perpetuation. Such views should not be confused with naïve optimism for its total elimination, however, and those who have shared this approach with Arendt have come to similar conclusions.\(^{282}\) Seeing power and the instances of its violent exercise as themselves the products of particular tensions does exactly the same, it frames these omnipresent experiences of the human condition as inerasable, and yet nevertheless neither

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\(^{282}\) While not necessarily following directly from Arendt’s formulation, and working from very different perspectives of their own, both Butler and Derrida have given similar prognoses to the issue of violence. In speaking about the violence inhering to the performative production of gender, Butler (2006) has noted that the purpose of radically unsettling notions of the possible and the real is to find less violent means of remaking them. Similarly, Derrida (1978) in his essay on ‘Violence and Metaphysics,’ noted that implicit in using language to categorize phenomena is a violence that, while we cannot eliminate it, we can at least be more ‘economical’ in our use of it.
inevitable nor immutable. In fact one of the most ubiquitous tensions in the exercise of power is
the ephemerality of its effect, it is the temporal tension of impermanence whereby any measure
of domination achieved must be continuously renovated in some way. In the case of the
perpetration of partner violence in Usme, from the stories presented in the preceding chapters,
there are a few other such tensions that merit special attention and reiteration.

Control and unintended consequences-

We live in a world that we are woefully unequipped to perfectly understand. One of the
many consequences that we must confront because of this fact is that any action in which we
partake is likely to have unintended consequences, and this is certainly true in the stories of
partner abuse previously explored. Among them, Carolina’s experience, discussed in Chapter
Two, stood out as perhaps one of the most severe, both for the intensity of the violence that she
had managed to survive but also for the irony in the undoing of her partners’ control over her.
Recall that both of her relationships, and in particular her second one, were characterized by rape
and reproductive coercion, but it was through her caring for her children that she was able to find
again in herself a powerful source of self-valuation. In fact in both cases it was when her
partners’ violence against her began to relate to her children in some direct way that she decided
to risk leaving those relationships altogether. One of the many mechanisms of control that they
had attempted to wield over her, indeed the most violent and potentially damaging of them all,
was equally one of the greatest sources of the undoing of their domination over her.

283 Indeed any grand theory of ‘practice’ (see Bourdieu, 1977) or ‘performativity’ (see Butler, 1993) is in some way
a basic recognition of this phenomenon, that power is always in a constant state of renewal.

284 While this is the basic premise of the philosophical stance of absurdism, it is also probably fair to say that this is
more generally a common realization that any conscious person has had.
What was true in extremis for Carolina was generally true for many, especially considering how the escalation of violence to more physical means was itself delegitimizing of the ostensibly paternalistic pretenses on which many abusive relationships had been built. When violence delegitimizes authority, and in the case of partner violence pushes survivors to leave, it betrays how violence is not just a reflection of the loss of control but actually a counter-hegemonic practice against itself. Or at least this is true in a context where victims have a means of recourse or escape. In such a context where survivors have the support—material, emotional, practical, legal—to extricate themselves from these relationships, it means that each act of intimate abuse has the potential to instigate its own crisis, and especially in hetero-normative abusive relationships this means that violence instigates a crisis for patriarchal systems of domination. Moreover this is not just a ‘crisis’ in the sense of a historically locatable moment, but rather in a more derivative sense of ‘moments,’ an ever-present possibility that indicates the direction in which we move.

For the perpetrators of abuse this crisis can be nothing less than existential. If we take chronic-coercive partner violence to be a question fundamentally about control, by intention or at least by effect, then there is no greater indication of the limits of one’s control than being confronted by the unintended consequences of one’s actions; and the greater the exercise of power, that is to say the greater one’s ability to influence and shape the world around oneself, the greater these unintended consequences have the potential to be. Caught in the confrontation between the need for control and the forced realization of its limits, the response of many abusive partners is to in turn escalate their efforts for control. Along with the paradox of control and dependence, to be later discussed, this tension between control and unintended consequences
is perhaps partly the reason why leaving abusive relationships is the most mortally perilous period for survivors.

_Violence and empathy-

Understanding partner violence might be so much simpler if only those who perpetrated it were completely devoid of any concern for their partners, or even a basic ability to empathize with them in their suffering. That is, however, usually not the case, and perhaps better for it because otherwise it would be much more difficult to imagine achieving a less violent world. While that realization in no way excuses or mitigates the accountability of abusive partners in their acts of violence, it does open a door to understanding this other tension (violence/empathy) and the multiple roles that shame can play in both the perpetration and perpetuation of partner violence. On the one hand, Diego, from Chapters Three and Four, most clearly demonstrated how shame from other aspects of his life—his unemployment, his mounting debts, the publicly visible threats by utilities to cut off his services—could influence his violence against his partner Luisa in the first place. On the other, Andrés, from Chapter Three, showed through his consumption of alcohol how shame could also follow from the perpetration of abuse itself. We see this tension in how Andrés spoke of his increased drinking _after_ his partner escaped his control, as well as in his attempted suicide. That is, along with drinking to cope with loneliness, what he spoke of most was drinking to forget: his own experiences as the victim of violence earlier in life as well as the violence that he had inflicted upon the closest person to him. By using alcohol for this purpose in the wake of his own actions, Andrés’s experience stands as a powerful reminder of the consequences of abuse when those who exercise it do not fully buy into their own justifications for it and still empathize with the victims of their violence.
That either of these outcomes might happen at all though is again a reminder of the central role that shame can play in acts of intimate violence. Even beyond the obvious evasion of criminal consequences, the hiding of abuse that perpetrators engage in could also be understood as partially motivated by their shame for those very actions.\textsuperscript{285} Contrary to common phrases such as ‘hombres sin vergüenza’ (‘men without shame’), it appears that partner violence is not so much characterized by a lack of shame but rather by a preponderance of it. Seeking ways of addressing such abuse needs to therefore be attendant to this, not dismissive of it as a false appeal for sympathy. Shaming abusive men out of abusing their partners seems to be as reasonable as trying to guilt someone out of depression, sometimes a reflexive response but likely counterproductive. Furthermore, just as survivors of intimate abuse cannot begin to process the trauma of it until they are safe from that violence, it is unlikely that abusive partners will be successful in projects of personal transformation until critical spaces are opened that allow them to confront, in a productive manner, the forces that shame them on a daily basis.

\textit{Control and dependence-}

Unlike the previous two tensions, the tension between control and dependence is perhaps the most potent, the most necessary, and to the greatest extent that it is possible, the most inevitable. Every act of control is an act of internal contradiction, every act of domination, however forceful, is by its very own definition also an act of dependence. As the stories of perpetrators and survivors illustrate, this dependence could have many different meanings. On the one hand we see it in the most mundane ways, a consequence of a gendered division of labor in which men are privileged from certain domestic obligations, but equally so incapable of fully

\textsuperscript{285} As previously noted, Gilligan (1997) has written extensively about the role of shame in interpersonal violence, not only as a consequence of those actions but also as a major impulse in committing them in the first place.
taking care of themselves because of it. At times this was told to me as a joke, a wink and a laugh about how helpless some men would be on their own, at other times it was revealed by the pride that men who did cook, clean, and generally could ‘defenderse’ showed in themselves for those abilities. We see it in graver ways too though, such as the emotional dependence that many perpetrators of abuse have upon the very people that they seek to control, and that those efforts of control are precisely due to that very dependence in the first place. This issue rang out clearly in the experiences of Diego in particular, a realization that Luisa no doubt had when she wrote into her denuncia at the Comisaría that her financial dependence on Diego was matched only by his emotional dependence on her.

Whatever the particular form of dependence, what unifies them all is that whenever a person stakes a part of their identity, a part of their means of self-valuation on their domination over anyone else, they have necessarily made themselves in some way dependent on that very relationship. The problem is that power over another is not supposed to actually be a reliance on them, and as such this paradox becomes the dirtiest and most shameful secret that those in power must attempt to conceal. As is often the case, that obfuscation is a violent endeavor, and it is quite possible that the greater the dependence, and therefore the greater the shame, the greater the violence in its erasure: the greater the internal contradiction, the greater the tension, the greater the violence it has the potential to produce.

\[\text{286} \] Generally meaning to ‘fend for oneself.’
\[\text{287} \] Following again from the lead of Connell (1987, 2005) and the notion of ‘hegemonic masculinities,’ this means that not only do hegemonic ideologies pervade various dimensions of power—such as gender, governance, and political economy—so to do their contradictions, and it is in fact by reaching across these various threads of power in society that further contradictions can be made.
\[\text{288} \] It is worth noting that this violent potential is not in any way necessarily a self-destructive potential, though it certainly has the capacity to be. The assumption that contradictions are likely to be self-destructive is a faulty one, but one that nevertheless can be found throughout a range of social theory, most notably Marx’s theoretical orientation to dialectical materialism and the contradictions of capitalism, a thread taken up more recently by Harvey (2015) in his Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism. Though contradictions are powerful tensions and
denigrating victims are not just about cultivating their psychological dependence on their partners, and therefore preventing them from leaving.\textsuperscript{289} It appears instead to also be about feeding an urgent need for some abusive partners to see themselves as in fact superior, something that this contradiction reveals to be anything but a pre-given. So pressing can this impulse be that perpetrators of violence like Diego pursued it even as those efforts undermined his very authority in that role and, as Luisa demonstrated, made it even more evident how desperately dependent on her he really was.

\textit{The paradox of surrogate power-}

The powerless becomes the powerful, if only for a moment. The dispossessed becomes the possessor, if only at home. When the means of control and respect are rent away from oneself and economized, made contingent on premises nearly impossible to attain, the response by some is to search for the one sovereign space in which they instead can be the purveyors of privation. This does not excuse partner violence, justify its premises in any way, or even imply that it is something restricted to those who have been most marginalized or exploited. What this does mean is that partner violence does not just happen in a vacuum, it is a violence that is intricately woven into broader fabrics of power and suffering and not excluded to expressly gendered relations. This also means that it is no ‘Russian doll’ either, a bounded phenomenon, a ‘sphere’

\textsuperscript{289} This is the kind of perspective that ‘wheel of control’ in the Duluth Model of partner violence conveys. While a valuable insight, the point here is that it is not the whole story and that there is an equal and opposite side to it.
of some sort contained within a larger context. To think of it in this way would actually be to perversely honor the myth that these are somehow ‘private’ affairs. Beyond all else, what the threads of paternalism (‘Permissible’ chapter) and dispossession/loss (‘Stakes’ chapter) make clear is that this intimate violence is perpetrated along the same dynamics, justified under the same pretenses, as other forms of violence played out at hemispheric scales. The same threads, and tensions between them, permeate all of these scales and undo any real meaning that we could give to demarcated ‘spheres’ of social consideration.

At the same time that these themes resonate across scales of human relations, in fact precisely because they pervade them, there is considerable tension that exists between the levels in these topographies of power. Contradictions in these relationships of abuse are therefore not restricted to those born out at the smaller scales. They also exist in the sleight-of-hand that perpetrators pull when they employ the very means of their own subjugation in order to justify the abuse that they commit in their intimate relationships. Managing this kind of contradiction is no delicate work. It is a daily and violent affair of desperately trying to hold together the resistant threads that they have attempted to weave into a life, and it means that abusive partners often occupy considerably unstable nexuses of power that are as much violent parody as they are authority. All of the faults in the other systems of their own exploitation—be it political, economic, racist, or otherwise—the ones that they themselves might seek to criticize, these faults become their own to obscure. It is in the quotidian work of this hiding, the violent silencing that must be done, that the illusions of bounded-ness are constructed. The home becomes its own reified space, the person its ‘own’ subject. Instead of seeing the processes that penetrate the frontiers of these supposed entities—the internal/external, private/public, person/society—we are left with the violent fiction of their reality. Space, like identity, does not precede struggles for
power but rather emerges through them.\textsuperscript{290} In the construction of these spaces, the search not just for power but a place in which to exercise it, it is in these struggles that we begin to witness the emergence of sovereign relations and its related consequences for the emergence of consciousness. It is to this final tension, one indelibly relevant to partner violence, to which I will now turn.

**On Sovereignty and Consciousness**

Throughout the preceding chapters, one of the consistent themes has been that of sovereignty: the question of how the ascension to power is spatially inscribed, and how those constructed social spaces mediate the perpetuation of that power. As a starting point at least, we could see sovereignty as the spatialized search for hegemony, be it on the intimate or global scales. In the chapter ‘Possible,’ this idea of power through space was most self-evident in intimate relationships. It came through the isolation of victims like Carolina and Sofía within their homes, the limiting of their contact with those outside of them, the enforcement of gendered divisions of labor, and the monopolization of control over their economic resources.\textsuperscript{291} In the chapter ‘Stakes,’ the preoccupation with gossip, the urgent desire to keep information about what happened ‘in the home’ inside of the ‘home,’ revealed how important controlling this flow of information can be to perpetrators of abuse like Diego. The concept of sovereignty, however, is more than the realization that any form of power is exercised over particular spaces. Max Weber called it the “monopolization of the legitimate use of violence” and Carl Schmitt took it to mean the “ability to declare the state of exception,” and both of these ideas were central in

\textsuperscript{290} This notion of identity is best represented in the theories of Butler (1990), following and building on Foucault.

\textsuperscript{291} In Latin America, as was the case in the Comisaría system, there is even a term for the violation of property rights, ‘patrimonial violence,’ that refers to when an abusive partner takes control over any object—identification, papers, items of economic value. It is perhaps the most immediately evident form of intimate dispossession.
understanding the paternalistic pretenses for violence—again all the way from the interpersonal to hemispheric scales of relations. This was the focus of exploration in the chapter ‘Permissible,’ as abusive partners sought to justify their violence as urgent states of exception, an unfortunate aspect of their paternalistic domination that resulted in moments when they were the unique agents of violence in their intimate affairs. Houses are built, homes are constructed, and in the case of violent relationships their walls are made as much of shame and the fear of reprisal as they are of the sand and clay taken from the earth. Though the term ‘domestic violence’ has largely fallen out of favor in recognition that partner violence does not only happen in the heteronormative home, it is also fortunate that our lexicon has evolved considering that calling it ‘domestic’ would be to somehow recognize the sovereignty of abusive partners, to validate the violent fiction of the home and to buy into the belief that these have to be ‘private’ affairs.

One of the principal consequences of this search for sovereignty is in how it shapes the emergence of consciousness for survivors of abuse and perpetrators alike. To understand the relationship between the two though, sovereignty and consciousness, it is necessary to first ask what consciousness is. While an exhaustive exploration of such a grandiose topic is simply not possible here, it is nevertheless evident that consciousness is far more than a simple synonym for ‘awareness.’ Consciousness, we might say, is that peculiar phenomenon that occurs when the mind’s eye is turned outward and inward simultaneously, and in doing so previously disparate elements are brought together in the crucible of ‘internal’ reflection and strained to be intelligible to, or in light of, the ‘outside’ world. It is the product of the tension of this ambivalent gaze, a consequence of both the general notion of ‘intentionality’ in the philosophic sense and the ‘global workspace’ to which some neuroscientists now refer.292 When the infinite beyond and the

292 For a summary of the Global Workspace Theory, see Robinson (2009). Combined with the most basic meaning of ‘intentionality’ as directedness toward objects, this view of consciousness points in the direction of what William
infinite within come to touch, this we can call consciousness, and it is in these moments that new mental assemblages come into being or old ones are recalled and reformed in new light. Consciousness is therefore a question of connection, but more specifically it is a question of configuration and how those reworked assemblages emerge through our encounters with some kind of ‘other.’ It is a process of perpetual becoming, of encountering a world from which we cannot turn our backs, so long as we live, yet always resists our understanding. So we struggle, and it is in this continuous search, this critical will to consciousness through which we make and remake the world. On the personal level then this means the continuous articulation of mental associations, new or reformed assemblages of internal thought, as constituted through the perceived encounter with an ‘external’ world. This motif takes analogous form at the scale of social relations when we consider the adage that collective identities, as well as collective representations, do not exist prior to political contest, or an encounter more broadly, but rather emerge through them. Consciousness, be it personal or collective, is always a matter of articulating connections, mental or social, and doing so through the process of experiencing a larger world.

James (1912) set forth as radical empiricism: a complex process that goes beyond the elemental experience of perception and includes making connections and constructing meaning. It is the way that connections are forged out of these particular intersections, the distributed mental representations that they create, and how these are intricately woven into broader social relations that is particularly relevant here.

That ‘other’ of course can also even be our own selves, a phenomenon critical to the possibility of self-consciousness, and one that finds its basis in any notion of the ‘stranger’ within.

Again, while the notion of ‘self-consciousness’ would seem to refute the idea that an ‘external’ gaze is a necessary component of consciousness, it is in these moments of self-consciousness that we hold ourselves as the perceived object of scrutiny. We might say that moments of self-consciousness are ones in which we look outward but bend that gaze back around to hold ourselves in the sight of our mind’s eye.

This is again following Butler’s (1993) notion of the emergence of identity. In Colombia, one of the best examples of this is the emergence of the collective identification of the ‘Wayuu’ indigenous group, a topic referenced in Chapter One under the section ‘The Uses of Usme.’

It is also worth noting that what these encounters produce is not just ‘consciousness’ but also ‘unconsciousness,’ a concept without which consciousness itself has little meaning. Consciousness by its very nature is an exceedingly
It is in this sense that the relationship between sovereignty and consciousness comes into focus, and where another notion of what sovereignty is begins to appear: sovereignty is how we give shape to consciousness. For survivors of abuse such as Carolina and Sofia, their partners confining them to particular places and curtailing their contact with people who might otherwise support them were not just exercises of power in their own right. They were acts of establishing sovereignty but they were also acts aimed at limiting the extent of the emergence of Carolina’s and Sofia’s consciousness. Preventing their connection with others was part of an extended effort to prevent the intrusion of perspectives or experiences that might otherwise question the work of normalization that they were trying to achieve. Normalizing partner violence is not just a question of espousing a particular set of ideas, it is a question of drastically limiting the possibilities of survivors to experience encounters that might otherwise challenge them, however limited such efforts may inevitably be. To confine or isolate is to limit the connections that are the very basis of consciousness, to prevent the interactions against which consciousness is cultivated.

Ephemeral experience and as moments of consciousness become entrained into some kind of latent representation, be it long-term memories in the mind or institutions and spatial organizations of society, we create unconscious contours to our lived realities that continue to shape, outside of our conscious awareness, our experience of them. Another product of these encounters may be, as is often discussed in social theory, ‘false consciousness,’ which is often taken to be a kind of misrecognition of the ‘real’ causes of one’s own suffering. Under the model of consciousness presented here we could consider false consciousness to be assemblages, mental or social, that perpetuate violent systems; and therefore the cultivation of false consciousness appears to be a question of articulating the proper connections in those moments of encounter, connections that will somehow serve to perpetuate those violent systems.

In other words sovereignty, or the search for it, is the process by which contours are formed in the landscape of possible connections, mental or social, the connections that form the basis for the articulations, the associations, that constitute consciousness.

This notion of limiting the ability for social encounter and its incumbent effects on consciousness is one of the two exceptions that Scott (1990) made to his criticism of Gramscian, what Scott called ‘thick,’ hegemony. The purpose of putting sovereignty into these kinds of terms is not just to swap terminology with Scott though, to echo his ideas, just changing the exact terminology. For one, by bringing ‘sovereignty’ into the picture, it brings a much deeper sense of the spatialization of power into conversation with consciousness and our social theorizing on it. Second, as the following paragraph will discuss, bringing sovereignty into conversation here also raises the issue of how consciousness for the perpetrators of violence is also forestalled, not just consciousness for the subaltern.
As explored in the chapter ‘Permissible,’ sovereignty is not just a matter of limiting the consciousness of survivors of abuse, it is a matter of limiting the emergence of consciousness for perpetrators as well. Paternalistic justifications and the rationalization that violent episodes are merely the state of exception to them are every bit as important for perpetrators to tell themselves in order to avoid becoming fully cognizant of the implications of what they are doing. It is to prevent the internal assemblage of ideas after these violent encounters that would challenge their own notion that they have legitimately monopolized violence in their relationships. It could be that through these experiences perpetrators instead became conscious that they are repeating the abuse that they lived through at the hands of their parents, as was the case for Andrés, or that their actions also constitute ‘injustice,’ as in the case of Diego. It could be that through these episodes of violence, these instead become the connections that perpetrators make in their minds. In truth, this is sometimes the case, and the shame and suffering that perpetrators might experience has to be dealt with in some way; all too frequently that solution is alcohol. But abuse also continues in its cyclical forms because perpetrators are able to convince themselves to some extent of these justifications. It is in these cases that it becomes most clear that the search for sovereignty is a question of shaping consciousness, but shaping it for both the abuser as well as the abused, the relatively powerful as well as the subaltern.

To say that the search for sovereignty is the shaping of consciousness does not make us beholden only to the designs of perpetrators though. Understanding the resistances against this violence—the daily work that survivors like Luz Elena, Sofía, and Carolina all exemplified—is to recognize that for survivors the search for sovereignty, and through it the cultivation of

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299 This focus on interaction and the amount and kinds of connection that are possible is reminiscent also of Durkheim’s (1893) notion of ‘dynamic density’ whereby the key is not just the number of people but the intensity of interaction between them. Consciousness on the scale of the brain emerges from the interaction, the connection, between neurons, consciousness on the social scales similarly emerges, and to constrain the possible connections that can be made is to in some way to shape, in this case in a limiting sense, its emergence.
consciousness, is as much about refutation. Refutation though not necessarily of the terms set forth by perpetrators: the ideas, the habits, and patterns of life; it is refutation of their right to monopolize the setting of them. Agency does not have to mean refuting specific ideas, it is not contingent on always living in opposition to the particular terms of regimes of power.\textsuperscript{300} It is a matter of who has power in setting those terms, and undoing another’s sovereignty is therefore a question of undoing another’s monopolization of that ability. In the case of partner violence these refutations can come in many forms: from not believing in the legitimacy of an abusive partner to taking out orders of protection, even leaving partners and the spaces in which they have consolidated power. With this recognition, the specific tension between sovereignty and consciousness finally becomes clear: it is the concentration of sovereign power that militates against the emergence of greater consciousness. Between these wills, that for control over and that for greater consciousness, there is much that can be produced. As the case of partner abuse makes all too clear, frequently what results from that tension is violence of the most serious kind.

\textit{Toward transformation through non-sovereign agency:}

Despite what each of the preceding sections might suggest, life is not lived in binaries, and to see its generation through tensions is not to conceive of it as a tree of diametric oppositions. It is instead to momentarily frame instances of articulation and see what they produce, knowing that in truth these are polyvalent interactions, not dyadic oppositions, and what these tensions produce may shoot off in any number of unpredictable directions.\textsuperscript{301} It is to look for the \textit{motifs} of tension and contradiction and to see their repetition across the scales of this

\textsuperscript{300} Mahmood (2001) gives an excellent illustration of why such a concept of agency is itself overly limiting.

\textsuperscript{301} The unpredictability of it is again an indication that such a framework is not guilty of reductionist reasoning but rather a manner of framing our understanding of a complex and chaotic world.
social experience that we call life, to help organize our wonderfully and woefully imperfect appreciations of its complexity. In doing so we are reminded that tensions are not just a part of life, they are its very vitality.

Beyond this basic recognition though, the true power in recognizing these tensions and their vitality is not just in the redistribution of sovereignty, it is in its dissolution. By seeing power and personhood in such destabilized, and unbounded, terms, we open up a critical space for building on the possibility of non-sovereign agency. Rather than mastery or control over be it the self as a person or the group as a collective—an understanding based on articulating tensions allows for the fluid indeterminacy of mastery through process, living as praxis. Engaging partner violence therefore does not need to be restricted to an understanding of sovereignty over others, it is every bit as much about questioning the need for sovereignty over our own ‘selves’ as well. It is therefore not just a question of domination but of direction. It is a recognition that the tensions that constitute us, cut across us, connect us, are bound to be generative, not restrictive, and that our work is not to contain them but to conduct them instead. Consciousness, above all, is what lies ever elusively in wait for us if we do, when we take agency in expressing those tensions to be affirming of others as well as ourselves.

This was plainly evident in the everyday assertions of independence that Luz Elena and Sofia made (from the chapter ‘Possible’), just as it is what I believe Jairo (from the chapter ‘Stakes’) began to make real within his own life, following his confrontation with an order of

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302 The notion of ‘non-sovereign agency’ has received renewed attention recently, typically following from earlier inquiries by Arendt into the relationship between non-sovereignty and freedom. More recently it has received recognition by Butler and Athanasiou (2013) with regard to its relationship to dispossession, as well as Krause (2015) who notes in particular that the term refocuses attention on agency to how agency extends beyond the boundaries of the self and often eludes intentional control. While inquiries into non-sovereign agency frequently focus on those who have been severely marginalized, dispossessed, or otherwise oppressed, it is worth noting that such forms of agency, and the application of insights wrought from them, do not need to be exclusive to the margins of society, something that Krause’s work in particular begins to explore.
protection from the Comisaría de Familia. In the aftermath of moments of crisis that interventions like these create in the lives of abusive men, the question is how do we open up spaces for critical reflection on gendered relationships. In the case of Jairo, it was by his estimation his new employment that at that juncture made the most significant difference for him. Being employed at all, having the basic validation of an income and in his case a job that he thoroughly enjoyed, certainly itself helped to open up that space for transformation. More than the simple fact of being employed though, his job put him in daily contact with people who had fled abusive homes and had become addicted to drugs following their experiences of violence, leading him to fear what might happen to his own children. Working in his role as an outreach nurse for the homeless, serving daily those who were more marginalized than he, provided him with the requisite self-valuation that allowed him the space to reflect critically on himself. Beyond that, learning from the experiences of those he served provided him the urgent motivation to continue that process of reflection, it was under the specter of the lives of these ‘others’ with whom he came into contact that he found the strongest impulse for change. Of the perpetrators of abuse that I knew, it was his experience that showed the most dramatic change, a transformation that his partner continued to endorse in subsequent follow-ups at the Comisaría.

Throughout this process, however, he never abandoned a notion of ‘paternalism’ as a central role in his life. What changed for him was the kind of paternal role he wished to fulfill. As such, given the highly pluralized meaning that such a term provided, ‘paternalism’ for Jairo became a kind of ‘transitional object,’ a pivot point or hinge that he used, swinging from one set of tensions to another that he instead found validating and rewarding. 303 When I first met him he

303 Critics might likely, and perhaps rightly, note that this still meant adherence to some kind of normative masculine role, and that ultimately addressing partner violence might require the total undoing of such notions. Even if this is the case, such a process of change will have to be a protracted one and require multiple ‘pivots’ in articulating new tensions. The key for the idea of ‘paternalism’ here is that terms that have such highly pluralized meanings, and
felt caught between his compulsion to be outside of his home and his paternal obligations to his children, compounded by his unemployment he felt a sense of urgency to reestablish his authority within his family. He was able to flip that tension, finding ways to share time with his children by bringing them out into the community with him, showing them the world he was learning about through his work, and in doing so allow himself the space to achieve a more equitable relationship with his wife.

While ‘paternalism’ and its many meanings demonstrates in Jairo’s experience the important role of hinge concepts, transitional objects in personal transformation, it was his job that put him in the service of others that illustrates that such ‘therapeutic windows’ are only opened in particular spaces. If sovereignty and consciousness are related, as previously discussed, consciousness can only emerge from experience, and experience always happens somewhere. For abusive men confronting their own intimate violence, that somewhere must also be a space in which they can critically encounter the social dislocation and violence that alienates them daily, shames them, and injures their very ability to value themselves. By creating spaces in which abusive partners can encounter these other ideologies—political, economic, religious, sexual, or otherwise—and the histories that have created them, we might have a fighting chance of opening up windows in which they can articulate new, liberating tensions in their lives. How we might more systematically open up such critical spaces, and where we might do so, is a

especially have variations that can be less engendering of violence, are useful tools at our disposal in initiating these processes of transformation.

304 Two examples of this—the Men as Partners program in South Africa and Sharon Spencer’s work in New Zealand—were previously discussed in Chapter Three. Both seek to address partner violence by directly engaging perpetrators on issues of apartheid and colonialism as they continue to cause injury today.

305 It is here in particular that I think of Nelson Mandela’s (1994) words when he said that, “to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”
topic that I will later take on in the final chapter of this thesis, giving particular attention to what kinds of roles the peculiar social institution of health care might play in these projects.
Comisarías

“No es amor
No es crimen pasional
En feminicidio
Es asesinado!”
-Anonymous

306 A graffiti message that was written along the main avenue, La Caracas, just where the district of Usme begins. It translates to: “It’s not love, it’s not a crime of passion, in femicide, it’s murder!”
I am sitting in the reception office with Cristina, the young psychologist-in-training, as one by one she receives the visitors for today. Outside her office, people wait on blue plastic benches and huddle against the interminable cold. A few mothers stay busy by keeping track of their young children running around the waiting area but most others are sitting alone, avoiding eye contact with one another and ignoring whatever soap opera is on the television. Stuck inconspicuously into a long row of businesses, there are precious few windows here on the first floor and the only natural light that finds its way in is through the small glass door that the security guard mans. And endless flow of people comes in and out of Cristina’s incandescent dominion as she quickly hears their story and directs them on to the next steps in their journey. It seems like half of the people are sent away to other agencies, and most of them complain that they have already been remitted from somewhere else, even the office to which they are being sent back.

One woman comes in and as soon as her daughter leaves for the waiting room again, bursts into tears and tells us about her ex-partner spends his money on alcohol and leaves her struggling to feed her daughter. She feels humiliated, frustrated, exasperated, she is at her very wits end. A few follow up questions, printed pages, directions and kind words later, she is sent to the Defensoría de Familia. Next, a father. His seventeen year old daughter left a few days ago with her boyfriend and has not called. Sent to the Defensoría. A woman who says she has an order of protection tells us her ex-partner has been calling and harassing her, but it turns out her order was never finalized because she had not made it to a follow-up meeting. When she hears her next appointment was already scheduled for a month from now, she sinks her head into her hands, sighs, then thanks Cristina and leaves. The next man looks older than his years; deep lines in his forehead, dirt on his hands. He sits down, arms slumped, and with words that are at
once angry, frustrated, and ashamed says he needs financial support. As Cristina tries to learn his story he tells us how he cannot read, that the woman at the social security office had ripped up his paper and told him to come here. He asks not to be sent somewhere else, the bus costs too much and he cannot find work, not even as a street sweeper. He looks at me and tells me he is a ‘desplazado’ of the conflict, his brother was shot when he was six and his father decapitated in front of him. He just needs some help. Cristina consults with the head Comisaria, writes him a referral, and sends him to an office within walking distance down the road. He thanks her and leaves. Now a woman in her thirties, I feel strange when I realize that she looks like a friend of mine back home. She carries her head high, sits straight in her seat, and tells us with confidence her story of separation from her partner. He had been verbally abusive before but now he was threatening her life, she wants to make a ‘denuncia’ and get an order of protection. She laughs when Cristina asks if he had been controlling or verbally abusive before the split. Yes, yes he had been, insults used to be her daily bread. Moving now with quick, precise motions, Cristina grabs a clipboard, hands her the paperwork, and enters her into the computer system. Next.

Who comes to the Comisarias? The desperate, the despondent, the indignant; the ‘punted’ and the confused; those in need of financial support without which they will not survive. I learned early on through these days that I spent in reception that those who come here are not just seeking support for partner abuse, there is a much broader range of issues that the people who work here address. Even still, this office, hidden in plain sight along a major artery in Usme, is this primary point of attention for anyone looking for official assistance in situations of intimate partner violence. Usme has two of them, and it was by conducting fieldwork in both of them that I became directly introduced to these issues in the community in
the first place. Over the course of my time in Usme, the people who worked in these offices became key community partners and some of the closest acquaintances that I built.

**What are the Comisarías?**

It is impossible to talk about the organized response to partner abuse without considering the Comisarías de Familia. Though the total response to gender-based violence extends to many other state entities and of course to civil society as well, the Comisarias are the ones that are most explicitly charged with this obligation. The driest version of this history is the series of laws that brought these agencies into existence and over time expanded their roles. Far from the esoteric purview of legal experts, recitation of numbered laws is a practice that I have frequently encountered not only in the Comisarías but also everywhere from health care settings to car sales and even written in the graffiti messages across the city. Invocation of laws, decrees, and accords, and knowing them by their numbers and years is part of the art of both working in and effectively consulting the many bureaucracies that order daily life in Colombia. I am not certain if this is what one of Colombia’s founders Santander had in mind when he said, “Colombians, arms have given you independence, laws will give you liberty,” but in either case it is difficult to deny the pervasive intrusion of legalistic frameworks into everyday living when ‘tramites’ (formal procedures or paperwork) are the stuff of casual conversation and everywhere people are seen carrying around personal archives wrapped up in plastic folders. When professionals hurriedly recite genealogies of these laws to citizens in places like the Comisarías, as if rushing through a mythic story of genesis, they leave the dusty pages of legal tomes and become the animating force of a performed authority. Knowing them is no trivial matter.
This particular version of history begins just before the adoption of the Constitution of Rights in 1991 with the Decree 2737 of 1989, the ‘Code of Minors,’ that established in the first place the ability of cities to set up commissaries for the specific purpose of addressing ‘family violence.’ Framing the mandate in terms of family violence was no frivolous decision either, as two years later in Article 42 of the new Constitution the family was officially framed as the fundamental nucleus of society. Over time, as all professionals that I knew in the Comisarías would consistently delineate to me, this mandate has then come to mean addressing four specifics kinds of violence: partner abuse, child neglect, child physical abuse, and child sexual abuse. How these kinds of violence are addressed by the Comisarías has been a bit more of an evolving story, but undoubtedly the major weapon in the armamentarium has been the Measure of Protection (‘Medida de Protección’). Law 294 of 1996 initially gave juridical authority to the Comisarías, but it was only through subsequent modifications such as Law 575 of 2000 and Law 1275 of 2008 that lawyers in the Comisaría system gained the full authority to place immediate orders of protection for people making denuncias. If this is the brief legal history of the Comisarías, putting an actual story to what this means and from whence these developments came is another task and requires the perspectives and institutional memories of those who have worked in the system. It was only once I was able to speak with a high up administrator, Marta—a lawyer who had worked in the Comisarías since its inception and rose to the level of Comisaria for a branch before working at the central level of coordination—that I was able to put this seemingly inert history of laws into real motion, and it was only after observing for months in the two Comisarías in Usme that I was able to understand how they work today.

307 In Bogotá in particular, the system of Comisarías was first established in the following year under the Accord 23 of 1990.
Reconciliation or bust-

As Marta explained to me, there were really two major periods in these first decades and they were currently at the precipice of a third. In the beginning, it was all about reconciliation. As she bluntly told me, “That was all we were able to really do. A woman came in whose husband beat her? Reconcile them! We did not have the power to do anything else.” This logic of reconciliation was not just a byproduct of underdeveloped legal authority, however, it came from a carefully delineated theory of conflict and violence. Outlined in full in a federal report called *Conciliation and Intrafamilial Violence*, the fundamental proposition was that conflict is not only inevitable but perhaps even vital to life, it is only violence that can and should be avoided.\(^{308}\) As the authors begin the report:

> “Conflict is a part of the dynamic of life. Everyone plays a role in the conflict and the different forms of approaching and resolving it... Men, women, children see the world in different ways. Depending on where they are situated, of their personal and particular psychological history, their position of power, their social position, age, sex, culture; depending on their own unrepeatable identity, among other things. The family, constitutionally consecrated as the fundamental nucleus of society, constitutes a topic of particular concern for the makers of laws and public policy, to the extent that it is necessary to surround it with the means to guarantee its unity, harmony, and survival.”

According to this, Marta’s early experiences of working in the Comisarias and her frustrations at being unable to do anything other than reconcile partners was built directly out of a normative mandate to maintain the integrity of the family. The system in which she worked was originally devised to only supervise and negotiate conflict, to try to maintain it within certain bounds and keep such tensions from exceeding the threshold into violent behavior.

To be fair, the same authors also adopted a view of violence that framed it as the instrumentalized force used in maintaining unequal relations of power and they explicitly

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\(^{308}\) Ruiz (2000).
promoted a view of family relations that was built on more equitable grounds. This was made most clearly evident when they contrasted the ‘traditional model’ and a ‘model of cultural transformation’ of family relations. In the column of the former were: appropriation, competence, submission to authority, obedience, control, verticality, imposition, and exclusion; while the latter included: participation, cooperation, reflection and constructive criticism, accord and consensus, horizontality, self-determination, and respect. In this way then the original Comisaría system might be seen as an attempt to preserve the family unit but to do so by promoting its transformation to a new paradigm of gender relations and conflict resolution. Without useful instruments like the orders of protection, however, personnel were at best ineffectual at realizing this objective. At worst they were routinely imposing unwanted solutions onto those who sought their assistance through something that could be called the normative violence of reconciliation.

Though the introduction of tools like the order of protection has certainly changed this in the system’s current form, there are still strong undercurrents of this kind of logic in the guiding philosophies of some of the functionaries. In some of the audiences that I was able to witness in the Comisarías in Usme, I was often shocked at the explicit messages delivered to the people who had placed the denuncia in the first place. In one instance, a young man in his early twenties came in to request an order of protection against his mother whom he claimed had pulled a kitchen knife on him during a recent argument. His parents had previously separated so he had since left to live with his father and at that point in time wanted nothing more than permanent separation from his mother and the legal protection to assure it. While the lawyer granted the order, so too did she mandate family therapy sessions for the two, justifying it by saying that no

person could go the rest of their lives without the presence of their mother and that what was best
would be to learn to resolve their differences more peacefully. On other occasions, women who
had taken out orders of protection against abusive partners and separated permanently from them
would be told during meetings about child support that visitation rights of the father would mean
that their ex-partners would never be entirely out of their lives. In such cases they would usually
also be lectured on how during these encounters they should take care not to fight with their ex-
partners, cause conflict with them, or speak poorly of them behind their back because of the
damaging effect this may have on the children that they shared.

Orders of protection, measures of separation-

Despite these pervasive tendencies, the orders of protection have been the source of the
single greatest transformation of the Comisarías and mark the second major era of its existence.
It was not until functionaries were able to grant these orders that the system came into its
contemporary form, capable of better realizing its original pretensions and envisioning new ones
as well. This is because the orders of protection, though imperfect and limited as all legal tools
are, offer two things previously not possible: a real means of deterring further violence and the
possibility of separation. I say possibility because, as I learned, obtaining an order of protection
does not necessarily even mean physical separation of the people involved. The orders of
protection therefore are not restraining orders that necessarily mandate a given distance of
separation, although some of them are, they are most fundamentally an instrument that is meant
to help shift the balance of power back to the survivor of abuse so that she has greater power in
the determination of her own future.\textsuperscript{310} While this ideal is not always realized, and sometimes even actively abated through the interactions between functionaries and citizens, it is nevertheless demonstrated at a number of points in the process.

When someone first comes in to make a \textit{denuncia}, she is asked to fill out a form that gives her basic information, an account of the events for which she is seeking protection, and a series of questions about the future steps in the process.\textsuperscript{311} The first question is whether or not she wishes to be placed in a protective shelter and, should she elect to do so, a member of the Comisaría will take her to the shelter once the rest of the paperwork for that day is finished. Most women elect not to take this option, and given the restrictions that are presented to them perhaps this is not surprising. As one psychologist explained to me, going to the shelter does mean protection but it also means not being able to go to work and likely losing one’s job, not letting one’s children attend school, limited ability to leave the facility, and no permission to have visitors as well as no contact with the person against whom she has made the \textit{denuncia}. The second question that she is asked is whether or not in the follow up meeting to establish the permanent order of protection she would like to present separately from or together with her accused abuser.\textsuperscript{312} Most women choose to have this meeting together with their denounced partner and in my experience the psychologists who work in reception sometimes actively encourage this by counseling that having this audience together will hasten the completion of the process. The reasons for choosing to have this meeting together go beyond these suggestions.

\textsuperscript{310} One must again forgive the heteronormative framing of partner abuse here, but it is true that in the context where I worked over ninety percent of \textit{denuncia}-makers were women seeking protection from male partners and this reflected the marked gender bias in terms of the kind of chronic-controlling partner abuse that I studied.

\textsuperscript{311} Critically, these must have happened no further than thirty days in the past. Anything beyond that is considered too far in the past and citizens were in my experience frequently turned away from any assistance unless they could claim more recent occurrences of violence.

\textsuperscript{312} Legally this meeting must occur within ten business days of the making of the \textit{denuncia}. Given that the waits for other kinds of follow-up can extend to several months, this regulation is actually rather significant.
though, and in the intake form there are open spaces for people to explain why they have made these decisions. Not infrequently these spaces are left blank, but when people fill them the answers that they give can be quite telling. For instance, one woman who was not even certain yet if she wanted to permanently separate from her partner or not wrote, “I want him to see that I have more in my life, that it does not revolve around his.” In these spaces, one finds everything from justifications based on practical matters to nothing short of declarations of independence.

From this initial encounter, those making *denuncias* must return for a meeting with the Comisaría’s lawyer in order to discuss the events in question, allow a space for her accused to voice his version of events, for both to present other evidence or testimonies to what has happened, and ultimately to finalize and sign the order of protection. The conditions of this final order are largely dependent on the desires of the person making the *denuncia* who may want anything from an official warning to their partner to a permanent separation with cessation of all contact. It surprised me greatly, the more cases that I observed, how often the former was the case. More frequently than I would have ever anticipated, women making *denuncias* did not want either immediate sanctions or separation but rather something more along the lines of an official warning that would let them still live with their partners but hopefully deter future physical abuse and give them more immediate recourse should it continue. Depending on the case, from this point a series of meetings may then follow with the psychologist on staff to discuss other issues such as child support or options for therapy and over the course of the following two years a social worker is charged with periodic follow up of the case. At the end of those two years, unless the person who made the *denuncia* renews the order of protection, it expires and the case is considered closed.
Contrary to the original system where the only recourse effectively was to reconcile couples, those who present to the Comisarías now have a much wider range of options that include, but crucially are not exclusive to, separating from their partner. From her initial presentation to determining the order of protection itself and up through the renewal (or not) after the standard two-year term, built into this process are a number of steps meant to provide support to survivors of abuse as they seek to reframe their intimate relationships more on their own terms. Should they choose to separate, the order of protection is there to help them do so in a manner over which they have greater control. Or at least this is the ideal version. Reality is of course usually much messier and the meetings that determine the terms of the orders of protection and the subsequent trajectories are framed in encounters of drastically unequal power that can dramatically alter the results, a topic to which I will later return.

In spite of this messiness, for those who work in the Comisarías this second era of the system, characterized by greater possibility for intervention on behalf of survivors of abuse, has produced results that are rather intimately felt. When I asked Marta what she saw as the major victories of the Comisaría system, she paused, looked away, and when she turned back she sighed and gave me a simple answer: it was the lives that they had saved. She went on to explain that this happened not only by directly intervening in the gravest of cases. This was also something that the Comisarías had contributed to by taking part in a much broader process of what she labeled as cultural transformation. Even if the system that she oversaw only contributed to this project of change through its very existence, which fundamentally challenges the legitimacy and tolerability of partner abuse in society, that was significant enough. Writing counterfactual histories is ultimately impossible and what will never clearly show up in the numerical records are the women who did not die because of these efforts. Nevertheless, this
basic belief intervention and cultural transformation is what has sustained Marta throughout her career, and from the others I came to know she was not alone in this.

Take for instance one of the psychologists in a branch in Usme, Julia. On a slow day when several of her appointments had not shown up, we had a chance to sit down and talk about her job in the Comisaría. She was part of the inner circle of professionals at this branch, employed directly by the government instead of contracted on a yearly basis. Her third story office boasted a window that looked out toward the eastern mountains, glowing in the rising sun this morning. Taking in this much welcome warmth, I sat and listened as she told me about how routinized many of her audiences had become and how the time pressures usually robbed her of doing her job as she wanted to. When the demand was high, she had little time to really engage couples, the men in particular, and do her job as she felt a psychologist really should. In other words there simply was no time for any sort of therapy. Before working in the Comisaria system she had worked as a psychologist in a hospital and still maintained a small clinical practice outside of her work for the government. With a bit of a sly smile she told me how she would bring in this clinical background of hers whenever she had the opportunity to and use it to create a space where she could get her those before her to begin to reflect on their actions.

Unfortunately, this simply was not her mandate in the system where her job is considered to be ‘juridical’ and not ‘clinical’ psychology and her priority is the volume of cases that she can turn over, not the change she can effect in any particular one. I asked her then a question that I had started asking all of the professionals in the Comisarias, what for her would be a successful day at her job? While looking out beyond the window to the mountains behind us, she told me that her good days were the ones where she could get a sign of recognition from the perpetrators of abuse. A good day was where during her consultations she could see light bulbs go off
somewhere in the back of aggressors’ minds that what they were doing was not their only set of options. Ideally this meant getting the perpetrators of abuse to realize that good authority, “properly managed authority” as she put it, was not based on singular control but was based on collaboration, on the equitable sharing of power in a relationship. She added though that these days were unfortunately few and when any meeting first began she could usually tell if the person in front of her had an open mind at all or not.

Sovereignty interrupted: the ‘private’ made ‘public’-

Regardless of how open the minds of perpetrators are when they come to the Comisaría, their being there at all represents a fundamental intrusion. In the most routine instances, this is carried out through the audiences that happen within those halls. Here the work of rupturing boundaries is accomplished through the means of legal imposition, the mobilization of instruments like the order of protection that facilitate the ability of survivors of abuse to carry state resources past previously impervious thresholds and into new spaces. The means of intrusion, however, are not so limited, and perpetrators do not in fact even need to be within the walls of the Comisaría for it to occur. This is precisely the case of the home visits that social workers conduct when they track down cases lost to follow-up, where the knocking on doors is as literal of a means as possible of breaching social space. These are visits that are conducted roughly once per week, when the Comisaría reserves a pick-up truck and driver to take a case worker out to cover a given segment of the community and re-establish ties with those that they have lost to follow up.

Early one morning, I followed an invitation from one of the social workers to go with her on these home visits. As we climbed out of the truck at our first stop, the social worker donned
her fluorescent red jacket, the back of which read ‘Office of the Mayor of Bogotá: Secretary for Social Integration,’ a barely disguised euphemism for the agency that she represented. The area of Usme we were in, Juan Rey, was farther up the mountains and one of the newer zones where communities were recently establishing themselves. The roads long ago stopped being paved and the number of broken down cars on the roadside stood as testament to the difficult terrain. This also meant that the house addresses were either in flux or frequently inconsistent with our maps, and in order to find our first house we had to canvas the blocks around where our best guess was, the social worker asking anyone we passed if they could help us find our destination. One man on the corner was particularly helpful, telling us that the house we were looking for was just on the other side of the block, and soon after thanking him we found ourselves knocking on the front door and ringing the doorbell of a two-story house. Up above us, an elderly lady poked her head out of a window and the social worker called up to her, asking her if she knew the woman we were trying to locate. She nodded, calling back down that her neighbor had left earlier in the morning and would not be back until the afternoon. In a few moments she was downstairs in front of us, on the other side of the door, and through it the social worker was asking her if she had noticed anything out of the ordinary recently, if she had heard fighting, or if she knew how this woman we were trying to find had been doing. Her answers were brief, and as we walked away the social worker explained to me that people often remain reticent on the details of their neighbors’ lives, at least whenever she asked them, either out of a sense of minding their own business or out of fear of retribution of some kind. Finally, before we left for the next neighborhood, she wrote out a notice that we had stopped by and taped it to the front door.313

313 In light of this, one view of this would be of the State imposing a new set of terms on previously sovereign spaces, the domestic spheres of everyday life. Except this is not exactly the case. Recall that the social worker was not making a canvas sweep of the neighborhood, knocking on doors one by one to question people on their intimate relationships. She was there because at some point someone had come to the Comisaría to make a denuncia and
Of all the things that Marta taught me during her crash course on the Comisarias, perhaps the simplest yet most profound was that the confrontation of partner abuse is fundamentally a practice of redefining the public/private frontiers of social life. One could even argue that their existence has contributed to a fundamental change in the notion of citizenship. By creating public institutions whose express mandate is to enter into and help to rework intimate domestic relationships, the Comisarias have made issues and spaces that had previously been considered ‘private’ the subject of renewed public scrutiny. They are however not the first to do so. Instructive in this regard is thinking back to Luz Elena’s oral history in Chapter Two on the evolution of gender relationships, a process that in recalling her own life course she traced back to one of the great ruptures in Colombian society, the Bogotazo in 1948. According to her living memory, it was after the Bogotazo that women began leaving the home more often, getting out into the streets and breaching some of the frontiers that previously bounded their social lives. In the decades that followed, those breaches of space became breaches in taboo as more people began talking more openly about what they knew or suspected happened behind closed doors. Eventually that growth in gossip began to infiltrate more formalized media outlets, as topics of initiate a process that would within it contain an eventuality, an obligation to follow up on the Comisaria’s stated duties. Our presence at that person’s house was of course that eventuality and therefore our presence was only possible because previously someone had decided that the terms of authority in her intimate relationship were illegitimate. Therefore, the creation of institutions like the Comisarias has only made this crisis of sovereignty possible, it has only ushered in an era where such sovereignty is in jeopardy. Its real contestation only happens when people come to make denuncias before the Comisarias, it is dependent upon them doing so.

314 Indeed in the body of the text that makes up each order of protection document, there is a paragraph that is worth quoting at length: “The Constitutional Court affirms that it is the duty of the State to intervene in family relationships in order to prevent any violation of the fundamental rights of any person. This is to say that the protection by the State does not remain limited to the public field, but also extends to the private space, as ordered in article 42 of the Constitution, according to which ‘any form of violence in the family is considered to be destructive to its Harmony and Unity, and will be sanctioned according to the Law’” (capitalizations from original text).

315 This is as Moncayo Plata (1997) had previously argued, and Marta’s invocation of this logic in our conversation was good evidence that this was not just some esoteric theoretical point. The contest over ‘public’ and ‘private’ is a vital and well recognized purpose of what is at stake in the realization of the Comisaria system. As Moncayo Plata further illustrates, this reconfiguration of public and private has deeper roots through the critical adoption of global discourses on human rights.
gender-based violence became increasingly valid topics of inquiry. It is a history that is admittedly only one person’s remembered experience, but it is also one that finds resonance in a number of ways. For one, the issue of gossip and its pervasiveness was reflected in the preoccupations of many of the perpetrators of abuse that I encountered. This was especially true for Diego, presented in Chapters Three and Four, who would frequently return our conversations to his anxieties over the optics of his own household, if neighbors might hear their fights through the thin walls that divided them, what they might think or say about him in turn. The issue of an evolving media coverage finds resonance even in a cursory survey of one of the country’s most prominent daily newspapers, *El Tiempo*, with the number of articles increasing fifty-fold over only a twenty year period.³¹⁶

Be it gossip or media coverage, each of these represents some kind of public intrusion into what perpetrators of abuse frequently attempt to conceal. But even if the Comisarías de Familia are therefore not the *first* public intrusion into these spaces, they are nevertheless a new and unique kind of them. Unlike the media, the Comisarías carry with them the tools and authority to intervene, and unlike the informal workings of gossip or any other spontaneous social censure, the Comisarías are organized apparatuses constituted by elaborate frameworks of laws, ones capable of imposing binding decisions. The uniqueness of them is captured perhaps most completely by a term that crops up repeatedly when working within them, as well as in the documents that buttress them, the notions of ‘normativo’ and ‘normatividad.’ While these might translate literally as ‘normative’ and ‘normativity,’ in the context of their usage they take on a supervisory sense, a greater meaning of mandatory, regulatory, compulsory, a matter of social

³¹⁶ This is based on a query of the *El Tiempo* online database using the search term of ‘violencia intrafamiliar,’ the common term used for this class of violence. In 1991 the number of articles was five, by 2008 that number had peaked at 264 in a given year. It is worth noting that the increase in media coverage follows the same period of time over which the Comisaría de Familia system has developed, and it would seem unlikely that the increase in media coverage is completely independent from the rise of that institution.
oversight as in the ‘Marco Normativo,’ a key text that outlines the current scope and operation of the Comisaría System. It is the organization of this normativity that sets the Comisarias apart, as well as their direct connection to state apparatuses like the police, purveyors of legitimatized violence, the combination *par excellence* of a Weberian sense of sovereign authority. For perpetrators of abuse, coming up against that authority is itself an obvious crisis, but for survivors, seeking its support is still no assurance of greater agency. Even for those who work within them, the rules, *normas*, that endow them with that authority is no guarantee that their tools will be up to the tasks to which they set them. The Comisarías, for all of their organization and the legal structures in which they operate, are still places of great uncertainty, and that is not necessarily a mark against them. Seeing what these uncertainties mean though, and what their consequences might be, requires entering into the audience room.

**Proof and Posturing: Coming before the Comisarías**

*They walk into the office together, not speaking, not looking at one another, quiet. Both are middle-aged, Juana is Afro-Colombian and Federico lighter skinned, tanned though with brown nevi on his face that makes it look like he works outdoors. I stand up and introduce*

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318 This is to say that the Comisarías combine two elements of Weber’s (1922) theory: the institutional authority of technical, rationalized logics with a direct line to the legitimacy of armed actors of the State, the police, who can enforce those logics if necessary.

319 There is something interesting to note about the kind of ‘crisis’ represented here. On the one hand, the initial creation of the Comisarías—as well as their subsequent augmentations of authority such as the inception of the order of protection—represent discrete ‘moments’ of crisis for masculine domination. The moments of their creation are crises in the historical sense, locatable on linear continuum of time. On the other hand, the everyday work that is done within the Comisarías represents ‘moments’ of crisis for masculine domination in a more derivative sense. What this means is that these are ‘moments’ that are constantly present and oriented in a particular direction. Everyday, every time that someone comes into the Comisaría and makes a *denuncia* and seeks an order of protection, they are making a powerful refutation of sexist heteronormative logics of power, and to the extent that people in the Comisarías can help them realize their desires, they are engaging in a slow but deliberate process of subverting both the ideologies and the structures of those systems of domination.
myself, explain who I am and what I am doing at the Comisaría and tell them that I can leave for another office if my presence would make either of them uncomfortable, that it would be perfectly okay. They shake their heads and tell me not to worry, then promptly sit down and face Ana, the Caucasian lawyer sitting across the desk who is attending this meeting for an order of protection. The meeting begins straightforward enough, with Ana asking basic questions like their names, cédula (national ID) numbers, contact information, and how many children they have in common, typing their responses into a template document as they talk. They both respond with slightly downcast eyes, Juana sitting a bit forward in her seat with her shoulders rolled forward and Federico leaning ever so slightly back in his chair, arms crossed. As the questions turn a bit more personal, they tell Ana that they live together but that she does not work, cannot read, and their only cellular phone is the one he owns. When she asks about their marital status, she replies ‘single’ and he says ‘unmarried partners living together.’ To this Juana adds that their romantic relationship in truth ended one year ago and recalls a night where she fell acutely ill and wanted him to call her mother to take her to the hospital, which he refused to do.

With this, Ana gets in to the heart of the meeting, asking Juana first to tell her what happened on the occasion that led her to come make her denuncia and telling Federico that once she is finished that he will have his opportunity to talk. Juana sits up a bit straighter, brings her gaze up to meet Ana, and in a voice and demeanor so calm that it surprises me, quickly tells her story. Just over a month ago, Federico grabbed her by her neck and chin, pushed her up against a wall, twisted her arm and yelled names like ‘hija de puta’ at her. Federico begins to bounce one knee, but just as he starts to lean forward an open his mouth, Ana lifts a hand up to him to silence him, never breaking her gaze with Juana. She continues. This was not the first time that
he has been physically abusive to her, and more frequently he is verbally so, calling her names and also acting very controlling of her. When she says that he does this in front of their three year-old daughter, Federico snorts and moves to interject again. This time his intrusion brings Ana around to face him directly and scold him, telling him that waiting his turn is a matter of respect and that if he cannot show respect then this ‘audience’ will not be possible. In just a few short minutes, Juana has finished her account and after Ana finishes typing into her document she turns to Federico for his.

Though he talks for far longer than Juana, he says very little about the specific incident in question and only barely confirms it when Ana repeatedly asks him if he has anything to change about Juana’s story. As Juana sits back in her chair a bit, he leans forward, arms still crossed, and in an indignant tone begins with “In reality, I’m the victim here,” going on to relate how she has a history of hitting him too and has even threatened him previously with a knife. Ana cuts in quickly and asks him if he made a denuncia or sought an order of protection and while he very simply says no, his expression says that he never even thought to do so. A bit dismissively, she goes on to explain that without any evidence or history of seeking help for this, that it is hard to take it into account for their current situation. A little phased by this, he slowly eases himself back into his story and continues on to talk about the psychological harm that he says Juana has caused him. As she sits beside him with her eyes fixed down on her hands in her lap, he mentions in passing suspicions that he has about infidelity but to my surprise quickly moves on and focuses on something else: gossip. For the next several minutes, getting increasingly worked up, he tells us about a ‘white woman’ friend that Juana has made after starting to attend an Evangelical church and how she is spending more and more time with her, talking about private matters that he does not want other people to know about. After calling her
‘chismosa’ (a gossip), he goes on to explain how she speaks badly about him to his own family and how he has come to feel that he has no other support left in his life, even though he is not a ‘malgasto’ (wasteful of money) and does not spend his income on alcohol or other unnecessary things. Ultimately though, he explains, his main concern is the well-being of their daughter and that the times that he has been abusive it has been because he thinks that Juana is not taking good care of her and instead is spending long hours at her new church with her ‘white woman’ friend.

Rather suddenly, the meeting comes to a halt. Federico looks up and fixes his eyes on Ana, Juana slowly does the same. With a long exhale, Ana looks between the two and says quite bluntly that she is not really sure what to do. Their stories are so markedly different, “white and black” as she puts it, with each blaming the other for this situation. Also, they currently live together and so, looking at Juana, she tells her that an order of protection is more complicated, but still possible. The first question it seems is corroboration, and Juana says that her friend from her church could come in to give testimony, but she does not have any proof other than what their three year old has seen. Somehow, slowly, over the course of the next fifteen minutes, the back and forth begins to edge further toward the idea of separation. Their romantic relationship has long ‘gone out,’ they have frequent fights in which Federico and possibly Juana become physically and verbally abusive, and most of all these things are happening in front of their daughter. All of the sudden, the idea gains inertia. Ana seems increasingly convinced that it is the right idea and Federico is quick to jump on board. He chimes in saying that he recognizes that this is his fault for not leaving this relationship earlier, but in part this is because his job requires him to go to Tolima sometimes and he needs help looking after their child. Suddenly, his voice breaks and he pauses as he begins to softly cry, putting his head down into his hand and
covering his eyes. As Ana reaches for a tissue, Juana reaches over and slowly begins rubbing his back. Through the remaining tears, he says that his principal worry now is making sure that he does not lose all custody of his daughter.

Now the idea of separation has taken full flight and as I look over to Juana all I see is her furrowed brow and the nervous glances she is making between the two. In her lap again, agitated hands with quick fingers shuffle through a stack of papers that she has brought with her. I get the unmistakable feeling that separation is not what she originally had in mind and that she is quickly losing control of where this meeting is going. After all, she has no job, is unable to write, and is an Afro-Colombian female immigrant to the city. Should this continue down this road she would be left in a very vulnerable position. Finding two papers in her pile, she brings them up onto the desk and as she passes them to Ana says something quickly about how Federico has previously threatened to kill her before. Before looking down at the documents, Ana looks back incredulously and asks her why this is just coming up now. An inaudible answer escapes Juana’s lips and by the time she finishes, Ana has already glanced down at the papers, folded them back up, and passed them back saying that “this doesn’t tell me anything.” I look on, incredulous. Ana, a person with a warm demeanor who just earlier was careful to carve out a space for Juana to tell her story, is now meeting the same person with what almost seems to me like hostility about claims that have been made on her life no less.

Perhaps realizing this, Ana pulls back and starts to explain what a process of separation would entail. When she gets to the part about the ‘conciliation,’ she looks at Juana and in a much kinder voice assures her that this would be another chance for her to work through the Comisaría to dictate the conditions of support that Federico would have to provide her. This seems to calm Juana considerably and she begins to say out loud the reasons that she too would
want to separate as well. When she ties it to Federico’s abuse, however, to my surprise Ana meets this with a quick rejoinder about how she needs to recognize that any separation is the fault of both parties involved. With both Juana and Federico now on board, the rest of the meeting moves along swiftly with Ana explaining that she is convinced that separation is the best option and the she will grant the order of protection for two reasons. First, Federico has confirmed the violence under question and Juana has every right to the protection. Second, the order will provide the context to ensure that as they figure out the separation, with the help of the Comisaría of course, that they will do so with calm heads and words because now the consequences are increased for Federico to act with physical violence. After a meeting of nearly two hours now, they quickly review the printed documents, sign them, set up a follow-up appointment to determine the conditions of support, and gather their belongings. As they leave the office, Juana is once again as stoic as when she first entered, but along with Ana is offering words of encouragement to a still somewhat distraught Federico.

It took me a while to be able to fully appreciate what transpired during this meeting. Even when the order of protection was ultimately given to Juana and her reservations about the separation addressed, there was something more going on here than I was able to understand at first, there were detours for which I could not initially account. The more audiences I witnessed between the two Comisarias in Usme, however, the more I came to understand the roles that proof and posturing, not to mention the pre-existing relations of power, played in the development of these events.
The Comisarias are above all legal institutions. This is not just to say that they exist because of a series of laws or that lawyers work in them, but more fundamentally that the work that gets done, and how it gets done, follows from a highly legalistic logic. In particular this is the notion of proof and considering that the decisions reached through these processes are legally binding and have legal consequences for everyone involved, this is neither surprising nor necessarily a fault in the system. What does come across in meetings with citizens though is the primacy of this logic of proof above all else. The very first time that I arrived at a Comisaria, the head of the office was showing me around and introducing me to the various people who worked there and whom I would soon be getting to know. As we toured, I was invited in to an ‘audience’ in progress where, as is typically the case, the two parties present told dramatically different accounts of what had happened. On the right, a woman was sitting forward with her elbows on the desk, and in a desperate voice on the verge of tears, was trying to explain what had happened. On her left, arms crossed and legs spread, simmering in indignation was a man her age who would intermittently punctuate her story with his own revisions and points of context. Standing on the opposite side, hands resting on the desk, the head of the Comisaría entered into the cacophony with a calm voice, just above a whisper. Her first words were that the Comisaría was an agency bound by law, and, looking at the man now, that meant that each of them had rights. She continued on to explain that this meant that each would have the chance to tell their story as well as present the testimonies of anyone or anything that could corroborate them. Until violence could be confirmed, there was little that they at the Comisaria could do. As the conversation continued along these lines, it appeared that a neighbor would be able to come in to offer
supporting testimony and, satisfied with this, we excused ourselves from the audience and continued on my tour.

There is undeniably a reasonable logic to why supporting evidence would be required in a case of partner abuse, absent any basic consensus between those involved. In most cases this was a simple recognition of the positional parallax, the ‘Roshomon effect,’ inherent to experiences of partner abuse as well as the obvious vested interests in obfuscating, diminishing, or flipping responsibility. Beyond this though there were more extreme cases that brought this healthy skepticism up sometimes to a point of frank fear of being deceived (‘ser engañado’), stories that then floated somewhere in the background of how more routine instances were treated. Whether accurate or exaggerated, I was frequently told stories of times when people had tried to use the Comisaría to false ends, claims that after significant investigation could in no way be verified. Usually reports of child neglect or child abuse between separated partners, these stories typically centered around claims made about dependents as means of controlling or exacting revenge on one another. Made by men against women and women against men, these claims were the main substance of the home visits made by the social workers on staff. Ultimately though the most that could be said in cases like this was that no supporting evidence could be found; after all it is difficult to prove that something does not exist and the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence.

Justified or not, this requirement of proof creates at least one inevitable consequence—those who come to the Comisarías to make any sort of claim about partner abuse require some sort of additional proxy agent.\(^{320}\) Survivors then are caught in a position where their options for future recourse are dependent on both those who work in the Comisarías, themselves proxy

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\(^{320}\) Proxy agency here refers to the definition as set forth by Albert Bandura (2001) vis-à-vis individual and collective forms of agency.
agents of sorts, as well as their ability to produce some other form of support. And not all proof is created equal. Clearly the simplest and most direct form of proof is where the perpetrator of abuse can confirm to some degree the story told by the person who has survived it. As the case of Federico and Juana shows, this does not mean corroboration of every single point, just a basic recognition that some sort of legally actionable event transpired. Barring this, some other testimony is needed. Of all the people who might possibly do so—children, family, friends, neighbors, employers—the unimpeachable option is medical exam. Indeed, on presentation to the Comisarías, many survivors are referred immediately to either a nearby emergency room or the Institute of Legal and Forensic Medicine in order to have any lesions documented by an officially trusted source. In cases where both stories share no point in common and the alleged perpetrator is even able to bring in supporting testimony, having medical documentation of injuries is the card that trumps all. In Juana’s case, had Federico not confirmed her story, her best option would have been the indirect support of her friend from Church but beyond this would not have been able to produce medical corroboration or a direct witness other than her three-year-old daughter. Her situation could quickly have been made much more dire depending on how the first moments of her audience transpired. The main problem with all of this is that the experience of partner abuse, in particular abuse that is chronic, is predicated on isolation and itself is even further socially isolating. When survivors of abuse present for help and are told that ‘nothing can be done’ unless they can substantiate their claims, they are potentially put in positions of further marginalization. When the mandate of the agency and the available tools are framed in such exclusively legal terms, the ability for its staff to show solidarity to all those who seek assistance there becomes considerably constrained and leaves some survivors without even the basic recognition of their abuse.
This logic of course is not just legalistic it is profoundly bureaucratic. The organization of the office, the forms, the computer system, the core instruments that functionaries have at their disposal, all fit within a bureaucratic frame of action (and sometimes inaction). In many ways then, coming before the Comisarías is another instance of ‘living la vida burocratica’ in Colombia, complete with all of its strategies and pitfalls. I first came to appreciate the bureaucratic life when working with patients with skin cancer in Bogotá through their struggle to gain access to the care that was Constitutionally guaranteed them. The same plastic folders that I came to recognize then were also part and parcel of the meetings that I witnessed in the Comisarías. These folders overflowed with documents: papers from previous visits, copies of identification, assortments of proof put to paper that could not possibly be relevant to the issue at hand. Assembled and organized under the notion that almost anything might be of use at some point, these plastic folders were nothing short of personal archives. Their creation was part of a veritable ‘archive fever,’ an attempt not only to assemble any potentially useful papers but also to reclaim some modest amount of control over a process that at times could seem frighteningly out of one’s hands. Doing so was not always effective though as Juana experienced when she produced papers to substantiate her claim that Federico had threatened her life. Proof alone is not sufficient and in order to be effective, it must be presented in a particular way. No matter how dedicated, caring, and concerned those who work in the Comisaría are, successfully coming before those who work there requires not just proof but also careful posturing.

321 As Derrida (1995) says when he introduces this term ‘archive fever,’ the creation of the archive is not only ‘commencement’ but also ‘commandment.’ By creating an archive we not only seek to mark the beginning of a record, we seek to stake our control over it. In the cases of these personal and mobile archives, that is often nothing less than seeking to maintain some modicum of control over one’s life and options, forged in the face of what are commonly perceived to be the dehumanized bureaucratic institutions that Weber (1922) warned us of almost a century earlier.
Posturing-

Calm, attentiveness, respect, coming before the Comisaría is not just a matter of strategy it is also a matter of form. When I began conducting fieldwork in the Comisarías, it was impossible to not immediately take note of the literal physical postures that people adopted throughout their meetings as well as the small signs of deference that they made to professionals. Sitting forward, leaning back, shoulders rounded or head held high; giving eye contact, maintaining an even tone, using words like sumercé.322 By this I in no way mean to imply that those who come to the Comisaría generally engage in cynical acts of manipulation, disingenuous farces intended to present only a carefully crafted image to those who work there. While on a very few rare occasions I did meet people who I believe did precisely this, the truth is that almost no one that I met was just a coldly calculating actor.323 The social poetics of self-representation followed more closely the lines of self-restraint, and we ignore their deeper impulses at our own peril. When abusive men minimize or justify their actions, the way that they rationalize tells us something about their worldviews (the topic of chapter 3). When survivors and perpetrators of abuse burst into tears, how they hide them, show them, and that they are crying at all can shock staff out of a sense of routine and open our eyes again to the depth of what they are experiencing. Even when abusive men lean back in their seats, cross their arms, and look away in simmering

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322 Sumercé is a typical pronoun of respect used in the Cundinaboyacense region in Colombia, deriving from ‘su merced.’ Merced referred in the colonial era to ones benefactor, literally the person at whose mercy or favor you were placed. While the term now is used more informally, it still often carries the intention of showing deference and a more formal respect to another person, over and beyond the alternative pronoun of ‘usted.’

323 In fact, even in these exceptionally rare cases, the way that these men presented themselves itself can be illuminating and often followed similar themes of how others presented themselves, albeit to a much greater extreme that therefore appeared qualitatively different. James Gilligan (1997) has illustrated a similar sentiment before, showing that even in the most severe cases of violence, perpetrated by people who become labeled as ‘psycho’- or ‘sociopathic,’ there is much to be learned about violence and society by the details of their violent acts and their subsequent self-portrayals.
indignation, this can help us to understand better what dynamics of power and what forms of its contestation are going on behind these closed doors.

Almost all of these can be seen in the case of Juana and Federico in their audience with Ana and how they shaped its trajectory. From his crossed arms, intrusions during Juana’s testimony, and his attempts to regain control of the narrative, Federico’s indignation during the beginning of the meeting did his cause little favor. The same can be said of his attempts to justify his abuse. Just as his rationalization of his violence as attempts to protect the well-being of their daughter were common enough claims, so too was the uninterested stance that Ana and Juana took toward them. While these kinds of statements can help to understand the self-appraisals and moral scaffolds that frame this abuse (as explored in earlier chapters), when coming before the Comisaría and ultimately negotiating accountability, they hold little productive value. Beyond this, his avoidance of talking about the event in question during his own chance to testify could be simply understood as a desire to avoid legal consequences. Such a limited interpretation risks losing however an important part of the picture. The moment that he acknowledged any amount of physical harm that he caused, the order of protection became a foregone conclusion as well as all of the legal consequences that this includes. Partial avoidance and minimization on this front accomplishes nothing. When he avoided discussing his abuse of Juana though he did not just avoid the subject, he avoided eye contact with everyone in the room, his shoulders hunched forward and his body closed off from anyone around him. These kinds of postures were the kinds of bodily positions of shame with which I became very familiar, be it sitting in audiences in the Comisarías or sitting alone in one-on-one interviews with men who abused their partners. Shame, a central feature of abuse to begin with, was also at the core of the experiences of men
who came before the Comisaría, a part of being directly confronted about the abuse that they had committed.

If this initial part of the audience was fairly typical, along with the understandably unsympathizing reaction of Ana to Federico’s ‘real victim’ claim, the subsequent reversal was equally uncommon and in my understanding centered around two issues: the involvement of children and Federico’s tears. Even if Federico’s invocation of their daughter failed to justify his violence toward Juana, it did drastically alter the purpose of the meeting. Satisfied following their two testimonies that confirmed abuse had occurred and the order of protection could be granted, under Ana’s direction the rest of the meeting had little to do with Juana’s abuse and became fully focused on the effect that this violence had on their daughter. It was from this shift of purpose that the whole notion of separation came from in the first place, a trajectory that clearly had not been on Juana’s agenda when the meeting began. As soon as Juana’s concerns were made to take a backseat to a new set of priorities, her loss of control over the meeting was precipitous and her growing desperation a testament to it. It was in this window that Federico’s tearful remarks suddenly recast him from the aggressor-in-denial to desperate father, someone whose desires now aligned with Ana’s. This is no way means that his tears were disingenuous manipulations of a situation and at the time this was not the reaction of anyone in that office. At the very least the impression given by Ana was that one could believe his deep concern for his daughter as an authentic expression of what he feels and at the same time in no way validate that as an excuse for his violence toward Juana. With the order of protection now a done deal though, this meant that for much of the rest of the meeting the direction of sympathy had flipped, as separation became the top item of negotiation.
In terms of understanding what it at stake for many abusive partners in coming before the Comisarías, the early parts of this meeting are perhaps the most telling; the dynamics that played out before the rather sudden and unexpected about-face somewhere in the middle. In my experience, Federico’s initial responses were anything but atypical and exemplify critical issues going on in these encounters. In order to understand the sources of these forms of posturing then—the sense of injustice, intrusion, and shame—it is necessary to consider in more lucid detail the parallels and ironies of how paternalism plays out in these meetings. That is to say, understanding these audiences as critical contact zones where the paternalism of state entities comes into direct conflict with the paternalism of more domestic spheres of everyday life. These moments of contact are nothing short of moments of contest over the definition of the frontiers of private and public authority, of who is the sovereign and what does this mean in these interwoven fields of relational power.

*Paternalism, meet paternalism-*

One of the most evident aspects of audiences at the Comisaría is their overall form and, across the two Comisarías in Usme and their various functionaries, there was little deviation in it. It is a performance that is run in three parts: she talks, he talks, I talk. The first two phases hold the testimonies where the denuncia-maker and the accused offer their version of events in sequence, a sequence that is militantly maintained by the person running the meeting. This is especially true when survivors of violence are telling their story and their abusive partners repeatedly try to hijack the narrative or interpose in any way. Typically the first warning is a raised hand, followed by a brief lecture on respect where the outlines of the meeting are given and a promise made to listen to them when they get their turn. This was about as far as Ana had
to go in her meeting with Juana and Federico. Further infractions though are given increasingly aggressive reprimands and, taken far enough, can raise the tension of the meetings almost to a breaking point.

Particularly memorable to me was one audience in which two ex-partners were meeting to discuss terms of child visitation and support. The man who was seeking visitation rights had already exhausted his first two gentler warnings when his ex-partner began to describe his history of drinking and violence. As she explained, his drinking had begun in Tolima before they moved to Bogotá, as had his physical abuse, though both worsened markedly when they migrated to the city. Before the psychologist running the meeting was able to react, the man was able to interject that while he did have a drinking problem in Tolima, his physical abuse of her did not begin until they moved to the city. This interruption brought down on him a high-volume, rapid fire scolding of his failure to respect his ex-partner’s turn to explain their history. Punctuated with a shaking finger and a voice raised loud enough to make even me sit back in my seat, the man accused fell back into a sort of stunned silence for the rest of her testimony. Silence however did not mean a total end to the mounting antagonism. As the survivor of abuse went on to elaborate how she had found work more easily in Bogotá, whereas his employment was still more tentative, he began shifting nervously, moving in his seat and shuffling his papers on the desk. Without a word, the psychologist in charge grabbed the papers from his hand and dropped them onto another desk to her side. At this point, he not only seemed to check out of the meeting, he wanted to show that he had. Turning his head to watch people passing by in the hallway, the psychologist quickly put snapping fingers in his face followed by sharp words to either pay attention or she would end the audience. Now past the point of repair, the rest of the time passed with him mostly keeping his chin to his chest, little dialogue transpiring him and the others
throughout the rest of the meeting. After they had left I asked the psychologist some questions about their history, I wanted to know what role she thought their experience of migration to the Bogotá had played in the abuse. She noted their different experiences of finding work as a relevant factor, but quickly changed the subject to how one could tell that they were from a more rural part of the country. His machismo, both of their combativeness and comportment during the meeting, this was typical of people from Tolima she told me, something that I had also heard on repeated occasions also said about those from the Atlantic coast.

Following the testimonies is the third, and typically longest, part of the meetings. Having heard and considered the various sides of the case, and sometimes having consulted the head Comisaria of the branch for guidance, the last major part of these meetings is in theory to discuss and outline a project for further action. This may include for instance the signing of orders of protection and agreements for financial support, referrals to counseling, scheduling follow-up audiences, or planning for the testimonies of corroborating witnesses. And while there were occasions that I witnessed in which this was the product of authentic dialogue, much more common was that this final stage was an extended monologue by the person running the meeting. Telling, not conversing, was the usual default for this major segment. Though the specifics typically depended on the meeting itself, this was a space that the functionaries would use to reflect back to the people before them their analysis of the genesis of their conflict and how they might remedy it. If the case was of partner abuse and an order of protection, this often also meant an extended explanation of the terms, consequences, and subsequent steps such as counseling that would be required with the order. Staff would often punctuate these speeches with citing laws by their numbers and years to lend a gravitas and legitimacy to the mandated interventions as well as irrefutably establish their authority on the matter. If the problem at hand was
negotiating support for children, this meant explaining what it meant to be a responsible parent following separation and how to not let their own problems with each other affect the children that they had in common. The longer these lectures would extend, the more unmistakably both people present, usually survivor and abusive partner alike, would slide further down in their chairs, heads down, silent. Even when these meetings were ended with ‘what do you think?’ as opposed to the less generous ‘any questions?’ it was not uncommon for the response to be at best a laugh, or at worst a scoff, and the telling reply of ‘what option do I have?’

What all of this points to is that meetings at the Comisaría seem to be characterized to their core by a certain dynamic of paternalism. From the way that people are scolded for interrupting to the dictation of solutions and the lecturing on parental roles or proper conflict resolution, audiences at the Comisaría, a state institution, can ironically recapitulate paternalistic forms of authority. I say ironic because the dynamics of these meetings, and the hierarchies of authority at the heart of them, is in many ways precisely the kind of justification deployed by abusive partners for their concentration of power in their intimate relationships. Even thinking back to the normative models of family relationships outlined in the formulation of the Comisarías themselves, these audiences sound much more like the ‘traditional’ rather than the ‘cultural transformation’ model: submission, obedience, verticality and imposition; rather than reflection, constructive criticism, consensus and horizontality. To a certain extent, this failure to

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324 In speaking with Marta, the high administrator in the system, there is another interesting continuation of this ironic tension. When I asked her what she wanted to see the future of the Comisaría system to be, her response was to expand it and further centralize it through higher levels of governance, even possibly up to the national level. In its current form, Comisarías are not an obligation for any municipality to have, their existence is entirely at the whim of various regional authorities. And so her desire to see the system expanded as a requirement everywhere in the country, and organized then as a federal entity, is not only understandable but most likely necessary for its universal expansion within the limits of the entire country. This tendency toward centralization though, in particular through familiar bureaucratic hierarchies of organization, does come at a cost. The cost is that in expanding a system meant to reconfigure intimate relationships of power and authority, that very process of expansion can lead to further elaboration of hierarchical systems of governing authority and the privileged logics that animate them.
consistently reflect the ideals of power sharing in their own practices is an unintended consequence of the exigencies to intervene decisively in cases of alarming violence, and to do so under very strict time pressures. After one time watching Julia lecture a man on how ‘talking’ about issues meant having a dialogue and not just telling or mandating, I asked her after the audience how typical of an encounter she thought the meeting had been. She told me unfortunately that it was all too typical: rushed. This was actually the first time that she explained to me the time pressures on her job and how that affected her ability to conduct her work as she really desired. As a psychologist she relished the days when her caseload was light enough to spend time conversing with people and exploring with them why they thought they acted the way they did. Indeed, on days where the office was relatively empty I had the privilege to learn by observing her some of the art of exploring these issues of abuse with the perpetrators of it. In the crucible of time constraints though, perceived dilemmas between intervention and dialogue are revealed and the priorities of staff emerge through the ways they shape their audiences.

Beside the basic urgency to intervene, the question remains of intervene on whose behalf? Far and away the most consistent and strongest impulse that I heard was to intervene on behalf of children. Such was the case for Juana and Federico and they were far from unique in this aspect. It seemed that regardless of the abuse committed from one adult to the other, if children were potentially affected by it they became an obligation of at least parallel importance to the woman seeking support in the first place. The logic that underlies this kind of intervention is no mystery either and was plainly explained to me by a number of people who worked in the Comisárias, in a variety of different positions. The basic rationale was that in cases of partner abuse where children were likely to be affected, that these cases amounted to a failure of
parenting in the sense that they were marked an inability to provide a healthy nurturing environment. In such a case, staff of the Comisarías viewed their roles as intervening as surrogate parents for the affected children in order to shield them as best as they could from fallout of the adult violence. This explicitly cast the Comisaría and its functionaries in the paternalistic role and as a corollary recast both adults as the offending parties. One of the main problem is that in every case save for one or two that I witnessed, there were children involved. This may in part be because children are often a source of tremendous motivation for survivors of partner abuse and therefore, of those who are the victims of abusive partners, those who come to the Comisaría might be more likely to have children. In either case, under ideal circumstances this would only mean that the suffering of the denuncia-maker and her children would be considered on an even level, but the truth was usually a hierarchy of suffering that considered children to be of the greatest importance due to their special vulnerability and innocence. The potential danger then of this dynamic was the risk of losing sight of the rights and desires of the person who made the denuncia, just as what happened to Juana when her audience quickly detoured to what basically amounted to an imposed separation of her from Federico.

The creation of this asymmetry of authority in audiences between staff and citizens was even more plastic though than the influence of time pressure and the complicating role of children. Considering these other factors helps to understand the even greater stratification of power that was created in some of these encounters. One of the most immediately obvious is the comportment of those who present to the Comisaría and how the person running the meeting receives this. In the case of the ex-partners from Tolima, the mounting antagonism between the psychologist and the man coming before the Comisaría helped to create a situation where listening and discussion was impossible on either side. Whatever chance for dialogue that existed
at the outset had long been lost by the time that the critical portion of the meeting was reached. But what was ‘possible’ from the outset? The closed doors of Comisaría audiences do not include hermetic seals, and pre-existing prejudices and stereotypes are never fully checked outside. The psychologist in this meeting illustrated this most explicitly to me in our conversation after it all ended, when she told me how their rural origins from Tolima explained their combative nature, which then presumably required a strong hand for guidance.

This kind of logic of regionally bound cultural differences was common for me to hear about, even if there were multiple contradictions in what it meant or what implications it had. In some cases, the rurality of certain departments like Tolima was considered to be the reason for their belligerence, in other cases I was told of how within Usme it was the rural campesinos who were more ‘noble’ and respectful to staff. In some cases, the presumed machismo of Costeños (people from the Atlantic coast) was cited as a reason for intransigence in partner abuse and the need of aggressive intervention. In others it was this very machismo that was cited as a call for empathy, that because a man was Costeño that he had probably grown up without receiving much affection and therefore this might be a means of extending a sort of olive branch in the reconciliation process that one particular woman was seeking. I will never know the exact extent to which racial prejudice played a role in the rather unusual encounter of Ana and Juana, but given the history of the racial exclusion of Afro-Colombians it hard to disregard. In the most extreme case that I ever witnessed in a Comisaría, to be sure a completely unusual interaction, a fair-skinned lawyer interrogated a family of bronzed campesinos about their religious beliefs and whether or not they in fact had any ‘fear of God’ or read the Bible. Though I never again saw an interaction so patently colonial, these more unusual cases were not so much qualitatively different from more mundane audiences, they were distinguished mostly by degree. What they
make manifestly clear is that even within the Comisarías themselves, broader social fault lines of power such as race, class, and regionalism work themselves into the inherently gendered constructions of paternalistic power between those who staff these institutions and those who present to them.

For the perpetrators of abuse in particular who come to the Comisarías then, the experience of shame is a deeply complex one. The shame inherent to confronting one’s abuse has already been discussed, but one must now consider what that experience is in the Comisarías in Usme. In the manners by which this paternalistic dynamic is imposed is a completely understandable desire to reflect back at abusive partners the injustice of their own violence as well as the exigency to intervene on behalf of the survivor. When audiences are performed in this way though, and when these interactions follow the grooves of other forms of power and prejudice, the total effect is one of a potent and multi-faceted shaming of abusive men. If it were in fact the case that abusive men were truly ‘hombres sin vergüenza’ (‘men without shame’) then perhaps there might be some perverse rational to this kind of response. The problem is that in my experience most of the abusive men that I knew led lives characterized by inordinate amounts of shame, and adding more shame to that does not seem likely to achieve the desired results. The utility of this kind of approach was equally evident in the closed postures and silent attitudes of many of the men that I saw leave these offices; the sense of being trapped beneath the gaze of a ‘new’ public eye, not enlisted into action, appreciable in the tones of their increasingly limited responses. The work of providing support to survivors of abuse and offering tools for them to regain power in their intimate relationships is unimpeachable in its objective, but if ever there was an opportunity for productive engagement with the abusive partners, in most cases it seemed to be a lost one.
This is as significant example as any of the costs incurred in establishing an institution so thoroughly legalistic in its rationales, and tools of engagement, as the Comisarías de Familia. While it is almost inevitably true that the work that will be done in spaces like these will be confrontational to some degree, it is when that confrontation becomes self-limiting to the broader goal of addressing partner violence in society that there appears to be room for continued growth. In my experience it is a kind of growth that those who work within the system already actively seek. Seek because it is not just abusive men who feel enclosed within these spaces. Survivors of abuse, like Juana in this chapter and Luisa in the previous, the very subjects of intended support, are not only noticeably constrained within the limiting pathways available to them, sometimes they avoid them entirely for fear that in doing so they will lose the last vestige of control that they have over their situations. The frustration that the professionals who work within the system feel at these limitations is easy to elicit, and it exists even though they are the ones that supposedly have the most efficacy and fluency within it. Under the pressure of impossible workloads, limited amounts of time for audiences, and the very specific arsenal of tools at their disposal, many have the sense that they are only able to halfway realize their jobs as they would like to imagine them. Despite the limitations though, the Comisarías are still more than just an iron cage of rationality. For one, evident from even the selected stories presented here, there is a great diversity of experience for those who come to them. Furthermore, even if on a day-to-day basis those who work within them are limited in their capacities, constrained to the narrow logics

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325 This was most noticeable in Luisa’s case, discussed in detail in Chapter Four ‘Stakes,’ where she was ultimately presented with a significant dilemma of whether or not to report Diego, her partner, to the Comisaría after he had violated his order of protection by hitting her again. Afraid that he would be taken to jail, leaving her and her children without financial resources, and as she said also leaving her without the emotional support that she needed at the time, Luisa felt stuck in a false dilemma for which she had no desire.

326 Again referring to the term by Weber (1922), relevant here considering the previous discussions of rational-type actors and the ordering of the work that gets done within these institutions.
of the operations allowed to them, that has not necessarily limited their imaginations of what the Comisarías could possibly be. Those who spend their days responding to the urgencies of partner violence are brimming with ideas of how to change what it is that they do, and engaging with them in a dialogue of what that could mean was one of the more rewarding aspects for me of working within that system. As my fieldwork matured, and we began holding these kinds of conversations, it became quickly evident that the professionals that I had come to know were only too willing to share those thoughts with me. Their ideas, and how they connect to other models of redress being advanced within the community, deserve consideration.
Onward

“Ideologies separate us.
Dreams and anguish bring us together.”
-Eugene Ionesco
Throughout all of the preceding chapters, through each exploration of the exercise of power and the commitments of violence, there has at every point already been significant attention given to its opposite: the undoing of those very systems. Through their performance, the practitioners of them, surrogates within broader systems of power and violence, come to confront their daily realities and their consequences, the contradictions and paradoxes of their employment, the vital tensions through which they continue to evolve. Even pervasive ideologies like that of ‘paternalism’ check themselves. But they do not just check themselves, there is a preponderance of activity to further limit them, rework them, transfigure those systems in order to collectively achieve something else. While the Comisarías de Familia are most obviously involved in this and do immensely important work—even as their staff sometimes slip into ironic recapitulation of the patterns of engagement they are supposed to discourage—they are also clearly not the only ones to do so. Chief among those who also militate against partner violence are the survivors of it themselves, forms of resistance that were the major focus in Chapter 2 ‘Possible.’ Through the everyday actions of survival, living as praxis, people like Luz Elena, Sofía, and Carolina have launched some of the most incisive refutations against these forms of violence. Their work, their survival, can never be relegated. Joining them have been other intrusions as well: from informal gossip and neighborly concern to media coverage on the issue and shouts of “forward women, back with machismo” from marching groups in public parades.

\[327\] Again one such example was that of Jairo from Chapter 4 ‘Stakes’ where following the order of protection placed against him, and the beginning of his transformation through the new job that he found, it was the contradictions relevant to his continued desire to provide his children with a guiding paternal figure in their lives that formed the strongest basis of his change. ‘Paternalism’ to him turned out to be a polyvalent ideal, and rather than buttress him against critically rethinking his intimate relations, it actually provided a sort of hinge, a ‘transitional object,’ for reworking his relationships. This notion of paternalism checking itself also goes beyond this one particular notion, and is the main subject of focus in Chapter 3 ‘Permissible.’
Other organized responses abound as well, from the ‘Secretary of Women’ in the city government to local foundations like Sofia’s group for mothers and children in Usme.\textsuperscript{328}

There is, to be sure, a great magnitude of very evident work bravely being advanced throughout Bogotá. There is also, however, much less obvious work being done as well, not always directly connected to partner violence but relevant all the same. Throughout my fieldwork I came into contact with many, though not nearly most, of these creative responses to relevant social issues in Usme, three of which I would like to briefly introduce here. They include unlikely alternatives dreamt up by those within the Comisaría system itself, an unusual take on the role of a public library, and an intrepid priest in the Catholic Church whose work stood in stark contrast to much of the history of paternalism from within his own institution. In each case these examples demonstrate some kind of deviation from the kinds of dominant social logics outlined throughout this thesis, and toward the end of my fieldwork it was actually through the process of trying to mediate connections between some of these efforts—in particular the public library and the Comisarías—that I continued to learn more about what they could possibly mean.

\textit{Restoring Justice}

It would have been easy to portray the professionals who worked in the Comisarías simply as automatons within a larger machine, rational-type actors constrained to specific kinds of actions, faithful practitioners of a carefully thought out legal plan. By spending months there,\textsuperscript{328} One of the largest aggregations that I saw of these various community groups was in a meeting at the Center for Memory, Peace, and Reconciliation, where the city government unveiled its new plan for how to protect female leaders in the community. Not only did this meeting represent a survey of some of the diversity amongst the more recognized groups fighting for gender rights, it was a striking reflection of the very real dangers that leaders of these movements continue to face for the work that they do.
however, seeing the diversity of interactions with citizens, hearing the misgivings and the
frustrations spoken around the lunch table, it would be wholly dishonest to portray any member
of this institution as such. Even still, had I only ever observed and interviewed within the
Comisarías, I would have barely ever glimpsed the imagination that went on in the minds behind
the routines, unrealized forms of creativity that were not always articulated. Julia the
psychologist was one of the few who spoke more openly about hers, who would take the
precious time between her consultations to elaborate to me her dreams of the ‘therapeutic
Comisaría.’

My break through along these lines only happened many months into my
fieldwork, after I had begun interviewing and following perpetrators of partner violence on my
own. Believing that at last I might have had something to contribute beyond what professionals
working within the system already knew, we began meeting on a monthly basis to reflect
together and discuss new possibilities for addressing partner violence in the community.

Our first such meeting was simple enough, but illustrious nonetheless. We sat there just
the four of us—the head of the Comisaría, the lawyer on staff, a social worker, and myself—the
smallest meeting that we would have. Thawing our meager proceedings was a much-welcomed
mid-afternoon sun, whose warmth worked its way through the over-sized windows of the head
office and softened our gathering. As we relaxed into chairs and couches, we began by outlining
our two major topics: how to approach engaging with the accused aggressors when they present
to the Comisaría and how to think differently about addressing partner violence more broadly.

329 Not only did she dream of such an institution, she also took classes in an extension course on human rights,
hoping to one day be able to effect broader change by speaking through that discourse.

330 What continued to surprise me throughout my fieldwork was not only that I had come to adopt a perspective that
offered a new basis of insight for existing actors in the community to reflect on the issue of partner violence, but
how I was able to begin to mediate new connections amongst those actors. By being detached from working with
any single entity, I occasionally found myself in the unlikely position of knowing more about community resources
than those who had worked for years, even those who lived, in Usme. It was through the unusual amalgamation of
connections that I was able to begin to foster that any work of mediating new social articulations was born.
The first of these was a particular point of continued frustration, a commonly perceived barrier to the success of the work when the response by perpetrators was the arms crossed, reclined attitude so familiar in the audiences that the staff held. I began by offering the reflection that behind such self-assured posturing were actually deeply held ambivalences over their actions and their situations, if for no other reason than in that very moment they were being brought before the Comisaría. This triggered some interest and discussion, a brainstorming of ways to elicit that ambivalence and foster dialogue with perpetrators, and to do so within the already insufficient amount of time allowed to them.

The real conversation did not being though until the social worker present raised something else entirely. As the interest in ‘ambivalence’ began to stall, she took the chance to speak out on what she really wanted to discuss, the reason she had come to the meeting in the first place. She began by talking about a forum that she had attended several months back, a convocation held by a department of the city’s government to talk about addressing juvenile substance abuse. What she had found most interesting, she said, and what she continued to think about all these months later was not the problem that they presented, it was a particular model of its redress: restorative justice. Partnering with an international NGO with experience in the field, they had run through some of the major underpinnings of this alternative model of justice, points that she listed again for the benefit of our own small meeting. Immediately a lively exchange began to take place, comparing the points of ‘restorative’ with ‘retributive’ justice, the model of legal action that dominated the work at the Comisaría. In quick succession many of the frustrations at the limitations of their current tools emerged: why did perpetrators pay the state a penalty for future infractions and not the survivors, could that instead be a way to help survivors leave abusive situations if they desired? Would a restorative approach engage survivors more
actively rather than treating them as relatively passive subjects that sat behind their office
desks? Would restorative practices open up a space for perpetrators to acknowledge and
openly address their own shame, making them more open to following up with other obligations
like therapy? Sitting there at the time, I found myself in my own reverie wondering why it was
that the model was called ‘restorative’ at all when what everyone before me was discussing went
far beyond just a return to the previous status quo.

Restorative justice, it seemed, had become the perfect lightening rod for channeling the
accumulated frustrations of most of those present. Not coincidentally, I believe, it was not a
subject that I myself raised. As the strange lone researcher, who had never really fit any
preformed categories that people had available to them anyway, it was never going to be my
place to propose a pantheon of solutions to the problems facing the community. What we had
begun to accomplish that day, together, was to build a space of unusual encounters: between
them and myself to be sure, but also between those who worked side-by-side everyday within the
Comisaría. Out of those unusual encounters germinated an inchoate seed, this one called
restorative justice, a line of inquiry that we would continue to follow together over the following
months after we broke for that particular day.

331 This was a reference back to an earlier conversation that I had had with the same social worker that raised the
idea of restorative justice in the first place. In our conversation she had lamented to me how her day had not been
one of her more successful ones, that after a series of follow-up meetings with survivors of abuse, she felt
discouraged by the seeming passivity that she had encountered, what she felt was a series of clients who looked to
her to single-handedly solve all of their problems. What she labeled as the “I am a victim” mentality, I saw as the
co-construction of victimhood that happened in the Comisarías, an ironic and unfortunate consequence of the kinds
of legal tools and the sometimes paternalistic means of their employment. Survivors of abuse, by very virtue of
being at the Comisarías were clearly not passive subjects, but through the kinds of interactions that I witnessed, it
was certainly seemed to be that much of that sense of agency was reworked throughout those proceedings.
I came in late to the convocation for the public library, sheepishly seating myself somewhere in a back row away from the speakers. Though the library had been built years ago, and had been in use ever since, today was a sort of re-presentation of it to teachers in the community. Technically affiliated with the school system in Usme, teachers were to become some of its key connections to the rest of the district, even though the library remained open to and actively encouraged use by the community as well. That orientation, that desire for communal use, was visible everywhere. Outside, just beyond the library’s front doors, was a small amphitheater, used by skateboarders and musicians in the early evenings, on weekends sometimes the site of a rap concert for local artists. Flanking its front doors was where someone had tagged ‘Welcome to Usmekistan,’ another ‘Usmekistan is Consciousness’ all those months ago, though both had since been cleaned away. Coming inside the building, on the landing halfway up the central steps, was another contribution, a more permanent installation, a three-meter tall canvas of Usme’s history that a group called ‘Harto Arte’ (‘Fed Up Art’) had painted. Just past it, on the second and highest floor, I sat down amongst a group of nearly a hundred schoolteachers and together, nestled between the library’s collection of books, we listened to a series of speakers outline what the library was to become.

First up were the library staff themselves, a younger group that took turns speaking in general terms about their vision for the library, their desire for it to become a center for fostering peace in the community. A refuge against violence they called it, a space in which to share, to weave, a space in which not just to read and remember but a place in which to construct memory for Usme, a place in which to historicize it. Amongst them was also a foreign scholar who
interjected every now and then with comments about ‘third spaces’ in society and the library as a
democratic space. Applause followed, seats were swapped, the meeting’s introductions replaced
by two writers and a teacher. Bearded men in leather and canvas jackets, they spoke of weaving
stories as a means to end isolation in the post-conflict world and the value of poetry in bringing
us back down to earth, reconnecting us by rooting us in the quotidian. Toward the end they
declared that we were “all there in communion.” By the time that they eventually ceded the floor,
most teachers had already reached the thresholds of their patience, but all the same a final
concession was made when the library’s head director himself pleaded patience for one last,
impromptu, speaker. At his beckoning and elderly man made his way forward from the back of
the room, a seasoned suit draping off his shoulders, turned the color of the earth from its many
years of wear. With a shuffling gate and eyes cast downward, he came to stand before the
increasingly restless room. Then, in sonorous voice and with infectious spirit, he began telling a
history of Usme, his story, and with it he proceeded to quickly enrapture all of us.

When it all ended, and the director came back up to say some final words, I found myself
still sitting there, lost again inside my own head, thinking back to previous conversations that I
had had with him. Sitting in his office just around the corner, we had talked about his idea for the
library to be a space in which multiple kinds of knowledge could intermingle, a place where
Usminian identities could be articulated. He wanted it to be more than a repository of books or
connection point to the internet, he wanted a space that either got people off their seats or at the
very least unsettled their assumptions. To his credit, the programming that they had already
developed spoke to these ideals. With titles like ‘concientizARTE,’ ‘learning laboratory,’ ‘dance
to learn about your body,’ and ‘writings from Bogotá,’ everything that populated their weekly
schedule felt like something vaguely familiar from my own childhood library, but bent in the
direction of social consciousness. One program in particular became a point of connection for us, his interest in starting a weekly meeting group for parents in which they could discuss everyday challenges, parenting, and living in Usme. Over a series of encounters we had discussed whether or not to have multiple groups, one being a safe space for potential survivors of abuse, and how to join efforts with the Comisarías de Familia. Perhaps, we had said, staff from the Comisarías could visit some of the group meetings, perhaps instead the library could provide the space to further explore the idea of restorative justice that had interested them. While the library director maintained reservations about skewing the focus of the groups too far in one direction, I kept finding myself thinking back to even earlier meetings that I had had. Soon I was remembering myself sitting in his office remembering my meeting with Marta, the head of the entire Comisaría system, an interview in which she had acknowledged that most of the community connections that the Comisaría system had were focused in one direction only: gaining allies to encourage people to come make ‘denuncias.’ Caught in the infinite regress of my own reverie, there I remained still on the second floor, growing eager at the idea of forming new directions of collaboration, contemplating possible futures in Usme in a place that was usually intended to simply archive its past.

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Changing Structures

I had to admit, the Father was charming. Fast talking, vivacious, but gentle, every sentence of his seemed to be punctuated by laughter. Far from forced though, it was the bent-
forward-at-the-waist kind that quickly put you at ease in his presence. He carried that same energy into his Sunday sermons as well, where he spoke of loving one another, loving oneself, and of welcoming with open arms the new immigrants to Usme. He had gotten his start as a priest in one of the more conflict-torn regions of the country and when he spoke he referred only to the ‘humble’ and not the ‘poor.’ Whenever he left the parish he preferred public transport, and in its waiting room he left behind a reading list that went heavy on the liberation theology.

Today we were meeting in that centuries-old parish, the one associated with the very first church in Usme, the group that he had invited was a motely gathering of a dozen service-oriented actors in the community, one that I had been invited to join for the day. Though starting at eight in the morning and going straight into the afternoon, we never left the parish the entire time. Moving from the dining room table to a tour through the pasture in the back (we had to meet the baby calf that had been born the day before), we soon retired to the second floor for a meeting on the social diagnostic and plan of action that a team of his had been developing. What came out of this presentation and the ensuing discussion was not just a clear description of what the structure of action was planned to be, but a lucid account of the philosophical underpinnings of it. The ultimate objective, he said, was to really make the parish into a space of reflection, a place where members of the community could come to “change their mentality.” To do so, however, would require starting with two basic steps. First, they had to undergo a critical self-reflection on Catholic pedagogy and pastoral services, they had to “go where the people are” both literally and figuratively. Second, and following the first, they had to begin with building up the economic wellbeing of community members, fostering new opportunities to raise their incomes, as well as proactively counter the social divisions that were emerging from rapidly diversifying communities. Not only were economics at the top of peoples’ concerns, he argued, this was the
necessary order of social change. As he envisioned it, the Church had to engage first in a ‘changing of structures’ for everyday life before Churches as ‘spaces of reflection’ could have any meaning. In order for people to focus inward and engage in the process of internal change, he argued, not only did their more urgent needs have to be met, the social structures that created those needs had to be addressed as well. On top of it all, social solidarity had to be rewoven.

What was striking about this underlying model of change was how opposed it was to the official mentality advanced through the everyday work at the Comisarías, even though violence in the community was also one of the predominant concerns for this social pastoral work. In the Comisarías, the dominant logic went that in order to effect change for partner violence, the key was personal therapy for the aggressors. If enough people could be reached, over time the summation of their personal transformations would be collective change. At this particular Father’s parish, the theory ran in the opposite direction. At a much later date, after months of chasing a follow up meeting with him, I finally had the opportunity to ask him where this idea originated. His answer: crisis. As he told it, when he first arrived in Bogotá following his previous posting, the archbishop met with him and told him that the Church was in a dangerous state. Every year more and more people were leaving, the Church was progressively losing its base. Taking this warning back to Usme, to the parish that exists right on the limit of the urban-rural frontier, his solution became that of radical decentralization. ‘Going to where the people

333 From the kinds of social and economic interventions that members of the group actually employed, it would not be accurate to characterize this plan of action as actually Marxist-inspired. Indeed, labeling anything as such cannot be done altogether carelessly in a context where Marxist movements have been a part of the longest standing political conflict and continue to bear both suspicion and a sense of transgression. Still, it is worth noting that the logic of this philosophy does bear some non-trivial similarities to the fundamental axioms of Marxist theory, that it is the social structures—in Marxism the modes of production in which we are implicated—that structure consciousness. To alter even personal consciousness then, one must act to change the economic structuring of our world. This was, at its most simplified, what the priest that ran this parish was advocating, a kind of personal, in this case spiritual, transformation for residents of Usme that began through the work of first changing the realities of their daily lives.
are’ to him meant both literally leaving the church and its sanctified spaces—meeting with people predominantly within their homes, in the streets, wherever they may be—but it also meant meeting them figuratively, working with them first on the issues that were of most urgent concern to their earthly survival. Out of these necessities, the pragmatics of saving the parish from obsolescence, emerged the more abstract philosophy.

Striking about his response is also how it bears similarity to the kind of crises that have been previously discussed throughout this thesis. Following the loss of relationships, crisis ensues, and in its wake, in an effort to win those that were lost back, changes to the concentration of power are tested. For this Father that meant putting the mundane before the holy, not just demanding that people came to places of worship but going to where they are, enlisting community activists in collaborative work rather than simply mandating or preaching what would have to be done. Each of these were but indications to a broader reworking of the kinds of paternalistic presumptions that had characterized much of the history of the Church, going back to the colonial era when this Father’s current parish was first founded. And while he may have still been constrained in a number of ways—by the limits of his influence within the community and within the Church, how the institutionalized privileging of men within the Church could continue to constrain his imagination of alternatives in addressing violence—these were motions that were nevertheless still radical acts.

**Therapeutic Windows, Third Spaces, and Transformative Care**

The examples above sample some of the various approaches to addressing pertinent social issues in Usme, of which partner violence was only one part of a broader picture. Out of them comes recognition not only of the possible advantages to mounting pluralistic responses,
but also how vital the intercommunication of creativity is to our ability to do so. This beckons
the question of what implications this might have for the redress of violence more broadly, how
can we draw from these various perspectives and apply them to other institutions, other spaces in
our social worlds? As a student of both anthropology as well as biomedicine, for me this holds
particular salience with regard to how systems of professionalized care might learn from these
experiences, what might we draw from these lessons earned on margins of Bogotá. Indeed
throughout much of my education I have been repeatedly asked how exactly studying intimate
partner violence applies to my desire to practice medicine. In the most direct sense, the
connection comes from addressing the survivors of it, in particular through mental health
interventions that provide spaces of healing for the intense suffering and the many sequelae of
depression, addiction, anxiety, and trauma that can result. When it comes to the question of
how medicine articulates with the perpetrators of abuse, frankly I have usually found my answers
wanting, and what I want to convey here I never could have anticipated prior to the crucible of
fieldwork. In order to explain this, however, I will have to take a brief detour through the most
unlikely of places. To convey the connections that these lessons might have for health care and
the perpetrators of violence, first I need to talk about pit vipers.

To be precise I need to talk about Brazilian pit vipers and the venom they produce, a
peculiar substance that has gone from lethal poison to one of the most essential medicines that

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334 The plurality of mental health consequences of intimate partner violence is a reminder not just of the severity of
that violence, it is a reminder that we are often best served by thinking in terms of ‘syndromes’ rather than discrete
illness categories, an approach more comprehensively illustrated in the report World Mental Health (Desjarlais et al,
1996; see in particular chapter 8). The primary purpose of a ‘syndromic’ approach is that to maintain that
perspective is to maintain the sensibility that the categories that we construct in order to classify suffering, by the
nature of the social processes that cause that suffering, tend to happen in constellation, and that experience
transcends the ontological presuppositions that we come to make regarding them.
we have in our arsenal today. The active element of this venom directly targets one of the most crucial axes of our physiology, and before it was ever a medicine its principle purpose was to induce a rapid and lethal drop in blood pressure for its victim. By attacking what is called the renin-angiotensin system it mediates arterial dilatation, and even if that failed to produce the lethal shock, over the long term is also inhibits sodium retention, and therefore water retention, causing a failure for the body’s ability to maintain fluid balance. Prior to the adoption of high-salt diets, any such challenge would have been overwhelming. Living in the Brazilian Amazon, where food staples are generally potassium-rich but sodium-poor, the renin-angiotensin system would be critical to retaining any amount of sodium taken in, and any level of inhibition of those mechanisms would likely be catastrophic. For most people around the world now, the challenge is of course the exact opposite. Having inundated our bodies with sodium, our challenge is not to retain it but to avoid the essential hypertension that can result. It is for this change in circumstance that we have the occasion to actually thank pit vipers for their venom, or at least we should, considering that it was the basis for creating the class of drugs that we now know as ACE inhibitors. Today these drugs are not only some of the most effective treatments for lowering blood pressure, they are also some of the few medicines that have the ability to extend life expectancy in cases of heart failure, diabetes, and other common non-communicable diseases.

What the peculiar case of ACE inhibitors illustrates above all is the notion of the ‘therapeutic window.’ In particular, it is emblematic of the central ambivalences in the practice of medicine, epitomized in the Greek notion of ‘pharmakos,’ which indicates the potential for

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335 Along with a select few other classes—beta-blockers, statins, other diuretics, to name a few—the ACE inhibitors derived from this venom are on a short list of the WHO’s for essential medicines for non-communicable diseases.

336 Granted, if anyone who consumed a high-sodium diet were to be directly bitten by a pit viper, their life chances would still be dismal, and it was actually because laborers on banana plantations were being killed by these snakes that the drug development connection was made in the first place (Patlak, 2003).
any agent to be either a poison or a therapeutic. In the case of the therapeutic window, the way
that we typically talk about it goes like this: give too little of a substance and there is no effect,
give just enough and there is therapeutic benefit, give too much and the adverse effects outweigh
the desired ones. This is most dramatically true in the case of ACE inhibitors, but it is also
frequently illustrated with the use of older generations of cancer chemotherapies, highly toxic
agents that only succeeded by killing tumors cells marginally faster than the person taking them.
The case of ACE inhibitors though illustrates another aspect of the therapeutic window, one far
less frequently discussed. It is not just the dosage of a substance that influences its therapeutic
effect, it is the historical context in which it is taken. And while this is most simplistically true
for a single substance, like a drug, it also true for how we practice care more generally. The
practice of professionalized care is not a matter of seeking transcendental truths in facing the
human condition, it is about facing people, it is a matter of responding to the needs and
aspirations relevant to the times and spaces in which we have those encounters.337,338 The good
news is that, unlike chemical substances, we also have the ability to alter the very kind of care
that we practice. While we may only be able to alter factors like dosage, duration, and route of
administration for the pharmaceutical treatments we offer, we have the ability to continuously
alter what care itself really means. It is little wonder then that the very meaning of caregiving is
receiving reinvigorated attention, led by a growing number of anthropologists and social

337 This is similar to the Gramsci’s view on social theory as Hall (1986) has reviewed it, noting that Gramsci’s
project of intellectual engagement was always born out of organic engagement and intended to serve political
practice, not an abstract academic purpose.

338 Recognition of this also therefore requires a radical humility on the part of the ‘practitioners’ to recognize that we
ourselves, through our limited horizons and social positions, can not really know what are those needs, what are
those aspirations, and therefore that a drastic devolution of control over spaces of healing is a requisite first step.
By placing focus on the acts of caregiving itself, what this group of scholars is increasingly demonstrating are the multitude of ways by which caring for one another is a mutually transformative experience, one that not only alters the cared-for but also the caregiver as well.

What all of this means is that in professional spaces of caregiving, what we require are forms of care that are mutually transformative in a more purposeful way, not just of the actors themselves but even of the spaces in which those efforts are made. This emphasis on space is not only a recurrent theme throughout the preceding chapters on intimate partner violence, it was the fundamental insight for the kinds of social redress underway in Usme’s public library. At the core of the library’s philosophy was the objective of creating an alternative social space, a ‘third space,’ in which multiple forms of knowing the world could come into communication with one another and lead to new, unpredictable means by which to address community needs. If ever there were potential spaces in society for this kind of creative play, it is not just libraries but health care settings that hold unimaginable, and largely unmet possibility. But why health care? Health care spaces are, by many accounts, quite unique. For one, across many contexts there currently exist serious efforts to ensure universal access to those spaces, and their services, across the entirety of the life-course, from before the very beginning of life unto death. Beyond that, health care spaces are immensely privileged. Not only does that mean that confidentiality in most contexts is a relative assurance, it is a reference to the qualities that characterize the healer-patient relationship. These are relationships that are made face-to-face, breach the boundaries of personal space, they are intimate encounters with ‘the other,’ consistent with what Levinas

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339 While interest in this field of inquiry continues to grow, chief among those leading this interest within the field of anthropology are Arthur Kleinman (2009, 2013) and Clara Han (2012).
described as the very first ethical act.\textsuperscript{340} But there is not only intimacy there is also, by promise, in every encounter supposed to also be an agonism of people, an acting in the interest of that ‘other’ through an intensely empathic bond. For reasons like these we cannot afford but to make full use of these particular spaces of care, they are too potentially vital to miss.

So what then of health care as ‘third spaces’? The very term itself harkens back to another concept, familiar to Latin American social movements: ‘third forces.’ Coming out of the Latin American tradition of Marxist-Feminism, as discussed in the chapter on Usme’s history, the notion of ‘third forces’ was that women were not only inseparable from class contention, women are vital to coalescing the kinds of highly pluralized assemblages of actors required to actually make those contestations. Why? According to the theory, suffering. It was proposed that experiences of suffering—incommensurable, unique, social—were the common denominator that held the potential to bring us together, to draw affinity without equivalence, to see ‘common good’ as something other than a zero-sum game. It is significant then that experiences of suffering are, if nothing else, what health care systems are supposed to engage. And yet this vision of professional care—as spaces through which we can coalesce disparate social actors and mobilize in the interest of action; spaces of creativity where multiple models of agency can be realized—will seem foreign to most actual health care systems.

There is perhaps no greater indictment of our failure to do so than the clinic waiting room. In that liminal space we most undeniably reveal our inclinations to promote patience and passivity, not consciousness or connection between the truly diverse arrays of people who every day come through the door. Speak only if spoken to, act only when asked. To be sure, there are very real and important issues of privacy and confidentiality, but honoring them does not require

\textsuperscript{340} Levinas (1979).
the wholesale atomization of those who are turned into ‘patients’ throughout the process. What if instead we rethought that liminal space of the clinic and turned the waiting room into something else? What might happen if those who are about to become ‘patients’ have the opportunity to read the desires, hopes, and frustrations of one another as well? Is there such thing as an active waiting room? What if it were instead a space that patients acted upon, rewrote and reformulated to tell something greater about the communities they hail from and find connections with other suffering human beings, people that they never would have otherwise met under such vulnerable circumstances. Doing so would be nothing less than challenging sovereignty over ‘our’ very own spaces, to actually contribute to the redistribution of control over places of healing. It would require going beyond rethinking just the waiting room, but the reward could be turning health care spaces more comprehensively into places of indeterminate and collective organization, fostered in the interest of cultivating critical consciousness and finding new ideas, and social assemblages, by which to engage the pressing everyday issues of our social worlds. Key of course to realizing this would be constant attention to the question of ownership. Who owns and directs these spaces, how might we reorganize them in order to allow for a greater variety of forms of agency: personal, proxy, collective; sovereign or not.341

It is with this kind of general concept in mind for the potential space of health care that we can finally return again to the notion of the therapeutic window, to see what it could mean for the practice of a socially-oriented transformative care. Think first about the issue of intimate partner violence. In this case the ‘window’ represents again a space—physical, collective, mental—in which perpetrators of violence can more critically encounter the social processes, and the means by which they have ‘internal’-ized them, in order to be able to more critically

341 The personal, proxy, collective agency triad is taken from Bandura’s (2001) breakdown of agency.
encounter themselves. The objective here would be to open up a ‘therapeutic window’ in which perpetrators of abuse are more able to cultivate critical forms of consciousness, and to open that aperture by providing both the spaces in which it can be formed as well as the social encounters that form the experiential material against which that consciousness is cultivated. By helping to mobilize collective means of actively opposing oppressive systems of power—political, economic, racist, or otherwise—it may be possible to not only assist perpetrators of abuse in articulating new notions of gender relations, but also to articulate the kinds of social relationships that support them. Such was the unintentional experience of Jairo, discussed in Chapter Four ‘Stakes’ and the following ‘Reflections’ section. Following the order of protection that his partner placed, it was not just couples therapy that formed the basis of his more durable transformation, it was his work in a public health outreach team, led largely by women, through which he reworked the tensions in his life. Through the acts of caring for others he rediscovered a means of caring for himself, through those encounters he became sensitized to a greater range of possible consequences that could result from the kind of violence that he himself was committing. By doing that work within a team where women held the highest positions of authority, a critical space was opened for him, one in which he was able to drastically reassess some of his previous assumptions about gendered relations.

This notion of transformative care in health care spaces need not only be applied to addressing intimate partner violence though, other important, and related issues like substance abuse could also benefit from such treatment. From Usme to the United States, substance abuse remains an issue of everyday relevance, and though these contexts have been formed through uneven histories, they both hold in common the fact that their criminal justice responses have failed to adequately address the issues at hand. In the wake of those shortcomings, many have
already begun to develop and advocate alternative models of justice. When the social worker in the Comisaría brought up in our meeting the idea of restorative practices, she was not just pulling an idea out of the thin air. She was speaking from the experience of attending a workshop that the city’s government had run in collaboration with an international NGO, an exposition on applying the model of restorative justice to adolescent drug addiction. And so one model of social change would indeed be to organize to make claims on existing state institutions, like the Comisarías, advocating for changing the models of practice from within the criminal justice systems themselves. Another model of change, however, would be to establish parallel systems of social redress, to challenge dominant institutions like the criminal justice system by existing outside of them, even possibly exceeding them at their stated goals.  

For issues like drugs in society, there are few better places to experiment with such alternatives than within health care spaces. Behind the privileges that already protect us, we have the ability to put into play alternative forms of redress like restorative practices, taking those models and advancing them to not only be restorative but even transformative of the social status quo. So long as there is a therapeutic promise intact, health care spaces, by being exempt from reporting on the criminalized behavior of drug use, can be places where we subvert the logics of carceral states. By reassessing the kind of care that we practice, we have the potential to piece by piece remake the local worlds in which we operate, not just the personal ones of those who seek care, to mend not just the injuries from these violent systems at large but to alter the processes that continue to remake them. We have both the space and the ability to foster truly subversive social play. The question remains then, if we have the space and we have some alternatives already to explore,

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342 This of course harkens back to one of the major themes that began to emerge in Chapter 2 ‘Possible,’ that one of the strongest forms of refutation that survivors of abuse could leverage against their abusive partner was to leave that relationship and the spaces in which is was realized. To exist outside of a system of power is to challenge it in the most fundamental way possible.
why have we so far failed to put them together?

The answers to such questions are of course extensive, and by posing those questions rhetorically I do not intend to trivialize the many obstacles that continually impede us from leveraging broader social change. Indeed many of those obstacles have been thoroughly internalized into our systems of care, and realizing these alternatives will require rendering onto ourselves in the biomedical fields nothing less than a continuous process of self-reformation. The preceding ideas are of course nothing more than early motions to different directions that could lie ahead. I make them largely because from the very first moments of my fieldwork, those that I encountered openly exhorted me to learn from them and to apply their lessons in some meaningful way. I can only hope that I have at least begun to adequately honor that request.

Even if it was not through their sharing of their situation or their worldview, what my informants imparted to me was a sense of hope that they somehow maintained. If it was not hope, at the very least it was a modicum of openness, a sense of possibility in the face of what otherwise seemed to be impossibly entrenched conditions. If nothing else it was humility. Through every minutiae of their lives or greatest shame that I was allowed to see, they challenged me to honor the struggle and to only ever ask my unending questions with the greatest of care. To each and every person that did this, I thank you. With you I also strive to find other ways, with you I say *hechamos p’adelante.*

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343 Literally meaning to ‘throw ourselves forward,’ it was a common saying that ended many of my conversations, a sense of maintaining if nothing else a sense of perpetual motion, a seeking, not always with the most direction but at least with the permanent intent of finding something better.
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