



Forced Migration and Neighborhood Formation: How Communities of Internally Displaced Persons Find Residential Stability in an Unstable World

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**Forced Migration and Neighborhood Formation: How Communities of
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presented by

Maria Atuesta Ortiz

candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and hereby
certify that it is worthy of acceptance.

Signature *Diane E Davis*

Prof. Diane Davis

Signature *Sai Balakrishnan*

Prof. Sai Balakrishnan

Signature *Mario Small*

Prof. Mario Small

Signature *Lawrence Vale*

Prof. Lawrence Vale

Date: April 22, 2021

**Forced Migration and Neighborhood Formation: How Communities of Internally
Displaced Persons Find Residential Stability in an Unstable World**

A dissertation presented

by

Maria Atuesta Ortiz

to

The Committee on Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Urban Planning
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
Urban Planning

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

April 2021

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Forced Migration and Neighborhood Formation: How Communities of Internally Displaced
Persons Find Residential Stability in an Unstable World

Abstract

How do communities find residential stability in an unstable world? This question—central to the field of urban studies—is even more urgent in relation to groups who have experienced turmoil and displacement in their immediate past. In the recent history of Colombia, a decades-long civil conflict has produced more than 6 million internally displaced persons (IDPs). They have followed a migration pattern from rural areas—disproportionally affected by conflict—to urban centers, echoing cases in many nation-states where civil conflicts or climate change increasingly displace families to a multiplicity of urban centers. My study based on Granada—a small Colombian city of about 80,000 inhabitants that has absorbed tens of thousands of IDPs over the last three decades—examines different processes of neighborhood creation among displaced persons and argues that these experiences affected the means available for displaced residents to make claims on the city. It shows that subtle differences in neighborhood sponsorship, or neighborhood enablers (e.g., the state, a local patron, local clientelistic leaders, armed actors, self-organized residents), can affect the strategies residents use to gain access to housing. In the process, it also explains why different displaced neighborhood communities develop different collective capacities to make claims on the city.

Based on one year of fieldwork—through interviews, participant observation, and extensive review of City Council Minutes—I examined neighborhood formation processes retroactively in two free housing projects, one land occupation, and one land subdivision by a pirate developer in Granada. Building on an inductive logic and using a comparative method to contrast these different resettlement types, I identify similarities and differences within and across vulnerable populations and spaces that are rarely disaggregated. In addition to detailing how and why communities of displaced neighbors pursue different housing acquisition strategies, assess the impact of their efforts on degrees of self-organization among neighbors and post-conflict reconstruction more generally.

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Preface

Homes in low-income neighborhoods in the small city of Granada, Colombia, have a small porch facing the sidewalks, which residents use at the peak-sun-hours to escape the heat generated by their houses' zinc roofs because, as they say: "It gets just too hot inside." Sitting on their front porch, I waited patiently for my interviewees to arrive home or get ready for our meeting. Porch sitting, I became a silent spectator of the street life surrounding my interviewees' front doors. Kids playing tic tac toe with a large stick, which they used to imprint Xs and Os on the unpaved street; lottery vendors screaming through their megaphones, "Chuchi Cuchi, ayyyy Chuchi," advertising the grand prize to be raffled that night in Granada; a street vendor selling arepas; and the kids favorite, a wood carriage pulled by a half bread horse, slowly moving around, displaying all sorts of inflatable figures, all tied up with string, exhibiting a messy bundle of rainbow color. I wondered who in their right mind would buy an inflatable pool—one among the different buying options—in a neighborhood where residential lots were 72 square meters wide, and where most of the potable water had to be pumped out of domestic water wells at risk of drying out during the dry season. The carriage was there nevertheless, constantly moving around, constantly attracting the children's eye.

The wood carriage with inflatable animals and other figures of all sorts and colors was the most conspicuous of many other types of carriages moving around neighborhoods. Some carried recyclable material, and others carried furniture and different sorts of household supplies on display. From my interviewees, I learned that sellers offered the displayed products on credit, and the reason carriages circulated around neighborhoods was not just to publicize their products, but also to collect payments from previous buyers. These picturesque carriages were another—perhaps friendlier—version of the popularly known *gota a gota* (drop by drop) illegal loans, charging

borrowers excessive interest rates, but being one of the few means through which poor households in Granada have been able to access and attain different sorts of goods.

For many internally displaced persons of the Colombian civil conflict who now live in Granada, the carriages represent one of the few means through which they have been able to afford new assets that they lost because of displacement: a TV, a fridge, the kitchen table. This type of businesses—common in low-income neighborhoods—has played an important role among displaced families, facilitating the reconstruction of a material life that was lost with dislocation. Besides housing and land, displaced individuals have lost most of their material wealth, which encompasses crops, cattle, farm animals, basic goods, and basic household supplies (e.g., mattresses, beds, kitchenware, fridges, televisions, radios, chairs, and tables) that more sedentary lifestyles have learned to take for granted.

Although the picturesque carriages offering all sorts of products are not necessarily the outcome of the arrival of numerous displaced families to Granada, their overwhelming presence in some neighborhoods are evidence of a social process of reconstruction of a material life, taking place among a multiplicity of displaced families who cohabit in the same neighborhoods. Part of this process is in itself the construction of the new neighborhoods through which multiplicities of displaced families have sought to attain new residential stability and a new place in the city. This study is concerned with the legacy of displacement as a material entity, revealed through the formation of new neighborhoods in cities and the displaced residents' achievements in the construction and transformation of their common living spaces.

Introduction

How do communities find residential stability in an unstable world? This broad question—central to the field of urban studies—is even more urgent in relation to rising numbers of people who have experienced turmoil and displacement in their immediate past.

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, there were a total of 50.8 million internally displaced people—within national borders—in 2019, 45.7 of which were displaced by internal armed conflicts and 5.1 of which were displaced by human-made natural disasters. The UN Refugee Agency reported that between 2008 and 2019 there were more than 17 million new asylum applications submitted worldwide across national borders.¹ Of those who are being forced to migrate, a large number have found refuge in cities. In 2012 the Head of Policy Development and Evaluation of Service of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees noted that almost one-half of the world’s refugees and 13 million internally displaced persons—or IDPs—lived in urban areas (Crisp et al 2012). In 2018, a report by the World Refugee Council established that more than 60% of refugees and more than 80% of IDPs were living in cities (Muggah and Erthal-Abdenur 2018). In a contemporary world that is increasingly defined by large levels of migration—within and between national borders—in a pattern from rural areas to urban centers, this study examines how forced migrants adopt different resettlement strategies, and how do they make claims on the city in the construction of their new common living spaces. Is the resettlement typology a factor shaping how forced migrants make claims on the city? How? In what ways?

¹ Internal forced displacement data by IDMC at <https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>, and refugee data by UNHR at <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/data.html>.

When moving to cities, forced migrants are known to land and make a living in different types of settlements. For example, a majority of forced migrants are known to inhabit informal settlements located in cities' peripheries (Crisp et al 2012). Many forced migrants have also been resettled in "planned settlements"—in cities and rural areas—established by governments as a form of disaster relief or as "necessary" relocation for the implementation of developmental projects (Cernea and Guggenheim 1993, Hansen and Oliver-Smith 1982). Scholars have also written about ethnic enclaves representing both a place of settlement and, most importantly, a place of work for vulnerable and low-income peoples who cross transnational borders (Portes and Bach 1985, Wilson and Martin 1982). Like ethnic enclaves, company towns are also spaces where forced and labor migration have met, but unlike the enclaves, company towns are normally constructed from the top-down and constitute highly controlled environments (Epstein 1958) that are similar in that way to refugee camps. Finally, migrants—and among them many forced migrants—are also known to settle in different types of new and old city neighborhoods, located for the most part in the cities' most disadvantaged areas (Pastore and Ponzo 2016).

In the face of such diversity, a postulate of this dissertation is that the creation of different types of settlements impacts, in different ways, displaced migrants' claims on the city. A comparative approach of the creation of different resettlement options and their impacts on a community of displaced residents is needed to understand whether and how this postulate holds true and in what ways. For example, observing that there are official and non-officially produced settlements, we may want to know what happens with the experience of forced displacement when migrants are left to find their own way instead of being officially resettled as a community. A review of the literature by Elizabeth Colson (2003) finds that migrants living in "official settlements," like refugee camps, tend to face more difficulties adjusting to their new living

environments than “self-settled” migrants. Could we argue the same for the case of different types of settlements within the same city? What other factors—besides “official” vs “spontaneous” resettlement—specific to the different resettlement options pursued in cities are important in explaining the different challenges and opportunities faced by groups of forced migrants in their processes of making claims on the city?

To address these questions, I examine life after forced migration at a territorial level of analysis—the neighborhood—in a context of civil conflict driven migration to a small Colombian city called Granada. To be clear, the study of forced migration at a territorial level has already been shifting from the study of nation states and transnational networks (Brubaker 2009, Castles 2003) to the study of cities and what scholars identify as the “urbanization of displacement” (Landau 2014). Acknowledging that there is a growing number of displaced families moving to live in urban centers—and are therefore more and more engaged in processes of urbanization—scholars are raising important questions about the territorial context of displacement and how displaced people negotiate their way in their new residential urban environments (Haysom 2013, Jacobsen 2006).

Although these prior studies of refugee relocation and IDP integration have been important in advancing new knowledge about the ways that forced migrants inhabit urban worlds, housing and resettlement options tend to be homogenized as static conditions of the urban context affecting the lives of migrants. Particularly, research has focused on informal settlements as the primary sites of relocation of internally displaced persons in cities, impacting them negatively because of high crime rates, the lack of access to public amenities, and its location in isolated urban peripheries far away from job opportunities. But these so-called slums can differ substantially in each of these variables depending on the conditions in which new

resettlement environments are created and how different authorities react to and participate in these creations.

For instance, sociologists Liza Weinstein and Patrick Heller are developing new research in Mumbai and Delhi—respectively—where they identify significant diversity across informal settlements unaccounted for by previous studies of informality. Heller (2015), in particular, identifies three main types of unplanned settlements in Delhi representing a grid of differentiated citizenship: (i) *jhuggijhopri* clusters, or settlements where tenure is most tenuous, (ii) unauthorized colonies, or settlements where residents have purchased land from a third party and where claims to land tend to be less tenuous, and (iii) resettlement colonies, or legal and planned resettlement developments by public authorities without basic services (p. 2). According to Heller, and his review of these different categories, the state creates and enforces different forms of citizenship—or access to city services—through its classification system of settlement types.

Like Heller's approach, I identify that there are different types of settlements through which displaced persons have been accessing housing in Colombia. Unlike Heller's approach, beyond his focus on state classification systems and how informality is constructed from above, I reconstruct the process through which different types of settlements are built from below and above. I study how these different types of settlements become new neighborhoods of the city and examine how this process impacts communities of displaced neighbors' claims on the city.

Adding a layer of complexity, the formation of new neighborhoods is in this study inextricably related to violent conflict and a regional history of displacement driven urbanization. Only until recently, scholars of conflict and urban studies are beginning to examine the complex interactions that exist between violent conflict and urbanization (Büscher 2018). With a focus on African cities, a group of scholars are paying new attention to these interactions examining the

role some cities have played as sites of security and protection, and as key hubs of war economies or humanitarian assistance (Büscher 2018, p. 196). In this case, with a focus on a small city that has emerged as an urban center in the midst of a high conflict region, and with a lens on neighborhood formation processes, I trace some of the physical manifestations of conflict on urban growth and the relations between displaced victims of conflict and the city.

Furthermore, in the context of displacement driven urban growth—where cities have played a role as sites of security and protection—I trace the complex dynamics that connect land grabbing practices in rural areas with processes of land acquisition in the city and their consequences for post-conflict reconstruction.

The neighborhood-formation framework

As I engage with efforts to better understand how space establishes different parameters on action (Davis 1999), I use the concept of the neighborhood in a broad sense, as a territorial continuity where people manage to regulate themselves as members of an institutionalized community of residents who share a *common* living space. In other words, I see neighborhoods emerging in the process of incorporation of different types of settlements to the city, where residents are able to identify themselves as sharing a *common* living space with others.

The notion of a *common* living space is important here because it elicits a scenario for collective action where residents organize to address day-to-day issues about the creation, use, and administration of the shared residential space. Empirical studies on the collective action dilemma have shown that some groups have been more successful than others addressing the “free-rider” problem in the management and use of common pool resources and the rates of contribution to a public good are shaped by various *contextual factors* like the normative framework, the capacity of communication and transparency of information, and the use of

sanctioning mechanisms (Ostrom 2000). This study will not evaluate how neighbors address the “free-rider” problem, neither do I assume that a neighborhood is just like any other common pool resource.² Still, if we can agree that a neighborhood constitutes a *common* living space, it is reasonable to expect that the use and management of such a space elicits some sort of collective action. Accordingly, it is also reasonable to expect that different *contextual factors* impact how people organize action—more or less successfully—around the creation, use, and regulation of such space. With this framework, and noting that Latin American citizens often organize at the neighborhood level “to express political preferences and make claims on the state” (Davis 1999, p. 609), I explore whether different resettlement options pursued by IDPs come with different *contextual factors* impacting residents’ claims on the city.

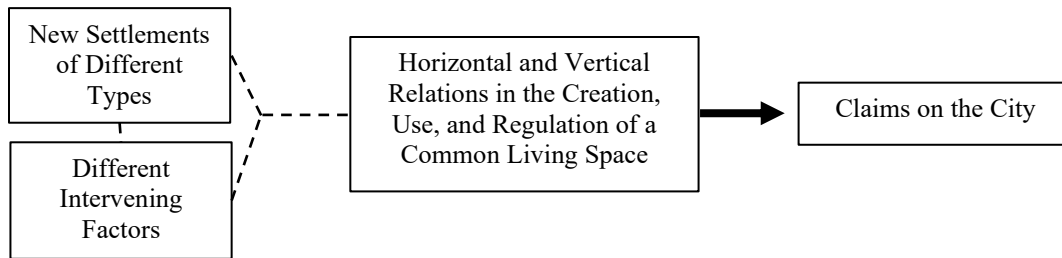
The importance of neighborhoods as crucial “testing grounds” to evaluate how migrants negotiate their way in urban residential environments has already been recognized by other scholars. In a major study on the integration of immigrant populations in different European cities, editors Ferruccio Pastore and Irene Ponzio (2016) identify the importance of neighborhoods as sites of “routinized practice and ‘repair’ work for everyday life” (p. 3). They argue that beyond nation-states and cities, we need to look at the local level where immigrants live and interact with others on a daily basis. This study shares Pastore and Ponzio’s view. But instead of looking at neighborhoods merely as *sites* of social interaction between migrants and long-term residents of the city, I retroactively examine *processes* of creation of new residential environments.

² Although residents do organize around the extraction of common pool resources available in their neighborhoods (e.g., subterranean waters, electricity, occupation of land, access to public aid), the neighborhood as such is somewhat different from a common pool resource.

By introducing the notion of neighborhood-formation I account for two related aspects of resettlement processes in a context of longstanding civil conflicts. The first is the creation of entirely new neighborhoods—or new residential spaces—largely formed as a result of the unmet housing demand of the many migrants that have been displaced to cities. Of course, not all migrants settle in what ought to become entirely new neighborhoods, but many do, and neighborhood creation is especially salient in moments of crisis when cities receive large influxes of forced migrants. The second aspect concerns basic transformations and changing urban conditions that young neighborhoods are subject to, especially during the first years of neighborhood creation and neighborhood stabilization. This second aspect is not limited to a specific period of time, but is defined by the following processes that are common in young neighborhoods: (i) the occupation and building of residential units, (ii) the allocation of land titles, (iii) the construction of amenities and public infrastructure, (iv) the institutionalization of the neighborhood and its boundaries in the local governance structure as well as in the minds of local residents, and (v) the configuration of neighborhood community groups and neighborhood leadership of some sort.

With this lens of neighborhood-formation, I evaluate how displaced migrants in Granada organize and participate in the creation and stabilization of their new neighborhoods, what intervening factors shape how residents establish horizontal and vertical relations to address neighborhood issues, and how this in turns shapes the ways in which they make claims on the city.

Figure 1: Neighborhood-Formation Framework



Following the Colombian experience and using Granada as a case study, I examine neighborhood-formation for three types of settlements prevalent among the more than 6 million Colombian IDPs by civil conflict: (i) public housing developments, (ii) land occupations, and (iii) land subdivisions without legal permits. In one year of fieldwork in Granada, between 2018 and 2019, I retroactively inquired about the formation process of new neighborhoods through oral histories and extensive review of city council minutes. The new neighborhoods of Granada that are the focus of this study were created between 2000 and 2015, and many displaced persons—whom I interviewed—who participated in the formation process still reside there. These relatively young neighborhoods were also undergoing important transformations in the allocation of land titles and the construction of public amenities and basic infrastructure which I was able to observe when I visited the neighborhoods. I discuss in more detail below my selection of the specific cases and the methodological approach of this study.

Armed conflict, displacement, and resettlement in Colombia

In the recent history of Colombia, a decades-long civil conflict (ca. 1964-2016) between the national government and various guerrilla armies has produced more than 8 million cases of internal forced displacement affecting more than 6 million IDPs.³ Protracted civil war and

³ There are different estimates of the total number of forced displacements produced by the violence of Colombia's last civil conflict, but the impact and scale of this phenomenon is undeniably large. As of today (April 2020), the

dislocation is a phenomenon that is somewhat unique of Colombia, positioning it in the world ranking as the country with the second largest number of internal displacements by violent conflict after Syria in the 20th century.⁴ Still, as in many other parts of the world, displacement and resettlement in Colombia are ongoing processes unleashed by violence and insecurity in the access to land. As in many other parts of the world, IDPs in Colombia have also followed a migration pattern from rural areas—disproportionally affected by the violence of conflict—to urban centers (Vargas 2012, Lozano-Gracia et al 2010, Ibañez 2009).

Within cities, also echoing cases in other nations, IDPs in Colombia have resettled in diverse ways, which begins to be evidenced in the heterogeneity of land tenure. A study by *Econometria SA*. (2005), which conducted a survey on a representative sample of displaced households in 2003, estimated that 24.7% of households were renting a space that year, 15.6% lived in usufruct, and around 53.4% of households had some sort of homeownership⁵—with only 11.6% of the 53.4% holding legal property titles (see Table 1). Within such diversity of tenure, the Colombian case also shows a general trend towards homeownership, evidenced both in the land tenure data as well as, physically, through the transformation of the built environment of many cities' urban peripheries.

national Victims Assistance Unit reports that there have been 8,011,693 reported cases of forced displacement, and this number does not include cases where people have not reported displacement to public authorities or forced displacements that occurred before 1985. Because some people have been displaced more than once the estimate is that around 6 million people have been forcibly displaced in the country.

⁴ See IDMC (<https://www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data>) data portal.

⁵ In this dissertation I adopt a flexible definition of ownership that includes not only households holding legal property titles, but also households that live in different types of informal settlements or are occupying land without paying rent, and with an option of becoming owners under Colombia's constitutionally recognized social function of property (article 58 of Colombia's Constitution of 1991). This includes the following categories outlined in table 1: Ownership with property title, Ownership without property title, and Land occupation.

Table 1: % Displaced Households by Tenure Type

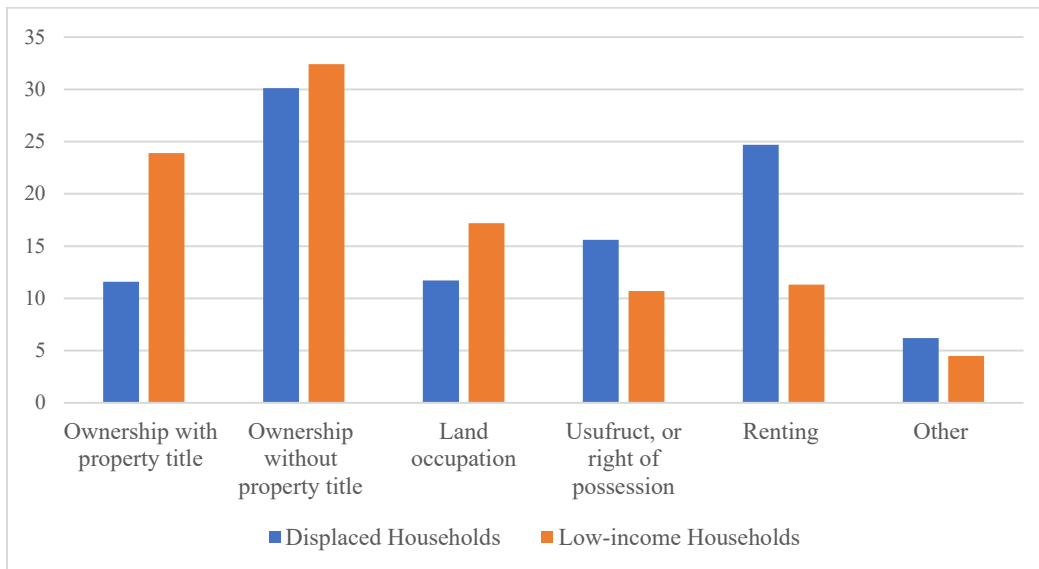
Tenure Type	% of Total Surveyed households
Ownership with property title	11.6
Ownership without property title*	30.1
Land occupation*	11.7
Usufruct, or right of possession*	15.6
Renting	24.7
Other	6.2

Source: Unión Temporal Econometría S.A. – SEI s.a. Encuesta a población desplazada por violencia – 2005

*The difference between “ownership without property title” and “land occupation” is that in the former case households hold some form of *informal* title, because they bought the lot from someone, but the purchase was not properly notarized and registered. Land occupation and usufruct refer to situations where households occupy land without paying rent. Whereas households in the former category occupy land by their own means, households in the latter case have been given formal permission by owners to live in their property in exchange for work.

The ownership rate among displaced households is consistent with the national trend, showing an ownership rate of 53% for all households in urban centers in the 2005 national census. There is however a significant difference between the national population and the population of internally displaced persons. At the national level, only 1% of households did not hold a legal property title of the owned housing unit, which contrasts with the 44.8% of displaced household that did not hold legal property titles in the sample by Econometria. The composition of displaced households by tenure type is actually similar to that of low-income households who also show high levels of informality in the access to property titles. The same study by Econometria created a parallel representative sample of low-income—but not displaced—households in Colombia, to compare the two groups. The results show that in both groups more than 40% of households were owners without formal property titles (see Figure 2), which is not unexpected considering that both groups represent vulnerable populations in Colombia, displaced families have a very low-income—with few exceptions—and market rate access to housing has been historically limited to middle- and high-income families in Colombia.

Figure 2: % Displaced Households and % of Low-Income Households by Tenure Type



Source: Unión Temporal Econometría S.A. – SEI s.a. Encuesta a población desplazada por violencia – 2005

Beyond these similarities, there are important differences between displaced and low-income families to consider. While a larger percentage of low-income households lived in owned homes with legal property titles in 2003 (23.9% for low-income vs 11.6% for displaced families), displaced households were renters or had an usufruct agreement in a higher percentage: 24.7% of displaced households were renters, in contrast to 11.3% for low-income households; and 15.6% of displaced households had an usufruct agreement, in contrast to 10.7% for low-income households.⁶ These differences can be attributed to the harsher conditions imposed by displacement, considering that the pool of ownership options to displaced families may vary according to the time families have had to adjust to their new living environments and to the economic and psychological shock of dislocation.

⁶ With sample sizes of 1200 households per group the differences in the mean estimators for each sample, and across each category, are statistically significant at 95% confidence.

Data from a 2005 representative sample of displaced households in Colombia by *Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Económico* at Universidad de los Andes shows that renting and usufruct housing options tend to be relatively high during the first years after displacement, but the tenure composition is reversed over the years with ownership options becoming more prevalent (Figure 3). This trend holds across age groups, revealing that it is not just the age of the householder that is driving a transition to ownership, but also the years that have passed after displacement.

Figure 3: % Displaced Households by Tenure Type by Years of Displacement

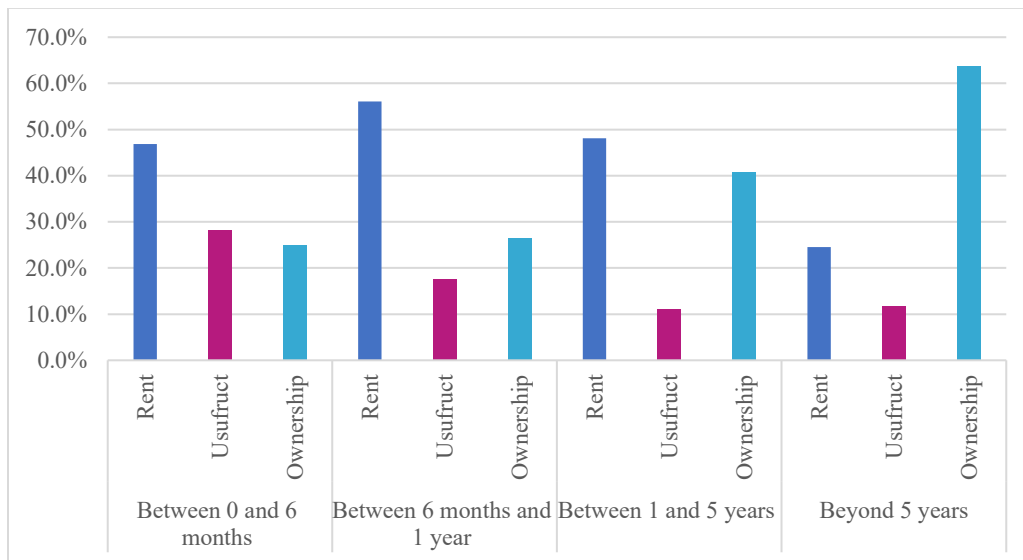
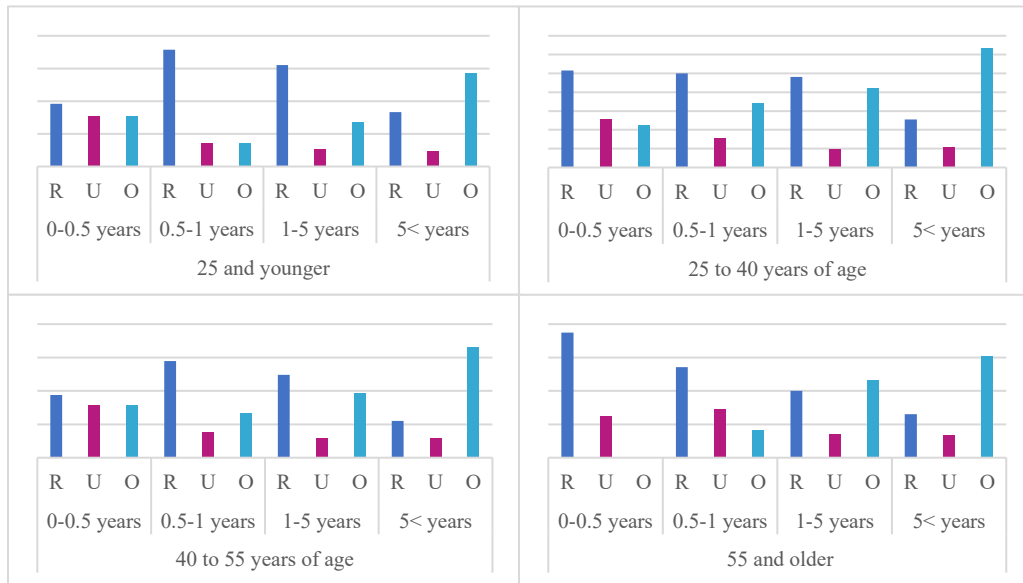


Figure 3 (Continued)



Source: Calculations by author; Data taken from Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Económico de la Universidad de los Andes – Encuesta de Hogares Desplazados – 2005, in <http://datoscede.uniandes.edu.co/>

These results support the idea that there is a transition process from displacement to homeownership in urban centers, but before this transition takes place there is a period of adjustment.

Generally, according to my interviews with displaced residents, when first moving to a new municipality after forced displacement, people tend to seek shelter at a relative or friend’s house, or at temporary living quarters provided by the local administration or a humanitarian organization like the Red Cross. As the displaced families find a way to sustain themselves in the city or start receiving humanitarian support from the national government in the form of periodical cash transfers—after their declaration of displacement has been presented, reviewed, and accepted by national authorities—many become renters. If they have enough income, they can rent a housing unit for the whole family. If they do not, they end up sharing the same living quarters with other families also paying rent. Alternatively, especially those of rural backgrounds

enter a bargain with landowners in the countryside to be allowed to live in the landowner's property, in exchange for their work safeguarding the property, taking care of the animals, or cultivating the land. Lastly, those who are able, attain some form of homeownership. In some cases, they use monetary reparations ranging between 15 and 35 million pesos (ca. \$5,000 and \$7,000 US dollars) to pay for a housing unit or an empty lot. According to the national Victim's Law, every displaced person in Colombia is entitled to receive humanitarian aid for about ten years, and a onetime monetary reparation in the year-ten after displacement (Law 1448 of 2011). Many have used these resources to access housing, but it is important to note that many are not officially registered as displaced persons because they never declared displacement to public authorities—thus are not eligible to receive income support for displacement—and have sought to attain housing through other means.

Why is there any such transition to homeownership? Although not every displaced person follows the same resettlement pathway in their own processes of moving on after displacement, the reality of displacement in Colombia reveals that families do have very bad experiences renting or living at someone else's roof after dislocation, which explains why ownership becomes more prevalent as displaced persons settle in cities. Generally, renting tends to be described as a harsh and difficult experience by displaced individuals. For one, they struggle with monthly rent payments because they lose most of their wealth with displacement, many households break apart after dislocation, and many heads of household struggle to find jobs in cities because their abilities working in agriculture are often not valued in urban centers (Ibañez & Moya 2006). Additionally, some of them do not count with a strong social network, and many are adapting to new living environments. Under such circumstances renting and even usufruct housing options, although necessary for some period, add instability to their changing worlds,

not just because they generally struggle to pay rent but also because they are more exposed to the mercy of landowners, who may decide to kick them out inadvertently or take advantage of their situation by demanding unpaid work—not considered in original agreements. As recalled by one of my interviewees: “when you are in need, people take advantage.” Parents and single parents with children have it even more difficult because they do not like landlords telling their children what to do and reprimanding them, and they fear exposing kids to sexual abuse when parent/s leave them at home alone with landlords because they must go to work. On top of these difficulties there is also the lack of a national program to support renters. Besides a 24 months’ rent subsidy that displaced families may request in exchange for their right to apply for a subsidy to finance the cost of low-income housing (Decree 095 of 2001), there are no other national forms of rent support. Actually, instead of receiving rent support for two years, many heads of household prefer to apply for the low-income housing subsidy which represents, to them, a better promise of residential stability for the long run. In this difficult institutional and social context, displaced households in Colombia have thus gravitated towards homeownership.

This trend towards housing acquisition is evidenced in the physical infrastructure of cities today. Especially in the urban peripheries of cities where land is less regulated and therefore easier to occupy and develop through informal processes. Similarly, institutional efforts to grant access to housing to displaced and other vulnerable populations also occur for the most part in the same urban peripheries where land is cheap. In a working paper by Camargo et al (2020), the authors examine the effects of conflict driven migration on urban expansion in Colombia using nighttime lights imagery and forced migration data. The authors identify, as expected, that forced migration flows to cities are related to an increase in urban expansion, particularly in peri-urban areas. The exodus of residents from Colombia’s rural areas over many decades has had an effect

on the urban footprint, which scholars are beginning to explore through the availability of these new tools of analysis that reveal transformations not just in the country's main metropolitan areas, but also in middle- and small-size cities.

The history of displacement in Colombia is materially imprinted in cities through the creation of these new residential spaces, which I identify as part of neighborhood formation processes through which displaced families have attained—or have sought to attain—some sort of residential stability. In this general and collective process, homeownership has been accessed for the most part through either of the following options: (i) a government sponsored housing subsidy or public housing project, (ii) occupation of private or public land and eventual construction of self-built housing—equivalent to the “land occupation” category in Table 1—and (iii) purchase of land and eventual construction of self-built housing in an area that has been subdivided by the landowner, or someone who claims to be the landowner, without legal permit—equivalent to the “ownership without property title” category in Table 1. These three different options create a resettlement typology for the Colombian case, which has also offered access to more affordable rents to many displaced families—besides the option of homeownership. This resettlement typology is the focus of this study. In the following subsections I provide some examples of how this typology has been consolidating in Colombia.

Public housing: Free housing neighborhoods

In 1997 the national government recognized, for the first time, the need to adopt measures to address many of the challenges experienced by displaced families, including the access to housing in areas of return and resettlement (Law 387 of 1997). Despite this important milestone in the recognition of special rights and challenges faced by displaced families, the national housing agenda for displaced populations has been limited to the basis of Colombia's

affordable housing policy: The Housing Family Subsidy (*Subsidio Familiar de Vivienda—SFV*). With the adoption of neoliberal economic reforms in the 1990s, the affordable housing policy has been framed in a context of supply and demand, where low-income housing supply gets left to the market—and the participation of private construction firms—and housing demand is supported through a system of subsidies—SFV—to eligible low-income households (Cuervo and Jaramillo 2009). Accordingly, with the reform of 1997, displaced households were meant to be prioritized, among the universe of all eligible low-income households, for a housing subsidy—or SFV.

Scholars have criticized the reduction of the housing policy for displaced persons to the SFV, arguing that even though there have been efforts to prioritize displaced households (Constitutional Sentence 28493 of 2006, Decree 170 of 2008), the housing problem of these families is not the same as that of low-income households and the government should be taking serious considerations about housing provision as a form of reparation (Jolly 2008, Castillo de Herrera 2004). Moreover, because subsidies do not cover the total cost of a housing unit, many poor displaced households have not been able to cash their assigned subsidies. In other words, displaced families have generally lacked the additional funds necessary to cover the full cost of housing,⁷ and subsidies have thus remained uncashed over many years; they have remained a piece of paper and an unfulfilled promise in the hands of many displaced heads of household.

To address the issue of the uncashed subsidies, the presidential administration of Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014; 2014-2018) adopted a program in 2012 to provide 100,000 completely free housing units to what the president identified as “the poorest of the poor.” The

⁷ The proportion covered by the subsidy varies depending on the cost of housing and the family income, but it generally represents about 50% of the cost of housing. Households may combine this subsidy with other available local and regional subsidies to finance about 80% of the cost of housing.

program was designed to benefit three vulnerable groups: (i) people “under extreme poverty” according to the State’s social programs, (ii) internally displaced persons by civil conflict, and (iii) displaced persons by the 2011 harsh rainy season. The implementation of this program was unprecedented, reaching displaced households who had been historically unable to attain formal housing through the national low-income housing policy; between 2012-2014, 74% of eligible households to a free unit were internally displaced (Departamento Nacional de Planeación 2014).

Most of the free housing projects implemented by the national government have been located in the peripheries of more than 205 small and large urban centers in Colombia. In large urban centers, the building typology is mostly characterized by the construction of mid- and high-rise housing developments with a range between 300 and 4,000 apartment units. In small cities, like Granada, where the public housing provided represents a larger proportion of the local housing stock, the building typology of free housing projects has been characterized by the construction of one-story single-family housing complexes, and many of these complexes have become entirely new neighborhoods of the city.

Informal settlements: Land occupations and land developments

Notwithstanding the national efforts to provide 100,000—plus a second round of 10,545—free housing units, the amount of public housing provided is no match to the numerous units that have been built in informal settlements for the use and benefit of displaced and low-income families in Colombia.⁸ Although there is no data on the number of informal housing units in the country, a study estimated that Bogota—the capital city—alone had at least 50,458

⁸ Scholars studying internal displacement by conflict in Colombia have identified that the displaced—along with other poor households—have been occupying for the most part neighborhoods in cities’ informal peripheries (see Salcedo-Fidalgo 2015, Lozano-Gracia et al 2010, Correa de Andreis 2009, Ruiz 2008, Bello and Villa 2006, Osorio-Perez 1993).

informal units in 2015 (Techo 2015). This is just a bit less than half the number of units that the government built for the whole nation with the free housing program.

Urban centers that have received large influxes of displaced persons over several decades have seen new informal settlements emerge, especially in the poor urban peripheries where most of the newcomers have accessed housing. In various Colombian cities, groups of displaced families have organized to occupy abandoned lands and reclaim back their rights to housing lost with displacement. Many who have occupied land illegally have been able to settle and institutionalize the existence of their new “neighborhoods”—recognized by other citizens and by public authorities despite their condition of informality. Others have failed and have been evicted. The arrival of disenfranchised forced migrants to cities has also boosted the informal land markets preeminent in city peripheries. Migrants have created a new demand for the housing projects by popularly known *pirate*—or illegal—developers. These types of developments are common and have become very salient in small cities with a large proportion of IDPs, where local governments have had less institutional capacity to control the financial appetites of informal developers, and where legal ambiguity in the specifications of land titles—who owns what—has facilitated the appropriation of abandoned lands by the developers.

Either through land occupations or through the participation of *pirate* developers in city building, newly formed informal neighborhoods of displaced families are common across many cities in the nation. Caracoli, for example, is popularly known as a neighborhood built by displaced families in the urban peripheries of the nation’s capital city, Bogota. It was established in 2014 with the arrival of 640 families who occupied what was then an abandoned landslide risk area (Radio Caracol 2019). To the outskirts of the big city, in a neighboring municipality called Soacha, thousands of displaced families have bought land through informal land markets in two

of the cities' most impoverished districts: *Altos de Cazucá* and *Altos de la Florida*. In Medellín, the second largest city in the country, the currently renovated neighborhood *Moravia* is known to be a neighborhood largely shaped by displacement because displaced families arrived there to occupy the less appealing floodable areas, located next to a former garbage dump.

Besides the most populous Colombian cities, there are also several examples of land occupations in small and medium size cities. Villavicencio, for example, had 356,461 inhabitants in 2005 and public officials estimated that around 65,000 displaced persons lived there in 2010 (El Tiempo 2010). Today, many displaced families have occupied land and have successfully built residences in neighborhood *La Reliquia*, to the outskirts of the city. By 2001, around 3,500 families lived in occupied lots in *La Reliquia* (Sentence T-1346 of 2001), and this number has been increasing with the arrival of new displaced families in recent years.⁹

Yopal is the capital city of one of Colombia's regional departments called Casanare. The city had a population of 90,172 inhabitants in 2005 and received 24,400 displaced persons between 1985 and 2017.¹⁰ With very low institutional and economic capacity at the local and regional levels, regional departmental authorities of Casanare admitted to national authorities in 2017 that although efforts had been made to facilitate the access to housing to some victims of the armed conflict, they had not been able to address the housing needs of the totality of families registered as displaced persons in the region (Sentence T-636 of 2017). As a result, many families turned to the informal real estate markets to get access to housing, and many also joined efforts to occupy public land. In particular, in 2012, a group of displaced families organized to

⁹ By 2012, the national Constitutional Court issued a warning about the housing situation of displaced persons in Villavicencio, documenting that displaced families lived for the most part in shacks, in land occupations, in environmental hazard zones with no access to basic services (Sentence T-454 of 2012).

¹⁰ Registro Unico de Víctimas data portal at <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394>.

occupy land owned by the city, arguing that they were protecting a fundamental right to “decent housing” after public authorities had failed to address the needs of displaced populations and deliver housing that had been promised—in 2010 departmental authorities promised to deliver low-income housing to 280 families in Yopal, 130 of which were headed by single mothers who were also victims of displacement (Sentence T-349 of 2012).¹¹ Another consequence of the imminent need of housing in Yopal has been the development of *pirate* neighborhoods in its urban peripheries. Specifically, neighborhood *Bendición* was developed in 2014 by then aspiring mayor—elected in 2015—John Jairo Torres. With 10,000 lots for sale, the *pirate* developer meant to house about one fifth of the city population, creating the largest neighborhood in town (Arenas 2014). Today, more than 5,000 families live in *Bendición* (El Espectador 2019), and a 2016 characterization of the area has established that around 45% of the families who resided there were displaced (Prensa Libre Casanare 2016).

The impact of displacement on the creation of new neighborhoods and the occupation of public land is further evidenced in more extreme ways in very small cities. La Paz had an urban population of 11,909 inhabitants in 2000, and according to the national registry of displaced populations 9,620 persons declared displacement in the city between 2000 and 2015. This means that in 15 years, La Paz became the temporary, or permanent, place of residence of almost 100% of the population it had in 2000. Unsurprisingly, the city has been experiencing a housing shortage. By 2014, the Constitutional Court identified that around 200 families were building shacks in the municipality’s soccer stadium and an additional group of 200 families had already built housing units in the municipality’s horse racing venue. Although the occupation of local

¹¹ With support of the Constitutional Court, the families were allowed to stay in the area until authorities had granted an alternative housing solution.

public venues may appear at first sight as a temporary housing solution—as these sites tend to be guarded by public authorities and regular citizens who have an interest in preserving the integrity of these places for the public use—the Constitutional Court reported that families in the local horse racing ring—most of whom were displaced according to the local ombudsman’s office—had been living there for over three years (Sentence T-655 of 2014). In the face of unattended housing needs and very low institutional capacities, temporary emergency housing became a neighborhood.

These are all examples of how informal processes of urbanization are intertwined with public legislation and the implementation of public housing in the urban peripheries of many Colombian cities. In these cities, low-income housing projects stand like a needle in a haystack of informality, spreading like a stain of fresh ink and re-shaping the urban footprint of cities. In these urban peripheries, new neighborhoods have emerged, and in these new neighborhoods, residents experience different challenges extensively discussed in the literature on urban marginality (Auyero 2011) and urban informality (Fischer 2014). In this dissertation, I explore some of these challenges, but within the diversity introduced with different types of resettlement processes. Specifically, I explore whether and how the creation of two public housing projects, a land occupation, and a pirate development have an impact on displaced residents’ horizontal and vertical relations, and their capacities to make collective claims on the city. I conduct this study in Granada, a Colombian city of about 80,000 inhabitants that has received tens of thousands of IDPs over the last three decades.

The study

In 2005 the Colombian National Census determined that Granada had a total population of 50,172 inhabitants. Like any other municipality in Colombia, Granada’s jurisdictional territory

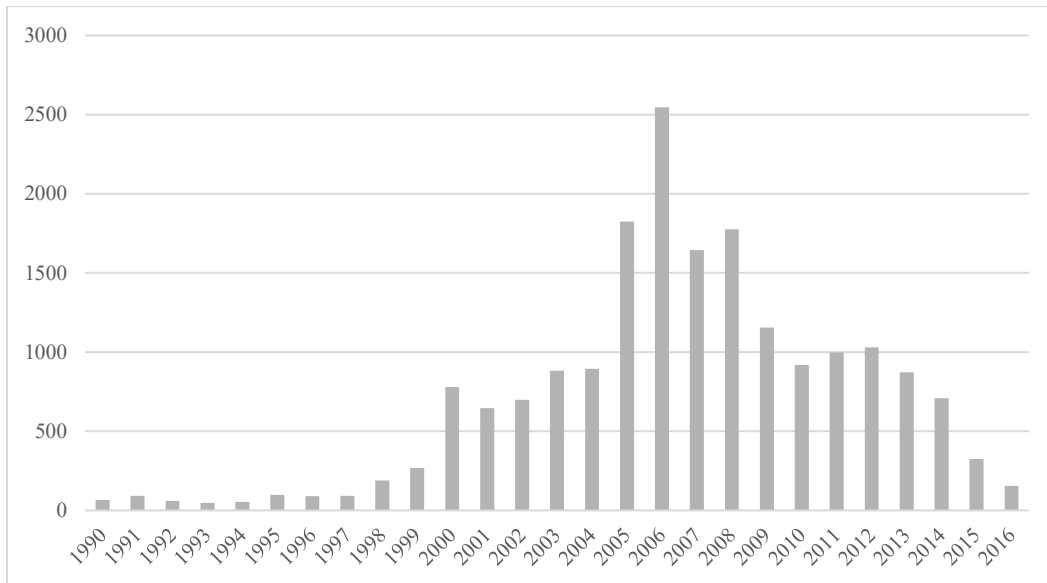
is divided in two: an urban area defined by the urban perimeter established in the local land-use plan, identified as the head of the municipality (*cabecera municipal*), and a rural area which comprises all what falls beyond that urban perimeter. According to the Census, 40,941 people lived within Granada's urban perimeter in 2005, and according to the Census projections, that number would increase up to 53,305 residents by 2016. Such modest projections bore little resemblance to the reality faced by city residents. For them, the city has grown much more than what the census depicted. Estimates of the population size of urban Granada vary from person to person. Planning officials who draft city plans using their own educated guess about the urban population of Granada estimate that the number ranges between 80,000 and 100,000 inhabitants for 2016. No one knows for sure what the precise number is, but residents in general insist that their own projections are better than those of the 2005 Census.¹² Why are these residents so concerned with population counts?

In the last three decades Granada received an unprecedented inflow of displaced persons coming from nearby rural areas, harassed by the violence of the armed conflict (see Figure 4). Throughout this period, the region became what residents call a *zona roja* (a red zone), because of the uniquely high levels of violence in contrast to other regions in the country. Granada, in the center of it all, received increasing numbers of dead bodies that would be brought to the city morgue or the regional hospital. It also received thousands of families who sought refuge within and just outside Granada's official urban perimeter. Specifically, the national registry of displaced populations reported that between 1990 and 2016 the municipality received 18,912 cases of displacement. A large number considering that the city had a population of 25,061

¹² Colombia has no more recent population statistics based on a national census survey. Although there is a 2018 census, today—October 2020—the government has not released the data on total population by municipality.

inhabitants in 1990. Current residents of Granada are thus very concerned with population counts because they know that the Census only captured a population increase up to 2005, and the 2005 urban population data did not account for the large number of families who settled just outside the then officially demarcated urban in Granada. They have seen the city transform.

Figure 4: Annual cases of displacement arriving at Granada



Source: Registro Único de Víctimas – 2018, in <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394>.

The attempts by Granada’s residents to estimate population counts are substantiated by a simple observation: they have seen new neighborhoods emerge. Although they do not know for sure how many neighborhoods has Granada today, people estimate that the number has doubled since the early 2000s. There were around 42 neighborhoods before the new millennium, now “there have to be more than 80,” they say.¹³ The conspicuous new neighborhoods of Granada are

¹³ There is no official data on the total number of neighborhoods in the city. The municipality estimates that there were 75 neighborhoods in 2019, but the land use plan under implementation in 2019-2020 identified more neighborhoods.

located in the city’s expanding urban peripheries (see Map 1), and, although there is no official data identifying where forced migrants have settled, residents know that most reside in these relatively new peripheral neighborhoods.

Map 1: New neighborhoods outside Granada’s 2000 urban footprint



Source: Author – 2019; Urban Footprint: Atlas de Expansion Urbana Colombia – 2019, in <http://www.atlasexpansionurbanacolombia.org/datos>

*All highlighted areas are residential developments established outside the 2000 urban footprint. This map was created with information taken from participation in several community meetings during the formulation of a new land-use-plan for the city, and one-on-one meetings with public officials and long-term residents where I asked them to identify all the new neighborhoods of the city—those that were established during or after the large migration wave of IDPs to Granada.¹⁴

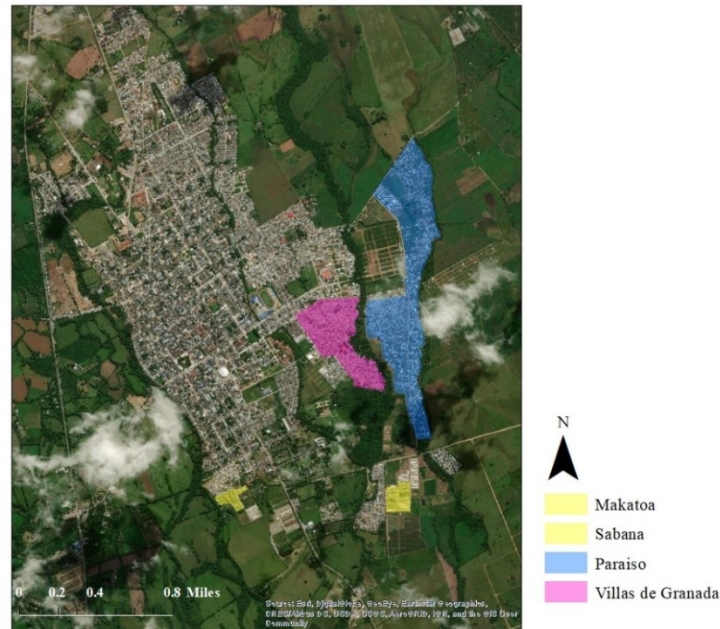
The emergence of a variety of new neighborhoods in Granada makes it an ideal place to study how displaced persons have followed different pathways in the pursuit of residential stability. Specifically, four new peripheral neighborhoods of Granada evidence the development

¹⁴ During my time doing fieldwork in Granada, I learned that the planning office did not have a clear account of how many neighborhoods the city had and what their jurisdictional boundaries were. There was also no available information on informal settlements.

of the three main spatial configurations IDPs have accessed housing in Colombia (i.e., government-sponsored public housing projects, land occupations, and land subdivisions by private developers).

First, *Makatoa* and *Sabana* are two housing projects established with the 100,000 Free Housing program, and each one has become a completely new neighborhood of the city. Built by the government between 2014 and 2015, Makatoa has a total of 180 housing units 95 of which are occupied by displaced families, and Sabana has a total of 196 units 161 of which are occupied by displaced families (Personal Communication from Subdirección para la Superación de la Pobreza at Departamento para la Prosperidad Social 2017). *Villas de Granada* is another new neighborhood, established in 2002 when many displaced and other poor families joined efforts to occupy private land that had been left abandoned for years. Although there is no data on the number of residents living in this informal settlement, the neighborhood's local leaders estimate that there are more than 2,500 families living in Villas de Granada making it the second largest neighborhood of the city today. Lastly, neighborhood *Paraiso* was developed by a powerful local entrepreneur called Reinel Gaitan-Tangarife. It was established in 2009, three years after the migration peak of IDPs to Granada. Again, there is no official data on the number of families living in Paraiso, but Gaitan-Tangarife's real estate agents estimate that more than 3,500 families—of which a great number are victims of the armed conflict—have built a house in the neighborhood. Today, Paraiso is the largest neighborhood of the city.

Map 2: Neighborhoods Makatoa, Sabana, Villas de Granada, and Paraiso



Source: Author – 2019

The process of neighborhood formation of Makatoa, Sabana, Paraiso, and Villas de Granada is inserted within a larger trend towards peripheral urbanization (Caldeira 2017), happening in many cities around the world. Cities are no *tabula rasas* to the arrival of displaced families, and urbanization processes—conceived in this case through the development of different types of residential environments—both shape and are being shaped by displacement. Acknowledging that there are general challenges that impact life in urban fringes, I explore whether there are specificities to the creation of these different types of resettlement environments that impact neighborhood communities and their capacities to organize and make claims around a common living space.

With this goal, in the following chapter—chapter 1—I introduce the specific context of Granada and its immediate region. I identify Granada and its immediate region as a geo-historical space that frames the social and material phenomena discussed in the subsequent chapters. I explore both the generalities and particulars of migration and urbanization in

Granada, and the relevance of this case to the study of small cities—generally less studied by the literature—that have emerged as urban centers receiving forced migrants in the midst of high conflict regions. To reconstruct the history of Granada and its importance as a regional epicenter, like many others in Colombia, I rely mainly on secondary historical sources and on migration flows data available at the municipal level in Colombia. I also conducted 32 interviews with public officials.

In the subsequent three chapters, I delve into the neighborhood formation processes of each of the three types of settlements that concern this study. Chapter 2 focuses on the land occupation Villas de Granada, chapter 3 studies the case of the pirate development Paraiso, and chapter 4 evaluates the two free housing projects turned into new neighborhoods Makatoa and Sabana.

In each chapter, I first reconstruct each neighborhood's enabling process through neighborhood narratives and extensive revision of city council minutes between 2000 and 2018. Narratives of neighborhood enabling processes not only provide a lens into how a neighborhood was created. They also reflect how residents think about and relate to their current neighborhoods; what they deem important and what they do not care to mention at all. I examine these narratives as a frame of action. According to Mario Small (2004), neighborhood narratives can be conducive to participation when they are perceived—or framed—as aligned to *personal life chances and aspirations*. Hence, the same narrative can, or cannot, result in more participation depending on how individuals frame it in relation to their own dynamic and diverse experiences. I am interested in identifying the ways in which *personal life chances and aspirations* are tied to particular conditions in the formation of new neighborhoods, shaping both neighborhood narratives and action of current residents. Accordingly, I examine these narratives

in relation to my interviewees' residential challenges and needs, and how residents in turn tend or expect to organize to manage their common living space. Neighborhood narratives and observations of social organization were collected through 124 in person interviews¹⁵ and participation in several community meetings.

Because of the differences in the years in which each neighborhood was established—with Villas de Granada being the oldest neighborhood established in 2002 and Makatoa the youngest established 13 years later—in my fieldwork analysis it was important to account for these time differences and how the passing of time can structure narratives and actions in each neighborhood. To do this, I not only used city council minutes to reconstruct the story of each neighborhood and contrast it with residents' narratives. I also focused on assessing each narrative in relation to the specific challenges' residents were facing at the time of the interviews, and at different moments during neighborhood formation processes. Instead of focusing on general perceptions of the neighborhood, which tend to vary with time, I paid particular attention to situations in which residents faced *very similar* challenges in *very different* ways, and how they made sense of these differences in their neighborhood narratives.

In a last and concluding chapter, I juxtapose the three cases comparing challenges and opportunities in terms of: the capacities of each community of residents to transform the conditions in which they inhabit the city and act politically, the potential for making new claims of reparation, and the vulnerabilities they are exposed to in the different types of settlements.

¹⁵ I conducted 110 interviews with displaced residents and 14 interviews with non-displaced residents of the four neighborhoods. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and I translated them to English. When allowed, interviews were recorded and transcribed. Most of the interviews were conducted at the interviewees' homes in each of the neighborhoods of this study.

This juxtaposition benefits from a comparative perspective that facilitates identification of the challenges and opportunities introduced with different types of settlements hosting a *fairly similar* population. To be clear, this comparative perspective is not intended to follow *a single factor* that varies across *fairly similar* populations or remains the same across *fairly distinct* populations, as it is common in quantitative analysis. Using an inductive logic, my approach seeks to identify instead *what are the various factors that vary* across populations and spaces commonly studied and understood as *fairly similar*. Having identified the relevant *contextual factors*—if any—I explore how they matter for shaping social organization at the neighborhood level. With this methodological approach, the three cases are not representative of any given population. They rather point at general mechanisms and specific conditions through which neighborhood formation processes impact a collectivity of migrants. By identifying such mechanisms and conditions, the last chapter also includes a discussion of the policy repertoires that could potentially address the challenges introduced with different settlement types to displaced migrants' collective capacities to make claims on the city.

Chapter 1: Geo-Historical Spaces of Conflict and Dislocation

Making the case for small cities like Granada: A small regional-urban-epicenter

Why Granada? This was a common question from residents of Granada who were surprised that I had traveled from my hometown Bogota to study their city. Without any family connections or a personal history that could explain why I ended up doing research there, my interviewees were amazed that an outsider had chosen Granada—a city that had not really made it into the national history books and was rarely mentioned in the national newspapers—as her own object of study and her own center of knowledge production. To them and to current scholars who may pose a similar question, I answer that Granada became important to me both in its specificity and its potential to contribute to more general knowledge about forced resettlement, intra-regional demographic relations of conflict and dislocation, and a generally unaccounted for trend of IDP relocation to small cities.

Like Granada, there are other small cities with a population between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants that have played an important role in the reception and integration of families and individuals displaced by the internal armed conflict in Colombia but have been unfortunately overlooked by the Colombian literature on IDP integration to new resettlement environments. These small cities face specific challenges that differentiate them from large cities. For example, they generally have less institutional and economic capacities to attend the needs of newcomers and the impact of displacement tends to be larger than in the large cities (Ibáñez and Vélez 2003).

Furthermore, as I will show below, in contrast to many urban migrants in the nation's largest cities, forced migration from rural settlements to small cities, like Granada, came, for the most part, from the most immediate regions as opposed to a diversity of areas around the nation.

Hundreds of thousands of individuals in Colombia have taken long journeys from the moist forests of the Colombian Pacific coast, the stretches of the Catatumbo river at the border with Venezuela, the steep slopes of the Andean-Amazon piedmont, or the oil producing territories of the vast oriental plainlands, to converge in some of Colombia's biggest cities (i.e., Bogota, Medellin, Barranquilla, and Cali). Many individuals have also migrated to small cities, but in this latter case the trajectories of migration tend to be shorter and more conscripted to specific regions. This difference in the trajectories of displacement suggests that migration to small cities lacks, in most cases, a distinct break between the geographies of conflict that preceded migration and the geography of the city. In other words, unlike large cities with migrants from very different regions, in small cities IDPs tend to come from the same region, thus they are familiar with each other and each other's histories of displacement. Moreover, while political and social dynamics in the creation of housing access in a large city like Bogota will probably be dissociated from the specific dynamics that displaced forced migrants who now reside there, in a place like Granada we should not be surprised to find out that actors who have played a role—directly or indirectly—displacing people in the region are also involved—directly or indirectly—facilitating access to land in the city.

Identifying that the relocation of an important number of IDPs to Colombian small cities is more strikingly embedded in, or less easily disconnected from, regional dynamics of conflict, in this chapter I use a regional thinking framework to better understand the consolidation of these regional dynamics with a focus on the case of Granada.

In 1991, historian Hermes Tovar wrote a seminal piece entitled *La Historia Regional como Problema y como Programa de la Historia Nacional* (Regional History as Problem and Program to National History). He, like other Colombian historians at the time, recognized the

importance of regional histories in creating better knowledge of key processes like the evolution of capitalist agriculture, guerrilla warfare, the rise of drug trafficking, and the composition and direction of internal migrations in the Colombian territory (Rausch 2010). In an effort to rethink the concept of the region, beyond static politico-administrative boundaries and “natural specificities,” Tovar re-defined regional thinking not as an end in itself but as a means to reconstruct *geo-historical* spaces established through demographic movements, economic dynamics, and the consolidation of habits and manners that are constantly shaping, and reshaping, social codes and a sense of belonging to one or another territory (Tovar 1991). From this regional thinking framework, I introduce the case and the history of Granada as a small *regional-urban-epicenter*—as current residents of Granada like to call it—that, like other small cities in the country, has received an important influx of IDPs from its most immediate region. By reconstructing the history of Granada as a *geo-historical* space of conflict and dislocation, I not only reclaim the role played by small cities in the reception and integration of forced migrants, but also provide necessary context to better understand processes of housing and land acquisition, and neighborhood-formation discussed in the next chapters.

A case for small Cities: Regional nodes within Colombia’s high conflict areas

Between 1990 and 2016 18,912 people reported displacement to official authorities in Granada.¹⁶ Not a great amount if compared to the 563,410 cases reported in Bogota during the same period, the 475,688 cases reported in Medellin, or the 165,641 cases reported in Cali. Yet, after controlling for the 1990 population size of each city, of the four cities, Granada received the highest percentage of displaced persons representing 75% of its urban population, followed by

¹⁶ Some among the displaced do not report displacement.

Medellin with 30%, Bogota with 11%, and Cali with 10%.¹⁷ The power of numbers is relative to a reference point, and these differences show that the reality of conflict driven displacement towards Colombia’s various urban centers can and should be examined from different perspectives.

If one were to identify which cities have been the main reception centers of IDPs in Colombia, based on the absolute number of persons who have arrived at each municipality after displacement, at the top of the list are Bogota and Medellin. Next in the list are other cities above 500,000 inhabitants (e.g., Cali, Santa Marta, Buenaventura) which have received more than three times the amount of IDPs that small cities—below 100,000 inhabitants—have received on an individual basis. And yet, together, 593 cities between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants have received 3,259,099 cases of displacement between 1985 and 2016, representing a non-negligible amount of 41% of the total reported cases of displacement in the nation for that period (Table 2).

Table 2: Reported Cases of Displacement by City Type between 1985-2016

	Large Cities (above 500,000 inh.)	Medium Cities (between 100,000-500,000 inh.)	Small Cities (between 10,000-100,000 inh.)	Towns (below 10,000 inh.)
Number of cases reported	1,660,558	2,599,577	3,259,099	333,923
Percentage Received of Tot. Displacements	21.15%	33.10%	41.50%	4.25%
Number of cities	7	49	593	429

Source: Reported cases of displacement at Registro Único de Víctimas – 2017, in <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394>; Population by municipality at DANE – 2005, in <https://www.dane.gov.co/>

¹⁷ Here, and in the rest of this study, data on the number of displaced persons expelled and received by municipality in Colombia has been taken from Registro Unico de Víctimas data portal at <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394>.

An interesting aspect of the demographics of civil-war-displacement in Colombia is that its rural-to-urban trajectories have been somewhat different from previous demographic transitions leading to higher levels of urbanization in the nation. Unlike the nation's mid-20th century's migration from rural areas to the four most economically developed metropolitan areas in the country (i.e. Bogota, Medellin, Cali, and Barranquilla)—driven for the most part for economic reasons during the implementation of national policies that benefited industries in cities over agricultural production (Murad 2003)—the migration flux of the civil conflict has broadened the range of recipient cities to a wider spectrum, encompassed by all the capitals of the national departmental territories, and other important small-urban-epicenters (Ruiz 2013).

According to Ruiz (2013), the urgency of conflict driven displacement explains why civil-war-displacements in Colombia have reached a larger spectrum of small cities—in contrast to previous economically driven demographic shifts. In other words, the urgency to protect one's life and that of loved ones has led many displaced households to land and make a life in intermediary cities that are closer to the original place of displacement, are more familiar to them, and have better institutional capacities—relative to the original place of displacement—to host newcomers and protect them from the violence of nearby rural areas. Granada, for example, has been for many years a commercial and institutional regional epicenter that residents of nearby settlements visit on a regular basis. Specifically, throughout the second half of the 20th century, Granada became a mandatory transit point for many merchants who visited the city to sell their rural products or buy supplies on a regular basis. The city has also hosted a series of important institutions that are absent in nearby municipalities like the regional hospital, the regional infantry battalion, the regional headquarters of the national training center (*Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje*), and the regional headquarters of the national Victims Assistance Unit

(*Unidad de Víctimas*). For these reasons, many residents of surrounding municipalities are somewhat acquainted with the city. For these reasons, many have identified this as a viable site to resettle after displacement, when violence erupted in their hometowns.

Despite the relative importance that small cities have played in the reception of Colombia’s displaced persons, they have received scant attention from Colombian scholars. Case-study based research on displacement in urban settings has been concentrated in six of the seven largest cities in the country (i.e., Bogota, Medellin, Cali, Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Cucuta). The lack of studies on small cities is a big hole in the literature, considering that in the smaller cities the impact of displacement tends to be larger because these cities generally need to absorb IDPs representing a larger portion of their population. Table 3 shows that between 1990 and 2015, 22 small cities received displacement cases representing more than 100% of their urban population in 1990, a total of 47 received more than 60% of their urban population, and 65 received more than 40%. In contrast, no large cities received more than 40% of their 1990 urban population during the subsequent twenty-five years.

Table 3: Reported Cases of Displacement Received Between 1990-2015 as a Percentage of the Urban Population in 1990

Cases Received Per Capita.	Number of Large Cities (above 500,000 inh.)	Number of Medium Cities (between 100,000-500,000 inh.)	Number of Small Cities (between 10,000-100,000 inh.)
0-20%	3	10	95
20-40%	2	9	35
40-60%	0	2	18
60-80%	0	2	12
80-100%	0	1	13
Above 100%	0	2	22

Source: Calculations by author based on reported cases of displacement at Registro Único de Víctimas – 2017, in <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394>; and city (*cabecera*) population at DANE – 1990, in <https://www.dane.gov.co/>.

Additionally, as Ibáñez and Vélez (2003) argue, with lower institutional capacity and lower economic development—relative to large cities—small- and medium-size cities in Colombia have experienced and will likely experience more challenges attending the needs of incoming displaced persons, in contrast to their larger counterparts. Granada, for example, has certainly not the same institutional capacity as some of Colombia’s biggest cities to attend to the multiple needs of the thousands of low-income migrants arriving at the city. As of today, the local administration has not been able to guarantee a 100% coverage in the access to all basic public utilities (i.e., water, energy, and sewage), and the municipality has not been able to increase its local revenue above 25,000 statutory monthly minimum wages, when, according to its population size, it should be receiving between 50,000 and 100,000 statutory monthly minimum wages in revenue.¹⁸ By 2003, when the city was receiving increasing numbers of displaced families, the municipal ombudsman, Ariel Corredor, declared to the city council that the situation with displaced families was critical and the local government offered no support to these families: “I believe not a single mayor has been committed to support the displaced, last year the municipality did not deliver any economic support to these families” (City Council Minute, May 28th, 2003).

Because of the generally lower institutional capacities of small cities, relative to the large cities in the nation, scholars have suggested that small cities are no more than transit points of IDP relocation on their way to big cities where they also have family members or other acquaintances, where they can be protected from violence by the anonymity provided by the big

¹⁸ According to the Law 1551 of 2012, each municipality in Colombia is categorized within a range from zero to six based on the population size and the revenue of each municipality. With a population above 50,000 inhabitants, Granada should be classified under category number two, but because it has not reached the revenue standards of this category (an equivalent between 50,000-100,000 monthly minimum wages), it has been generally classified under categories five and six with revenue brackets between 15,000-25,000 statutory monthly minimum wages.

city, and where they have more options of employment (Carrillo 2009, Ruiz 2008).¹⁹ Although there is evidence that some individuals follow such migration pattern, there is no empirical study evaluating the extent to which small cities are only transitory points towards large cities.²⁰ As a counter-example to this view, available data for the case of Granada suggests that the city remains an important center in the reception and integration of IDPs—it has served both as a transit point and as a permanent new place of residence to forced migrants. Evidence of the latter is that between 1995 and 2005 the city population increased by 44.5%, showing a significantly higher rate than the average population growth (27.3%) for all cities above 10,000 inhabitants.²¹ With no record of an economic boom that could explain why people moved to Granada,²² rapid population growth during this period suggests that many of the displaced families that arrived at the city in the late 1990s and early 2000s remained there in 2005. Although there is no accurate population data available for subsequent periods,²³ it is telling that between 2001 and 2014 Granada’s urban extent almost doubled in size, from 467 to 712 hectares, whereas it remained

¹⁹ In her doctorate thesis, Nubia Yaneth Ruiz draws on Ravenstein’s (1834-1913) laws on migration (1977) to argue that IDPs who migrate to small cities will tend to migrate, eventually, to great centers of commerce and industry.

²⁰ Work by Ibáñez and Moya (2006) has provided some preliminary observations of this issue, identifying that closeness to the place of origin was less relevant as a choice of destination, compared to other variables like potential support from family, friends, and government. Still, closeness to the place of origin was a motivation in 30% of the cases of their sample. They also identify that migration in stages was less frequent representing only 11% of the cases of their sample, which supports the counter argument that many of the families who report displacement in small cities remain there (Lozano-Gracia et al 2010). Nevertheless, theirs is not a study of displacement trajectories, but of welfare losses after displacement, and their sample is not representative at the level of municipalities, which means that results are not generalizable for this specific kind of question. I have not been able to identify other studies assessing this question, which is probably due to the lack of longitudinal data on individual trajectories after the moment of displacement.

²¹ Data can be found at the DANE data portal at <https://www.dane.gov.co/>.

²² On the contrary, City Council Minutes revealed that in the early 2000s the city was under serious fiscal distress.

²³ Unfortunately, the latest municipal population count available in Colombia is for 2005. Population counts for subsequent years are all based on projections which are not accurate for the case of Granada given the large number of IDPs that arrived at the municipality after 2005.

almost the same for the entire period between 1989 and 2001—the size in 1989 was 353 hectares.²⁴ As discussed in the introduction of this study, evidence of the impact of IDP immigration on the built environment—and for that matter IDPs’ tendency to stay in Granada—is the creation and consolidation of new neighborhoods. While city planners claim that the city used to have a stable number of neighborhoods (ca. 42) for a long time, since the late 1990s, about 30 new neighborhoods emerged in the city, many of which are known as the “neighborhoods of displaced families.”²⁵ This is all evidence that many IDPs have arrived to stay in Granada, despite its institutional limitations *vis-à-vis* large cities.

Is Granada a rare or even unique case? The displacement data cited above suggests that it is not (see Table 3), and that there are other small cities that have played an important role in the reception of these displaced migrants.

Importantly, processes of rapid urbanization of small cities like Granada are also not a unique experience of the Colombian case. Rapid urbanization of small cities in the midst of high-conflict areas is currently being studied by scholars in urban studies who are beginning to unveil the important role played by these cities in countries under civil conflict like South Sudan, Uganda, and DRC (Büscher 2018). For the Colombian case—but with potential repercussion for the study of other cases in other nations—I identify these rapidly urbanizing small cities as regional-urban-epicenters or focal points attracting forced migrants within functional regions.

²⁴ Data on Granada’s urban extent was taken from the Atlas of Urban Expansion (2019) at <http://www.atlasexpansionurbanacolombia.org/datos>.

²⁵ There is no data available on the number of displaced families in each neighborhood. Therefore, I had to rely on my own interviews and on word-of-mouth communication.

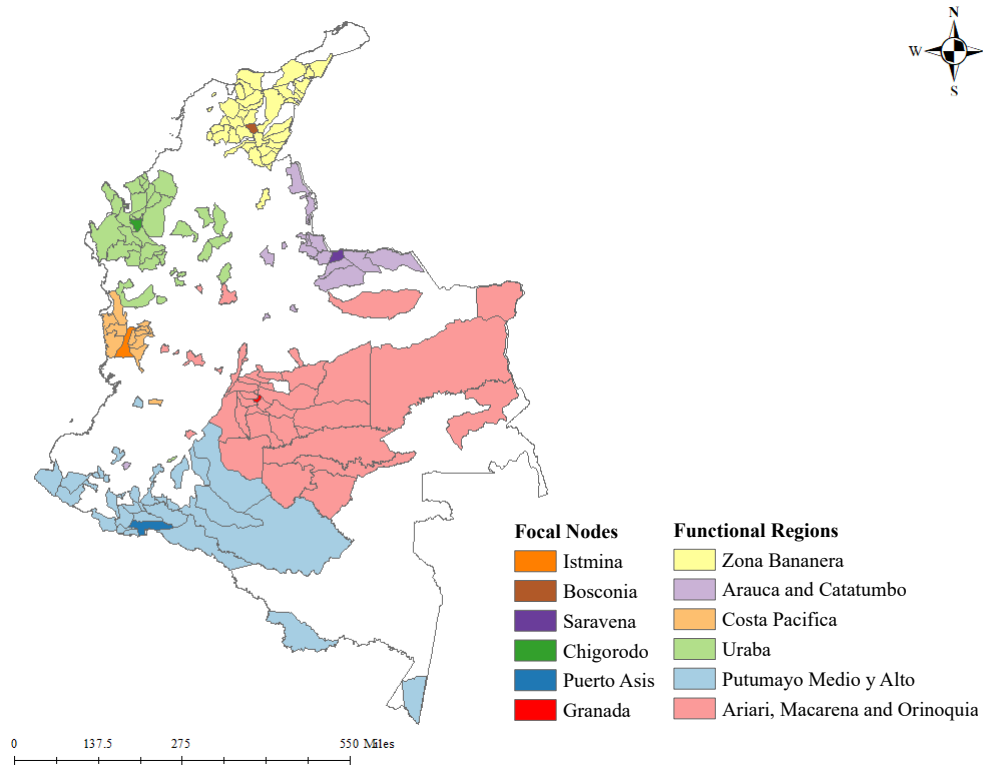
Focal points and functional regions

To reclaim the role played by small cities and decentralize the study of forced resettlement to territories located at the peripheries of knowledge production, I examine the small centers receiving large inflows of IDPs through the analytical concept of *functional regions*. Functional regions are defined as territories where a set of locational entities interact, in this case, through the outflow and inflow of displaced persons. Focal points are the locational entities within functional regions where the inflows of IDPs—in this case—tend to concentrate relative to other locational entities. What do these functional regions look like in the case analyzed here?

To identify these functional regions, I created a national dataset with all links between municipalities of origin and municipalities of destination for all registered displacements in Colombia between 1990-2015. I then established a threshold to map functional regions. Assuming the municipalities to which IDPs move should be equally distributed across all municipalities receiving IDPs, I identify links where a focal point (or receiving municipality) receives more than twice the expected number of IDPs it should receive from a given municipality (see Appendix 3). Accordingly, all connected municipalities to a focal point become a functional region. In the following map I show six focal points and their respective functional regions. The focal points are all small cities—including Granada—that had a positive impact of migration²⁶ and received IDPs representing more than 60% of its 1990 urban population between 1990-2015.

²⁶ They received more displaced persons than the number expelled from the municipality due to the armed conflict.

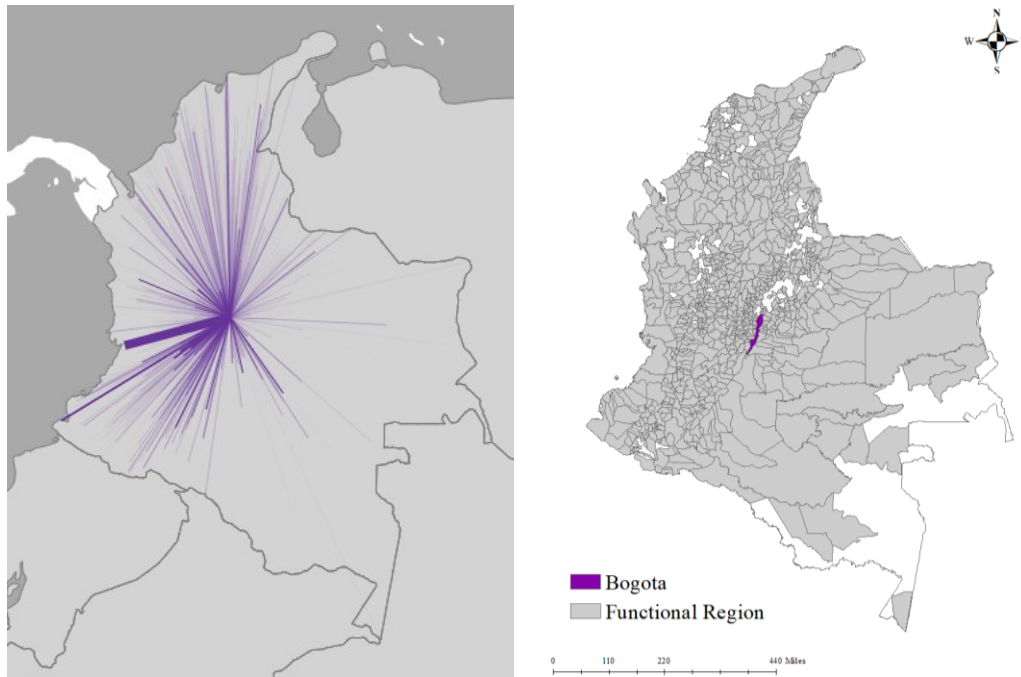
Map 3: Small city nodes receiving IDPs and the municipalities from which they are receiving population creating a functional region



Source: Visualization by author; Data by Angelika Rettberg, Departamento de Ciencia Política, Universidad de los Andes—Conflict Urbanism Project at the Columbia University Spatial Lab.

A distinctive characteristic of these small cities, like Granada, is that they have received displaced persons mostly from their more immediate regions. Whereas the trajectories of displacement to cities like Bogota or Medellin reach almost the entirety of the national territory, and the functional regions of these cities comprise, accordingly, a wide territory (see for example Map 4 for Bogota), the trajectories of displacement to smaller focal nodes encompass more constrained territories within the nation.

Map 4: Municipalities sending displaced persons to Bogota (left) and the functional region of Bogota (right)



Source: Visualization by author; Data by Angelika Rettberg, Departamento de Ciencia Política, Universidad de los Andes—Conflict Urbanism Project at the Columbia University Spatial Lab.

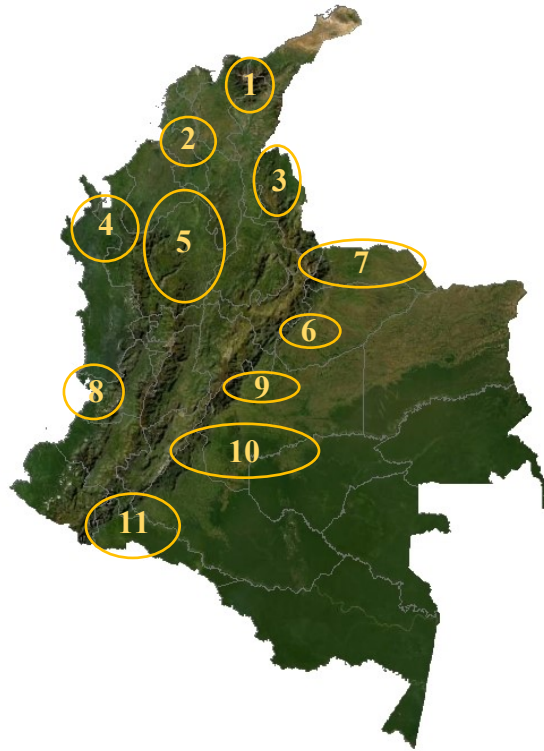
Of course, there are many individual reasons shaping how forced migrants move and settle in some places and not in others (e.g., family connections, familiarity with the area, access to housing, access to jobs, cost of living, etc.), but beyond these individual choice factors, there are other structural regional factors that are equally relevant and important explaining general patterns of movement, especially for the case of small cities. A regional thinking framework is needed to better understand the consolidation of the constrained territories of displacement, revealed in Map 3. Through this framework, I focus on the social, economic, and political dynamics forming geo-historical spaces of conflict and dislocation to better understand why people are migrating within these constrained territories. These geo-historical spaces have evolved and materialized in Colombia through the combination of a series of factors known to be highly correlated with displacement like the extraction of natural resources, the presence of coca

crops, the location of drug trafficking routes, the presence of guerrilla and paramilitary groups, and informality of land tenure which facilitates the illegal takeover of land by armed groups and other powerful actors (Vargas 2012, Lozano-Gracia et al 2010, Ibañez 2009, CODHES 2004). In each case, it is important to note that even though regional-urban-epicenters like Granada offer a shelter from violence in its respective region, these cities are also deeply interlinked with the economic, political, and social dynamics of conflict of the areas they are receiving displaced persons from, bearing on the post-displacement conditions and resettlement environments of many IDPs.

Several authors and reports on the regionalization of conflict in Colombia have already identified different regions that have been largely affected by the violence of conflict. In particular, analyzing data on conflict-driven violence, geographer Luis Gabriel Salas-Salazar (2016) has identified eleven regions²⁷ that were consistently affected by the armed conflict between 1985 and 2015 (Map 5), which largely coincide with the regions I identified in Map 3. The regions identified by Salas-Salazar (2016) provide an entry point to name some of the different geo-historical spaces of conflict and dislocation in Colombia and identify the distinct role some small cities have played as urban epicenters within these regions.

²⁷ He actually identifies 12 regions, but I have collapsed two regions in one which correspond to a commonly known region of the Magdalena river, called Magdalena Medio.

Map 5: Regions identified by Salas-Salazar (2016) as most affected by the armed conflict between 1986-2015



Source: Author based on Salas-Salazar (2016); and Esri Imagery Basemap.

The 11 regions displayed on the map can be identified as: 1. Zona Bananera, 2. Montes de María, 3. Catatumbo, 4. Urabá, 5. Magdalena Medio, 6. Agua Azul, 7. Arauca at the border with Venezuela, 8. Pacific coast in the area of the port of Buenaventura, 9. Ariari, 10. La Macarena, and 11. Putumayo Medio y Alto.

In the remainder of this chapter, I reconstruct the formation of a geo-historical space of conflict and dislocation around the specific case of Granada and its regional factors of conflict and dislocation—not very different from the factors shaping conflict and dislocation in the regions identified by Salas-Salazar (2016). The geo-historical history of Granada takes place, primordially, within the region of the Ariari (number 9 in Map 5), and also within the extended region of La Macarena (number 10 in Map 5).

Granada and the Ariari region: A geo-historical history of conflict and dislocation

To refer to the history of the Ariari region it is important to locate it first within a larger analytical framework that refers to processes of national consolidation and fragmentation. Colombian historiography has generally identified the nation and the nation-building project as inscribed in a failed process of national consolidation. Starting with the seminal book *The Making of Modern Colombia: A Nation in Spite of Itself*, David Bushnell (1993) writes a general political history of Colombia, tracing the process of state-building from the Colonial period to the late 20th century. A foreign national, visiting the country in multiple occasions, Bushnell encountered a nation that, unlike others in Latin America, was not bound by a nationalist spirit. Throughout the entire period of analysis, the political history is characterized by the permanence of deep social and regional disparities, chronic state weakness, and the fracture of state and society relations.

In a subsequent attempt to write a general political history of Colombia, entitled *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divided Society*, Safford and Palacios (2002) also identify a lingering case of state weakness and national fragmentation throughout the whole process of national consolidation, with negative consequences over the extension of full political rights to the civil population. Safford and Palacios (2002) pay special attention to the role geography has played in the development of distinctive regional cultures increasing the social and political fragmentation of the country. Unlike other Latin American nations, the authors argue, the division of the Andes in three mountain ranges (i.e., the Western, the Central, and the Eastern mountain ranges) in Colombia has created a great barrier inhibiting communication between

different regions since the pre-colonial era. This natural division has in turn created distinctive “regional cultures” that subsist today.²⁸

Regional disparities, fragmentation, and an incomplete state-building process are also a matter of concern for the authors of another seminal political history entitled *Political violence in Colombia: From a Fragmented Nation to State Building*. Providing a new interpretation of the Colombian armed conflicts throughout the 20th century, González, Bolívar, and Vásquez (2002) argue that conflict is not necessarily the result of a power vacuum, but it is rather intimately related to the national state building process. According to the authors, political violence needs to be understood as ingrained in the different social struggles that emerged with the occupation and colonization of less populated national territories in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Disputes over territorial control and land ownership were common and resulted in political violence.

Margarita Serje (2005) has expanded on the accounts of the relation between violence, regional inequalities, and state formation in Colombia through the notion of a “state of exception.” According to Serje, stark regional inequalities cannot be fully understood without considering the consolidation and reproduction of political narratives used to represent impoverished regions at the margins of the nation. She shows how marginalized—not marginal—regions have been represented by the state as “wild” territories, characterized by violence and chaos, and thus condemned to a generalized state of exception, which has in turn facilitated domination and exploitation over its lands, natural resources, and peoples. Serje identifies that this ensemble of marginalized regions has remained pretty much the same

²⁸ The authors identify three regions in the country: The West, which includes the area of the Andes Central and Western mountain ranges; The Caribbean coast; and The East, which includes the Eastern mountain range and the eastern plainlands.

throughout history and could be considered under a “permanent and uninterrupted state of conquest” (Serje et al 2007, p. 38). Hence, beyond the regionalization proposed by Safford and Palacios (2002), she identifies that there is a division between a center and a periphery. The center is constituted by the central Andes territory—including some large cities of the Colombian Caribbean coast (e.g., Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Santa Marta). The rest has remained marginalized.

The history of the urban-regional-epicenters and their constrained territories of regional displacement, introduced above, falls within this national history of “peripheral” and marginalized territories. This general history of incomplete state formation and national fragmentation begins to explain why violence and dislocation are reproduced unequally in some territories of the nation (see Map 5), more than in others, and why some small cities have emerged as urban epicenters in the reception of Colombia’s IDPs. It provides a framework to understand the consolidation of a geo-historical space of conflict and dislocation around Granada, as examined in the following sub-sections.

Colonization and land titling of “peripheral” territories

Granada is located in the eastern plainlands of Colombia, in what Serje (2005) identifies as a “peripheral” territory, in the Ariari region (number 9 in Map 5). Despite Granada’s rather small geographic extent, it has become a populous epicenter serving many economic and political functions for other nearby municipalities and becoming an epicenter in the reception of displaced persons from the region and other adjacent territories. Why did Granada become an urban-regional-epicenter in the reception of displaced migrants? Its history, at the center of a geo-historical space of conflict and dislocation begins with 19th century national efforts of “colonization” and “civilization” of some of Colombia’s “peripheral” territories.

In the late 19th and into the 20th centuries the national government of the recently formed republic—after independence from Spanish rule in the early 19th century—sought to incorporate what were conceived as “uninhabited” and “uncivilized” national territories through strategies of “colonization.” Through a project of republican colonization, the government sought to secure better control of borderlands and boost the national economy through resource extraction and agricultural production (Rausch 2013, LeGrand 1988).

Specifically, the colonization of the Ariari region began with the migration and settlement of low-income peasants around the 1920s and 1930s, and the subsequent foundation of the first settlements including Granada—which was then called Boca de Monte. By the 1930s prominent colonization companies—private resource extraction companies coming from the largest cities in the country—also settled in the area, interested in oil exploration and the exploitation of rubber and cinchona trees (Londoño-Díaz 1997). But only until the late 1940s did the region experience a large influx of population.

This influx was triggered by both the national government’s colonization efforts and political violence. Around 1946 violence erupted in Colombia between members of the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties resulting in the killing and displacement of massive numbers of people. The violence was more acute in the more populated central regions of the country where towns were identified as liberal or conservative, depending on the party in power, and where members of the minority party were systematically killed or forcibly displaced to more isolated regions, not yet touched by the political rivalries. In this context, the Ariari region received large groups of Liberal families who migrated collectively from their hometowns in the central Andes to create new towns and settlements in the Ariari’s eastern plainlands. Such

collective processes of forced resettlement are part of what Colombian scholars have identified as the process of “spontaneous” colonization.

As if the displacements of liberal peasants from central Andes territories in the late 1940s had not been enough, attacks by governmental authorities to disserving peasant organizations in the 1950s led to a second wave of “spontaneous” colonization from the Andes to more “peripheral” regions in the nation. In 1953 military general Gustavo Rojas Pinilla mounted a successful coup against the conservative government in power with the goal of pacifying the country and putting an end to the 1940s bipartisan war between the liberal and conservative parties. But despite the new administration’s (1953-1957) efforts to end bipartisan violence, the siege against low-income peasants continued in the form of a national campaign against communism.

A government that had sworn to end conservative military harassment against liberal civilians adopted a military campaign against all forms of communism in the country, which included the liberal armed resistance that had subsisted from the previous years of violence. Particularly, by 1954, military forces attacked the centers of the armed resistance—also called the self-defense peasant movement—forcing its members, and with them many civilians, to abandon their residences in the central Andes region for more isolated regions in the country. As it had happened in the 1940s with the expulsion of liberal families from their homes, members of the self-defense peasant movement escorted and guided families of peasants throughout an entire journey from the central Andes mountain range, in different directions, to new locations, including the Ariari region, where they could escape state violence (Pizarro 1991).

In contrast to these processes of “spontaneous” colonization, immigrants were also drawn to the region in the late 1950s through the implementation of national colonization plans or

planes de colonización dirigida. These national plans offered low-cost credit options to peasants who wished to migrate and develop crops in some pre-selected regions in the country. Granada, which was already an obligatory transit point for everyone who needed to move cattle or other commercial products from the region to Bogota (Molano 1987), was selected by the national government as a colonization and modernization axis (*eje de colonización*) of the *planes de colonización dirigida* (Gonzalez-Arias 1987). This national policy not only ended up bringing new immigrants to Granada, but also elevated the importance of this transit point as a commercial and institutional epicenter. Alfredo Arango-Delgado, who worked in the office in charge of the reception of new settlers in the 1950s (*oficina de recepción de colonos*), recalled in his own memories of the history of Granada:

Every day we saw cars arriving with lots of people with their luggage, coming from many parts of the country (...) the population grew scarily fast; you could hear the instruments people used to build their shacks, hammers, machetes and other tools, resonating at late ours. They built spaces to shelter their families and leave their belongings, at least temporarily. (...) Up to four or five families lived in one shelter. But right after they arrived at Boca de Monte [Granada], they left town for the woods hoping to find empty land to cultivate and build a future for their families. About one year later, some of them came back here and told us that they had colonized in El Crucero, La Playa, Mogotes, Caño Blanco, Quebrada Honda, La Cristalina and Alto de Urichare, which later became Lejanias. Others left for Mesetas, El Jardín de las Peñas, Uribe, and more distant places. (Arango-Delgado 2001, p. 37-38) [1]

With the implementation of the *planes de colonización dirigida* various public institutions were established in the city to support the newcomers, and Granada consolidated as a regional commercial center visited by different settlers who came to town to stock up on basic goods. A couple of years later, the first private banks established in the city, as well as other important public institutions like the National Training Service (*Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje*), the Colombian Agricultural and Livestock Institute (*Instituto Colombiano*

Agropecuario), and the Colombian Institute for Agrarian Reform (*Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria*).

On a less positive side, despite the government's promises to support colonization, efforts by low-income peasants to get legal titles of their colonized lands were squandered in juridical complications. As a result, without official titles to assert and recognize the right of ownership, quarrels over land became common and were commonly resolved by violence. More affluent landowners who, like small peasants, sought to benefit from the public incentives and who could pay private armed militias to protect their lands, or take lands from others, ended up benefiting the most from the government's colonization programs. In other words, the state's incapacity to guarantee access to land titles meant that disputes over land were often solved through violence, often working for the benefit of large landowners who were able to hire private militias and displace low-income peasant colonizers for whom the policy was intended in the first place. According to José Jairo Gonzalez-Arias (1989), evidence of this unintended consequence is that the areas that were selected by the government as focal points of colonization—like Granada and its immediate surroundings—saw a reconfiguration of their population from small farmers to large landowners—or *hacendados*—specialized in agro-industrial products such as cotton, soy, oil palm, and rice. In contrast, areas that were colonized “spontaneously” preserved a structure of small ownership.

Accordingly, while Granada grew in its importance as a regional-urban-epicenter—boosted by governmental policies of colonization—the implementation of the same policies ended up intensifying regional inequalities. Large landowners ended up concentrating in the better-connected and subsidized areas around Granada, and small farmers relocated to more isolated areas in the same region, some of which were already inhabited by populations who had

fled violence from the central regions of the country. These social and spatial dynamics became a breeding ground for social conflict and violence in subsequent years, and, ironically, the subsequent relocation—or displacement—of formerly displaced small farmers to Granada in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

Political violence in borderland territories

As stated above, the notion of “spontaneous” colonization stands in contrast to processes of colonization supported by governmental policies. It does not mean that the colonization process was not organized. On the contrary. For example, the second process of “spontaneous colonization” led to the creation of six agricultural enclaves,²⁹ commanded by the well-organized peasant movement. In each enclave, the leaders acquired political and military control over their new territories and became in charge of land subdivision and the administration of justice (González-Arias 1991). One of these enclaves was located in the Ariari region.

With an epicenter in Medellín del Ariari, the agricultural enclave was located less than ten miles away from Granada, towards the Andes piedmont, separated by the uninterrupted stretch of the Ariari river (see Map 6). The newcomers forced their rule on the local population, many of whom did not identify with their communist ideals, but they also established a variety of social organizations in support of agricultural colonies of small, low-income peasants with presence in the area (González-Arias 1991). All in stark contrast to the larger agro-industrial conglomerates that developed around the same time in the near vicinities of Granada, at the other side of the river, and with the support of the *planes de colonización dirigida* (Duplat-Ayala 2019).

²⁹ These enclaves were located in the territories: El Duda, Marquetalia, Guayabero, El Pato, Riochiquito, and Ariari.

Map 6: Borderland territories along the Ariari



Source: Google Earth, Maxar Technologies 2020

* To the left, Medellin the Ariari and surrounding territories with a tradition of small ownership. To the right, Granada and surrounding territories with a tradition of large land ownership; in the image is possible to identify some of the differences in the parcellation of land, with larger parcels to the right of the Ariari river.

During the first years of “spontaneous” colonization, the agricultural and social organizations based in Medellin del Ariari were not entirely opposed to the new liberal government of Alberto Lleras Camargo who—like Rojas Pinilla had done before him—came to power in 1958 with a promise to pacify the nation. To reach the more isolated regions in the country and transform what was seen as a context of violence and disorder with one of “state presence,” he reinstated colonization efforts adopted by previous governments establishing the *planes de colonización dirigida*, with a focus on Granada as a key site from which to coordinate colonization. During the first year of implementation in 1960, there was an effort from both public authorities and residents of the newly formed agricultural enclave in Medellin del Ariari to collaborate in the creation of new agricultural colonies. Members of different agricultural boards and peasant unions in Medellin del Ariari used to serve as local advisors to national civil

servants, showing them the suitable lands for colonization, and referring them to populations in need of support (Pizarro 1991).

However, despite these initial fruitful interactions between national public authorities and local peasant leaders, the political environment changed rapidly. In 1961, the senator for the conservative party Alvaro Gomez Hurtado, openly criticized president Lleras Camargo's "permissiveness" towards the consolidation of the six self-defense agricultural enclaves, which he called "independent republics." The senator demanded that the government regain sovereign control over the integrity of the national territory (quote in Gonzalez-Arias 1991, p. 70). From that moment onwards, the self-defense enclaves were depicted by the media as a national problem. By 1962, during Lleras Camargo's last term in office, the government conducted the first military operation against the enclaves. A few months later, under the new conservative administration of Guillermo Leon Valencia (1962-1966), all enclaves were surrounded by the military, controlling the commercialization of products and the movement of people from and to these spaces. By 1964, President Leon Valencia ordered a military strike against the enclaves to "regain full control" of the territories.³⁰ The most famous one was the attack on Marquetalia, popularly known for leading to the consolidation of the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*) guerrilla, soon to become the largest and strongest—militarily—guerrilla army in the country. After Marquetalia, the main leaders of the self-defense peasant movement who escaped the attack³¹ formed the unified FARC guerrilla movement with the goal of overthrowing the national government (Pizarro 1991).

³⁰ Of all the six enclaves Medellin del Ariari was the only one that was not militarily attacked.

³¹ One of these leaders was Manuel Marulanda or "Tirofijo," who became one of the founders and the main leader of the FARC for four decades.

The FARC center of command was located in la Uribe, a few miles further west of Medellin del Ariari in the Andes piedmont. From there, they were able to gain control over extensive territories, including the area of Medellin del Ariari with a history of strong left-oriented peasant organization in support of small ownership. Accordingly, while the west side of the Ariari river slowly consolidated as an area under strong influence of the FARC, nearby territories to the east side of the river—in the more immediate vicinities of Granada—consolidated through large land estates and a strong political influence of the right (Duplat-Ayala 2019). These latter territories would eventually facilitate the incursion of right-wing paramilitary groups, all of which would result in the escalation of violence in the entire region. Political violence between left-wing FARC guerrillas and paramilitary groups intensified in the 1980s and 1990s, especially in the bordering territories of municipalities that were traditionally identified as having high influence from either group.³² In between both groups, the civil population suffered; often accused and punished for sympathizing with either side; often forced to leave their homes and untitled lands. In this period, Granada began to consolidate not just as a commercial and institutional center, but as an urban epicenter in the reception of forced migrants.

The consolidation of narcotraffic

Overall, political violence and the consolidation of a borderland territory along the Ariari river—separating left- and right-wing political orientations—and the lack of access to official land titles originally promised by the national government’s efforts of colonization constitute two main structural conditions shaping a long history of forced displacements within the Ariari

³² For more on this issue see Tatiana Duplat-Ayala’s (2019) analysis of the confrontations between bordering municipalities El Dorado and El Castillo—where Medellin del Ariari is located.

region and nearby territories. Additionally, displacements in the region cannot be fully understood without considering the arrival and consolidation of the coca economy in the 1980s.

Although the FARC was originally against the cultivation and commercialization of coca—because it was against its anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist principles—in the 1980s the guerrilla group began to participate in this business by allowing drug dealers and coca growers to operate in their territories, in exchange for a monetary contribution and under strict regulations enforced by the armed group (Norman 2019). Meanwhile, powerful drug traffickers known as “El Mexicano” and emerald dealer Victor Carranza began to buy and monopolize land in the territories to the east of the Ariari river, where FARC had less control. Through the alliance with local large landowners and their own hired private security forces—which pertained in most cases to right-wing paramilitary groups—Carranza and “El Mexicano” managed to bypass FARC territorial control and constitute their own narco- and emerald-trafficking routes (Duplat-Ayala 2019). A similar strategy was later implemented by other entrepreneurs, all of which ended up unleashing a fierce dispute for territorial control between the different parties—including FARC and paramilitaries—interested in controlling the business. It all resulted in what Tatiana Duplat-Ayala (2019) has identified as an infrastructure of indiscriminate violence against the civil population, forcing many people to leave their places of work and residence, and contributing to further expropriation and expulsion of small peasants from their untitled lands.

Another important aspect of the boom of the coca economy is that it encouraged people to migrate from urban areas, like Granada, to the rural areas at both sides of this borderland territory where the coca was being produced and manufactured (Norman 2019): day laborers began to circulate in large numbers around the region to work in the coca crops; merchants commuted to the new coca epicenters where new markets for all sorts of goods emerged out of a

sudden; unemployed individuals also decided to try their luck in these booming areas. Referring to a coca epicenter called San Jose del Guaviare Alfredo Molano recounts:

Life came back to San Jose, and the fertile plains of the Guaviare river, and along came thousands of people: an army of unemployed, adventurers, *trujumanes*, all sorts of merchants, women, children, old people (...) There were no frustrated hopes and expectations. Everyone realized their dreams: the unemployed coming from the cities, the officially employed, the professionals without a job, the police, the prostitutes, the killers, the peasants, the lessees, the *culebreros*, the hucksters, the buyers, the ice cream vendors, the traders. They all found a job there. A superbly well-paid job. (Molano 1987, p. 61-63) [2]

Ironically, with the boom of the coca economy, people began to migrate to the areas that were most affected by violence and were producing the most cases of forced displacement. While the promise of economic benefits pulled people to try their luck in coca producing territories, the certitude of violence of the coca economy pushed them to move back to where they came from.

The nation's peace and warfare directives

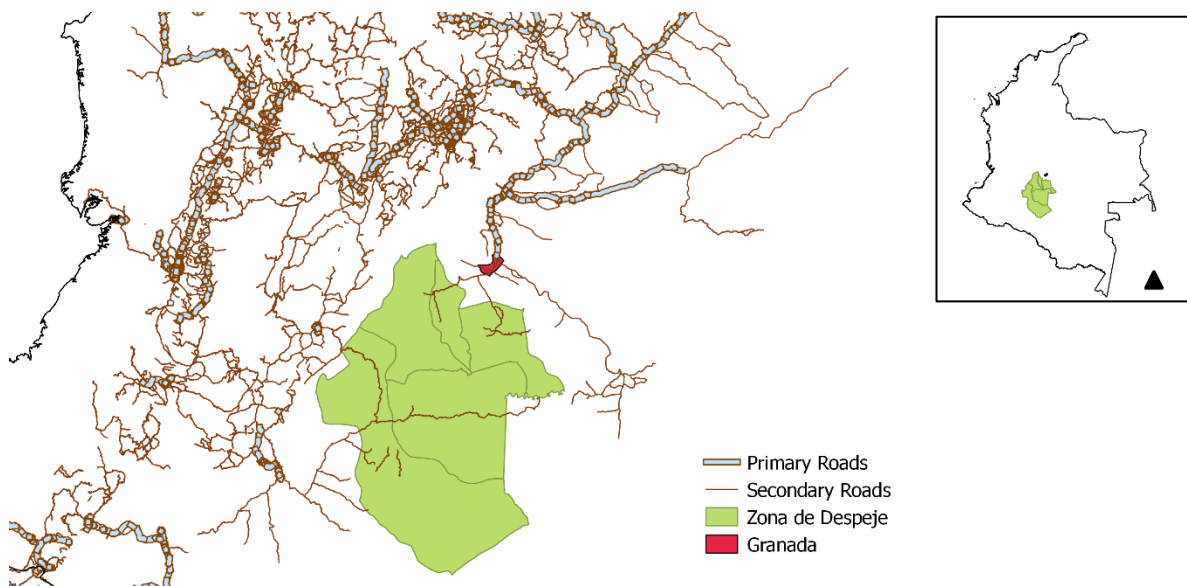
Besides unequal access to land, political violence, and narcotraffic there is one last and very important factor that explains the spike in the cases of displacement arriving at Granada in a relatively short time span; starting in the late 1990s and culminating around 2006 (see Figure 4). I identify this factor as the national government's peace and warfare directives.

In 1998, President Andres Pastrana (1998-2002) agreed to demilitarize an entire region the size of Switzerland to conduct peace negotiations with the FARC. By 1999, five municipalities—including La Uribe and other FARC high influence municipalities to the west of the Ariari river³³—were completely demilitarized and identified from that moment on, during the whole negotiation period, as the *zona de despeje* (see Map 7).

³³ San Vicente del Caguan, La Macarena, La Uribe, Mesetas, and Vista Hermosa.

The peace negotiations with the FARC were anything but smooth and the guerrilla movement was often accused of taking advantage of its jurisdiction over the *zona de despeje* to plan attacks on nearby municipalities, hide kidnapped individuals, and extend coca crop cultivation in the entire region. With the demilitarization, the FARC assumed both judicial and police control over the entire territory—imposing taxes on landowners and local businessmen, imprisoning people who were accused of committing criminal activities, and using other means of punishment for people who were suspected from collaborating with state authorities and the paramilitaries (Aguilera-Peña 2010). During this state of exception, many residents of the *zona de despeje* who suffered under the FARC’s rule of law—who refused to pay the newly imposed financial obligations or who were accused of collaborating with the government and the paramilitaries—were forced to leave their homes for new locations. Many of them left for Granada. With the regional Infantry Battalion XXI Vargas located in Granada, many families were also forced to relocate there, aided by military forces during the demilitarization of the *zona de despeje*. Many families ended up in Granada because they were familiar with the city. Others ended up staying there, inadvertently, in their way to other cities in the nation, because Granada was the necessary transit point connecting their places of origin in the *zona de despeje* to the main highway that could take them in different directions towards larger and more important cities, like Bogota (see Map 7).

Map 7: Zona de Despeje and Granada



Source: Visualization by author; Data on roads were downloaded from OpenStreetMap contributors – 2020, in https://data.humdata.org/dataset/hotosm_col_roads; The Zona de Despeje was made based on municipal spatial information from Maurix Suárez – 2009, in <https://sites.google.com/site/seriescol/shapes>

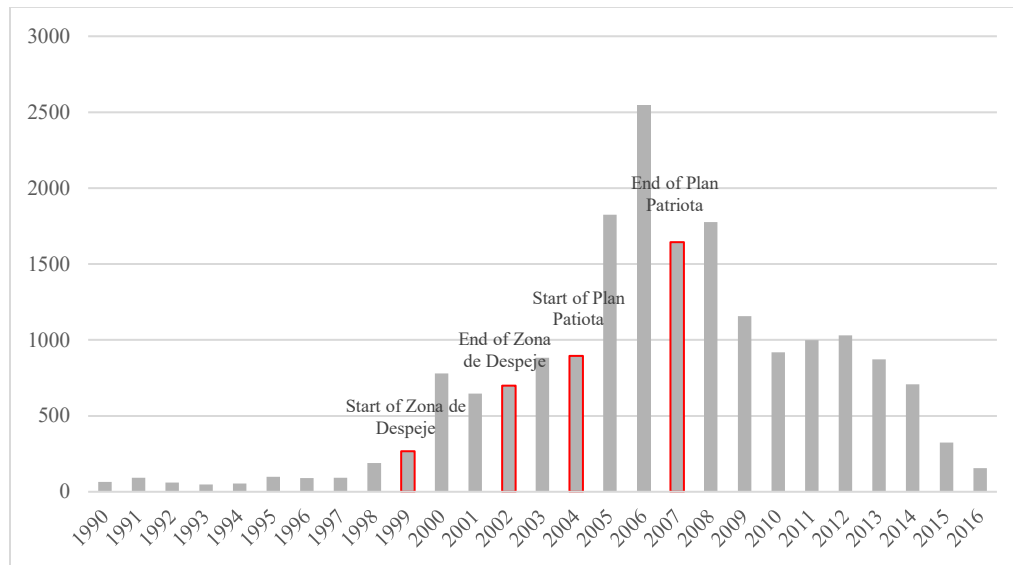
If many families were displaced during the peace process, many more would be displaced later, after president Pastrana announced the end of the peace negotiations and ordered the remilitarization of the *zona de despeje*. In 2002, the militaries re-entered the area to take back control over the territory. Military onslaught against the FARC became especially strong with the new presidency of Alvaro Uribe Velez (2002-2006; 2006-2010), a very popular right-wing politician who promised in his political campaign to adopt a heavy-handed approach against the FARC “terrorists.” In 2004, he launched his *Plan Patriota* (Patriot Plan) to defeat the FARC militarily through a series of operations intended to capture and kill FARC leaders who were located, primarily, in the former *zona de despeje*. The resulting military offensive was fierce, forcing the FARC to retreat from many territories where they used to have political and military control, and also displacing many civilians who were accused of being *guerrilleros* or

sympathizing with the FARC. Numerous families who used to live and own land in the *zona de despeje* were displaced.

In addition to the full-frontal military attack in what used to be known as “FARC territories,” the government adopted a national strategy to eradicate coca production through the aerial spraying of crops. The indiscriminate nature of aerial spraying damaged all sorts of crops—not only the coca crops—leaving impoverished peasants with no products to sell for the season (Fundación Ideas para la Paz 2011). As a result, many families were also forced to leave their crops for a potential job in the city.

The nationally enforced decisions regarding the *zona de despeje* give new meaning to the longitudinal data on displaced persons arriving at Granada between 1999-2006. As can be seen in Figure 5, every decision to create, dissolve, and militarize the *zona de despeje* precedes a rapid increase in the number of individuals declaring displacement in the city on an annual basis. The impact of these national decisions on displacement is supported by many of the individual stories of the people I interviewed in the city. These people live today in Granada, and their stories are evidence of this intra-regional history of dislocation.

Figure 5: Number of displaced persons registered every year in Granada in the national registry of displaced populations



Source: Author calculations based on Registro Único de Víctimas – 2018

The specificities and generalities of Granada

This chapter has documented the specific context in which Granada has become an important urban epicenter of the Ariari region, receiving a large influx of people who have been forcibly displaced from nearby municipalities. The story of Granada and its region is unique in many ways. But it is also distinctive of more general urbanization processes that are happening in geo-historical spaces of conflict and dislocation in Colombia, where small urban epicenters are intricately connected to surrounding territories through diverse processes of colonization, unequal access to land and resource extraction, political violence and control of illegal markets, and a nation’s peace and warfare directives in its “peripheral” territories.

The data on the trajectories of displacement to small cities like Granada indicates that, although conspicuous for the relative number of individuals who have arrived displaced at the city, the case of Granada is not unique. There are other small regional epicenters that are all located in what Colombian scholars have identified as the peripheral territories of the nation and

share a general history of conflict and dislocation like the one I just summarized. Although all these regional epicenters provide a shelter to many who have fled violence, these are not necessarily “sheltered” cities (Beall et al 2013). The geo-historical history of Granada shows how urban centers can be rather deeply connected to the same dynamics of conflict and violence that have produce displacements in its immediate region.

Furthermore, the structuring factors shaping Granada’s geo-historical history of conflict and dislocation bear on the present of many IDPs who live and have made their lives anew in this city. In chapter 4, for example, I show how in-and out-migration motivated by the boom of the coca economy is complicating the story of what residents of Granada consider to be “real displacement” and who has been “really displaced.” In chapter 2, I recount the story of individuals who have been displaced back to their hometown in Granada and have used their knowledge about both displacement and the city to run a land occupation and create a new legal neighborhood called Villas de Granada. In chapter 3, I discuss how displaced individuals develop intimate relations with local bosses, or *gamonales*, who they suspect are complicit in land grabbing practices in the region, which have ironically led to further displacement to Granada.

The extent to which the analyzed experiences of Granada’s migrants translate to other cases of forced migration in other nations’ cities needs to be evaluated in accordance with the respective contexts of urbanization. Overall, however, I consider the Granada case to be both salient and important to understand forced resettlement and post-conflict reconstruction in small urban-regional-epicenters located in a nation’s “peripheral” territory.

Chapter 2: Informality, Infrastructure, and Violence: Neighborhood Formation in Villas de Granada

New neighborhoods in Granada's urban margins

As a result of the large migration influx to Granada, a variety of new neighborhoods have emerged in its urban peripheries. A few of these new neighborhoods have become Granada's largest in terms of their population and geographical extension and are referred by long-term residents as a *cinturón de miseria* (a belt of misery): "we are forcing people to empty out the rural areas and come here, to town, to live in those belts of misery" (City Council Minute, June 10th, 2000). In the narratives formed by long-term residents of Granada, the poor and informal urban peripheries have emerged after the large influx of displaced populations to the city, who have come to occupy land illegally for the most part "because they have nowhere else to go." They perceive that these urban territories have been growing at a fast pace, chaotically, and with no consideration of local planning regulations. They speak with regret about the ways in which their preferred urban forms—the wide streets and reticular layout of Granada's core that describe an apparently rational pattern of premeditated planning—has dissolved into narrow, unpaved streets circling small lots of patched-up housing in the new, peripheral Granada.

Image 1: Street patterns in “central” (left) and “peripheral” (right) Granada as experienced by long-term residents



Source: Alcaldía Municipal de Granada – May 2017, in <http://186.155.227.67:8019/es/map/new/#18/3.54764/-73.70365>

They also claim that the informal urban peripheries have become hot spots of crime and drug dealing. For one Granada resident, the term *ollas* (very dangerous blocks controlled by drug dealers) was something he used to associate with large cities, like Bogota, but now he could hear about the existence of *ollas* in the new neighborhoods of Granada. That scared him and annoyed him. Long-term residents also speak of how rivers have been contaminated and dried up in the new urban peripheries, where places for weekend recreation have become preferred spots for drug consumption, a place for dumping garbage, and— “why not”—a place for dumping “fresh dead bodies” too.

This is of course a caricature of the recently urbanized peripheries of Granada as perceived by long-term residents, offered to me after I asked about their impressions of the new neighborhoods that have emerged in the city over the last two decades. Their accounts might give a better picture of how a resident population experiences urban growth in a small city, rather than a correct characterization of the peripheral neighborhoods of Granada which are very diverse and not necessarily as disorganized compared to how the city has been urbanizing all along. There are, nevertheless, some truths to their observations.

Established in the urban peripheries in the early 2000s, facilitating access to housing for vulnerable and displaced families, Villas de Granada is an informal land occupation also known as the second largest and one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the city; a place where drug dealing, drug consumption, and killings take place disproportionately, relative to many other neighborhoods of the city. Unfortunately, many families who have arrived at the city, harassed by the violence of civil conflict, continue to be exposed to the reproduction of violence in Villas de Granada—or what residents like to call Villas. But the reproduction of violence is not a product of disorganization and lack of planning, as perceived by the long-term residents of Granada. In fact, informal settlement Villas was highly planned and established through already institutionalized practices of urbanization and through the consolidation of a very organized neighborhood community with the capacity to control the occupation and transformation of urban space very effectively.

With a focus on the formation process of Villas de Granada, in this chapter I examine what local social practices become institutionalized when people join efforts to occupy properties on their own accord, and how these practices impact a community of displaced residents' access to the city. I show how residents adopt different social practices to regulate occupation, resist against eviction, attain and transfer property rights, and obtain basic services and amenities from higher authorities. These practices have implications beyond the provision of shelter, allowing for the consolidation of strong horizontal relationships between neighbors and vertical relations with different types of authorities that support residents in their capacities to make different claims on the city—including the right to inhabit the city on their own terms. Unfortunately, some of these practices have also left residents more exposed to violence.

Image 2: Neighborhood Villas de Granada



Source: Author – 2019

The neighborhood enabling process

The process of urbanization of neighborhood Villas de Granada cannot be fully understood without taking into consideration similar processes of urbanization of other neighborhoods of the city.

Even though the long-term residents of Granada identified the proliferation of informal settlements in the urban peripheries as the result of the large migration wave of displaced persons over the last decades, they also acknowledged that the history of urbanization of Granada is characterized by informal spatial practices. Although they did not explicitly acknowledge the similarities in the processes of urbanization of the new urban peripheries and the more traditional neighborhoods of Granada, they had no problem recognizing that their own neighborhoods and the core of Granada developed through what they called “land invasions.” They made remarks such as: “Granada has been built out of land invasions,” or “all of Granada is informal.” What long-term residents identified as the core of Granada—with a “modern,” regular pattern of rectilinear square blocks—developed through informal practices of land appropriation bypassing official planning regulations.

For example, the neighborhood *Primero de Junio*—which is one of the building-blocks of Granada located right next to the city center—was formed out of an informal land occupation. It is called *Primero de Junio* to commemorate the date when the neighborhood founders joined efforts to “invade” the land on a June 1st, around 44 years ago.³⁴ Even though the neighborhood has been legalized, there are many plots today, occupied by long-term well-off residents of Granada, with no legal land titles.

In other neighborhoods, residents occupied land that was set to be developed into affordable housing projects, but was left unattended for many years, showing no progress. This was the case of neighborhoods *El Popular* and *Villa Unión*, both established around the 1980s, and currently referred to by some residents as wealthy neighborhoods of Granada. *El Popular* was originally a housing project by the municipality to develop the land through a self-building scheme. *Villa Unión* was a project by the National Institute for Social Housing and Urban Redevelopment³⁵ to develop land through self-built affordable housing units. Although self-built housing projects are largely developed by the residents, authorities are obligated by law to generate and enforce specific development guidelines, to guarantee access to residential public utilities, and to monitor and ensure that all new constructions adhere to the local building regulations. This did not happen in *El Popular* and *Villa Unión*. It seems—according to oral histories—that the two public authorities in charge of development faced a series of obstacles to getting approvals for the projects and subsequently left a large empty space of developable land

³⁴ I was not able to get access to an official source with information about the approximate dates in which each neighborhood had been established. I had to reconstruct the story of each neighborhood presented here through the oral histories of its residents and public officials. For the approximate dates of origin, I used data on the conformation of local action boards in each neighborhood provided by ASOJUNTAS—the municipal association of local action boards.

³⁵ An agency in charge of the provision of housing subsidies to low-income households. It was liquidated in 2003 and replaced by *Fonvivienda*.

unattended for years. Hence, many families—with or without lots officially assigned—decided to occupy the land and develop it through their own means, with no oversight from public authorities over compliance with building regulations such as set-back distances and prohibitions against building directly adjacent to water bodies (see Image 3). Once construction had finished and residents were settled into their new homes and neighborhoods, families were able to coordinate efforts to legalize the neighborhoods and attain property titles.

Image 3: Housing units in conflict with building regulations in neighborhoods El Popular (left) and Villa Union (right)



Source: Author – 2019

* The left image shows a house in neighborhood El Popular that does not comply with the general set-back requirements. The right image shows a house that was built right over the river in Villa Unión, which is not permitted according to building regulations.

The fact that informal land occupations were very common in Granada when it received a large influx of IDPs, and the fact that they were not necessarily the residence of marginalized or stigmatized communities, matters because displaced residents of Granada’s new informal peripheries are very aware of the city history of urbanization. They have learned to operate within these institutionalized governance practices of informality where the state is deeply complicit, and it involves all levels of society—the poor, the displaced, and the better off. Specifically, many residents who participated of the land occupation in Villas de Granada—or

Villas—joined long-term residents claiming that “Granada had been built out of land invasions.” This means that they knew they were not the first to occupy land through informal means, thus they had a *legitimate* right to *illegally* occupy the city through the same practices.

Residents of Granada inhabit an environment where land occupation without legal titles is customarily accepted, and institutionally reproduced through governance practices. An accepted right to land that is not technically owned but has been occupied over many years is so embedded in the land tenure regime that it has become a sort of invisible scaffolding shaping social relations and the built environment. For example, residents told me of a case where land occupied by a high school near the city center was about to be confiscated, because the lot had never been detached from a larger parcel that belonged to a defaulting debtor. Although the lender had every legal right to claim property rights over the high school terrain, the lot had not been considered as collateral in the original agreement, and the lender had no interest in claiming property rights over a space that had *de facto* belonged for many years to the local high school. This unusual situation forced residents to address and try to resolve, for a moment, the rooted structure of ambiguity shaping tenure and land-use regimes in the background.

This invisible scaffolding facilitates processes of neighborhood formation in both the center and the urban peripheries of the city. Although most residents I interviewed in the urban peripheries expressed that they would prefer to have their papers in order, they had learned to—and were used to—operate according to Granada’s rooted ambiguities in the specification and exchange of property. In this fashion, the neighborhood enabling process for many displaced families who live in Villas has not been very different from that of other more established residents of the city.

Moreover, the enabling process of Villas resembles that of neighborhoods *Villa Unión* and *El Popular*, introduced above. In all three neighborhoods, residents occupied a site that was originally meant to become an affordable housing project but, due to irregularities in the development process, was left neglected for many years. Residents in turn resolved to take matters into their own hands and occupy the land.

Neighborhood founders: Building the neighborhood from the bottom-up

A consequence of the informal logic of urbanization in Granada is that there are many residents that proudly identify themselves as *fundadores* (founders) of their neighborhoods—people who built neighborhoods from scratch and saw them grow. They can typically identify other neighborhood founders and have played an important role in their communities, informing people about general administrative procedures concerning their housing units, organizing local communities to resist eviction or work on a given infrastructural project, and letting newcomers know where they can find a place to rent or live in the area.

Clara is a founder and a leader of the Villas land invasion. She has played a key role organizing the community to fight together against eviction and coordinate efforts to get access to public services and other amenities. She is an advisor to many and has the conviction that residents will be able to attain property rights of their individual lots without having to pay the official owner, Fundariari.³⁶

Clara was born in Granada but left town to work in the rural areas of a nearby municipality with historically strong presence of the FARC guerrilla, where commanders

³⁶ Fundariari was established as a private foundation with the goal of contributing to the development of the Ariari region. It acquired the land in Villas from a senator who donated it for the construction of affordable housing. Some residents of Granada claim that the non-profit has been unlawfully used to benefit the economic interests of the Urrea family who lead the foundation.

controlled much of the social and economic life in the region for many years. She was displaced and forced to leave her house and her job in the late 1980s and returned to her hometown Granada. About 20 years passed, renting different spaces in different informal settlements of Granada, before she came to occupy land in Villas in 2002 and became, in her own words, a “property owner”—she still does not have formal property titles. She lives today in the lot she invaded about 16 years ago. There, she built a 72 square meters two-bedroom unit where she lives with her son, her daughter in law, and her three grandchildren. She runs a small business from her front porch, selling telephone calls, candy, coffee, and cigars. There, sitting at the table where she regularly attends customers, she recounted the story of the neighborhood.

In the early 2000s Clara acquired a physical copy of the affordable housing development plan for low-income families that had been originally established, and approved by the city council, for what was meant to become neighborhood Villas de Granada. Meant to be developed, but never developed, by the private foundation Fundariari. The plan contained guidelines on how to develop the area (e.g., demarcation of access routes, public utilities infrastructure, lot sizes, spaces that should be reserved for public amenities etc.) which had been neglected for many years by Fundariari. Armed with this physical copy, she and other founders of the land occupation made great efforts not only to defend the occupiers against eviction, but also to organize the community in order to: get access to public services; prevent land speculators from taking lots that could be occupied by families who “really needed housing;” and enforce demarcation of streets, areas that would be reserved for residential uses, and areas that would be reserved for public amenities (e.g., parks, a community centers, a space for a church). All this was validated in the physical copy of the never developed development plan that Clara had acquired from public authorities.

While the scale of the land occupation in Villas—the second largest neighborhood in the city—would have never been possible without the large migration wave of internally displaced persons who had come to live to Granada—generating high demand for housing—the organization of the land invasion was also largely shaped by individuals like Clara. Being both displaced and born in Granada, and having lived there for many years, she had knowledge of both the reality of displacement and the local informal governance practices rooted in Granada’s urbanizing processes.³⁷ With political connections and access to official documents, Clara and other leaders were able to organize the community in such a way that the land occupation took advantage of the opportunities and operated within the limitations imposed by Granada’s environment of informality.

For example, the process of getting access to basic utilities depended heavily on the collaborative work of the community, and it was also buttressed by the institutional support that Clara and other leaders like her were able to leverage. On one hand, the installation of sewage pipes underground was carried out by the community with “picks and shovels,” at night, to avert police attention. On the other, the pipes were donated by a local politician³⁸ and for the installation Clara collected money from the community to pay a surveyor for his technical assistance. The surveyor was an employee at *Cormacarena*—the regional environmental authority in charge of the technical assessment of subsoil interventions in the municipality. “It was all done under the norm, under the law, as it was supposed to,” Clara added during our interview. She knew that *Cormacarena* was the regional entity in charge of assessing all sorts of

³⁷ Unlike what studies of urbanization and displacement have emphasized (Gupta 2015, Crisp et al 2012), IDPs are not necessarily strangers to the cities they live in after displacement (see chapter 1). Some of them, like Clara, were born in the city and have privileged knowledge of local politics which they use on their behalf.

³⁸ In accordance with well-studied relations between *clientelistic* practice and access to basic utilities in informal settlements (Mitlin 2014).

risks of environmental hazard in Granada, and they could make life harder for residents if they decided that something about the new self-made public infrastructure was creating a risk for the community. The land invaders needed to be in good terms with them, if they wanted to attain formal recognition of their neighborhood and avoid forced eviction.³⁹ In other words, despite their illegality, their physical infrastructure needed to be in “good terms” with the legal infrastructure regulating the city’s built form.

In some situations, embedded ambiguity between the legal and the illegal brought residents to face direct opposition from regional authorities, which Clara and other residents faced by playing the card of displacement. As with the installation of sewage infrastructure, for the installation of energy infrastructure residents took advantage of clientelistic relationships with local politicians who “donated” the necessary materials (i.e., wires, lampposts, and a power transformer) for residents to connect, illegally, to the nearby power grid. “Those were election times” (*tiempos de política*), said Clara, thus politicians would come to the neighborhood to compete for votes: “We took that to our advantage and told them ‘if you want to come to get [votes] you must give too.’”

Shortly after wires, lampposts, and a power transformer were properly installed, and the community was able to illuminate their homes, the regional energy company (*Electrificadora del Meta S.A.*) began to charge for the unpaid energy that had been consumed with the “donated” materials. The community refused to pay. They claimed that the regional authority had to legalize the service first.⁴⁰ “A service that is not legally provided is a service that we do not pay

³⁹ More on the politics of risk as a challenge faced by informal settlers in Colombia is discussed in Austin Zeiderman (2016).

⁴⁰ A legalized service means that the Energy Company, not the community, installs the proper infrastructure to connect each housing unit to the municipal power grid, and charges each household independently, not the whole community together, for each kilowatt of energy consumed.

for,” exclaimed the community; “they [the energy company] said that they could not legalize [the service] because the neighborhood was illegal, so in other words we were illegal when we asked for legalization, but we were not illegal when they came here to charge us money,” said Clara during our conversation.⁴¹

The quarrel between the community and the energy company continued for a couple of months. “They sabotaged our power transformer,” said Clara, “making us spend weeks without light during the flooding season.”⁴² Responding to the aggression, Clara filed a lawsuit against the company under the name of a housing corporation representing the residents in the neighborhood and pointing out that the company was violating the special rights of protection of internally displaced families who lived there. She won the lawsuit, and the company was sanctioned.

These stories of neighborhood-formation are common and are extensively documented in the literature on informality and clientelism. Informal settlements are known for having a strong history of social cohesion that emerges from the various obstacles faced during these long *formative* periods.⁴³ In these processes, it is common to expect the emergence of strong forms of bottom-up social organization led by residents who are well versed in local politics and city

⁴¹ The law is very ambiguous in this respect. According to Law 812 of 2003, public authorities were not allowed to invest in the development of public infrastructure—such as energy infrastructure—if neighborhoods and individual properties were of an informal nature. But Law 388 of 1997 established that areas without official access to public services could under no circumstances be included within a municipality’s urban perimeter and thus become a legal neighborhood of the city. In this legal framework, legalization of informal settlements became a paradox between 2003 and 2008, before the specific article of the law 812 of 2003 was repealed by the Constitutional Court (Sentence C-1189 of 2008). Still, some local authorities continue to cite this article as an excuse to justify lack of public investment in public infrastructure in informal settlements.

⁴² During the flooding season, there were days when residents would have water coming up to their waists in a couple of minutes. Hence, many times residents were not able to relocate all their belongings and had to spend the night fishing for stuff in the water. With no lights, this task became significantly harder, considering that the residents had to pay special attention for snakes and other animals swimming passed them, hiding in the dark.

⁴³ See Ward (1999), Lloyd (1980), Perlman (1976), and Leeds (1973).

building. Still, it is important to note here that not all formation processes of informal settlements require the same level of bottom-up social organization. For one, not all informal settlements are created after people occupy land on their own accord. For example, occupation in informal land subdivisions is generally coordinated and supervised by illegal or *pirate* developers who do not live in the area (see chapter 3). Furthermore, unlike previously mentioned neighborhoods *Villa Union* and *El Popular*, land in Villas was privately owned, whereas land in the other two neighborhoods was public. This represents an important aspect shaping the neighborhood formation process in Villas because in this case the private owner was adamant in making efforts to claim his land back and force residents out. Unlike other informal settlements where residents do not face real opposition from the owner—because they occupy public land or buy it from an illegal developer—in this case, residents had to organize to build and defend their neighborhood from the bottom-up. These specificities of resettlement and occupation are key to understand the cascading consequences of neighborhood enabling processes on the consolidation of horizontal and vertical relations that bear on the present of Villas' residents and how they make claims on the city.

Vertical and horizontal relations

Narratives and community attachments

Displacement is a very important element of the residents' narratives of their neighborhood formation process. Of course, not everyone in the neighborhood has been displaced, and not everyone has declared displacement to public authorities, yet residents repeatedly mention that theirs is a neighborhood of displaced families. Why? Displacement, in this case, is a key factor determining the residents' quest for formality and a legitimate right to stay put in the city. Like Clara did, when she filed the lawsuit against the regional energy

company, many other residents used the category of displacement to appeal to special rights of protection to defend themselves against eviction.

Esperanza, for example, was displaced from a rural town in the Colombian Andes beset by guerrillas and paramilitary groups. She ended up living in Granada because she moved to live with her grandma in a nearby town, and then she found a job in a restaurant in the city. She never declared displacement to public authorities, but when she invaded land in Villas with her new husband, she learned from her neighbors that those who were officially identified as displaced persons had special benefits and protections against eviction. Accordingly, facing ongoing threats of eviction, 27 families in her block got together to file a *tutela* lawsuit against the city, demanding a special right of protection and the right to decent housing for displaced peoples under Law 1448 of 2011—known as the victims’ law. She remarked: “we filed a *tutela* lawsuit because we were displaced. I am displaced but I do not have the official title. So, around 15 families [of the 27] were officially displaced and we [her own family] contributed only as *vulnerables*. We won.” Even though Esperanza never declared displacement, she continues to make part and participate in the general meetings of the victims’ association created in the early days of the neighborhood to protect families against eviction. Like her, many other victims in the neighborhood are still affiliated to victims’ resident organizations that played an important role providing residents with a means to file lawsuits and make formal petitions to defend their rights of possession during the first years of neighborhood consolidation. Today, Villas’ residents continue to identify themselves under the unifying category of displacement to make collective claims on the city.

Related to their efforts to stay put and resist eviction, the Villas residents also faced the challenge to legitimate occupation. Although residents may have adopted individual actions to

secure ownership of their occupied lots, the challenge to prove legitimacy of occupation among land occupiers required some sort of coordination.

Beyond leveraging support from local politicians and local authorities, neighborhood founders in Villas also fulfilled an important role solving disputes about ownership within the neighborhood. Luisa, for example, calls herself a *fundadora* and was appointed by one of the main leaders of the Villas land invasion as a *lider de manzana* (block leader), in charge of solving immediate problems in her block. She played an important role organizing the occupation in her area and determining who had a right to stay.

Many times, people would come to enclose a lot and leave. Ah! That lot for example, that lot over there, at the corner [pointing with her finger]. Someone enclosed it and did not come back. Then came a woman with many children asking whether there were any empty lots. I told her to take that one [the one that was enclosed but not occupied]. Then came the lady [the one who had enclosed the lot] saying: ‘That lot is mine, that lot is mine.’ So, people sent her here [to her house]. I told her: ‘that is not your lot because you do not have *escritura* [land title], and you do not need it because you have not been living there.’ Like that, I succeeded [getting a lot] for those who really needed it. There were many [whom she helped] in this block.

Were you not afraid that they would retaliate against you?

A lot! Many would come here to insult me, but I used to tell them: ‘this is for those who need it, this is a land invasion, this is for poor people, this is not for people who come to enclose a lot just to get money out of it, no, here are many people who really need it, women alone with children, displaced, I, no, you can stand on your head, if you have *escritura* you can bring it and we will give you the lot, otherwise, no.’ [3]

During the first years of consolidation, there were many founders in Villas who, like Luisa, played an important role solving disputes and determining who owned what in the absence of formal property titles. Furthermore, like Luisa, many neighborhood founders became block leaders enforcing general rules that were meant to legitimize the whole land occupation. Provision of housing to displaced families was a key legitimizing factor, but it was not the only one.

Following the development plan that had been originally established for the neighborhood—that Clara once held in her hands—block leaders did more than determine who owned what. Leaders also determined and surveilled compliance with the standard for lot sizes—all residential lots had to be 72 square meters per family—to guarantee an equal distribution among residents. With this same purpose, a rule was established that people should not occupy more than one lot per family and occupiers had to live in their occupied lots. Those who came to invade to make business were not welcomed. Leaders also demarcated areas that should be reserved for public amenities, which needed to be protected from residential occupation. Their efforts required constant and tireless supervision and could not have been possible without the support from the community. Considering that supervision is costly, it may create social tensions, and residents could have easily resolved to mind their own business in order to avoid trouble, it is not self-evident why residents decided to work together and go through the trouble of surveilling others. Why did they push for such forms of local “formality”—as established in the official copy of the development plan—within the “informal”?

For one, residents considered that the land occupation was legitimate as long as it was the last resource poor and displaced peoples had at hand to access housing. They had to show that they were invading land ‘because they had to,’ not because they were making a business. Consequently, they worked together to prevent profit-making interests from claiming any lots in the neighborhood and belittle the real purpose of the land invasion. Although they were not 100% successful, they worked together to preserve legitimacy in the best way they could. As Pedro, another leader of the land invasion noted: “as the saying goes, in every nest there is an egg that does not belong there, like that, there were many insiders [*infiltrados*] here (...) insiders are people who have a house, have a farm, and came to occupy a lot anyways (...) not like us,

like me, a displaced person. We came here because we did not have anywhere else to go.”

Constant supervision of who came to occupy land in the neighborhood was thus prevalent and necessary during the first years of occupation. This entailed both checking on those new residents who came to occupy lots and protecting fellow occupiers with a legitimate claim to the land.

Additionally, beyond protecting a legitimate claim to the land among fellow occupiers, residents operated in a way to make the land occupation look legitimate according to locally accepted standards of city building. Through *design-politics*, justified in the already approved but never implemented plan for Villas, residents adopted a series of rules and regulations organizing access to land for residential and public uses in a way that provided a visual reinforcement for legitimacy (Vale 2013). These self-enforced rules generated tensions between occupiers but, in general, residents recall that they operated under the idea that if they did not make their best effort to organize and control the land occupation in a way that was legitimate, authorities and opponents would succeed in shutting them down.

Today—18 years after the neighborhood was founded—many residents have acquired property titles, and many have retreated to their household affairs and are less engaged with community issues. Many have sold their properties and left the neighborhood. Newcomers have also arrived. Nevertheless, the practice of monitoring and keeping record of who owns what has prevailed over the years, helping preserve the neighborhood integrity and informal practices of social control, at least when it comes to protecting public amenities like local parks and already occupied lots against new occupations.

Although in principle the territory of a land invasion could be conceived as a blank slate, ready to be occupied by anyone, these spaces are deeply planned and surveilled. In Villas, the

spaces that were originally designated for parks or open communal spaces continue to be surveilled by neighbors who protect them from any attempts at using them for residential purposes. Residents are also used to monitor and surveil their neighbors' residential units. For example, Anastacia, who moved displaced to Granada around 16 years ago, has been living in Villas ever since she arrived. First, she informally rented a space in Villas, then she invaded a lot at the outskirts of the same neighborhood, and then she sold the invaded lot to buy another one nearby—she has not held a single legal title, but all her transactions and relocations have been approved by the community. She has been living in her new lot for three years, in a shack enclosed in black plastic, in a very coveted spot on the corner of a street block. “The zinc roofing is new”—she told me one day—because one woman tried to invade her lot when she was out for work.⁴⁴ Fortunately, the neighbors were there—at home—when that happened and called her on her cellphone to let her know. She went home immediately and kicked the stranger out with the support of the neighbors. She bought the zinc roofing because neighbors would be able to hear the metal plates clashing if someone tried to break in again.

Today, residents are used to keeping an eye on each other's lots, to protect ownership of those who have an agreed upon right to it, which also enforces a relation of mutual support and dependence between them. For those who are completely new to the neighborhood and in need of housing, many of the well-known *fundadores* or block leaders continue to play an important role letting them know whether there are still available lots to occupy, buy, or rent.⁴⁵ These leaders continue to have a voice advising neighbors on local matters and managing specific collective projects like the construction of a local community center, the tarring of roads, or the

⁴⁴ She provides cleaning services for a lodging house in the city center.

⁴⁵ Naturally, they were also the first people I was recommended to speak to when I first visited the neighborhood.

provision of public amenities for the communal green spaces that have been successfully safeguarded against residential occupations.

These many examples indicate that an environment of informality is not solely generated by the complexities of the law around land titling (Holston 2008). It is also reproduced by a general custom towards property and ownership (Wigle 2010), largely shaped by the process of occupation itself. In the context of an informal land occupation, the Villas residents' necessity to defend the neighborhood against credible eviction threats and legitimize in turn collective occupation, has impacted a community that has been able to organize organically, and pretty effectively, to shape the conditions in which residents have planned to inhabit the city. Despite these positive outcomes, the same conditions that have impacted the formation of a cohesive, engaged, and active neighborhood community also explain why Villas suffers from high crime rates.

The perils of vertical and horizontal attachments

Villas is many times referred to as the Cinderella of Granada and represents the classic example of a marginal neighborhood, suffering from crime and victimization (Auyero et al 2014, Wacquant 2008). Before I conducted any interviews in Villas, I asked residents of Granada for some references about the neighborhood. It was referred to as a place of absence of law enforcement, where drug dealing took place. Homicides, the popularly known *ollas*, and the *fronteras invisibles*—invisible borders controlled by gangs that if crossed without permission may result in fatal consequences—were all placed there in the collective imagination of my informants. When I visited Villas, I realized that the neighborhood was not as bad as it was repeatedly portrayed, but there was nevertheless some truth to its bad reputation.

Luna: Here, the other day 3 people were killed. Down there. There, next to the fence of the Infantry Battalion. There they kill many people. But only because they [the victims] owe stuff, or sell drugs, or are addicts, or are kidnappers. It is not that you are going to get killed because you just came here to the neighborhood, no, it is because you know something.

I don't understand, what does 'knowing something' mean?

Linda: Yes, for example, that this is a red zone where people get killed. But, for example, what is ugly here is that over there [pause]. There is a house where the lady sells crack. She sells to children, adults. To everyone. So, people *los sapea* [tell the authorities]. But you cannot speak about this with local prosecutors, or the police, or the *DIJIN* [Division of Criminal Investigation in the Police], or the army, because all are accomplices and come and inform [the drug dealers]: 'ahhh, look, that lady is a snitch.' Hence the lady [the drug dealer] comes and calls the *paracos* [armed paramilitary groups] and asks them to kill her [the snitch]. You have to keep your mouth shut [chuckles] [4].

Like Luna and Linda, most residents of the neighborhood acknowledged that crime and drug dealing was concentrated in Villas, more than in other neighborhoods of the city. Most residents described their neighborhood as a healthy place (*un barrio sano*) with good people, but unfortunately there was also violence and ongoing "social cleansing" conducted by organized criminal groups. Residents mentioned that in most cases perpetrators were not from the neighborhood, but they would come to kill or dump bodies, because it was easier to commit a crime and avoid the consequences in a place like Villas, where the police were sometimes an accomplice, and where the topography of circumventing, unpaved roads along riverbeds provided multiple escape routes for criminals.

During my time conducting interviews in the neighborhood in 2018 and 2019, I heard of several murders that had taken place in the area. The victims were all young people who were either drug consumers, drug dealers, or both. Residents were fully aware of this. Nevertheless, they would opt for keeping their mouths shut, as Linda mentioned in our conversation, because

they felt threatened by paramilitary groups,⁴⁶ and they feared compliance between drug dealers, paramilitaries, and the police.

Although homicide rates are generally not high in small cities like Granada—in contrast to large metropolises (Gomez-Lievano et al 2012)—and even though there seems to be an under-reporting of crimes in the national police records,⁴⁷ residents’ perceptions and accounts of crime in Villas are supported by the data. In contrast to other neighborhoods in Granada, Villas has been having some of the largest crime rates in the city since 2011, peaking at 31% of all homicides in urban Granada in 2015 (see Table 4).

Table 4: Total Homicides Reported by Neighborhood

Year	Total homicides in Villas*	% Homicides in Villas of Total Homicides in Urban Granada
2011	2	9.1%
2012	2	7.4%
2013	0	0.0%
2014	1	7.7%
2015	5	31.3%
2016	5	25.0%
2017	3	30.0%
2018	2	15.4%

Source: Policía Nacional de Colombia – 2019

*Interviewees and the local press gave account of more homicides than the ones registered for 2018, which suggests that the data is underestimating the total number of homicides. During my time in Villas, I heard of six different homicides that took place in the neighborhood, which contrast with the 2 cases reported by the national police records for 2018.

The residents’ complaints about high criminality in their neighborhood are surprising, at first glance, given that empirical findings about the relation between neighborhood poverty and

⁴⁶ Paramilitary groups in Colombia are organized illegal armed groups that have fought leftist oriented guerrillas since the 1980s.

⁴⁷ Interviewees and the local press gave account of more homicides than the ones registered for 2018 in Table 4, which suggests that the data is underestimating the total number of homicides.

crime have shown that social ties, social control, and collective efficacy⁴⁸ play a role, as mediating factors, decreasing the likelihood of crime in neighborhoods (Kubrin and Weitzer 2003). In other words, we may ask why residents who were highly successful regulating the use of space in Villas were not successful controlling the consolidation of criminal activities in their neighborhood.

Studies with a focus on Latin American informal settlements have found that these spaces tend to have a mix of high collective efficacy with high crime rates (Villareal and Silva 2006). Cerda et al (2008) argue that the presence of paramilitary groups in these types of settlements explain the presence of this “uncommon” mix because paramilitaries tend to provide informal social control of deviant behaviors, while also bringing violent crime rates up. My interviews with residents reveal that this is the case for neighborhood Villas where paramilitaries penalize drug consumption and “deviant” behaviors by assassinating drug consumers or other individuals accused of stealing or performing illegal activities (see for example Image 4), while protecting drug dealers from whom they receive economic benefits. Although important, this explanation does not answer the question of why a highly organized neighborhood community, with the capacity to control who can occupy a space in the neighborhood, allows paramilitaries and the drug business to establish themselves in the neighborhood.

⁴⁸ Defined as “social cohesion among neighbors combined with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good” (Sampson et al 1997, p. 918).

Image 4: Social cleansing pamphlets circulating around the neighborhood



Source: personal communication – 2019. *This is a short version of the whole document.

An excerpt of these document translates: “we don’t want to find you stoned, doing nothing at neighborhood street corners, we are ‘cleaning’ [cleaning is here another word for killing] right now, this is serious.”

There are three potential explanations for this question. The first is that the paramilitaries and drug dealers’ presence is imposed by force. The second is that these actors tend to have a stronger presence in the neighborhood as neighborhood cohesion falters. The third, which does not exclude the previous two and is revealing in terms of the goal of this chapter—understand what local social practices become institutionalized when people join efforts to occupy properties on their own accord—is that paramilitaries first arrived at the neighborhood and gained a place there by supporting residents against eviction.

There is no single story of how residents managed to stop the different eviction processes that were initiated against them. Residents who experienced eviction threats emphasized the role played by different factors, such as: the cohesion of the community and their capacity to act together, the role played by local neighborhood leaders, the support from local politicians, or the filing of lawsuits in the name of the victims of conflict. Surely, these were all important factors, but the presence of paramilitary groups also played an important role.

In a City Council meeting, a few days after a failed eviction attempt in Villas, local councilors discussed the various reasons why the eviction process had been unsuccessful. One of the reasons was the threats that had been made against workers driving rubble removal machinery: “I heard that there had been threats, that if anyone dared to drive the motor grader, he

would be turned into a puppet [*muñeco*], which is how people who get killed are popularly called” (City Council Minute, February 7th, 2003). A few months later, the local ombudsman mentioned during another meeting at the City Council that public officials at the local administration had received threats to their life, hence the administration decided that the eviction process should be handled by departmental—not municipal—authorities to protect the life of local authorities and their families (City Council Minute, May 28th, 2003). The threats were coming from organized, illegal armed groups, or paramilitaries. Some of the Villas founders also acknowledged that paramilitaries played an important role defending them against eviction, while acquiring lots in the neighborhood.

They [the Mobile Anti-riot Squadron-ESMAD] came to kick us out, but at that time *paracos* [the paramilitaries] came to live here and they kind of stopped the ESMAD from coming back, because they [*paracos*] went and talked with ESMAD and the ESMAD never came back. Of course, *paracos* occupied lots here. (Interview by Author, November 2018) [5]

The presence of paramilitary actors in the neighborhood—as in other similar types of settlements—was legitimized by the role they played defending the land invasion against eviction. Through neighborhood formation processes, residents developed different sorts of horizontal and vertical relations with different authorities including local paramilitary groups. In this process, paramilitaries became residents—and in that way part of the neighborhood community—with a capacity to protect fellow neighbors against eviction. But unfortunately, they also operated under the interests of their larger military organization, with negative consequences for the neighborhood residents in the long run.

The confluence of groups of displaced people and paramilitaries in Villas can be surprising, given that many residents were displaced from their hometowns by paramilitary groups, to be then ironically protected from eviction by similar groups in an urban neighborhood.

Nevertheless, a consequence of the longstanding armed conflict in Colombia is that its victims have learned to live with, and deal with armed actors for extended periods—in some cases a lifetime. That is, the presence and co-residence with paramilitaries in Villas, and in much of the entire country, although problematic, is not unexpected. In such national context, the paramilitaries did not just impose their own rule of law on neighborhood residents through the use of violence. They also worked together with an active and well-organized community towards a common goal: resisting eviction. The presence of paramilitary groups became thus a reality in the neighborhood formation process, incorporated into the communities' sophisticated schemes controlling who owned what, and who would occupy which space in the neighborhood.

If one wants to understand the consolidation of violent practices and violent groups in a place like Villas today, one must understand the complex ways in which, over the course of years-long organized efforts to resist eviction among a self-organized community, paramilitaries have gained a legitimate position in this neighborhood, and, consequently, have introduced complex trade-offs for neighborhood members. Research by Mary Patillo (1998) and others⁴⁹ has established that in some situations greater social cohesion may be associated with higher crime rates, when perpetrators happen to be deeply *integrated* into the community, making residents less willing to intervene against them. The case in Villas suggests that such *integration* in informal settlements is deeply connected to the challenges and obstacles faced during neighborhood formation processes, where self-organized residents may allow and legitimate the presence of other parties who have an interest in defending the neighborhood but have also the power to compromise neighborhood safety in the long run.

⁴⁹ Villarreal and Silva 2006; Browning et al 2004.

The institutionalization of these violent practices in collective and self-organized processes of neighborhood-formation also takes place, in this case, in a specific context of civil conflict introducing new actors with an interest in neighborhood-formation. Specifically, in Villas, military and paramilitary tactics of war during an active civil conflict in Colombia became problematically aligned with the creation of this neighborhood in the urban peripheries of Granada.

Military war operation and post-conflict reconstruction

Why were paramilitary groups interested in defending the land occupation in the first place? One straightforward explanation is because of economic reasons. Paramilitaries can gain profit through the control of illegal businesses taking place in the area, and they can also take hold of land that could appreciate in its value in the future. Another explanation is related to the strategic location of some informal neighborhoods. Basically, their location in urban margins, or in other words: border areas and gray spaces that are somewhat exempt from strict legal compliances (Yiftachel 2009), where paramilitary groups can operate easily. Villas has an additional, and seemingly contradictory, incentive: it is located in a strategic place of state action.

The presence and rule of illegal armed groups in Colombia's diverse territories has been generally examined as a result of state absence. However, this is not the case for Villas, which happened to be strategically located in the vicinity of the Infantry Battalion XXI Vargas, from which the National Army of Colombia conducted military operations for the whole region.⁵⁰ The Infantry Battalion occupies a territory adjoining Villas to the south side of the neighborhood and

⁵⁰ The Ariari region.

is today enclosed with a fence—the same fence mentioned above by Luna as the place where people are murdered on a regular basis.

Image 5: The Area of the Infantry Battalion adjoining Villas to the south side of the neighborhood



Source: Google Earth, Maxar Technologies – 2020

Between 2002 and 2004, during ongoing armed conflict in Colombia and during the consolidation of the Villas land occupation, there was no fence surrounding the Infantry Battalion, and people used to walk in and out of the military premises without trouble. Back then, Colonel Hector Alejandro Cabuya was commander of the Infantry Battalion XXI Vargas, holding the highest military rank in the region. Colonel Cabuya also played a very important role protecting the land occupiers against eviction, as one resident explained:

That lady [Nubia Henao-Garcia, mayor of Granada between 2002-2003] went against us, and she spent a lot of public money to bring 300 anti-riot police here [to the neighborhood] (...) She [Mayor Henao-Garcia] went to ask Colonel Cabuya for his support, and Colonel Cabuya said no, he rapidly said no, he said that he would not harm the civilian population. (Interview by Author, February 2019) [6]

Colonel Cabuya not only refused to evict the residents. He also contributed with resources for the construction of sewage infrastructure and donated infill material to help

residents reduce the risk of flooding during the rainy season. He became an important authority supporting and protecting occupiers, and some residents still speak of him with great esteem. However, in 2017, Colonel Cabuya was arrested in Dallas and extradited to Colombia under the charges of enforced disappearance, arms trafficking, homicide, and ties to paramilitarism. He was also accused of being involved in one of the most infamous practices of human rights abuses committed by the Colombian state authorities: the *falsos positivos* (false positives). In alliance with paramilitary groups, the armed forces of Colombia captured and killed civilian population, dressed the bodies up in guerrilla uniforms, and moved them to war zones to count them as guerrilla fighters killed in combat for which the military received monetary rewards. The victims of such practice are identified today as false positives and are an example of an inversion of the geopolitics of conflict in Colombia where cities and their marginal neighborhoods, instead of being shelters of relative security from civil conflict, became an epicenter of military tactical operations.⁵¹

According to a report by the Office of the Attorney General, the Infantry Battalion XXI Vargas left more than 200 victims of *falsos positivos* (Valencia-Molina 2016).⁵² The selection of victims was part of the recruiting tactics of the paramilitary who used to approach young people in low-income neighborhoods in the largest cities of the region, such as Granada, to persuade them to join the paramilitary lines. Those who had a history of drug dealing, stealing, or drug abuse, or who they found drunk at bars and discos, were never “recruited,” but were delivered instead to the army to be presented the next day as “guerrillas killed in combat.” This terrible

⁵¹ The most famous case in Colombia is that of the Mothers of Soacha, who learned that their missing sons had been reported dead in Ocaña, a little town close to the border with Venezuela, at least 600 kilometers away from home in Soacha, a municipality right at the urban margins of Bogota.

⁵² In 2010 the Office of the Attorney General was investigating 1451 cases with 2445 victims for the whole country (CINEP 2011).

practice created a “win-win” situation for both armed parties. For the paramilitary, this practice was another form of “social cleansing,” it was well aligned with their recruitment methods, and helped them maintain alliances with high-ranking military officers. For the military, this was a way to keep high performance rates in a context where the national government demanded and rewarded combat kills.

In 2010, demobilized members of the paramilitary group that was active in Granada (*Bloque Centauros*) declared under official testimony that they interacted with the armed forces on a regular basis, walking in and out of the Infantry Battalion with no trouble, before and during Colonel Cabuya’s mandate. The demobilized paramilitaries named several military officers who participated in the *falsos positivos*, and one in particular, mentioned over and over again, was Colonel Cabuya, ironically decorated in 2003 for his “outstanding operational results” (Valencia-Molina 2016).

Whether Villas became an epicenter in the production of *falsos positivos* is today an open question. What is evidenced here is that both paramilitary groups and military officers had a military-operational interest that benefited from the location of the land invasion right next to the Infantry Battalion where paramilitaries could settle and hold regular meetings with military authorities. Hence, both came to play an important, and coordinated, role in supporting well-organized residents against the multiple challenges they faced resisting eviction attempts and building basic public infrastructure. Today, after the official demobilization of numerous paramilitary groups—including the *Bloque Centauros*—and the signing of a peace agreement between the national government and the FARC guerrilla, the Villas residents continue to suffer

from forced recruitment practices and violence inflicted by paramilitary actors who continue to have presence in the neighborhood.⁵³

The challenges and opportunities of land occupations

The neighborhood formation process of Villas de Granada introduces a lens into the different practices that become institutionalized when residents join efforts to create new residential spaces and claim a common right to inhabit the city. These practices are shaped by the different challenges faced and the different actors involved in neighborhood-formation. They impact the ways in which residents establish horizontal and vertical relations and their capacities to make claims on the city as a neighborhood community.

Regarding the institutionalization of different social practices, it is important to start by acknowledging that new informal settlements that have emerged, for the most part, in the urban peripheries of cities after rapid population growth are not necessarily unplanned and disorganized. In fact, the Villas case shows that the creation of one of the largest new informal neighborhoods of Granada is not very different from how this small city has been urbanizing all along. In fact, the Villas' land occupiers have joined efforts to create a neighborhood that fulfills basic planning regulations. In this instance, the role played by Clara and other neighborhood founders reveals the importance of in-site bottom-up enforcers of local area plans and city-wide planning regulations, within efforts of insurgent citizenship (Holston 2008, Bayat 2000).

Having said that, the Villas neighborhood shares many similarities with other informal settlements, but there are particularities of this neighborhood that become important in

⁵³ Paramilitary groups, like the *Bloque Centauros*, organized under the paramilitary confederation—*Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia*—demobilized under the presidential administration of Alvaro Uribe Velez (2002-2010) but transformed into what have been identified as “paramilitary successor groups.”

explaining why individual residents ended up organizing in the way they did. In the Villas formation process, residents occupied land by their own means and faced imminent threats of eviction that are not necessarily common in other types of informal settlements. These related conditions directly impact the personal life chances of residents and reflects the consolidation of a highly organized neighborhood community, with a bottom-up leadership structure established to legitimize, control, and regulate the use of a common living space. The structure of social relations established during the first years of neighborhood creation have been maintained over the years—beyond the eventualities of eviction and access to basic services—through various forms of social organizations and institutionalized social practices in the acquisition, protection, and exchange of land.

Accordingly, the consolidation of this highly organized neighborhood community has had positive consequences bearing on the present of neighborhood residents and their capacities to make claims on the city. Residents have not only successfully resisted eviction. These organized residents have also been able to control how the neighborhood space is occupied and transformed, limiting lot sizes for residential uses, and protecting areas for communal use against residential occupation. Today, the neighborhood can boast a diversity of spaces reserved and developed as local parks. Residents have also appealed to and have acquired resources from national and international authorities to build a local community center, a soccer court, and a space to take care of the elderly. There are also many local organizations that persist from the early days of neighborhood-formation, including some victims' organizations that were highly successful in protecting residents against eviction and continue to represent a means of support for many displaced families. Even though many residents lack official property titles, socially

accepted informal agreements and institutionalized practices of control among neighbors have facilitated the acquisition, transfer, and protection of living spaces over more than a decade.

Unfortunately, in this process, residents' efforts to push for formality and defend the community against eviction can also bring negative consequences to the neighborhood. On the one hand, it can foster social cohesion and effective social organization. But on the other, it also favors clientelistic practices and ceding control over space to illegal armed groups. Like the literature of marginality has shown for other neighborhoods in Latin America's informal settlements, in Villas the state has been complicit in the perpetuation of violence through intermittent and selective alliances between the police and local criminal groups (Auyero et al 2014). But to understand why criminal groups are located in certain types of neighborhoods and not in others, it is important to examine neighborhood formation processes. During the Villas' *formative* process, armed actors attained a legitimate "right" to occupy a space in the neighborhood by supporting residents in their many struggles against eviction. As a result, displaced and poor residents of this neighborhood are currently more exposed to violence and criminal activities.

Furthermore, the geopolitics of the Colombian civil conflict add a layer of complexity to these *formative* processes. Even though urban centers in Colombia's armed conflict have been described as "gated cities" isolated from military trenches and contested areas of resource extraction (Serje et al 2007), or "shelters" hosting large numbers of Colombia's IDPs, the truth is that the urban peripheries of some of these cities have also been contested territories of military and paramilitary war-operation. A case like Villas shows that organized land occupiers, military leaders, and illegal armed groups can establish different sorts of agreements in the formation of new neighborhoods. These agreements support residents in their capacities to stay put and gain

access to basic city services, but the embeddedness of military and paramilitary actors in neighborhood-formation makes of these spaces preferred locations for the perpetration of war crimes (e.g., recruitment of minors, or *falsos positivos*). These practices have violent consequences bearing on the present of displaced communities, even after “the end” of civil conflicts. Hence, neighborhoods like Villas constitute today key scenarios and key challenges to post-conflict reconstruction.

Chapter 3: Pirate Developments, Gamonalism, and Unequal Access to Land: Neighborhood Formation in Paraiso

An informal settlement of a different kind

Neighborhoods *Villas de Granada* and *Paraiso* are two examples par excellence of the high concentration of displaced families in informal settlements in urban centers. Both neighborhoods emerged after a large influx of IDPs came to the city; both host a large proportion of the newcomers and have become the two largest neighborhoods of Granada; both are located in the urban margins, in cheap lands that experience seasonal floods; both have precarious access to basic public services; in both cases the majority of residents have built their housing units themselves, in stages, through the support of their neighbors and their families; and in both cases residents came to live to the neighborhood without legal land titles. Both neighborhoods are also located right next to each other, separated only by a muddy stream at the eastern outskirts of urban Granada. And yet, there are important differences between the two, shaping the urban residential experience of many displaced families and the ways in which they make claims on the city.

There is one important factor that differentiates Paraiso from the Villas neighborhood: Paraiso was developed by a powerful local entrepreneur called Reinel Gaitan-Tangarife, popularly known as “El Gurre.” While Villas was established by an organized group of land occupiers, against the best interest and in spite of the opposition from the landowner, Paraiso is what has been long identified in Colombia and other Latin American countries as a *pirate development*. In contrast to the former, in a pirate development land is subdivided and sold by one or a couple of resourceful individuals without legal permit from municipal authorities. In Paraiso, in particular, the land was sold and developed by one of the most powerful—if not the most—persons in Granada.

Comparing informal land occupations with pirate developments in Medellin, Colombia, Baross and Mesa (1986) argue that pirate developments are “more legal” because they offer more tenure security supported through informal land transactions with positive consequences on the building infrastructure of neighborhoods. This is partially evidenced in Paraiso where the cheap land prices offered by the powerful developer were publicized widely and became news in Granada as well as in other municipalities of the region, also reaching distant land speculation interests in Colombia’s capital city, Bogota—a phenomenon that is not evidenced in other informal settlements. Accordingly, Paraiso has urbanized relatively rapidly exhibiting an intricate landscape combining empty lots waiting out for valorization; rapidly urbanized ones with a variability of residential, industrial, and commercial infrastructure; and a majority of low-budget residential units standing on 72 square meters lots (see Image 6).

Image 6: Various types of building infrastructure in Paraiso



Source: Author – 2019

* The left image shows empty lots left for valorization and a variety of residential buildings. The right image shows commercial infrastructure.

Like Baross and Mesa (1986) identified for the case of pirate developments in Medellin, tenure security is an important factor that tends to differentiate pirate developments from land occupations. However, market transactions are not necessarily what generate tenure security in

these types of settlements as opposed to land occupations—there is also a market for land in the latter case. In Paraiso, El Gurre’s unique reputation for his capacity to “legalize” illegal urban developments and protect his urbanization projects against eviction is actually the main factor encouraging many families and land speculators to invest in the neighborhood.

From and beyond a discussion about tenure security, I study what happens when powerful sponsors, like El Gurre, get involved in neighborhood formation. I argue that neighborhood sponsors can have unique influence on a neighborhood’s formation process and its residents’ capacities to make claims on the city. I show how even though residents from all sorts of informal settlements may suffer from the same problems of lack of access to public service infrastructure and lack of individual formal property titles, how they face these challenges collectively varies depending on the types of sponsors invested in neighborhood-formation.

Differences in who sponsors the development of a new neighborhood are significant across informal settlements and need to be accounted for in the literature on informality and urban poverty. They are not only key actors facilitating access to housing. They can also shape how residents make claims on the city as a collective, how they interact with public authorities, and how they interact amongst themselves. Furthermore, these important differences in who sponsors new neighborhoods also shed new light on the different power structures that shape processes of city building. In this case, El Gurre’s participation in the making of Paraiso speaks of a wider phenomenon that needs to be accounted for in the study of both informal practices of city building and IDP integration to urban environments. I identify this phenomenon as *gamonalism*, which is a term that is specific to Latin American contexts but has its equivalences in other continents generally referred to as *local strongmen*, *bossism*, or *gangsterism* (Sidel 2005). In Colombia, the participation of *gamonales*, or village-bosses, in city building shows

how collective processes of housing acquisition can be embedded, spatially and institutionally, in a long history of political relations and governance practices of conflict and violence, and in an incomplete nation-building process where the nation's peripheral territories tend to be governed by a mix of para-statal authorities with the capacity to appropriate land and reproduce violence.

The neighborhood enabling process

Land in Paraiso was originally classified as rural, which means that it was located outside Granada's urban perimeter. In Colombia, urban perimeters are defined in the local land-use plan of each municipality and function as an urban growth boundary, distinguishing land-use permit constraints inside and outside the boundary. High-density residential uses, commercial, industrial, and institutional uses are generally allowed inside the boundary. Low-density residential uses, agricultural and some industrial uses are generally allowed outside the boundary. This boundary has become an opportunity for the consolidation of illegal neighborhoods, just outside the officially demarcated urban perimeter. It has encouraged self-organized residents to occupy rural areas that tend to be less supervised and protected by public authorities but are close enough to cities to facilitate access to basic utility infrastructure. It has also attracted pirate developers to subdivide and sell land in border areas, outside urban perimeters, without legal permit. Pirate developers who do not own the land they develop—land tricksters—are drawn to these areas because they can take advantage of the legal ambiguity that is common among rural land titles to subdivide and sell land without being punished by public authorities (Holston 2008). Those who are landowners can profit from converting low productivity agricultural uses into high density residential. In each case, developers are considered illegal, or *pirate*, because they develop the land without legal permit and put pressure on local authorities to move the officially demarcated

urban perimeter and build the connections to public services that should have been provided by them according to the law (Blaesser 1981).

Reinel Gaitan-Tangarife is a pirate developer with an official title to the land in what is known today as Paraiso. Like in many other cases, he has subdivided these rural lands in Granada without legal permit, right outside the officially established urban perimeter. Unlike other informal settlements in the city, he has been very successful achieving the legalization of his residential project and transforming it into a neighborhood of urban Granada.

Early in 2010, some members of Granada's city council raised concerns about the illegal subdivision and building of housing units that was taking place, since 2009, in an area beyond the river Irique to the eastern border of the city (City Council Minute, February 24th, 2010). Despite these concerns, out of a total of fifteen members of the city council in office between 2008-2011,⁵⁴ only three councilors were consistent in mounting opposition against the illegal urbanization that was taking place. These three councilors lost every single battle and in 2012 what was referred to as "the rural area beyond the river Irique" became neighborhood Paraiso: the largest neighborhood of Granada with an area representing 13% of the total urban footprint in 2016.

To be considered an official neighborhood of Granada, Paraiso had to be included within the demarcated urban perimeter, on top of other requirements (i.e., get access to basic public services, provision of individual land titles to residents, provision of basic amenities, and demarcation of access routes according to the local land-use plan regulations). While this issue has become the bottleneck for the legalization of many other informal settlements just outside Granada's urban perimeter, in Paraiso it was, surprisingly, the first one to be resolved.

⁵⁴ City councilors are elected democratically every four years.

According to the Colombian legislation every city must produce a local land-use plan that can only be renewed every 12 years, except for some exceptional reasons (Law 388 of 1997). As noted above these land-use plans establish the urban perimeters separating cities from rural areas. In Granada, the land-use plan was adopted in 2004, but in 2011 the city proposed to implement an extemporaneous amendment, to be approved by the City Council, before the required 12 years cycle. What is striking and suspicious about this proposal is that Paraiso—established less than two years before the proposed amendment, with no access to public services, and risks of flooding—was first in the list to be included as an area of “urban expansion” in the new version of the land-use plan, before more plausible areas also urbanized through informal settlements. In fact, consideration of Paraiso as an area of urban expansion, dragged other long-established, small, and better consolidated informal settlements along behind it, to be included as urban areas in the new land-use plan. How did this happen? Through a complex process of political machinations.

In December 2010, city councilor Ramon Olmedo-Vargas remarked that the area beyond river Irique—or Paraiso—had been included as an area of urban expansion in the proposal to amend the land-use plan. This was for him a matter of concern because other areas in Granada, with better access to public services had not been considered (City Council Minute, December 14th, 2010).⁵⁵ He proposed to have an open council meeting about the issue. In the open council meeting, city councilor Gerardo Montenegro denounced that the administration was putting personal interests ahead of the interest of the public by proposing to reclassify land that did not fulfill basic requisites (i.e., access to public services) as an area of urban expansion, while other

⁵⁵ This was for example the case of informal settlement Ciudad Bolivar, bordering Paraiso to the south, established in 1998, with access to basic utilities and no risk of flooding.

areas that were closer to the urban perimeter had not been considered. Responding to these concerns, invited public officials representing the planning and environmental authorities responded that they would investigate the cases that had not been included. They also mentioned that the urbanization beyond river Irique was illegal and people should not buy lots there. Nevertheless, they never questioned its re-classification into an area of urban expansion. Instead, they assured that this transformation did not entail immediate legalization because both the developer and the residents would have to abide by the law and fulfill all the planning regulations—cited above—that had been ignored (City Council Minute, February 18th, 2011).

Alongside the urban expansion discussion, members of the city council were debating a proposal to allow the mayor to buy land for the construction of the largest public school in town. Regional authorities had already assigned the money for the construction, and it was up to local officials to buy the terrain for the project. Surprisingly, one of the lots in question was located in the area beyond river Irique and was owned by El Gurre's son. The same city councilors that had objected the urbanization of the area questioned the city's resolution to locate the school there, because there were other better options available with no risk of flooding, with better access to public services, better access routes, and closer to the city center (City Council Minutes, April 3rd, 6th and 9th, 2011).

On April 9th, 2011, the three councilors that had raised their concerns against the illegal urbanization of Paraiso lost their first battle when a large majority of members voted in favor of authorizing the mayor to buy land for the construction of the public school (Municipal Council Agreement 017, July 29th, 2010), giving the city questionable scope to buy the lot beyond river Irique. Ultimately, the construction of the public school increased the value of the land controlled by El Gurre in Paraiso and brought a sewage network to the neighborhood which El Gurre had

promised to deliver in some of the purchase receipts of the already subdivided and sold lots. Even though the sewage network did not connect to the residents' homes—it was just intended to connect the public school—residents built their own connections through self-made clandestine pipes, and El Gurre received the credit for bringing sewage infrastructure that he did not pay for.

Two months after the mayor was allowed to buy land for the public school, the same three councilors lost their second battle in the City Council when the amendment to the land-use plan was approved with a positive vote of all—but three—members (12). Thus, Paraiso became an area of urban expansion. That day, opposing councilor Montenegro declared: “I do not agree with this amendment to the land-use plan, because we are including something that has been decided before those affected have heard about it and we are favoring specific people [probably referring to El Gurre] from Granada” (City Council Minute, June 10th, 2011).

One year later, Reinel Gaitan-Tangarife, or El Gurre, sent a written official request to the city council to change the classification of Paraiso from an “area of urban expansion” to a neighborhood of urban Granada under Law 1537 of 2012. According to the law, every city in Colombia could include an area of urban expansion within the municipality’s urban perimeter, for one-time only between 2012-2015, for the development of affordable housing projects. Paraiso already had a wide mix of residential, industrial, and commercial uses, but the request was nevertheless approved, and Paraiso became the largest neighborhood of Granada without fulfilling any of the steps and obligations that planning and environmental officials had declared to be necessary before “legalization.”

The rapid legalization of Paraiso, relative to other informal settlements outside the urban perimeter, is explained by the role El Gurre has played in city building and his unique economic and political influence in Granada.

A powerful developer

In 2015 a video of El Gurre was released telling a group of people to vote for Yanett Gutierrez⁵⁶ for mayor of Acacias—another small city located about one hour driving distance from Granada. Having access to land in the rural areas of Acacias, El Gurre planned to create an illegal land subdivision, like Paraiso, but before getting on with the project he needed an ally in the mayor's office. He told the community surrounding him that day:

They [opponents to the project] are going to say that this is not legal, that it is illegal, and they might be right. We are not making this illegal, we are making it legal, but in order to legalize, the only person who can do it is the mayor of this town. Hence, listen carefully, if doctor Yanett is not elected we do not have anything, because the others [the other candidates] are all our opponents and you know how politics work. (El Tiempo, September 27th, 2015) [7]⁵⁷

It is not a novelty that processes of urban development, property titling, and access to basic public services are intensely political. But local entrepreneurs seeking to appoint mayors before carrying on with illegal development projects are not that common. To fully understand the neighborhood enabling process of Paraiso, it is key to understand who El Gurre is, how he makes business, and the role he plays in city building.

Even though El Gurre is a popular benefactor to low-income people in Granada and he is also invested in politics, unlike the *clientelistic* patron who engages in city building by representing a specific political party (Mitlin 2014), he engages with informal urban peripheries as an entrepreneur—not as a politician who depends on a specific party—highly invested in the

⁵⁶ Yanett Gutierrez was aspiring for the second time to become mayor of Acacias with political movement MAIS (Movimiento Alternativo Indígena y Social—Alternative Indigenous and Social Movement). Despite the name of the party, many of its political representatives are not indigenous peoples and have no direct connection with the Colombian indigenous movement.

⁵⁷ Unfortunately, for El Gurre, Yanett Gutierrez did not win the elections for mayor of Acacias in 2015, hence he did not move forward with the project.

urbanization of rural lands. He actually uses his capacity to influence elections and “appoint” mayors and council members to guarantee that his projects get legalized. In a short interview by the national newspaper, *El Tiempo*, about the video that was released of him asking people to support Yanett Gutierrez, El Gurre stood by his acts and words saying:

It is normal, everywhere you need to *fix* [appoint] the mayor and the city council. That happens everywhere in Colombia (...) it is not illegal because every mayor can decide what they want to do for their time in office (...) I want to give housing to the people and I have solved this problem for many people in Granada already. (El Tiempo, October 8th, 2015) [8]

If we take these words at face value and assume that it is normal to “fix” mayors to develop illegal urbanization projects, and it happens everywhere in Colombia, a reasonable deduction from such a premise would be that only a few people in every city would have the power to do this. Accordingly, with a capacity to “fix” mayors, El Gurre is a special kind of *pirate* developer. Pirate developers are generally described as avid out-and-out entrepreneurs “prepared to take risks and skate on very thin ice” (Gilbert 1981, p. 664) to make some profit. As an avid entrepreneur that is illegally subdividing land for residential purposes, El Gurre is in many ways a pirate developer. But unlike the paradigmatic pirate developer he does not really “skate on very thin ice.” When it comes to developing new neighborhoods, his business is solid as a rock.

He is one of the most important entrepreneurs in the region, and he is popularly known as the most powerful person in Granada. El Gurre is the owner of the largest locally run legal businesses in Granada,⁵⁸ he owns the largest palm tree plantation in the region, and he represents one of the most important sources of employment in the city. In 2018, his company,

⁵⁸ There are a few other large businesses but with the headquarters in Bogota.

Agropecuaria la Rivera Gaitan, produced 152 formal jobs, representing 100% of the jobs offered in the municipality in the animal and vegetable oil manufacturing industry.⁵⁹ Information on the total jobs offered by industry in Granada suggests that *Agropecuaria la Rivera Gaitan* is one of the top five employers in the city (see Table 5), and this is an estimate that does not include other jobs offered through El Gurre’s foundation, *Asoagripalma*,⁶⁰ or any other jobs—formal or informal—offered by him directly.

Table 5: Top five employers in Granada (based on the average number of jobs by firm in each industry in 2017)

Industry	Number of firms or companies in industry	Employment in industry
Activities of political organizations	1	282
Recycling of metal waste and scrap	1	187
Legislative activities of general public administration	2	161
Manufacture of vegetable and animal oils and fats*	2	141
Technical and vocational secondary education	1	73

Source: DATLAS Colombia – 2017, in <http://datlascolombia.bancoldex.com/>

*El Gurre’s company is classified in the area of Manufacture of vegetable and animal oils. Because his company employed 151 people in 2018 (EINFORMA), it is very likely that he employed most people working in the industry (141) in 2017, making him one of the top five employers in the municipality. It is also important to note that the other industries with high representation of employment in Granada are associated with the public sector, which suggest that El Gurre might be the second largest employer in Granada after the government.

Although El Gurre is rarely mentioned on the record, his name is overly present in informal conversations about politics and urbanization in Granada. El Gurre’s “real estate” branch office is located in Paraiso, and it has been open and in operation for more than eight

⁵⁹ The information was taken from EINFORMA at https://www.einforma.co/servlet/app/portal/ENTP/id_sess/00042569343000082224960000038704/prod/FIN_PRO_MO_CARRITO/NUEVO_REGISTRADO/1/id_sess/00042569343000082224960000038704; and DATLAS Colombia, at <http://datlascolombia.com/#/location/793>

⁶⁰ *Asoagripalma* is meant to support low-income farmers in the region.

years with no oversight from public authorities. His employees receive clients on a regular basis, on weekdays, and they are now selling lots for ten million pesos (ca. 3,000 US dollars) in a newly attached extension to the neighborhood of about 10,000 lots called Paraiso 2. The office is managed by a former city council member, serving for the period between 2008-2011 when the extemporaneous amendment to the land-use plan was approved.

The rumor in Granada is that El Gurre “owns” the city council and the mayor’s office. Whether this is true or exaggerated, his unique political influence transcends the limits of party-politics and has allowed him not only to accelerate the process of legalization of Paraiso and redirect development to the city peripheries, but also to protect residents against eviction. For example, since the early days of Paraiso, opponents in the city council denounced the involvement of public officials in the making of the informal neighborhood. Specifically, the head of the local government office, Asdrubal Martinez,⁶¹ was seen in Paraiso encouraging visitors to buy land (City Council Minute, March 9th, 2010). As a public official, he was, ironically in charge of sanctioning pirate developers and conducting evictions if necessary. Evidently, unlike in other informal settlements, Paraiso residents did not face any real threats of eviction.

Overall, El Gurre has played a vital role providing access to housing for poor and vulnerable families in Granada, in Paraiso, and in other neighborhoods he has urbanized without permit in the urban peripheries. Furthermore, as I will show below, he has become a popular benefactor fulfilling some of the basic obligations in the provision of goods and services that should have been fulfilled by local and national public authorities. The role El Gurre has played in city building and in the provision of basic services to vulnerable and low-income families in

⁶¹ He was a former soccer player who went into politics in the early 2000s as acting mayor of Granada.

Granada, represents an important factor shaping the living experiences and personal life chances of many residents of Paraiso, including many displaced persons. Accordingly, unlike in other informal settlements, the relation that Paraiso residents develop with the city and their own neighborhood is deeply mediated by El Gurre and his economic and political capacity to make things happen.

Vertical and horizontal relations

Narratives and community attachments

With a few differences here and there, residents' answer to the question of the story of Paraiso was short and concrete and can be summarized as follows: they mentioned that the neighborhood did not have legal access to basic utilities, that it was the biggest neighborhood of Granada, and that they bought their lot from El Gurre and since then they have seen the neighborhood grow. As in other informal settlements, residents of Paraiso had organized by block to build basic sewage infrastructure, and they had subdivided the neighborhood in nine local energy boards to plan and manage the building of basic energy infrastructure and collect payments for consumed energy services. A couple of times, the community had marched together to the city center to make claims about their right to have proper access to energy services. They also organized with two surrounding neighborhoods to build a bridge over river Irique and connect the south side of the neighborhood to the city. And yet, these events were not directly recalled by residents when I asked them to tell me the story of the neighborhood.

Interestingly, despite sharing and having experienced many of the challenges faced by residents in other informal settlements, their neighborhood formation narratives were more similar to the ones I heard from public housing residents in Granada (see chapter 4) where residents conceived a neighborhood that had already been established by an authority—in this case El Gurre—before

they bought land and came to live there. In other words, in contrast to other informal settlements in the city, these residents did not conceive their neighborhood as strictly the product of their own making.

This particular way in which many residents of Paraiso tell the story of their neighborhood reflects how they organize and seek support today, and how they address matters of urgency. In a nutshell, residents tend to address matters of urgency first with El Gurre, before organizing with neighbors. If he manages to solve the problem, they can skip the part of community organizing.

For example, in 2017, the pipes of the sewage network that the government had built for the new public school in Paraiso began to fill their capacity because many residents were using it to dump their wastewater through their clandestine self-built connections. Wastewater began to reach the surfaces of the high areas of Paraiso, and those living in the lower areas knew it was just a matter of days for the water, and its putrid smell, to reach their homes too. Antonia, a resident of the lower areas of Paraiso, was working for the local public service company back then, and she decided to visit the manager's office to ask for support. On her way out from the manager's office, she came face-to-face with El Gurre. He told her that many residents in the neighborhood had already complained to him about this issue, hence he decided to come to speak with the manager. She exhaled in relief, thinking: "This is real support." One week later the issue was resolved.

There are indeed many factors shaping how residents relate to their neighborhood and their neighbors. A powerful sponsor helping residents to solve problems is one of them, and one of unique importance in this case. In Paraiso, stories about camaraderie, shared codes of communication, or gatherings with neighbors are often secondary to anecdotes about different

encounters and conversations residents have had with El Gurre. In the eyes of residents of Paraiso, he is first and foremost the one person who brought the neighborhood into existence, he is the person who guarantees that they will not get evicted for occupying land under legally questionable terms, and he is the first person they will go to if they need to solve a pressing neighborhood issue. This unique way of solving problems does not mean that residents have no agency over their neighborhood, but their agency is exercised in many instances through the lines of communication that they have established with the powerful neighborhood sponsor. He has been shown, after all, to be highly effective at solving some of the residents' collective and individual needs.

In this context, the influential presence of El Gurre in the neighborhood formation process is transforming the way residents organize as a community and make claims on the city. This is also evidenced among displaced residents of Paraiso who, unlike those in other informal settlements, have not organized under the legally binding category of displacement to defend common rights against eviction and demand special rights of protection and a right to inhabit the city under decent conditions.

Throughout my interviews, displaced residents of Paraiso mentioned that displacement was not really a topic of discussion among neighbors or a common factor prompting them to join together with other residents. Some of them acknowledged that their neighbors did not even know that they were displaced. Lena, for example, was displaced from her rural estate a couple of miles away from Granada. They left land and livestock for Granada, where they lived under friends' roofs for a couple of years until they bought land in Paraiso. In Granada, her husband was able to get a job in construction, and he has applied all he has learned to the building of their new home. His knowledge is also greatly appreciated by neighbors whom he helps repair water

wells or informal drainpipes that get clogged regularly. The couple has maintained a very good relationship with the neighbors. They take care of each other's homes, and the neighbors bring food to Lena's house anytime they have leftovers because they know her fridge is often empty. Still, when I asked her whether having other displaced people living in her near vicinity had been useful for her in any way, perhaps learning about public programs that could benefit her, she responded that many of her neighbors did not know that she was displaced. Like many other displaced persons in Paraiso, Lena does not think that there are any special benefits of sharing a neighborhood with other displaced families.

In Colombia, many displaced families have organized under the figure of *Organizaciones Populares de Vivienda*—OPV—which are nonprofits established with the main purpose to facilitate access to housing or develop housing improvement projects for all its members. Through OPVs many victims have gained access to public and affordable housing, and many who inhabit informal settlements have used OPVs to defend their right to stay put, legalize illegal occupations, and get access to basic construction materials. In Paraiso, however, despite being the largest neighborhood of the city, there is no active OPV advocating for the rights of residents. In many ways, El Gurre has supplanted the role played by OPVs. He has satisfied several needs, from protecting residents against eviction to facilitating access to basic housing materials.

Pilar, for example, is another resident of Paraiso who was displaced from a rural village a couple of miles away from Granada. When she was in her teens, the FARC commander controlling her hometown territory expressed his interest in having her join the ranks of his guerrilla army. She had not turned 15 when her aunt—her guardian at the time—decided that it was time to send her away to a small city in the Central Mountain Range of the Andes to live

with her grandparents. From the small city in the Andes, she moved back to the Meta department from which she was displaced to live with her mom in a small rural estate.⁶² There, she met her future husband and the couple moved to Bogota because he got a job in the big city. They lived there for six years until he lost his job. They decided to move to Granada because they heard that there was land available at very affordable prices and there were plenty of job opportunities for the young couple. Only the former turned out to be true: there were plenty of lots for sale in Paraiso.

Pilar moved to Granada in 2015 with her new family—her husband, her daughter, and her newborn child—and her mother. They initially paid rent in a house in neighborhood Villas de Granada with no connection to any public services and no access to clean water. A couple of months later, her mom learned about the cheap lots in Paraiso and both mother and daughter bought land there. Despite being able to afford land in Paraiso, Pilar and her husband were having a difficult time finding a job. Hence, they ran out of money to invest in the construction of their new home. Pilar decided that it was time to ask for help. Instead of spending days trying to get an appointment at the local victims' unit,⁶³ or contacting city council members or other public authorities who were known for supporting displaced families, or seeking support from NGOs, religious communities or local victims and housing organizations, Pilar decided to wait for El Gurre outside his office. She decided he was her best option, since she had already bought land from him and he was known to be generous with those in need. It was not easy to reach him

⁶² Her mom had also been displaced from another rural estate in the Macarena region. A family member had decided to leave the FARC guerrilla for good, and she knew that meant the FARC would in turn sentence his whole family for treason.

⁶³ The main point of contact between victims and local and national public authorities.

because there were always people waiting for him outside his office. But she was resolved to wait until she got the chance to speak with him.

When she finally spoke with him, she told him that she was displaced and a mother head of household. She said that she had bought land in Paraiso, but she did not have a penny to start building her house. She needed help. He offered her one million pesos (ca. \$330 US dollars) in building materials and sent someone to identify where her lot was to bring bricks, cement, and other supplies. She blushes and admits amidst laughter: “they caught me telling lies when they came here”—she was not a single mother—but she does not regret for a second having reached out to El Gurre. With the materials he provided, her husband built what she calls a 4x4 home, with four walls and one room for everything. Subsequently, her husband, as well as her mom’s new husband, got a job in El Gurre’s palm tree plantation, located right in the vicinity of Paraiso. Pilar concluded after our one-hour conversation: “Everything was possible thanks to God and Don Reinel.” Both mother and daughter were deeply grateful with El Gurre and they did not hesitate to answer affirmatively when I asked them if they would vote for him if he ever ran for office. Her mother added: “I would help him campaign for whichever candidate he would like me to support. His son might run for mayor in the coming elections and if that is the case, I will vote for him.⁶⁴ Undoubtedly!” Her daughter nodded approvingly.

The perils of vertical and horizontal attachments

Even though El Gurre has been proven effective solving many of Paraiso residents’ individual and collective needs, his role as an illegal developer and social aid provider is compromising how residents organize with neighbors and how they engage with the city as

⁶⁴ El Gurre’s son did not run for mayor that year; he ran and was democratically elected for a position in the Departmental Assembly of Meta.

political subjects. Of course, not every resident of Paraiso is willing to vote and campaign for El Gurre's candidate, and Pilar's story was one of the most striking I encountered, regarding the blatant admiration and respect she and her mother expressed for El Gurre. Their case is an example of how processes of housing acquisition—in a relatively new living environment and after many years of struggle looking for housing, jobs, and basic goods to sustain a more stable lifestyle—can incidentally transform how they behave politically. Even though Pilar and her mom's case is extreme, for the benefits they received and for their willingness to give their vote to the candidate of El Gurre's choosing, displaced residents of Paraiso in general know that he is inevitably a “go to” authority to solve many of their needs and problems. Even in the case where residents are not willing to vote for El Gurre's candidate, their political relation to the city and local public authorities is deeply shaped by the projects of the powerful entrepreneur.

Unlike Pilar and her mother—who moved recently to Granada in 2015—residents of Paraiso who had been living for a long time in Granada provided more complex descriptions of El Gurre. They had mixed feelings about his multiple business activities and were more independent politically. Nevertheless, even in those cases, the trajectories and plans of individuals—how they imagined the composition of their neighborhood in a long temporal horizon—continued to be tied to this somewhat obscure entrepreneur.

Talia is a resident of Paraiso who was forced to leave her rural town for Granada with her family when she was just a child more than 20 years ago. Unlike Pilar and her mother, Talia has neither worked for El Gurre nor sought economic support from him directly. She bought her lot in Paraiso for twelve million pesos (ca. 4000 US dollars)⁶⁵ with money from her own pocket.

⁶⁵ Although lots in Paraiso 2 are sold for ten million pesos, available lots in older parts of the neighborhood have valorized more because they have been urbanized over the years (i.e., roads are in slightly better condition and they have access to electricity and sewage services not provided by El Gurre but by the community). This is why Talia paid more for a standard lot.

From her father, Talia learned different skills and was able to take different kinds of jobs when she was young. After displacement, her father worked in agriculture, in carpentry, in construction and fixing bicycles. She admired him deeply, and it saddens her when she recalls: “They killed him in the workshop where he used to fix bikes and flat tires.” Three years later they killed her brother too. The death threats that had displaced the family from their rural lands had followed them to Granada. She decided to leave town, but despite the bad memories that Granada elicited she returned pregnant with her new partner shortly after. Since then, she has been taking different cleaning jobs in companies and family houses. With the cleaning jobs she has enough to sustain herself and her son.

Talia had mixed feelings about El Gurre when I spoke with her. She, like other residents of Paraiso, knows that El Gurre has been accused of having relations with drug traffickers, and paramilitaries. Like other residents, she suspects that the urbanization of Paraiso might have been the result of some sort of unlawful business: a strategy to avoid “paying something he owed” to public authorities—probably taxes. She cannot tell for sure. She just knows that he “is no saint,” and he did not create Paraiso for the sole benefit of low-income displaced persons like her. When I asked her if she was going to vote for El Gurre’s son in the upcoming elections, she laughed and replied: “Don Reinel’s son, *ahmmm*, no, I am going for Yider Torres, we are going to help him.”

Overall, unlike Pilar and her mother, Talia was more skeptical about the politics behind the urbanization of Paraiso. She was also more independent from him economically and had a better idea of the political candidate she would like to support for mayor of Granada. Nevertheless, despite her capacity and willingness to identify the best person to represent her interests in the political arena, some of the decisions she has made, and the decisions she is

bound to make for the future of the neighborhood she now lives in, are inevitably bound to El Gurre. When I asked her why she ended up in Paraiso, as opposed to any other neighborhood in Granada where she could have bought land for a similar price than the one she got, she replied: “because we [her family] have always been with Don Reinel.” They have always relied on him. She knows Don Reinel is no saint, but she also speaks highly of him. She says he is a man of the people, he is a good guy, humble, and people like him because he provides for them. When we spoke about politics and how politicians can help the neighborhood grow, she said: “With whom we need to talk [*al que hay que caerle*] is with El Gurre, because his son is the one who is going to run for office. Maybe they make promises about land titles or paving the roads.”

Even though Talia is not willing to relinquish her power to vote to El Gurre’s candidate, she still relies on him, expecting him to respond to the many needs of the neighborhood. As she said it: her family has “always been with Don Reinel,” and she has learned from experience that El Gurre delivers—even when he does not necessarily pay for what he delivers—and is also able to protect the projects he is invested in. In a displaced person’s unstable world, where she has experienced little protection of what is owned and what is dear, El Gurre represents one of the best options available to secure her future. So, beyond a patron-client relation that many displaced residents have established with El Gurre, they have also developed an intimate relation, or an intimacy in how El Gurre’s actions and deeds are shaping the trust they put into their residential futures—conceived beyond their housing units at the level of the neighborhood. When I asked Talia to compare Paraiso with other informal neighborhoods in Granada, she did not identify any major differences. She mentioned that all had the same problems and challenges. However, her answer was very different when I asked her about the future of Paraiso: she thought it was going to be one of the best neighborhoods of Granada. Other residents shared

similar grand expectations for this neighborhood, supported in their own trust on the powerful entrepreneur.

Karen had been displaced twice from her hometown at the verge of the Amazon rainforest—once in 2007 and the other in 2014—and had been renting a housing unit in Paraiso for the past three years when I spoke with her. She had recently bought land with her husband in Paraiso 2, which they were paying in monthly installments. They planned to save enough money to build a house with three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room before moving there. She liked neighborhood Paraiso very much because it was quiet, and it reminded her of the town-like life that she used to have in her hometown. Nevertheless, when I asked her why they decided to buy in Paraiso 2, she emphasized the development projects she expected to see in the neighborhood, instead of the bucolic tranquility that she liked about Paraiso. She said: “many good things are coming to Paraiso, and especially to Paraiso 2, because the central police station, the main highway, and the bus terminal will be built there.” She acknowledged that there were many hurdles related to the implementation of these different projects, but she trusted that it would all be possible in the future because Don Reinel was working on it.

When I asked Karen where she learned about all these potential projects, she answered that her neighbors talk about this, and she also heard about them in El Gurre’s office. When interested buyers visit El Gurre’s office in Paraiso they can have a look at available lots in an aerial image hanging on a white wall. They are told that the lots are 6x12 meters wide, and they are introduced to the different payment options they can take if they decide to buy. On a white plat map, spread out on the table, potential buyers are invited to select the lot of their liking, while they are introduced to the different development projects forecasted for Paraiso: a road connecting Granada to the *Carretera Marginal de la Selva*—an important highway connecting

Colombia's Andean foothills to the Amazon—the construction of a modern bus terminal, the relocation of the police headquarters, and the municipality's prison facility. Although none of the forecasted projects have been considered in the local development and land-use plans of Granada, the buyers feel assured that something good will come to Paraiso thanks to El Gurre's ability to make things happen.

Such facilities and infrastructures represent, for residents, projects that will bring public services and other resources to the neighborhood and will decentralize development from the city center to the urban fringes where they have decided to invest most of their savings. Despite the difficulties that they are currently facing—with no access to basic services or public amenities—and despite their own experiences of the manifest fragility of the state's capacity to protect their right to stay put, they have faith in the future stability and growth of the neighborhood. They trust their neighborhood will be, eventually, at the center of urban development in Granada thanks to the powerful entrepreneur. Residents know and have heard of El Gurre; they know he is famous in Granada; they know of his record and political influence; they know he has been a reliable source of support for many, and his influence has pervaded through family generations. For this reason, they have bought more than land in Paraiso. They also trust El Gurre to become their main resource to mediate between the legal and the illegal, to legitimize their existence as an official neighborhood of Granada, and to bring development to their residential futures.

This intimate relationship that residents have developed with El Gurre impacts their capacities to organize independently among neighbors to regulate how space is being utilized and demarcate necessary space for parks and other public amenities. While residents in other informal settlements have generally gained access to such services and amenities through their collaborative and organized efforts, in Paraiso residents are still waiting for El Gurre to define

which areas will be made available for public amenities. As of now, residents continue to conduct community block meetings on the streets, or in the facilities of the large public school that was built in the neighborhood. Although residents could organize to occupy available—empty—land to build a park or a community center—like many residents of informal settlements have done it before them—they prefer to wait to hear from El Gurre. They prefer to wait and see whether he is willingly going to assign a space for the use and enjoyment of the community. Why? Because as some residents put it: “no one messes up with Don Reinel.”

Accordingly, through his interventions in neighborhood formation processes, El Gurre is shaping how many residents—especially displaced residents who develop more than a seller-buyer relationship with the powerful entrepreneur—organize to make claims, how they act politically, and how they plan for their residential futures. Beyond the Paraiso residents’ unique experiences of their neighborhood, there are other structuring factors that further complicate the story of Paraiso and its displaced residents in a context of post-conflict reconstruction. The neighborhood has been established under conditions that reproduce violence and the unequal access and distribution of land in the region.

Gamonalism and post-conflict reconstruction

El Gurre is generally perceived as a figure of authority who is both a generous benefactor and a villain. On the one hand, he is known as a person who lifted himself out of poverty. He used to be a truck driver before he ventured in the palm oil business, and he is now one of the most powerful persons in the region. Because of this history, people believe that he understands the poor. On the other hand, he is also known as a person who has coopted politics and public institutions on his behalf and has been accused in different opportunities for his ties to drug traffickers and paramilitary groups.

Despite being a salient and exceptional character of Granada, El Gurre is not unique in Colombia. About 300 kilometers from Granada, in another important small city of Colombia's Orinoquia region called Yopal, lives a similar popular entrepreneur. His name is John Jairo Torres, and his nickname is *John Calzones* (John Underpants). John Calzones received his nickname because, as the story goes, he made a fortune out of a small female underpants business named *Caricias Intimas* (Intimate Touches). Starting his business without secondary education, he became one of the richest men in the region holding assets valued in more than 10,000 million pesos (ca. 3 million US dollars) (Semana 2015). Like El Gurre, John Calzones is known to be a benefactor of the poor, someone who understands the struggle they go through; he was also invested in politics and urbanization. He subdivided a large parcel in the urban peripheries of Yopal and sold more than 10,000 lots without legal permit in what today is called neighborhood *Bendición* (Blessing). Unlike El Gurre, John Calzones ran and won the elections for mayor of Yopal in 2015, but he was imprisoned shortly after for different crimes. On the day of his arrest, he took the liberty of smiling to the cameras while he was being taken away handcuffed by four policemen. The press release with his smiling pictured entitled: "The end of the John Calzones era in Yopal" (Las dos Orillas 2017).

Both John Calzones and El Gurre can be defined as local patrons, or village-bosses, with unique access to land and capital, and great political influence and capacity to shift local democratic elections. Furthermore, the role of these patrons in shaping the course of local politics is reminiscent of the role played by a political and economic figure that emerged with the process of national consolidation in the many provinces of Latin American countries during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century: *the gamonal*. The gamonal was a person with great political influence at the local level, to which national authorities appealed to in order to

secure votes in the “distant” and “unreachable” provinces of the country. According to Keith Christie (1979), “the strength of the *gamonal* in Colombia was directly related to the weakness of central authority established in Bogota” (p. 43). The *gamonal* had normally the power and the financial influence—they provided the greatest number of jobs, credit facilities and public services in their regions in contrast to what the national government was able to offer—to demand obedience from a large sector of the population of a given village and arrange local electoral support.⁶⁶

According to Colombian scholars, the rapid urbanization and modernization of the state around the mid-twentieth century replaced *gamonalism* with *clientelism* as the main system shaping national politics. The latter is also based on a scheme of patron-client relationships structuring both local-national politics, but in a context where local political influence is not necessarily driven from the successful performance of patrons in the local productive system. Rather, their influence builds on their capacity to successfully navigate the political party structure. Leal and Dávila (1990) acknowledge that some economic leaders, or *gamonales*, survived the transition to a clientelistic political system, but they identify this as a “transition lag.” For the authors, the permanence of *gamonales* represents the instability that characterizes the moment when different leaders compete for power during a political transition, but such instability is bound to disappear when one of the leaders—the clientelistic leader in this case—finally wins power (p. 25).

⁶⁶ Beyond their influence shaping local politics, they played a crucial role in the configuration of national politics and the reproduction of bipartisan violence throughout the country. They often adopted a factional stance, and inflicted violence on political opponents in the bipartisan conflict that existed between the traditional Liberal and Conservative parties, which culminated with a ten-year civil war in Colombia named *La Violencia* (1946-1958). See Guillen (1996), Sanchez (1983) and Christie (1979).

In contrast to this logic, the cases of El Gurre and John Calzones show that local economic leaders and their influence over local politics is not bound to disappear. The process of modernization of the state is not as linear and teleological as Leal and Dávila (1990) describe—it is rather uneven and combines various political structures (Allinson and Anievas 2009)—and the gamonales have been rather restructuring and readapting to their new conditions of possibility, partaking in clientelistic practices and efforts to win votes from a mass of low-income households through the creation of informal pirate developments, among other forms of support. In each case, clientelistic and economic leaders operate in perpetuity of an incomplete state- and nation-building process, and they adjust to the economic and political opportunities that such a state of affairs offers.

Today, in a context of post-conflict reconstruction, where internally displaced families are making a new life in the city, the role played by El Gurre as the main agent providing support to these families is problematic as it is evidence of how *private forms of coercion and protection* continue to regulate social transactions. Gustavo Duncan (2006) has shown that throughout the Colombian civil conflict and especially with the rise of narco-trafficking in the 1980s, many of the state functions in the country's peripheral regions have been controlled by private actors, and in particular narco-traffickers and paramilitary leaders, through enforcement of violent forms of *coercion and protection*.⁶⁷ Although El Gurre cannot be identified as a paramilitary leader or narco-trafficker, he has been accused in different opportunities for financing paramilitary groups and for economically benefiting and accessing land through his ties with narco-traffickers.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Gustavo Duncan (2006) identifies these actors as *señores de la Guerra* (warlords).

⁶⁸ In 2008 the national newspaper *El Tiempo* identified El Gurre as a middleman of El Loco Barrera holding some of the drug lords' many properties under his name (*El Tiempo*, September 2008). Five months later the same newspaper rectified this information (*El Tiempo*, February 2009), after El Gurre filed an injunction against it and a regional judge demanded that the media outlet correct this information. The ruling also required rectification from journalist Daniel Coronell, who refused to comply. In 2013, a newspaper article in *El Espectador* cited a report by

Accordingly, his role fulfilling local state functions and supporting the poor cannot be celebrated, when it is through these practices of *coercion and protection* that inequality in the access of basic state services has been maintained in Colombia, illegal appropriation of land by few powerful individuals has been made possible, and the use of violence by non-state actors—like a powerful gamonal—has been justified (Duncan, 2006).

This is why the reproduction of violence and inequality in the access to land is today at stake in Paraiso, Granada, and the Ariari region. In fact, El Gurre's dubious access to land was a topic repeatedly raised in interviews and secondary sources where he was not only accused of owning land that had been illegally appropriated by narcotraffickers, but also of unlawfully trying to register rural public land under his name.⁶⁹ It is also ironic, that the prominent landowner of some of the largest palm tree plantations in the region has become the main authority facilitating access to urban land—and housing—to displaced families in Granada, given that the palm oil industry has been known to have thwarted land-restitution efforts of the displaced victims in the rural areas, and has therefore been suspected of creating displacement in different Colombian regions.⁷⁰

the attorney general's office that found property seized from drug traffickers known as the Meyendorff brothers was legally owned by Gaitan-Tangarife (Duran, June 2013). El Gurre sued the newspaper, but even though the local court of Granada admitted the action in first instance, he lost the lawsuit in the regional court. In 2015, Joaquin Gomez, a member of the FARC secretariat who joined the peace negotiation tables in Habana between FARC and the government of President Santos in 2014, identified in 2015 that El Gurre was one of the main financiers of paramilitaries in the region of the *Llanos Orientales* (the eastern plainlands) and that he had been able to successfully turn local elections for mayor in the municipalities of Granada, Guamal, San Martin and Acacias on his behalf (Gomez 2015).

⁶⁹ A Master's Thesis by Lady Andrea Reyes (2020) found that Gaitan-Tangarife tried to illegally appropriate uncultivated and uninhabited public land in the rural areas of the municipalities of Granada and Fuente de Oro. A conversation with civil servants at Colombia's Housing Ministry revealed that the national government has no clear, consolidated record of the uncultivated and uninhabited rural public lands in Colombia, not to mention the confiscated lands from narcotraffickers. This environment makes it easier for "avid entrepreneurs," like El Gurre, to appropriate public lands by registering the merging of different lots (some of which do not belong to them) under their name in the local notaries.

⁷⁰ Today, many of the lands reclaimed by displaced victims appear to be suspiciously occupied, or owned, by people in this industry (Comisión Colombiana de Juristas 2019).

Overall, the case of Paraiso reveals the profound and disturbing connections between rural and urban worlds, throughout a decades-long civil conflict and what has been identified today as an incipient post-conflict era in Colombia.

The challenges and opportunities of pirate developments

Contrasting the neighborhood formation process in Paraiso to that of other informal settlements in the city, I have shown that there are different forms of urbanization in informal settlements, with different consequences on the populations who inhabit the new neighborhoods. The case of Paraiso, reveals that powerful neighborhood sponsors can play a key role shaping how residents organize with neighbors, and how they make claims on the city. Even though informal settlements may share similar challenges in terms of the access to basic services and official land titles, a powerful neighborhood sponsor—like El Gurre—has a direct incidence on the neighborhood and the residents’ personal life chances. He shapes in turn residents’ expectations of their residential futures and how they organize and act upon the management and transformation of their common living space.

In fact, it is very difficult to understand the lives and collective actions of many of the displaced families who live in Paraiso without alluding to the powerful gamonal. He has played a unique role becoming the main means through which residents seek protection from eviction and address basic needs. In this process, the powerful gamonal ends up shaping how some residents cast their vote in democratic elections. Moreover, he ends up shaping how many residents imagine their residential futures, how they expect change to happen, and how they relate accordingly to planning authorities. His role in neighborhood formation processes helps explain how residents organize, or fail to do so, to make claims as a collective, and how they also seek support, or fail to do so, from fellow displaced residents. Specifically, its influential presence

explains why, in some neighborhoods, life in residential proximity may encourage social organization around the profound and binding experiences of violence and displacement—like in the Villas case (see chapter 2)—and in other instances—like in Paraiso—it may not.

Finally, although there is no doubt that El Gurre plays an important role attending the basic needs of the poor and the displaced residents of Granada who claim that they have been forgotten by the state, it is also important to acknowledge that his role providing these services creates a risk of reproduction of private forms of coercion and protection that have structured civil conflict and violence in Colombia for several decades. Although the figure of the gamonal has lost its momentum structuring the national political system, gamonalism is very much alive at the local level. It is ultimately up to future research to determine whether and how gamonalism, or bossism, is shaping post-conflict reconstruction processes in other cities of Colombia, and perhaps the world, and whether and how the large influx of IDPs to cities is transforming power relations to the benefit of these local entrepreneurs. In this case, I have shown that gamonalism subsist and is highly shaping the residential—and collective—lives of many displaced residents of Granada through neighborhood formation processes.

Chapter 4: Public Housing, Public Aid, and Collective Reparation: Neighborhood Formation in Makatoa and Sabana

Free housing for the poor and displaced

In 2012 the government of President Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014; 2014-2018) launched a program to provide 100,000 completely free housing units to Colombia's "poorest of the poor." The program was unprecedented because never before had the national government been directly involved in the financing of 100 percent of the construction costs of housing units for the poor in a variety of cities across the country, and its implementation was justified as a means to provide housing to poor families, poor families displaced by the harsh winter season of 2011, and, primordially, displaced persons of the Colombian civil conflict.

With the Free Housing program, housing complexes were built in more than 200 cities between 2012 and 2016. In the smaller cities, like Granada, the building typology has been mostly characterized by the construction of one-story single-family housing complexes, with side-by-side units, sharing a common wall and a common look for the entire housing complex. Because in small cities housing units represent a larger proportion of the housing stock, projects tend to be incorporated to the city as entirely new neighborhoods. This is the case of Makatoa and Sabana, two free housing projects built by the government in 2014 and 2015 in Granada, with a total of 180 and 196 units, respectively, providing housing to 95 and 161 families victims of conflict. These two housing projects became entirely new neighborhoods of peripheral Granada in 2015.

The two projects are the first neighborhoods of completely subsidized housing units ever built in Granada, and this chapter is concerned with their formation processes and related outcomes over the internally displaced persons who live there. Unlike the two informal settlements in this study, in the free housing neighborhoods Makatoa and Sabana residents

expressed that they had a hard time learning to live together and organizing with neighbors to solve problems and access new services and amenities. I also found that residents were less successful organizing with neighbors to solve problems and access new services and amenities than similar communities in informal settlements in the city. In this chapter, I explore what are the factors that explain these differentiated experiences among the residents of free housing. I examine what social and claims-making practices become institutionalized in free housing neighborhoods, and how do these practices impact on the capacities of residents to transform the conditions in which they live.

To be clear, the Latin American literature studying public and affordable housing has found several faults in the state's involvement in housing provision (Jannoschka and Salinas-Arreortua 2017). Scholars studying housing provision under the current liberal policy model of housing subsidies—which leaves the construction of housing to the market-oriented interests of private developers—have criticized the proliferation of low-income housing complexes in the urban peripheries of cities (McTarnaghan et al 2016)—favored by developers due to lower land costs—typically lacking the infrastructure to satisfy the needs of residents and negatively impacting low-income households' social networks (Libertun 2017). Scholars have further identified that private construction firms' efforts to reduce costs and make projects 'pencil out' have resulted in poor-quality housing, and some suggest that there is a positive relationship between the quality of physical residential spaces and the capacity of residents to live in peaceful coexistence (Rodríguez and Sugranyes 2004).

Makatoa and Sabana share the problematic conditions identified by this literature and, like Rodríguez and Sugranyes (2004) have argued, in both neighborhoods poor-quality housing conditions have been denounced by residents as a source of social tensions between neighbors.

For example, residents fighting over the use of defective communal spaces, and the noise that travels through the neighbors' thin walls were frequently referred to as common problems creating social tensions among residents. However, even though these are all good explanations of social tensions, there are important limitations to the impact that the design of physical space can have over specific groups. As Foucault once said: "the architect has no power over me" (Foucault 2000, p. 357). There are variations in how the same built environmental conditions can impact—negatively or positively—specific communities. For instance, in stark contrast to the free housing neighborhoods, in the informal settlement Villas de Granada infrastructural deficiencies became the means by which residents came together and joined efforts to change their living conditions for the better (see chapters 2). This contrast between the paradigmatic case of informal settlements (see also Lloyd 1980, Perlman 1976) and public housing projects indicates that the design of physical space and the difficulties brought by peripheral locations are only part of the explanation of the social tensions experienced in public housing projects. In other words, while poor-quality housing may be a challenge to low-income communities in general, we need to understand why it tends to become a means to refer to social tensions and a factor dividing a neighborhood community in public housing projects, instead of a means to bring residents together like in informal settlements. Beyond explanations that rely strictly on locational and material components of the design of housing projects, I find that we need to understand how the state is involved in neighborhood enabling processes that transform how communities engage with challenging factors and how they ultimately make claims on the city.

Image 7: Free housing neighborhood Sabana (left) and Makatoa (right)



Source: Author – 2019

The neighborhood enabling process

The enabling process by which free housing neighborhoods form is determined by the implementation of top-down national and local institutional mandates and regulations that set the stage for the construction of free housing projects that became new official neighborhoods in small cities. These mandates also impose conditions on the use of the built environment, and eventually frame interactions among residents.

In 2004 the Colombian Constitutional Court—the highest court for the protection of fundamental rights—issued Sentence T-025 demanding immediate action from all public authorities to protect the constitutional rights of displaced populations—including the right to housing (Constitutional Sentence T-025 of 2004). The 2004 constitutional mandate sought to respond to numerous cases brought by the displaced victims of conflict before the court to address the lack of an effective response from public authorities to their basic needs. This mandate became a steppingstone for the development of new regulations and new programs targeting displaced persons above other vulnerable populations in Colombia. One of these programs was President Juan Manuel Santos' *100,000 Free Housing* program. In April 2012, President Santos launched

the program declaring that the free housing units would be built for the “poorest of the poor,” and would benefit, among others, vulnerable populations and families displaced by the armed conflict.

According to vice-minister of housing Guillermo Herrera (2013-2016), with the best intentions to achieve greater transparency in the distribution of the 100,000 free housing units, the government used information technology to systematically allocate those units. To create a list of potential beneficiaries, the government merged several national datasets on poverty and displacement.⁷¹ This list was delivered to each of the municipal administrations where free housing projects would be built. It was up to the mayors and other local and national authorities to inform all potential beneficiaries of the program and help them file the required paperwork to manifest their interest in obtaining a free housing unit. This paperwork was then sent back to the national government, which used a ranking scheme to further refine the list of potential beneficiaries. The ranking scheme was meant to prioritize groups of households based on several criteria, like: whether they had an assigned housing subsidy which they had not been able to cash before, or whether they were included in the lists of both the national information system of displaced persons (*Red Nacional de Información*) and the national strategy for the eradication of extreme poverty (*Red Unidos*)—in the refined list by the national government for all free housing units to be built between 2012-2014, 74% of eligible households were internally displaced.⁷² This list was then sent back again to municipal authorities. If, as was often the case, the number of eligible households in the refined list exceeded the number of units to be built in the city, then local

⁷¹ The main datasets used to create the list of potential beneficiaries were the National Registry of Displaced Populations, Infounidos (containing information of vulnerable families), SISBEN (containing information of vulnerable families), and municipal registries of victims of displacement of the rainy season.

⁷² For a more detailed description of the selection process see Departamento Nacional de Planeacion (2014).

authorities conducted lotteries.⁷³ Accordingly, hundreds of the eligible households attended the public lotteries in their respective municipalities (see Image 8).

Image 8: A lottery event of Free Housing units



Source: Ministerio de Transporte de Colombia, November 2013, in https://www.mintransporte.gov.co/publicaciones/3237/2858_familias_vulnerables_de_barranquilla_ganaron_en_sorteo_publico_una_casa_gratis/

* In representation of the Housing Minister Luis Felipe Henao, Minister of Transportation Cecilia Alvarez Correa conducted the lottery in the city of Barranquilla; The organization of lottery events was very similar in every city that was selected for the construction of free housing projects. In Granada, Housing Minister Luis Felipe Henao and Mayor of Granada Alexander Guzman ran the lottery events.

Through this highly technocratic selection scheme the national government sought to prevent local authorities from exploiting public funds to benefit family members, civil servants, and local political brokers. Additionally, to guarantee that public funds were used properly by beneficiaries, free housing units came with a series of obligations for those receiving the units.

With the keys to their new homes, beneficiaries received a list of obligations to comply with, which they constantly recall in conversations because the government has the power to reclaim the house in the case of non-compliance. Even though residents receive property titles and

⁷³ In Granada, displaced persons who had been assigned a housing subsidy in previous years, but who had not been able to cash it, did not have to participate in the lotteries. Housing units were first assigned to this population. The remaining housing units were assigned through the lotteries.

become the sole owners of their units, they are obligated to inhabit the house for a period of ten years. If they leave the house abandoned or rent it to someone else before ten years, the government has the power to reclaim the house. The government can also reclaim the house if residents fail to make timely payments for public utilities and annual property taxes.

Once the residents moved to their new neighborhoods, they also learned about other restrictions. In compliance with city regulation, residents cannot make any structural changes to their homes such as installing fencing or adding decks or front porches. They also cannot create any form of enclosure around open patios—as originally designed for both Makatoa and Sabana. Residents are also not allowed to run their own small businesses from home, which also means they cannot change the buildings in ways that would facilitate commercial activities. And they are not allowed to transform public sidewalks in front of their homes.

These rules and regulations on the use of the built environment make residents feel choked, even though they know that it is very rare to get penalized for non-compliance. Residents have learned that breaking the rules “is not a big deal,” and it will not get them, or others, in trouble. They know, for example, which housing units in their neighborhood are being rented out to third parties. So far, the government has not taken any action against the owners. Many have built decks and fences outside their units without being punished or penalized, and many have also transformed their front porches and living rooms into small grocery stores, hair salons, and paper and office supplies stores, among others. However, despite the apparent ease with which residents break the rules, they still fear and resent that authorities might feel compelled to penalize them and ruin the investments they have made to their homes, if not worse (i.e., initiate an eviction process). Unlike residents who live in informal settlements in the city, they have more reasons to fear public retaliation against informal practices in the use and transformation of their homes, because they

are immersed—at least in theory—in an environment of residential formality and control. With the free housing units, they have achieved a legitimate right to own a place in the city, but they have not gained a legitimate right to transform it.

Embedded in this environment of residential “formality” is also a system of aid provisions to Colombia’s displaced persons, where assistance is justified and constantly evaluated on the basis of providing it to the “poorest of the poor,” and those who “really need it.” It was through this system that residents became eligible and were able to access a free housing unit in the first place, and through it they have also become the subjects of systematic monitoring and evaluation practices.

The public aid system for displaced families

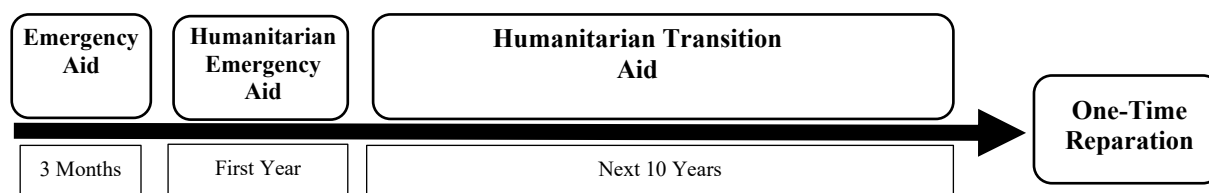
In Colombia, aid provision to displaced persons of the armed conflict is organized through a series of stages which the displaced household is meant to reach, as it becomes less and less dependent, or in less need, of public support. The first stage represents the period from the moment when the person, and his/her family, arrives at a new municipality and declares displacement to public authorities.⁷⁴ This stage is meant to last around three months during which the family is entitled to receive *Emergency Aid* in the form of food, household supplies, shelter, and basic health services.⁷⁵ Once the family is included in the national information system of displaced persons, it enters the second stage of the process and is entitled to receive *Humanitarian Emergency Aid* for about one year. The third stage is comprised of the subsequent ten years during which the family

⁷⁴ Declarations are generally made to local public authorities (i.e., the local ombudsman offices, and the local victims’ unit in the area).

⁷⁵ The amount of Emergency Aid provided varies substantially across cities depending on the resources available at the municipal level and the types of organizations involved (e.g., the Red Cross, Pastoral Social) in aid provision.

receives *Humanitarian Transition Aid*.⁷⁶ About ten years after the declaration of displacement, every displaced person should receive a monetary reparation from the national government. This represents the last stage of the process. From this moment on, displaced families are considered no longer in need of governmental aid for the condition of displacement.⁷⁷

Figure 6: Stages of Humanitarian Aid Provision in Colombia



Source: made by author based on information from the National Victim’s Unit and the Victims’ Law (Law 1448 of 2011)

To account for the different circumstances and needs of displaced families, the duration and amount of humanitarian aid is adjusted by the national Victims Assistance Unit (*Unidad para la Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas*) and the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare (*Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar*). Households receive between 100,000 and 600,000 pesos (ca. \$30 and \$200) every trimester in humanitarian aid, but amounts vary according to an assessed level of vulnerability—determined by how much food and other basic resources families have access to—the size of each household, the number of children at home, and the municipality of residence. One-time monetary reparations also vary depending on degrees of victimization (e.g., a person with a declaration of displacement and who has lost a family member due to the armed conflict can ask for a higher reparation amount than a person that only has a declaration of

⁷⁶ Both *Emergency* and *Transition* aid are provided in the form of periodic cash transfers from the national government, and both differ in the amounts provided—emergency aid tends to be higher. Free housing is considered a form of transition aid.

⁷⁷ They may continue to receive support provided to any low-income household.

displacement). Reparations range between 15 and 35 million pesos (ca. \$5,000 and \$7,000 US dollars).⁷⁸ To make all these adjustments, the government collects information at the household level through a survey system called *Plan de Asistencia, Atención y Reparación Integral* (Comprehensive Care, Assistance, and Reparation Plan).

With this set of rules, conditions, and monitoring practices, Colombian governmental authorities have sought to provide aid to Colombia's displaced families more efficiently, in a context where the policy to attend the needs and rights of the victims of the armed conflict (Law 1448 of 2011) has been critically underfunded (Sikkink et al 2014). At the same time, in order to receive support from the government, every displaced family implicitly agrees to become the subject of an intricate system of classification, requiring periodic controls and comprehensive regulation; a *biopolitics* (Foucault 1988) assessing "ideal" degrees of vulnerability and "deserved" social aid in every household.

To be clear, conditions of public aid provisions are not unique to the provision of free housing. Poor and displaced residents of other neighborhoods in the city are also recipients of low-income support and humanitarian aid. These conditions, nevertheless, play a key role in the constitution of new free housing neighborhoods because it was through this regulatory system that families applied for a free housing unit and became neighbors. As a result, unlike any other neighborhood in the city, all residents of the free housing neighborhoods are subjects within the national system of regulation of aid provisions, on top of the already mentioned regulations limiting the use and transformation of the free housing units. These conditions of neighborhood enabling processes, have created fissures between neighbors in Makatoa and Sabana.

⁷⁸ Reparations can be up to 40 months of payments equal to the monthly minimum wage. Addressing a general state of underfunding, in 2017 the government announced that reparation payments would be prioritized among people who were older, had a disability, or were critically ill (Government Ruling 1049 of 2017).

Vertical and horizontal relations

Narratives and community attachments

There is a popular saying in Colombia that translates: ‘everyone in bed, or everyone on the floor’ (*o todos en la cama, o todos en el suelo*). It reflects a sense of shared responsibility where “the welfare of each is bound up in the welfare of all,” but the proverb is not used in Colombia to evoke a general lesson of what society as a whole ought to achieve. It is rather used in specific circumstances. It is used in dire times where a given group or community agrees to carry the heavy burdens of life together: if some must suffer, the community agrees that everyone will suffer together. Unfortunately, under specific circumstances, this sense of community spirit can lead to less than desirable social outcomes.

Penelope, a displaced resident of Granada, told me an interesting story that is not directly related to housing but illustrates how an initiative of aid provision may awaken an ‘everyone in bed, or everyone on the floor’ dilemma, with undesirable social outcomes. She had been living in Granada for many years already when she learned that her name had been listed to receive a basic mix of food supplies that people call *la remesa*. The news came as a surprise to her, because, as she put it: “I have never received anything from the government.” To receive *la remesa* she had to go to the House of Culture, a public venue where the government organizes all sorts of events. She arrived there to realize that *la remesa* was, unexpectedly, rather good and included, among other items, a large sack of potatoes, beans, oil, and rice. There was nevertheless a problem. Many of the displaced persons who had not been selected as beneficiaries were there too, to complain. Things got out of hand. She remembers hearing people screaming at different tempos: “either everyone gets something, or no one gets anything” (*o le dan a todos o a nadie*), and then, the storm of popular discontent was unleashed. She saw how

one woman tore the sack of food of another, and beans began to rain onto the tile floor. She panicked. She asked a resident of a house nearby to let her keep her stuff while things settled down. In the meantime, she found another resident of her neighborhood and they agreed to share a taxi ride back home. They both jumped into the cab with their food packs and left the disturbance behind.

Although anecdotal and not directly related to housing, Penelope's story reveals an interesting insight about a situation in which government aid, intended to help the poor, can create tensions and fissures within a community which in this case involves a group of displaced persons who proclaimed: "either everyone gets something, or no one gets anything." The question, in this case, is whether it is similar with public housing, how, and why. As in Penelope's story about the delivery of food packages, I find that conditions imposed over the distribution of free housing units and local-national tensions in the definition of "deserved" public aid can undermine social solidarity, especially in neighborhoods comprised of publicly provided housing.

Despite efforts from authorities to implement an objective selection criterion for the distribution of the free housing units, the complicated selection scheme was difficult to understand at the local level and generated discomfort and social unrest among many residents of cities that would be receiving free units.

Specifically, the publicly distributed lists of potential beneficiaries generated discomfort and discontent among citizens. For example, civil servants who played a role informing potential beneficiaries of the free housing projects to be constructed in Villavicencio—a mid-size city about two hours driving distance from Granada—complained that people reacted violently to the publication of this information. In an official statement sent by these civil servants to national

authorities in the Department of Social Prosperity—the agency charged with providing social and community support to all free housing projects—they remark: “because the information was disclosed without further clarification and discussion with the community, too many people came to deliver their paperwork [to apply for housing], not just those who had been pre-approved by the government. This generated a complex situation of social unrest”⁷⁹ (Departamento Nacional de Planeacion, 2014).

Nicolás Marquez, a national official I interviewed in charge of facilitating the selection process of free housing beneficiaries and who interacted with local officials to coordinate the implementation of the housing lotteries, corroborated this story by claiming that one of the biggest surprises during his time in office was the general pushback against the implementation of the nationally produced, highly technocratic list of eligible individuals. He identified this as a specific issue of small cities—like Granada. In such places, residents were more likely to know many who were included or excluded from the lists, which meant they had their own views of what they thought was the right selection criteria for their cities. For example, the lists of potential beneficiaries included residents from the rural areas of municipalities—even though housing was going to be provided only in urban centers—and residents who had left town. Seeing these people listed did not sit well with many residents who argued that those people would probably not move to occupy the free housing units, while there were many other residents in town who needed housing. Additionally, in the lists of potential beneficiaries, residents identified people who, according to them, had properties somewhere else or who were better off financially than other residents of the city. These shortcomings proved to their eyes that the selection criterion was biased

⁷⁹ The statement was made by civil servants from ANSPE, Cofrem, and Cavis-UT, and was cited in the official evaluation of the *100,000 Free Housing* program by Departamento Nacional de Planeacion (2014).

and wrong. As a result, despite best intentions from national authorities, inflexibility of the technocratically produced lists left local mayors—who are particularly close to the citizenry in small cities and deal with all sorts of local complaints—with no room for maneuver to address some of these concerns. The result, in some cases, was public upheavals. In a few cities, according to Marquez, mayors were forced to postpone the lotteries because some people in the community threatened to disrupt the events. Here again, as it happened in Penelope’s story about the distribution of food provisions, many people protested and resisted the implementation of what they considered to be an unjust selection process, even at the risk of losing the product that was being delivered. Marquez recalled that the burden of popular discontent fell all on the mayors’ shoulders, and some complained to him, arguing that the program was “the worst that had happened to their administration.”

Beyond an issue of party politics, in this case the problem with the distribution of housing lay in the institutional design and a mismatch between national and local knowledge (Flores and Davis 2013). Bureaucrats and displaced persons need to deal with the inevitability of exclusion in the distribution of scarce resources. In this process there can be fundamental differences in how local and national public authorities, and regular citizens assess what and who is deserving of support. All believe support should be distributed on the basis of need, but they assess need in very different ways. These tensions are specific to small cities, where residents are familiar with those who are receiving support and they have an idea of which families need support and are not getting it. These different views can put a burden on those who are receiving the provisions in question because they become the visible beneficiaries of what some people see as an “illegitimate” distribution system. Such challenge is evidenced today in the free housing neighborhoods of Granada.

When asked about the distribution of free housing units, the general stance today among many residents of Granada is that the government made many mistakes giving free housing to people who did not really need it or deserve it. Criticism to the way housing was distributed also came from people who live today in a free unit. When asked to tell the story of their neighborhood, many residents felt compelled to mention that while the housing had been a blessing for them, after all they had lost, they had issues with the free housing program. Many disliked that the program had benefited some victims who already had means to make a living and had also received disproportionate support from the government over the years, leaving others who were in real need of support behind. Others thought that the selection process should have given a higher priority to people who owned a home and lost it when they were displaced. In some instances, my interviewees even admitted that if it were up to them, they would not have given priority to displaced families but to vulnerable populations.

Such an answer could be interpreted, at first, as a lack of fellow-feeling among displaced persons. But the answer is not very different from that of those who worried about displaced families that had been overlooked by the government or who had lost property with displacement. I understood this better one Friday afternoon conversing with Dilma at her front door, in one of Granada's informal settlements. She pointed at nearby houses of neighbors who, unlike her, had received a free housing unit. Through the labyrinthine narrow alleys, she pointed at a house painted in pale yellow a couple of steps away and said: "Ana got a house in Makatoa." Pointing at the wooden house right in front of hers she mentioned: "this one belonged to a black woman from Choco [a department in the Pacific coast]. She got a house in Sabana." Lastly, she noted: "another woman with two lots [not around her corner] also left for Sabana and is now renting one of the lots to a car repair business."

I asked her whether she thought it was unfair that they all got free housing and she did not, since she had also been displaced, not only once, but twice—the first time in 1996 and the second in 2006—and her husband and one of her sons were killed because of the armed conflict. She shook her head. She thought her former neighbors were all displaced and in need of housing, and the problem lay instead among those who were “not really displaced.” “Commuters,” she called them, explaining that they were people who moved to areas controlled by the guerrilla or paramilitary forces because they could make money from the then-booming coca economy (see chapter 1). For her, they were not really displaced, because they moved to these areas to make money. What she identified as “commuters” were also known as *raspadores*—day laborers who went to live and work in the coca crops—or businessmen who traveled daily to sell goods and take advantage of the heated coca market. Dilma mentioned that she knew many of these commuters, because she used to live in a coca territory, and she knew that they returned home to Granada to declare displacement, with money in their pockets, and without being “really displaced.” She remarked that the commuters had no problem waiting in long lines to get humanitarian aid and other sorts of provisions, while people who were “really displaced” had not even had the chance to declare displacement. She concluded: “that is why many of us question the use of the category of displacement to define who gets housing.”

The displaced people who live in Granada, including those who live in the free housing neighborhoods, have a vague idea of who is and who is not getting a free housing unit because many have migrated from the same regions (see chapter 1). As a result, they are familiar with the stories of displacement of others, and they see what the government does not. Because aid is limited but reachable, and desired, they use this information to evaluate and reevaluate where the line separating the deserving and undeserving beneficiaries of social aid should lie. These social

assessments are prevalent in the city, and they are also very much alive in the neighborhood narratives of the residents of free housing. Still, only in the latter case does the narrative of the problems with distribution involve residents directly, thus impacting how they relate to their neighborhood and their neighbors.

In my interviews, the many residents who embraced this narrative were compelled not only to assess whether their neighbors “deserved” a free housing unit but also whether they themselves “deserved” one as well. Fabian, for example, felt compelled to both criticize the way housing had been provided, and defend his rightful access to a free unit when I asked him to tell me the story of his neighborhood and how he became a resident of Makatoa. Fabian, who is now in his late sixties, used to live on a rural estate of his own and sell *merchandise* (coca leaf production) to both paramilitaries and guerrillas in what Dilma identified as a coca territory. Because he was selling *merchandise* to both sides, the FARC guerrilla threatened to kill him. He left his estate and declared displacement in Granada, because it was “the place to go to” in a time when hordes of people from his home region were forced to leave their homes. Fabian had no intention of staying in Granada. He moved away immediately to work on a rural estate nearby. About seven years after displacement, he received an unexpected call from a public agent from Red Unidos—a national program providing comprehensive support to vulnerable families—who told him that he was eligible to participate in the lottery for a free housing unit.⁸⁰ Fabian was not able to explain to me why Red Unidos called him in the first place, because he never applied for housing and was not even living in Granada at the time. He just knew that: “I met with her [the agent from Red Unidos]

⁸⁰ Red Unidos is part of the selection process of the Free Housing program. Public agents had to find and inform all potential beneficiaries under the Red Unidos program.

and she gave me my winning number for the house. Because I asked God to give me some place to live to stop suffering, I believe that God granted this gift to me.”

When talking about the neighborhood, Fabian mentioned that the government did not deliver housing in what he thought was the right way, because there were many people with other properties who had been given a free unit in his neighborhood. But, at the same time, he admitted that he still owned the rural estate where he used to live before displacement, and for this reason, others claimed that he was being dishonest. He made it clear that he was not, because he did not intend to return and, in fact, was willing to give away his former property at any moment, should the government require so. He felt old and tired, and he did not trust the guerrillas who were still present in the territory.

Fabian’s story is interesting because it combines many of the issues mentioned by other displaced persons in the neighborhoods, as a problem of the distribution of free housing units. He owned property elsewhere, and he was not living in Granada before getting a free unit. He only moved there to occupy his house. He could also be easily mistaken—to the eyes of others who did not know his story in detail—with what Dilma identified as “commuters” or “not really displaced” people who came back from the coca territories with money in their pockets. And yet, like many others, Fabian perceived that others, unlike him, had manipulated the system by not providing information about other properties they owned or by receiving housing that they did not really need because they had money. He claimed that this was not his case, because in some instances, like his own, having a property elsewhere did not necessarily mean that the owner was willing or able to “return.” Whatever others might say about him, he considered himself a “rightful” owner of a free housing unit; a person who has had a hard time in life and deserves reparation. Today, Fabian thinks there is “a lot of envy and competition” in the neighborhood and feels judged and

observed by some of his neighbors. Even though he is involved in neighborhood organization efforts with some local leaders, he wants to sell his new house and leave the neighborhood for good.

The perils of vertical and horizontal attachments

Not all residents of the free housing neighborhoods had a hard time justifying their access to a free unit like Fabian did, but, overall, the institutionalized narrative of who deserved free housing complicated relations with neighbors, encouraging residents to assess others' legitimate right to a free unit, and making them feel self-conscious; aware of being assessed by others who did not understand their particular situations well. In each case, it did not help that residents were internally differentiated by a wealth of different sorts of aid provisions that had been provided on an unequal basis, further encouraging residents to assess each other's "rightful" access to specific benefits.

For example, because of the national visibility of the free housing projects, a multiplicity of social programs by public authorities, national NGOs, or international organizations focused their efforts on these neighborhoods. Unfortunately, each of these programs had their own budget and mission statement, and, accordingly, their own rules and restrictions on who could participate or how many people could enroll. As a result, not all residents benefited from each social program implemented in the neighborhoods. Some residents rationalized this situation as another example of the "unfairness" of aid distribution, further cementing the general narrative about the problems of free housing provision.

Within neighborhoods, residents were also internally differentiated by the same national institutional system of humanitarian aid provision through which they accessed housing. Rosa, for example, is one of the few people in her neighborhood who has received the monetary reparation

from the government. I asked her how she managed to get her reparation, since it had been so difficult for most people I had interviewed so far to even know where they were in the process of obtaining it. She replied: “I sued the government.” Because her health insurance company was refusing to cover the cost of thyroid medicine that the doctor had prescribed her, she visited the local health department to request the medicine. There, she learned that she was able to sue the health insurance company at no cost through the municipal ombudsman’s office to get her medicine. There, she also learned that she could sue the government to get her long-awaited reparation, which she did. Rosa has invested the money in her house: buying basic household appliances, painting it, building a wall in her small backyard—without official permit—and putting tiles over the cement floor. Although her modest housing investments are already visible to her neighbors, she tries to keep the source of such transformations a secret. Whispering in her living room, she mentioned: “only God, who is listening, you and my husband know that I sued the government.” I asked Rosa why she did not want people to know. She replied: “I do not like it because people start asking, ‘hey you have money, can you lend me some money?’” She also mentioned that her neighbors were “envious” and difficult to deal with, as she personally experienced when she was selected as one of the beneficiaries of a municipal program to install gas services to her home.

Even though the property titles that each family received from national authorities indicated that the housing units were supposed to have a direct connection to gas services, the private construction firm in charge of building the project delivered the units without those connections. To solve the issue, some residents used their savings to pay the approximately two million pesos (ca. \$600 US dollars) needed to install the lines. Others took out loans from the local public services company, which they paid back in monthly installment payments. Many others,

who did not have the money or claimed that the government should be the one paying for the installation, decided to live without gas installation to their homes. Instead, they bought cooking gas cylinders and refilled them on a regular basis.⁸¹ By the time the municipality released the program of gas installations, 24 property owners in the neighborhood signed up to receive the subsidy, but only six were selected and one among them was Rosa. The goal of the program was not to address the issue of the gas installation that had been promised but never delivered with the free housing program. Rather, it was to increase the coverage of gas services in a city with very poor coverage. Nevertheless, residents, who already resented a government that had not fulfilled what was supposed to be delivered, did not take the news well. They were suspicious of the selection criteria, which according to public authorities was based on a random selection of city blocks. Although anger and resentment were primarily directed at public authorities—as had happened before with the distribution of food and housing—those receiving the gas connections were the ones who suffered the direct consequences, bearing the stigma of state corruption in their daily lives. Local leaders were accused of interceding on the behalf of their friends and family members in the neighborhood. Rosa, who claimed that she had nothing to do with them and she had just been lucky, had to endure criticism because of all this. Hence, she concluded that her neighbors were “envious” and “constantly watching,” and she resolved that it was better to keep information about the benefits she received private as much as possible.

Beyond political-, kin-, and friendship-loyalties that may be shaping how some individuals get access to specific benefits, what these different examples show is that the distribution of housing and other related sorts of *selective* provisions by different organizations and national and local public authorities is highly contested. This contested inequality in the distribution of

⁸¹ A refill costs around 60 thousand pesos (ca. \$20 US dollars) and households run out every one or two months.

insufficient resources also reveals that there are tensions across the scales at which benefit programs are planned and executed. What is a legitimate way to target resources at the level of national and international entities, and even at the level of the city—as in the case of gas connections—may be in conflict with local assessments of worth and the context of what neighbors expect from public authorities. These tensions, introduced by free housing projects and their associated social programs—unfolding at different scales of operation (e.g., at the level of the nation, international organizations, the city, or the neighborhood)—are impacting individuals’ willingness and capacity to establish horizontal relations with their neighbors. Envy was a commonly used word by the residents of Makatoa and Sabana who often felt unjustly judged by “envious neighbors.” Feelings of resentment were also common among residents who felt they were “unreasonably” excluded from the *selective* provisions.

According to the literature, envious feelings among neighbors can be explained by an environment of precarity where the good fortune of some might be read as a challenge to “others like them” (Smith and Kim 2007). In the case of the free housing neighborhoods of Granada, the “good fortune” and personal life chances of residents are very much related to how aid is distributed and socially framed. In this institutional and social context, evaluation of who is, and who is not, deserving of free housing and other benefits has become a source of internal social division. Accordingly, even though most residents share a common experience of displacement, a narrative of difference and differentiated “deserved” social aid has taken precedence among them when speaking about their new neighborhood.

Social fissures in the free housing neighborhoods are further exacerbated in an environment of state practices of surveillance and control where material improvements to individual units and communal spaces are “penalized” but where it is also relatively easy to trick the system to avoid

“penalization.” These conditions on the transformations of housing units and the neighborhood’s built environment are negatively impacting horizontal relations and the neighbors’ capacities to organize to achieve greater benefits for all, actively transform their neighborhood’s material infrastructure, and address local tensions and needs.

For example, the Sabana housing project design is characterized by its compact rows of housing units. Each row is separated by narrow sidewalks and a drainage channel, and public streets surround the entire complex of free housing units. On the streets surrounding the housing complex plenty of space has been demarcated for parking purposes. The parking spaces, however, have remained empty, because few people own cars, and those who own motorcycles prefer to park them on the sidewalks, right in front of their units. This practice has become the source of heated conflict between neighbors because parents fear for their children when they see motorcycles speeding on the sidewalks in front of their homes. Others also simply dislike that what was supposed to be a pedestrian throughway became a parking area for motorbikes. To prevent drivers from speeding on the sidewalks, some residents have strategically placed large stones in front of their units, which has in turn infuriated the drivers who must step down from their vehicles to avoid the dangerous obstacles.

Image 9: Stones laid out by residents on a sidewalk in Sabana



Source: Author – 2019

This is an example of how design features can exacerbate local tensions. But beyond the issues with design and the quality of material infrastructures—which are common in different types of low-income neighborhoods—there is an additional limitation in free housing neighborhoods evidenced in how residents address these problems. Instead of setting up a meeting with neighbors, residents of Sabana have raised the issue with public officials every time they come to visit the neighborhood. While motorcyclists claim that laying stones on the public sidewalks is against the regulations, their opponents claim that driving on the sidewalks is illegal. Authorities in turn validate both claims, acknowledging that both driving and laying stones on the sidewalks are against the rules, but they do not provide a real solution to the problem. Authorities ask residents to learn to live together and build their own agency as a neighborhood capable of solving their own problems. However, they also demand that residents behave within the rules of

a highly regulated environment. So, residents are left to make decisions in a normative limbo where opposing parties are both right and wrong, where there is no enforcement, and where residents demand that others follow the rules in a social context where “nobody really follows the nonsensical regulations” over the use and transformation of their housing. Regulations are thus not serving their ideal purpose, which is to help a community mediate social tensions through an agreed-upon social contract. Regulations are instead heightening these tensions by producing expectations of vertical authority before horizontal agreements to solve local problems. As of today, residents continue to suffer and fight over this issue.

The issue with parking and motorcycles is certainly a problem that is dividing the community, making it harder for residents to act together. However, challenges to community organizing persist even when residents face common needs that should encourage residents to act together. For example, in Makatoa, housing development does not include a space to have community meetings—even though the free housing program’s guidelines stated that projects should include such areas. In Makatoa, like in any other neighborhood of the city, neighborhood residents have constituted a local action board. These boards are elected every four years (Law 743 of 2002)—represented by neighborhood residents—can propose local development projects to city authorities, and request resources to municipal and regional public entities to invest in the local infrastructure (e.g., build a park or pave a street).⁸² The president of Makatoa’s local action board, and his team, tried to organize the residents to—like residents of informal settlements in Granada had done before—occupy an empty lot owned by the city and build a community center

⁸² Unlike housing complexes that become new neighborhoods, in large cities residential compounds are administered by a management board elected by all property owners and regulated under the national System of Horizontal Property. The System of Horizontal Property establishes specific directions regarding the management of communal areas and basic rules residents need to follow to guarantee peaceful coexistence within housing complexes (Law 675 of 2001).

on the site. However, few individuals joined the effort, in part because many residents no longer trusted the local action board, which had been the subject of controversies involving the unequal distribution of aid in the neighborhood. Nevertheless, the board went forward and even started work on the proposed center's foundation. But the work stopped after board's opponents contacted public authorities, who quickly dismantled the center's foundations.

This example is not evidencing that effective community organization is impossible in public housing neighborhoods, but it shows that there are unique challenges to such efforts. For one, unlike residents of informal settlements, an environment of residential "formality" and control will inevitably make it harder for residents to take matters into their own hands—through horizontal relations—to build solutions that ignore official regulations in the use and transformation of space. Additionally, although formal mechanisms of neighborhood participation, like the local action boards, can provide residents with new political agency to represent community interests to the city, these official entities face important challenges fostering collective support in a neighborhood context where residents tend to prioritize vertical over horizontal relations when trying to solve problems.

In addition to state practices of surveillance and control over material improvements, residents experience regular monitoring of their own economic improvements. Because humanitarian aid is designed to target the most vulnerable households, the government implements regular surveys and control visits by public officials to evaluate each household's economic improvements and restructure aid accordingly—on an individual basis. These forms of control and surveillance are also impacting on displaced residents' capacities to organize and make collective claims on the city. Moreover, these various forms of control challenge displaced individuals' efforts to prioritize collective needs of reparation over individual benefits.

Humanitarian aid and post-conflict reparations

As shown above, the national government regularly assesses “ideal” degrees of vulnerability and “deserved” social aid in every household that receives any form of humanitarian aid from public entities. Notably, in the *Comprehensive Care, Assistance, and Reparation Plan* process, the national entities that provide humanitarian cash transfers⁸³ use phone surveys and visits to family homes to assess each household’s level of vulnerability. The surveys analyze households based on several unfulfilled goals in the areas of housing, nutrition, health, and education, and aid is then assigned based on the different degrees of vulnerability identified in each area.⁸⁴

Even though it is necessary for a system that operates with scarce resources to assess levels of vulnerability and provide aid accordingly, this practice frequently has a negative impact on assessed individuals. Many residents thought that they were being evaluated based on pointless criteria that required them to stay poor or at least embrace the appearance of poverty. Manifesting her discontent with public authorities, one resident exclaimed: “they come here classifying everything; whether I have tile floor, whether I have silverware, whether I have mattresses, but instead of asking what I did do to be able to get all these things they just conclude, ‘ahhhh, you do not need,’ or ‘ahhh, you are a victim and you have all this?’”

The implementation of these different sorts of inspections is not restricted to free housing neighborhoods but to all households receiving humanitarian aid from the national government. Still, their impact is more clearly evidenced in these neighborhoods where most residents are

⁸³ The Victims Assistance Unit (*Unidad de Víctimas*) and the Colombian Institute for Family Welfare.

⁸⁴ Information on the Comprehensive Care, Assistance, and Reparation Plan can be found at the *Unidad de Atención y Reparación Integral a las Víctimas*’s website: <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/pi%C3%A9rdale-el-miedo-al-paari/13932>.

subjects within this system, and they speak about it on a regular basis. The regular inspections govern the everyday of residents of free housing who become self-conscious of what they eat and do not eat, or what they have or do not have. Because the inspections are generally discredited by residents, many think it is fine to trick the system to continue receiving monetary support and different sorts of aid from the government, while they adopt similar criteria to make sense of what makes them eligible and deserving of support *vis-à-vis* others.

Lucia, for example, who declared displacement five years ago, is a resident of Makatoa, and is a single mother of three children—two of which have a cognitive disability—expressed her discontent with the government’s survey system. She said: “you are supposed tell lies. But, I say, I can deceive people, but I cannot deceive God (...) so I have to respond [to the survey] ‘it is not that we eat good meat, no, if we have plantains we fried them, broth, lentils,’ I do not know, but there is always something to eat, if we have eggs, we eat one egg each, so, how am I supposed to say, when they ask me if we eat five times a week: ‘no mam, only twice.’” As a result of the survey, Lucia stopped receiving *Humanitarian Emergency Aid*, but she still receives *Humanitarian Transition Aid* from the government in the form of an annual cash transfer of 380,000 pesos (ca. \$125 US dollars). She says it is not enough for her to sustain her children and resents the outcome of what she thinks is a “ridiculous survey.” She knows couples “in less need” and with “well-paying jobs” who receive better forms of support, she believes they lied, and she wonders whether she should have lied too.

The institutional requirements of program delivery are having a direct impact on the ways in which residents classify themselves as “deserving victims” against some of their neighbors, in a context where aid is provided unequally and without a clear logic to residents who know that the system can be easily tricked. These regular surveys and what the residents perceive as

inconsistencies in the way aid is being distributed among neighbors—with some families apparently in better economic situations receiving more support than others—are encouraging residents to embrace the appearance of poverty relative to other neighbors, instead of identifying commonalities in their deserved rights of reparation, affecting in turn their capacities to make claims as a neighborhood community of displaced persons. As one resident argued, she did not like the institutionalized term victims—or what I identify above as the emerging notion of “deserving victims”—because it made people depend on the authorities and act independently to receive some form of economic or material benefit, instead of working together to achieve long term benefits for all. The extent to which the institutional design of humanitarian aid provisions is affecting the capacities of displaced individuals to make collective claims of reparation needs further examination. At the neighborhood level, it is impacting on how residents assess their economic situations and own personal hardships *vis-à-vis* others, which is creating new obstacles to the organization of the neighborhood community towards the attainment of collective benefits and basic rights to improve their material and economic living conditions.

The challenges and opportunities of public housing

Disputes around food and housing are certainly exceptional instances of the everyday of displaced persons in Colombia. These events however offer a glimpse into the mundane: a years-long relationship with a system of social provisions that was put in place with the well-intended purpose of helping the millions of people displaced by armed conflict in Colombia. Despite the good intentions, the institutional design and delivery of aid has produced some problems. Protesting by tearing someone else’s bag of beans is nonsensical and might be read as clear evidence of anti-social behavior. However, such incidents show how distribution systems that are considered unfair and are difficult to understand can result in such behavior, even in communities

that share similar interests and include people who are concerned about the wellbeing of others. In the context of free housing neighborhoods in small cities, there is a material and social legacy of a system of institutional support targeted towards displaced persons but reaching individuals on a very unequal basis. This system is shaping horizontal and vertical relations among the displaced residents of free housing, and explains why residents of Makatoa and Sabana manifested, in general, that they had a harder time learning to live together and organizing with neighbors than in the other informal settlements of this study.

I found that tensions between national public officials and residents—in how the distribution of housing is justified—are impacting the adoption of a narrative of “worth” among free housing residents, shaping how they relate to their neighborhoods. Residents who frame their relation to their neighborhood through this narrative are compelled to find differences between themselves and their neighbors, and feel often unjustly judged by others, all of which does not bode well for local solidarity and does not facilitate processes of collective claims-making under the common experience of displacement and the common right of reparation.

Adding to the tensions across scales, there are several inequalities in the distribution of aid provisions that residents need to grapple with—even though they all have received a free housing unit. The unequal distribution of gas connections in Makatoa is just one example of this challenge. Inequality in the distribution of resources can be the result of corruption and ill-intended private interests, or an outcome of local bureaucracies’ limited time and resources, especially in small cities. Moreover, these bureaucratic challenges are especially salient in moments of crisis (i.e., when there is a large influx of displaced people coming into a given city), when public officials must quickly make decisions that affect individuals in their own processes of moving on after being displaced. In any case, whether ill-intended or not, inequalities of provision, uneven access

to information, and lack of transparency about who gets what and why are likely to become a burden for those who visibly receive support. These factors can also tarnish the legitimacy of institutional modes of local organization like the local action boards run by neighborhood residents.

Lastly, a condition of apparent formality—imposed on the distribution of humanitarian aid and the transformation of the built environment—also impacts how residents live, relate to their neighbors, and organize to make claims on the city. First, residents are encouraged to embrace the appearance of poverty, *vis-à-vis* others, to justify their right to receive social aid. Second, they also end up privileging vertical over horizontal relations to solve internal tensions and needs. Within this neighborhood environment, it is more difficult for residents to articulate a common critique about their living conditions, and they have a harder time claiming a collective right to improved forms of consumption, taste, and social distinction. These obstacles indicate that the design of aid provisions based on individual benefits and individual assessments, can also tarnish efforts by displaced peoples to make collective claims for post-conflict reparation.

By emphasizing this multiplicity of complex challenges, I am not arguing for the futility of public housing. Quite the opposite, housing is a much-needed resource, especially in a city with large numbers of poor displaced families. Public provision of housing is considered a blessing by most who have benefited from these programs and who have finally been able to own a place in the city after forced displacement. It is, however, important to acknowledge that there are obligations and expectations related to the consolidation of state enabled neighborhoods of public housing that can be a burden for families who inhabit the housing units—particularly in smaller cities.

Conclusion: Neighborhoods, Citizenship, and Post-conflict Reconstruction

Neighborhood sponsors

Four new neighborhoods of Granada have emerged after an unprecedented wave of forcibly displaced families arrived at the city. The rise in housing demand has been imprinted in the city through the consolidation of extended residential territories reshaping Granada's urban peripheries. The current residents of the new neighborhoods have followed different trajectories before they reached their present residential location: many have migrated from nearby territories where they used to own and cultivate land; some have been born and raised in Granada, and a couple come from other urban centers in the country. The residents of these new peripheries of Granada tend to speak candidly about their neighborhood's enabling processes. Residents of Makatoa and Sabana speak about bureaucratic hurdles, paperwork, the happiness they felt when they heard their names called in public lotteries, and the role the state has played delivering the new units. Residents of Villas de Granada recall the first days of illegal occupation, when they built shacks in the darkest of nights, only to see the faces of fellow occupiers with the first light of sunrise the next morning. In Paraiso, residents cannot avoid talking about El Gurre.

In a way, these narratives reveal how processes of neighborhood formation have impacted personal life chances and aspirations of residents who still live there, also shaping how residents expect to organize—or not—among neighbors to transform the conditions in which they live and make claims on the city. Yes, all four neighborhoods in this study host vulnerable populations who face common challenges related to structuring inequality, lack of access to jobs, poor-quality housing, possibly segregation, and higher crime rates, as already discussed in the literature on informality and urban marginality (Auyero 2011, Fischer 2014). But beyond these common challenges, there are important differences across the settlement types, materialized

through neighborhood formation processes. Specifically, one crucial factor determining these differences is the role played by different types of sponsors in the creation and stabilization of new neighborhoods. These different sponsors have established different institutionalized processes through which residents have appealed to vertical and horizontal relations to face challenges of legitimacy, access basic needs—individual and collective—and address local tensions.

The politics of legitimacy

Common challenges experienced among residents of different neighborhoods are related to issues of legitimacy, but there are important differences in how residents experience and face these challenges depending on the types of sponsors that participate in the neighborhood enabling process.

Unlike informal settlements, formal housing projects represent, in principle, legitimate means of accessing housing. Still, even though the residents who won a free unit through the government's lottery system acquired a legal, and thus legitimate, right to occupy their new houses, they now live in a neighborhood that is perceived by them and other citizens as the result of a flawed and unjust scheme in the distribution of public resources benefiting many who did “not really need” a new house. In this context, the residents of free housing feel often compelled to defend their own legitimacy to a free unit—*vis-à-vis* others—when speaking about their neighborhood.

This challenge of legitimacy is not entirely unique of the public distribution of free housing. I have shown that in Villas de Granada residents also felt compelled to demonstrate that the land occupation was made for those who “really needed it,” and they also regretted that they had not been entirely successful controlling occupation by people with money and other

properties in the city or elsewhere. So, in both the free housing neighborhoods and Villas de Granada, residents related with a narrative of “who deserved,” and “who did not deserve,” a place in the neighborhood; they believed that those who already had housing and other properties elsewhere should not be entitled to access land; they assessed others who came to occupy and live in their residential vicinity; and they believed that some people who “did not deserve it” had unjustly acquired a space and a house in their neighborhoods. Still, only in the case of Villas de Granada, this challenge of legitimacy was addressed through a successful infrastructure of informal social control; through block leaders with enough agency and community support to regulate who had a right to stay and who should leave; and through the consolidation of victims’ organizations meant to protect the right to stay put of displaced and other vulnerable families with an agreed upon right to a space in the neighborhood. This robust social infrastructure has gradually lost momentum, but it is still present in the residents’ narratives of their neighborhood, and it continues to play an important role in what many conceive to be their own alternatives of social organization today—by blocks and block leaders and appealing to local victims’ organizations.⁸⁵

In the free housing neighborhoods, on the other hand, this challenge of legitimacy has been addressed on a more individual basis, mainly because decisions of who will occupy units are made from the top-down by national public authorities—not by organized occupiers. Accordingly, while the challenge to proof legitimacy of occupation was inherently collective and required some sort of coordination among all occupiers of Villas de Granada, the perceived problems with the distribution of housing in Makatoa and Sabana were imposed by a nationally

⁸⁵ Today, to address local needs, block leaders interact with newly established institutional forms of social engagement and social organization—created after the legalization of the neighborhood—like the neighborhood’s local action board.

enforced selection scheme that was difficult to understand and justify at the local level. These impositions are today meshed with experienced inequalities in the distribution of aid and other sorts of provisions—besides housing—which have in turn encouraged residents to assess their household economic conditions against that of their neighbors, instead of finding commonalities to make claims as a community of neighbors like in the Villas case.

The interesting case of Villas de Granada is, in fact, not very different from many other informal settlements in other nations, known for having a strong history of social cohesion (Ward 1999, Lloyd 1980, Leeds 1973), where challenges of legitimacy are experienced and addressed through collective processes of social organization. To be sure, the time when residents are building their new informal settlements is so pressing—facing threats of eviction and impending needs of access to public utilities—that “strangers became friends and collaborators” (Solnit 2009, p. 17). Still, despite these commonalities with other cases portrayed in the literature, it is important to acknowledge that there are different types of urbanization in informal settlements with different types of sponsors. In some types of informal settlements—with some type of sponsors—challenges of legitimacy are not necessarily faced through the same collective processes or are not necessarily seen as a challenge at all.

While the Villas’ residents often spoke about their neighborhood with stories about the struggles the community faced defending a legitimate access to land and housing, issues of legitimacy in the narratives of the informal settlement Paraiso were often reduced to market transactions with El Gurre. Although some residents were suspicious of El Gurre’s interest in the urbanization of Paraiso, and many questioned whether he really owned the land he was selling, nobody I interviewed had adopted a narrative of “who deserved and who did not deserve” a space in the neighborhood. Like in the free housing neighborhoods, occupation in Paraiso was

controlled and assessed from the top-down—either by the state or by El Gurre’s office, respectively—but only in Paraiso, top-down impositions about the occupation of space were rarely questioned; interestingly, residents agreed that it was up to El Gurre to determine who had a legitimate right to a space in the neighborhood—market transactions legitimized occupation but also nobody thought it to be a problem if El Gurre decided to give land for free to some families and not others. Hence, in this neighborhood context, in contrast to the other neighborhoods in this study, narratives about who had a legitimate right to occupy land were replaced with stories about El Gurre; how he created the neighborhood, and his political and economic capacity to make things happen and transform everyone’s residential futures for the better.

Agency in the access to the city

In Paraiso, the role that the powerful *gamonal* has played dealing with risks of eviction, solving some of the problems of access to basic services, and providing support to individual families (e.g., providing construction materials) has not only shaped how some residents vote—in line with El Gurre’s political agenda. It has also defined the extent to which they organize to make claims and access new amenities. For example, while residents may march together to the city center to demand access to energy services from local public authorities—like residents of Villas de Granada did before them—unlike residents of Villas de Granada, they have not considered occupying empty land in the neighborhood to create needed space for a park or a community center. Why? Because “no one messes up with Don Reinel.” It is not just that residents fear retaliation if they invade the lands of El Gurre. They do not envision the possibility of occupying “his land” to access basic amenities that he was obligated to provide because they have established an intimate relation with the person, and the plans of the person, who has

effectively provided for the neighborhood, and the poor residents of Granada, for many years already. Their intimate relation with El Gurre also explains why, unlike the Villas case, residents in Paraiso did not organize around the category of displacement. Neither have they established new victims' organizations that operate at the neighborhood level.

Specifically, missing in the narratives of Paraiso were references to the condition of displacement—so prevalent in Villas de Granada. An explanation for such surprising absence, giving the large number of displaced families living in the neighborhood, is that residents did not have to appeal to the condition of displacement, and therefore to locally organized victims' organizations, to legitimize occupation and defend themselves against eviction. While local authorities, including El Gurre, did appear in social media and other public venues claiming that Paraiso was generating housing for vulnerable and displaced families, residents do not feel necessarily compelled to mention this in their neighborhood narratives. These differences with the Villas case show how life in residential proximity may, or may not, encourage social organization around the profound and binding experiences of violence and displacement.

In some cases, like in the free housing neighborhoods, the condition of displacement may even become a means to emphasize on the social differences that keep a community apart. Today, residents of the free housing neighborhoods, as well as public officials, argue that a reason for the many social tensions experienced among neighbors is the condition of displacement. They argue that displaced persons' process of adaptation to new urban environments, as well as the difficult experiences they have gone through, make it more difficult for them to live in peaceful coexistence in their new urban neighborhoods. Although, these conditions may in fact represent a challenge to peaceful neighborly interactions, it is interesting that in a neighborhood like Villas de Granada—with a very similar population—the condition of

displacement was seen by many residents as a unifying factor and a means of purposeful social organization—not solely a cause of social tensions—to reclaim their right to occupy a space in the city and gain access to different services. What explains these different perspectives?

In free housing neighborhoods, imposed regulations on the use and transformation of housing units and their surroundings—considered necessary in a larger political environment where the state needs to justify the distribution of scarce resources—combined with regular monitoring of the distribution of other forms of aid, were commonly recalled by residents when they spoke about their neighborhood. As one resident put it: he conceived his neighborhood to be ingrained in a “special process” where residents had to put up with onerous forms of control and regulation. In this “special process,” residents become used to interacting with a diverse pool of local and national civil servants and bureaucrats who visit the neighborhoods on a regular basis. The free housing neighborhoods are thus blessed with a high degree of state and institutional support that is missing and needed in the other poor and peripheral neighborhoods of the city. Yet, housing and institutional support have also come with other expectations that have created burdens for families.

The pre-imposed regulations established with the legality of housing units have inhibited the neighborhood community’s capacity to address local tensions and access new services. The reason does not lie, specifically, in the rigidities of the law or the “technology of power” of governmental attempts to discipline citizens (Foucault 1977). Public officials visiting the neighborhood on a regular basis were, for the most part, flexible towards the enforcement of the given rules and regulations governing residents’ everyday lives. Residents on their part continually broke rules and regulations, following the example set by others and noticing no real efforts of enforcement from authorities. In a way, the formal free housing neighborhoods share

some of the flexibility that is characteristic of informal settlements. And yet, unlike informal settlements, the superimposed regulatory framework generates expectations of vertical authority that residents appeal to when addressing social tensions or trying to access basic needs. This has created a complex social and institutional environment where authorities expect residents to develop their own agency, solving their own problems, while residents' expectations of vertical authority thwart efforts to access new services and amenities. When addressing local social tensions and needs, residents tend to appeal to the top-down imposed—yet rarely enforced—rules to justify, denounce, or demand actions, before making compromises with neighbors to solve internal conflicts or before joining efforts to demand access to basic services and amenities that were not delivered but promised in construction plans (e.g., a community center, gas services, and neighborhood parks). As a result, the law, in this case, does not offer a means to maintain orderly operation of social relations (Durkheim 1933), but it is rather contributing to heighten social tensions among neighbors, and limiting their own agency in the access to the city.

Now, like in the free housing neighborhoods, in Villas de Granada rules and regulations are also very important components of neighborhood narratives. Still, unlike the free housing neighborhoods, in the Villas' creation process rules and regulations were established from the bottom up, in an effort to make the land occupation work. First and foremost, residents got together on a regular basis to plan for the future of the land occupation and agree upon a series of rules that needed to be enforced. These meetings created a platform to address social tensions and get to know neighbors—all to make the land occupation work. Like one resident who lived in Villas before receiving a free housing unit recalled: she thought that unlike her new free housing neighborhood—Sabana—in Villas people had “time to learn the conditions of their new

neighborhood;” they had “time” to identify who was problematic; who was loud; when to turn down the music because a neighbor had to wake up for work early in the morning; and when to allow the other neighbor to play music at very high volume without complaining. Her remarks show that the “time” to get to know neighbors is experienced differently in a neighborhood where residents become their own sponsors; where they build their own rules and regulations, as well as their own structures of enforcement, through an iterative process commanded by a common goal—make the land occupation work. By contrast, in the free housing neighborhoods, residents had to rapidly adjust to the pre-imposed social and regulatory schemes established by higher authorities. While there is flexibility of action in the two types of neighborhoods, only in the Villas case, regulatory scripts did not precede community meetings and efforts to work collectively for peaceful coexistence. Hence, unlike residents of the other neighborhoods, neighbors of Villas de Granada frequently refer to the condition of displacement as a unifying factor and a means of purposeful social organization. They have been able to organize around the category of displacement, not only to defend their right to stay put and own a place in the city, but also to negotiate the way in which they inhabit the city: controlling who has a right to claim a space in their neighborhood, getting access to basic services, and organizing to attain resources from higher authorities to build their own local parks and community center.

Although a challenge for many residents who would prefer to have their papers in order, in Villas de Granada, informal social organization in the access to urban land has facilitated a more “organic” process in the formation of a neighborhood community with the capacity to organize to solve local tensions and access new services and amenities. Unfortunately, however, in this same process, residents’ efforts to defend their right to stay put and attain basic services have also exposed them to illegal armed actors, unlike the case of the other neighborhoods. In the

Villas neighborhood formation process, paramilitary groups have gained a legitimate right to inhabit the common space because they have joined residents in their many struggles to make the land occupation work. Despite the support paramilitary groups provide, these powerful actors have other political and economic interests that have exposed residents, in the long run, to a new path in the reproduction of violence.

Having summarized the main differences across the resettlement typology, a sensible question to raise now is: which type of neighborhood is better? Which one provides better opportunities for forced migrants? The one created by a local boss, or by public authorities, or by bottom-up social organization? I hope not to disappoint by stating that the answer cannot be reduced to a single type of settlement. Each one introduces different challenges and opportunities that require different types of policy instruments. I will explore, accordingly, the potential for the implementation of new policy instruments below.

A place for policy

Neighborhood-formation and urban poverty

Many of the challenges and opportunities faced by the residents of each of the neighborhoods of this study are shared by residents of poor areas in other cities of Colombia, Latin America, and the world. It is well known that displaced migrants tend to join the ranks of the urban poor in cities, and the creation of new neighborhoods is also not an exclusive condition of the arrival of forced migrants in cities. Hence, many findings of this study speak to the case of urban poverty and peripheral urbanization (Caldeira 2017), with different policy implications for the different types of settlements inhabited by the urban poor.

Informal settlements are known to be the main residential option of the urban poor in many cities of the Global South. In this study, I have tried to move beyond the all-encompassing

concept of informality—as a practice of city building (Roy 2009)—and identify different types of urbanization in informal settlements with different policy needs. For example, inadequate and insecure living conditions are known to be one of the most common deprivations faced by the urban poor in informal settlements. In Judy Baker’s (2008) review of the literature, she concludes that the insecurity of tenure associated with informal settlements not only puts residents at constant risk of eviction, but it also “hampers them from building up assets and accessing credit, inhibits using one’s home for income generating activities and does not allow for investments in service provision” (p. 6). Accordingly, housing policy on informal settlements has focused on the implementation of slum upgrading initiatives which encompass the provision of utility infrastructure, improvements to the quality of housing, and access to property titles. In small cities like Granada, where local governments have limited financial capacities, slum upgrading is generally reduced to the provision of property titles. A limitation of this general approach is that not all informal settlements face the same issues of residential instability, and neither do they require the same process of state action.

In Paraiso, for example, without facing real threats of eviction, the residents’ biggest challenge is not necessarily the formalization of the neighborhood and their individual land titles, but the access to basic utility infrastructure and amenities. Ironically, in this case, the formalization of the neighborhood as a residential space of urban Granada has worked against the residents’ best interest in terms of their and the city’s capacity to put pressure on the illegal developer to provide basic service infrastructure and demarcate the areas that should be reserved for parks, a community center, and other sorts of public amenities. On the other hand, in a land occupation like Villas de Granada, the legalization of the neighborhood and the provision of individual land titles is, indeed, a key challenge faced by residents who do not count with the

support of a powerful neighborhood sponsor and face eminent threats of eviction. However, it is important to acknowledge that while facing residential instability, residents have been able to organize and regulate, successfully, the conditions in which space is being occupied and used. Facing residential instability, residents have also created ties with paramilitary groups who have provided protection against eviction but have also exposed them to higher crime in the long run.

A policy approach to informality and displacement should, at a minimum, acknowledge that there are different forms of social organization in different types of settlements. That these forms of social organization are normally shaped by powerful third parties or external neighborhood sponsors—rarely accounted for in policy programs—who have become part of the neighborhood community through neighborhood enabling processes, but who also have political and economic interests that may act in detriment of the residents’ best interests. A policy challenge of informal settlements is not simply one of formalization, but one that seeks to enhance the residents’ independence from these powerful third parties, without undermining structures of social support and solidarity that have been consolidating through informal processes of land acquisition and access to basic services.

Regarding this last remark, policy has generally been considered and implemented as a tool to solve problems and address social needs, but it can also be used as a tool to sustain and support positive social practices like the successful self-organization around the use and management of a common living space. Academic work on collective action has challenged Hardin’s influential proposition of the “tragedy of the commons”—he noted that users of the commons are caught in an inevitable process that leads to the destruction of the commons—showing with a variety of examples that people have successfully self-organized to manage common-pool resources (Ostrom et al 1999). It does not have to be any different with

neighborhoods if we agree to consider them as *common* living spaces that need management and regulation. There are informal neighborhoods like Villas where residents have successfully self-organized, and the policy challenge, in this case, is to facilitate access to land titles and basic services, preserving, at the same time, local forms of informal social control already in place.

Unlike the case of Villas de Granada, in both Paraiso and the free housing neighborhoods, expectations of vertical authority—either by El Gurre or by the state—have inhibited local social organization at different levels. Moreover, in the free housing neighborhoods, imposed rules and regulations over the use of housing units and common spaces exacerbated tensions within the community. These findings are consistent with the empirical findings of the academic work on collective action identifying that: “cooperation enforced by externally imposed rules can disappear very quickly;” and “the worst of all worlds may be one where external authorities impose rules but are only able to achieve weak monitoring and sanctioning” (Ostrom 2000, p. 147-148). Accordingly, the policy challenge in this case is to encourage informal self-organization. But how? And how can governments facilitate access to land titles and basic services, preserving, at the same time, local forms of informal social control already in place, as proposed above? What does the above suggested need to enhance residents’ independence from third-party actors really mean? A sound policy approach could start by avoiding what the literature has already identified as worst practices, or “threats”—cited below in italics—in the management and regulation of *the commons*.⁸⁶

First, as I mentioned above, *externally imposed rules and regulations that are not really enforced* are a well-studied challenge to collective action. In the context of neighborhoods, this challenge is especially salient in settlements that have been enabled by public authorities and

⁸⁶ For the full list of “threats” and recommendations see Ostrom (2000, p. 153).

their complex bureaucracies. A policy approach towards these cases could start by addressing the following questions: are all imposed regulations necessary if not enforced anyways? What are the regulations that tend to be enforced? What are the regulations that tend to be compromised? Should the latter be revoked, transformed, or passed onto community groups to define enforcement? How can governments incentivize communities to create their own regulations and mechanisms of control?

Second, scholars of collective action have identified that *international, or national, aid that does not take into account local knowledge and institutions* constitute a threat to collective action. So does the *lack transparency of information* on the distribution and availability of social aid. This situation impacts all the subjects of social aid in this study, but their negative consequences are more clearly evidenced in the nationally imposed, and locally contested, distribution of free housing units. If governments must grant access to housing “on the basis of need,” should the selection scheme not be socialized with the groups representing those who do not have housing? Should the selection scheme be defined at the local or national levels, or a mix of both? Furthermore, should different forms of aid—besides housing—be distributed at the neighborhood level, instead of the individual or household levels as it is usually done? This very last point is of particular importance because it brings up new questions about different scales of sovereignty and urban governance in the implementation and management of social aid programs, and their differentiated social and individual impacts on the recipients of aid.

A third factor known to affect collective action is the *frequent reliance on external sources of help*. Again, all subjects of this study were somewhat reliant on third-party sponsors that brought both negative and positive consequences to the neighborhood communities, but this problematic factor was more drastically evidenced in the local-patron-enabled neighborhood

Paraiso. In his theoretical proposition of the strength of weak ties, Mark Granovetter (1973) argues that communities with relatively well-connected social networks—with weak ties creating links across clusters, or *cliques*, of strong ties—should be able to organize for common goals more easily and effectively. Particularly, he identifies that leaders, who play a crucial role organizing communities, build a community base for action through “intermediary personal contacts”—or weak ties—who can assure people that the leader is trustworthy. Accordingly, the more connected the community, the greater the number of paths between a leader and potential followers with a better “capacity to predict and affect” the leader’s behavior (p. 1374), and thus the willingness to act in a coordinated manner under the leader’s guidance. This was the case of Villas de Granada, where a complex informal social structure of housing and victims’ associations, and local organization by neighborhood blocks with block leaders coordinating efforts with other block leaders, facilitated effective organization to achieve common goals. However, the same logic does not entirely apply to a case like Paraiso. In Paraiso, residents did develop a trust relationship with one special leader, El Gurre, in many ways supported by their own experiences and those they heard from their neighbors. But, in this case, reliance on this special leader inhibited, in different ways, the consolidation of local forms of social organization as well as the neighborhood community’s capacity to effectively organize around common goals.

A case like Paraiso does not negate the postulate of the strength of weak ties, but it shows how such strength might be coopted by a powerful sponsor. It also reveals the importance of considering the role of different kinds of sponsors/leaders in policy programs, evaluating with caution cases where there are *external* neighborhood sponsors with unique influence and with particular interests only partially aligned to those of the neighborhood residents. A case like Paraiso also calls for more explicit cooperation between local and national public authorities to

control the actions by local patrons whose economic and political influence overpowers local authorities' capacities—especially in small cities—to exert control over these powerful individuals.

Finally, *rapid increase in reliance on monetary transactions* and *transmission failures of governance principles across generations* are two related “threats” noted in studies of collective action that are important to consider for the case of informal settlements undergoing processes of formalization. But the “threat” in this case is not created by the pace of a *new reliance on monetary transactions*—monetary transactions have been taking place since the very creation of both informal settlements in this study—but by the pace at which land titles are introduced. I have shown in chapter 2 that social cohesion and informal social control in Villas de Granada is greatly explained from communal efforts to defend occupiers against eviction and make the land occupation work. Furthermore, these social relations have been maintained over the years—beyond the eventualities of eviction and access to basic services—through informal social organizations and institutionalized social practices in the acquisition, protection, and sale of properties that are not officially owned, but where residents have an agreed upon right to them—this also includes the protection and care of common spaces like parks. In this context, land titling efforts by public authorities, although important for the community, can render some of the institutionalized social practices in the acquisition, protection, and sale of properties obsolete, with potentially cascading negative effects on social cohesion and the informal means through which residents have managed to control and regulate how space is utilized for many years. Accordingly, this is not to argue against the implementation of land titling efforts, but to recognize that the pace of the implementation of such efforts matters as it can affect the transmission and preservation of institutionalized local governance principles. In a case like

Villas, land titling efforts should allow for adjustment and repurposing of locally institutionalized social practices in the transaction and protection of “informal” properties and common spaces, instead of rendering these practices obsolete overnight—as it has been happening.

Altogether, bearing in mind a diverse world of neighborhood-formation, governments should pay attention to the different ways in which housing provisions are released to allow for a mix of government support with “organic” community formation. Planners and other local authorities, as well as international organizations and scholars, need to consider that different types of neighborhood-formation with different types of sponsors lay out different processes for policy action.

So far, I have emphasized policy actions in the creation of new neighborhoods that could potentially transform the lives of the urban poor in cities. I will focus now on the specific case of forced migrants who participate in the creation of new neighborhoods in cities, and how these spaces constitute new scenarios for post-conflict reconstruction.

Planning in post-conflict communities; provisions for new forms of citizenship

Acknowledging that it is not easy to draw a clear distinction between conflict and post-conflict (Büscher, 2018), scholars and public officials have generally referred to post-conflict as a transition in *time*, mainly associated with the implementation of different sorts of peace agreements. I propose to think about post-conflict scenarios as evolving in *time* and *space*, through the signing and implementation of peace treaties, but also through the relocation of families from areas harassed by violence to areas where they feel safe and protected. While peace treaties may lay the grounds for the reduction of conflict and violence in *time*, what are known as “shelter cities” often represent the grounds for escaping conflict and violence through

space. Accordingly, both “shelter cities” and peace treaties represent tipping points marking potential transitions to post-conflict futures. Moreover, and importantly, a focus on post-conflict transitions in *space*—in addition to *time*—allows for a new understanding of how victims, and among them many IDPs, participate in the construction of new spaces, the challenges faced as they move to new places, and how in this process they create new forms of citizenship.

In this study, Granada has shown to play a key role as a scenario of post-conflict reconstruction in *space* and *time*. First, it has become a shelter for many displaced persons who have moved there to escape violence in other territories—representing a *space* of post-conflict reconstruction for many IDPs who now live there. Second, with the 2016 signing of a peace agreement between the national government and the largest guerrilla army in the country—the FARC—Granada has not only offered a form of shelter in the middle of a civil war, but it is now also embedded in a national process of post-conflict transition. Accordingly, the city offers a window into the challenges and opportunities that emerge in the process of creating new post-conflict futures. With a focus on Granada, and its role shaping post-conflict futures in both *time* and *space*, I have been able to identify some of the elusive links that may remain between war and peace, and the different forms of citizenship that may emerge in this process of post-conflict reconstruction.

With a focus on new neighborhoods that have become primordial spaces of residential integration of forced migrants in Granada—as in many other cities of the country—I have argued that neighborhood sponsors play a crucial role shaping vertical and horizontal relations of neighborhood residents. Furthermore, in a scenario of post-conflict reconstruction, these neighborhood sponsors play a crucial role facilitating access to land and housing to many displaced families in cities. Access to land and housing represents a crucial step in the process of

reconstruction of a material life after dislocation and thus an important form of reparation for IDPs. However, and unfortunately, besides playing a role in the reparation of some of the victims of conflict, neighborhood sponsors have also the power to reproduce political inequality and violence of civil conflict in different ways.

The case of the free housing neighborhoods is the most evident in terms of the role the state has played in the provision of housing as a form of reparation to the displaced families of civil conflict. The provision of free housing by the state is unprecedented in Colombia. It has been justified under a constitutional mandate (Constitutional Sentence T-025 of 2004) to address a historical debt from the state towards vulnerable and displaced persons whose basic rights have been violated, and whose demands to receive protection from public authorities have been neglected for decades. Although 100,000, plus a second round of 10,545 free housing units represent a meager amount when contrasted with the more than 8 million cases of displacement that have been reported in Colombia, it is important to recognize the relevance of this initiative in the absence of any other national policies addressing displaced families' housing needs as a right of reparation (see introduction). Nevertheless, despite its relevance, and the need for more public housing in Colombia, there are important challenges faced with the implementation of free housing projects undermining the basic principle of deserved reparation.

If housing is to be considered a form of reparation, it needs to be better integrated—through institutional design—to other efforts of humanitarian provision and monetary reparation. I have already discussed how the regulations on the use of public housing add up to other regulations and controls over the delivery of humanitarian aid, shaping how residents experience and talk about their free housing neighborhoods. I have shown how in a neighborhood environment where aid is distributed on the basis of need, at an individual—or household—level,

unequally, and without a clear logic to prospective recipients, it is more difficult for residents to articulate a collective critique to the conditions in which they live, and they have a hard time claiming a collective right to improved forms of consumption, taste, and social distinction. These difficulties reveal new potential explanations as to why Elizabeth Colson (2003) found, in her review of the literature, that forced migrants tend to face more difficulties adjusting to their new living environments in “official settlements” rather than more spontaneously created settlements. Furthermore, these difficulties indicate that in official resettlement environments residents can find it harder to make claims of reparation as displaced citizens, even though the government has grant them their right to receive free housing for their condition of displacement. Why?

If citizenship is to be evaluated in the strict *relational* sense—through mutual contested claims between the state and a group of social agents that entail both enforceable rights and obligations (Tilly 1995)—it is possible to argue that residents of neighborhood Villas de Granada have been more successful than the residents of free housing neighborhoods creating citizenship around the identity of displacement. This difference does not necessarily mean that the residents of the informal settlement have better access to an *instituted* form of citizenship (Holston and Appadurai 1999). In fact, I would argue that the residents of free housing neighborhoods have a better *instituted* citizenship, understood as the instituted access to city officials and the city’s basic services. But, as a community of neighbors, the Villas’ residents have become more successful mobilizing resources and people to defend their right to stay put and negotiate the way in which they inhabit the city. It is important to draw attention to these differences between *instituted* and *relational* forms of citizenship because even though they are interlinked,⁸⁷ the

⁸⁷ The creation of citizenship in the relational sense should lead to the institution of new rights and obligations of citizenship.

experience of citizenship can be very different: while residents of free housing neighborhoods tend to have better access to the city services and the city officials, residents of the illegal land occupation have been more successful organizing under a common identity to access the city. What are some of the consequences of this difference?

I believe that the construction of citizenship in the strict *relational* sense is of particular importance among IDPs, and with the purpose of post-conflict reconstruction, because it represents the means through which they can expand *instituted* rights of citizenship to a new social base (i.e., displaced persons) (Holston and Appadurai 1999). It is through the construction of a *relational* form of citizenship that they can claim new rights of reparation and attain a new political representation to advocate for the specific needs of the victims of the armed conflict, beyond the instituted rights already established and partially enforced by public authorities. Accordingly, it is not only important to identify that different neighborhood formation processes create different challenges of instituted citizenship—as in Heller (2015). It is also necessary to acknowledge that the creation of new neighborhoods constitute a crucial process through which groups of forced migrants construct and negotiate their citizenship status in cities—especially considering that in Latin America citizens have often organized at the neighborhood level to make claims on the state (Davis 1999). To recognize this means that planners, as well as local and national public officials involved in post-conflict reconstruction, need to engage with new neighborhoods, not just as a means to facilitate access to housing and basic utilities, but also as a means to reconstruct the relation that collectivities—not individuals—of displaced migrants have with the state and build on their capacities to participate in their own reparation agendas. With this goal in mind, informal land occupations like Villas de Granada have much to teach us, and

the challenge for top-down public housing efforts remains: how to encourage the creation of horizontal relations before creating expectations of vertical authority?

A case like Villas de Granada also has much to teach us about additional complexities of neighborhood-formation and post-conflict reconstruction. It shows us that there are instances where political inequality and violence of civil conflict can be reproduced through the same relational processes through which residential communities enable new forms of citizenship. Studying the *new geographies of migrant refuge*, Davis and Potvin (2017) identify that resilience is an action metric of these spaces that can be positively and negatively qualified. On the positive side, resettlement options can provide protections and reduce migrant vulnerabilities. On the negative side, resettlement options can amplify violence, social unrest, and inequality (p. 191-192). With the same reasoning, I argue that planning in post-conflict communities requires us to recognize both faces of resettlement processes and trace the mechanisms through which violence and political inequality are reproduced, as opposed to eliminated.

I have already shown how in the case of Villas de Granada many displaced families have been able to claim a space in the city. But due to challenges of eviction, the organized residents have also allowed and legitimated the presence of third-party actors with the capacity to compromise safety and political autonomy in the long run. This phenomenon is a characteristic of poor and informal neighborhoods and is not unique of contexts of civil conflict, but there are unique links to civil conflict that take place in this process and need detailed consideration.

Drawing on but also problematizing the notion of cities as havens of relative safety in civil conflicts, or as the “eyes of the storm” (Beall et al 2013), I have discussed in chapter 2 how the peripheries of many of these cities have become both places of *migrant refuge* as well as key scenarios of military and paramilitary war operation. As military and paramilitary actors work

together with vulnerable communities in the creation of new neighborhoods, their military interests in neighborhood-formation transform these spaces into preferred locations for the perpetration of war crimes (e.g., recruitment of minors, or *falsos positivos* in Colombia) with violent consequences also bearing on the present of post-conflict communities. Acknowledging the possibility of such an interlinked spatial history between war and peace—at the neighborhood level—is a first step if we aim to understand and curtail the reproduction of violence in many spaces of *migrant refuge*.

Another socio-spatial dynamic taking place in the urban peripheries of many cities is that these spaces have become key scenarios of land grabbing practices, where the uncertainty around public and private land titles facilitates appropriation by large and powerful landowners. This practice is reproducing unequal access to land that has been a root cause of civil conflict in Colombia (LeGrand 1988), while also becoming—ironically—one of the main means through which impoverished forced migrants can get access to housing in the city. Furthermore, the increasing unmet demand for housing, generated by large influxes of forced migrants to cities, can further justify land grabbing practices and illegal development by powerful local patrons who benefit politically from transforming rural lands into residential neighborhoods hosting many citizens with voting capacity in democratically run local elections.

In Colombia, a case like Paraiso shows that *gamonales* coexist and interact today with *clientelistic leaders* as well as paramilitary chiefs and drug lords—or what Gustavo Duncan (2006) identifies as *señores de la Guerra* (warlords)—regulating social transactions through private forms of coercions and protection. It is through these practices that inequality to the access of basic state services has been maintained, illegal appropriation of land by few powerful individuals has been reproduced, and the use of violence by none state actors—like a powerful

gamonal—has been justified (Duncan 2006). Accordingly, the outstanding role El Gurre has played and is playing in the provision of housing and other basic services to vulnerable populations—and a majority of displaced persons—is a cause for concern in Granada and other similar cities. Is the same happening in other cities? Are large influxes of IDPs in small cities helping economic leaders—or *gamonales*—to consolidate politically as the main actors supplanting most state functions towards vulnerable communities? These are questions that need further exploration.

Having reviewed the diversity of challenges and opportunities brought by different types of settlements, we can agree that planning in post-conflict communities should not be reduced to a specific task or goal, but to a bundle of strategies that face a bundle of challenges. In this case, however, I want to highlight the importance of neighborhood creation in the process of reconstruction of residential stability, a material life, and citizenship rights of many families who have suffered forced dislocation. Beyond the provision of housing, the creation of new neighborhoods can unleash different social process in the creation of new rights of citizenship or the reproduction of violence and political inequality shaping conflict and post-conflict contexts for many decades. Neighborhoods, I would argue, can determine the extent to which we may dream for better post-conflict futures.

One final consideration

I would like to end this study with one final question that hovers over this research: whether small cities constitute a different *type* of city for migrant residential resettlement. Do small cities, like Granada, offer the same resettlement conditions to forced migrants as the more commonly studied larger counterparts (e.g., Bogota, Nairobi, Johannesburg)? Furthermore, does

displacement-led urbanization unfold differently in a small city like Granada, as opposed to large cities?

To begin to answer these questions it is useful to examine whether the residential experience of displacement in a place like Granada—a small city—shares the same features as the residential experience of displacement in a place like Bogota—a large city—and in what important ways do these features differ. Like Granada, large cities like Bogota offer different resettlement opportunities to forced migrants, including public housing and different kinds of informal settlements—facing specific challenges and opportunities across each settlement type. Still, in this study, I have identified important aspects shaping the residential experience of displacement in Granada, in contrast to large cities like Bogota. Beyond the already identified limitations in the institutional capacities of small cities to attend the needs of newcomers (Ibáñez and Vélez 2003), I have found that small regional epicenters like Granada have received IDPs mostly from their more immediate regions. This means that migration from rural settlements to small cities generally lacks the distinct break between the geographies of conflict that precede migration and the geography of the city. Many migrants are thus no complete strangers to their new urban residential environment, which may facilitate processes of residential integration and access to land in the city. On the other hand, this situation also makes IDPs more susceptible to become re-victimized by the structural conditions—in the access to land—that displaced them in the first place. Although the civil war is no longer active in Colombia, I have shown how its history is still present within the communities in Granada; where the legacies of conflict and displacement left their imprint on the social and spatial organization of the city; and where organized armed actors and economic authorities who have played a role displacing people in the region, continue to play a role today facilitating access to land in the city.

Accordingly, from the lens of Granada, the residential experience of displacement takes place in the context of a complex interconnectedness between urban growth and civil conflict in its immediate region. This city—and its rapidly urbanizing rural society—has emerged as an epicenter in a high conflict region. It has received huge influxes of displaced migrants, relative to its population size, and it has served important functions in both the reproduction of violence and the implementation of post-conflict reconstruction efforts that take relevance in the entire region. Accordingly, although every city—small or large—that has received forced migrants is in principle intricately connected to the regions producing displacements, in this case, there seems to be an *intimate* relation between displacement and urbanization that needs further exploration. If we define urbanization as the processes through which people participate in the production of new spaces of human agglomeration,⁸⁸ urbanization in a case like Granada is largely shaped by the large influx of IDPs to the city, as well as the extent to which the new migrants are intimately related—in their processes of accessing land in the city—to the same actors and industries that have been creating displacement through violence and land grabbing practices in the region. Urbanization in Granada is also largely shaped by the extent to which residents in general (e.g., politicians, public officials, landowners, local developers, residents with capacity to offer shelter to migrants etc.) are intimately related to the experience of displacement in the region.

Are these particularities of Granada a common feature of other small cities receiving a large influx of forced migrants? Are these particularities enough to open up the analytical concept of the experience of displacement and pinpoint different features that apply to different *types* of cities (i.e., small and large)? These are questions that require further examination and

⁸⁸ There are different definitions and approaches to the study of urbanization. In this case, I draw on urban theories of urbanization from the Global South (see Caldeira 2017) laying emphasis on the creation and construction of residential spaces and their related material infrastructures (see McFarlane 2008).

open new avenues for new research projects. They lay the ground to explore the extent to which the findings in this study travel to other cases worldwide, all in a common effort to understand how displaced persons find residential stability in an urban world.

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Appendix 1: Long Quotations in Spanish

[1]

Todos los días llegaban carros cargados de gentes y equipajes, procedentes de todas partes del país. (...) La población se veía crecer de manera espantosa; hasta altas horas de la noche se escuchaba el golpear de martillos, machetes y otras herramientas utilizadas en la construcción de ranchos y rústicas viviendas, para albergar provisionalmente a las familias que iban ingresando y no que tenían donde descargar sus pertenencias y enseres. (...) Hasta cuatro y cinco familias se acomodaron en una sola vivienda. Pero así como llegaban a Boca de Monte, así salían al otro día para el monte, en busca de un pedazo de rastrojo para hacer sus parcelas y forjar un porvenir para sus familias. Seis meses, o un año después volvían algunos al caserío, para contarnos que se colonizaron en el Crucero, La Playa, Mogotes, Caño Blanco, Quebrada Honda, La Cristalina, y en el alto de Urichare, donde años más tarde se fundó Lejanías. Otros se fueron para Mesetas, El Jardín de las Peñas, La Uribe y lugares más distantes.

[2]

La vida volvió a San José, se extendió en las vegas del Guaviare, y con ella, llegaron miles de personas: un abigarrado ejército de desempleados, aventureros, trujumanes, comerciantes de todo género, mujeres, niños, viejos (...) Nadie vio frustradas sus esperanzas. Todos coronaron sus sueños: el desempleado de las ciudades, y el empleado oficial, el profesional sin oficio, la policía, las prostitutas, los matones, los campesinos, los arrendatarios, los culebreros, los vendedores, y los compradores, los paleteros, los chalanos. Para todos había oficio y oficio bien remunerado. Magníficamente remunerado.

[3]

Mucho tiempo que gente que venía y encerraba y se iba, entonces yo veía como que, ¡ah! Ese lote por ejemplo ese lote de la esquina lo encerraron y no volvieron y llegó una señora con un poco de niños, 'ah que un lotesito', y yo le dije coja ese. Y vino la señora que ese lote es mío, que ese lote es mío, entonces la mandaron pa acá. Yo le dije, suyo no es porque usted no tiene escritura y usted no necesita porque no ha vivido ahí y así, logré que mucha gente que en verdad lo necesitaba, aquí hubieron varios al otro lado a esta cuadra que también (...).

Y no le daba miedo que tomaran represalias.

Muchos veían y me insultaban, pero yo les decía esto es para el que necesita esto es una invasión esto es para gente pobre, acá no es para gente que venga a encerrar lote para engordar, no, hay mucha gente con necesidad señoras solas con niños, yo no, puede pararse en la cabeza, si tiene escritura tráigala y se le entrega el lote, si no, no.

[4]

Hija: Porque aquí el otro día mataron a 3. Alla más abajito, allá está la malla del batallón y por ahí si cogen la gente y la matan, pero porque ya deben cosas o son expendedores de droga o son viciosos son secuestradores. No es que a usted la vayan a matar porque se metió al barrio, no, es porque usted debe algo.

¿No entiendo bien, qué quiere decir saber algo?

Madre: Si, por ejemplo, que esto sea zona roja y maten. Pero por ejemplo aquí lo feo es que por ahí hay una casa y la vieja vende bazuco entonces le vende a niños, a grandes, a todos, entonces la gente del pueblo ya los sapea, dicen que no pueden sapearle ni con la fiscalía, ni con la policía ni la DIJIN, ni con el ejército, que porque todos son cómplices, entonces vienen y dicen: ‘ahh mire, no, que a usted lo sapeó la señora tal,’ entonces la vieja viene y le manda los paracos a que la maten, o eso es lo que le dicen a uno su, toca tener la jeta cerrada, jejeje.

[5]

Nos vinieron a sacar y eso, pero aquí en ese tiempo vinieron a vivir unos paracos y ellos como que impidieron que el ESMAD volviera porque eso se fueron y hablaron con el ESMAD y no volvieron, si claro como ellos [paracos] tenían lotes aquí.

[6]

Esa señora la fue a contra de nosotros y ella fue la que antes endeudó, fue que endeudó al municipio para traer los 300 antimotines (...) ella fue a pedir apoyo a donde el coronel Cabuya y el Coronel Cabuya le dijo que no, de una vez le dijo que no que el con la población civil no se metía, que le pidiera otra cosa pero que con la población civil no se metiera.

[7]

Van a decir que esto es ilegal, que es ilegal, y hasta razón tengan. No lo vamos a hacer ilegal, lo vamos a hacer legal, pero para legalizarlo, la única persona que puede hacerlo es el alcalde del pueblo. Entonces, escuchen bien, si la doctora Yanett no sale, no tenemos nada, porque los otros son contrarios de nosotros, ustedes saben cómo es la política.

[8]

Eso es normal. En todas partes hay que arreglar al alcalde y al Concejo. Eso pasa en toda Colombia (...) Eso no tiene nada de ilegal porque cada alcalde manda en su temporada (...) Yo quiero regalarle vivienda a la gente y ya le he solucionado el problema a mucha gente en Granada.

Appendix 2: Functional Regions and Regression Analysis

Functional Regions

I used the following formula to identify whether a municipality of origin and a municipality of destination of IDPs belonged to the same functional region, with the municipality of destination as a focal node of that region.

$$\frac{D_{b-a}}{D_b/M_b} \geq 2$$

D_{b-a} : represents the total number of displaced persons that moved from municipality b to municipality a between 1990 and 2015.

D_b : represents the total number of persons displaced from municipality b between 1990 and 2015.

M_b : represents the total number of municipalities that received displaced persons from municipality b between 1990 and 2015.

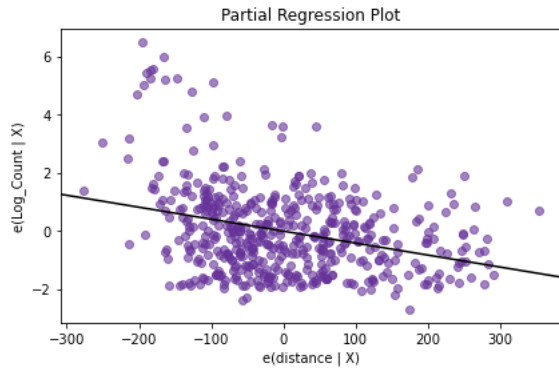
The rationale of this formula is that assuming there are no special conditions across municipalities receiving IDPs (a), a given municipality that expels population (b) should send, in principle, displaced persons proportionally across all its receiving municipalities (M_b). This means that D_{b-a} should be equal to D_b/M_b (the proportion of displaced persons per the total number of receiving municipalities of b). According to my formula, I identify a link between municipalities a and b when a received more than twice the number of IDPs it is expected to receive given an equal distribution of displaced persons across all the municipalities of destination of b . The functional region is created by adding all municipalities of origin (b) that are connected to a municipality of destination (a).

Regression Analysis

In addition to identifying functional regions, I conducted two regression analysis, one for Bogota and another for Granada. In each case I evaluated the total number of displaced persons who declared displacement in each city between 1990-2015 with respect to the total urban population of each municipality of origin (sending displaced persons to Bogota or Granada) in 1990 and the distance of each municipality of origin to the respective city. Each regression was made with standardized coefficients to be able to compare the magnitude of results for Bogota and Granada.

Results (below) shows that Granada has a higher negative relation with the distance of each municipality (-0.5 vs -0.2) whereas Bogota has a higher positive relation with the population of each municipality (0.9 vs 0.4). All relations are statistically significant at the 5% level. These results provide further evidence to argue that small cities tend to receive IDPs from nearby municipalities in contrast to large cities.

Granada



Dep. Variable:	Log_Count	R-squared:	0.132
Model:	OLS	Adj. R-squared:	0.129
Method:	Least Squares	F-statistic:	38.02
Date:	Wed, 31 Mar 2021	Prob (F-statistic):	4.28e-16
Time:	11:33:07	Log-Likelihood:	-883.29
No. Observations:	502	AIC:	1773.
Df Residuals:	499	BIC:	1785.
Df Model:	2		

	coef	std err	t	P> t	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	1.7703	0.063	28.130	0.000	1.647	1.894
log_pop_origin_st	0.3943	0.065	6.107	0.000	0.267	0.521
distance_st	-0.4798	0.065	-7.432	0.000	-0.607	-0.353
Omnibus:	81.799	Durbin-Watson:	1.307			
Prob(Omnibus):	0.000	Jarque-Bera (JB):	138.430			
Skew:	0.983	Prob(JB):	8.72e-31			
Kurtosis:	4.658	Cond. No.	1.26			

Notes:

[1] Standard Errors assume that the covariance matrix of the errors is correctly specified.

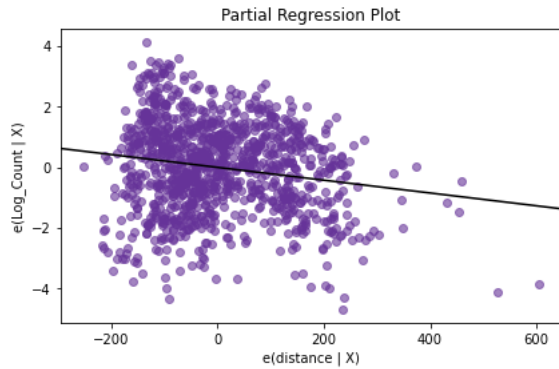
Log_Count: the logarithm of the number of displaced persons sent to Granada by municipality.

log_pop_origin_st: logarithm of the total population of each municipality of origin.

distance_st: the distance from each municipality of origin to Granada.

*Regression variables were standardized to compare the magnitudes of coefficients.

Bogota



Dep. Variable:	Log_Count	R-squared:	0.270
Model:	OLS	Adj. R-squared:	0.268
Method:	Least Squares	F-statistic:	202.3
Date:	Wed, 31 Mar 2021	Prob (F-statistic):	1.70e-75
Time:	11:38:34	Log-Likelihood:	-1976.1
No. Observations:	1098	AIC:	3958.
Df Residuals:	1095	BIC:	3973.
Df Model:	2		

	coef	std err	t	P> t	[0.025	0.975]
Intercept	4.6594	0.044	105.362	0.000	4.573	4.746
log_pop_origin_st	0.8990	0.045	20.001	0.000	0.811	0.987
distance_st	-0.2552	0.045	-5.677	0.000	-0.343	-0.167

Omnibus:	16.393	Durbin-Watson:	1.420
Prob(Omnibus):	0.000	Jarque-Bera (JB):	15.969
Skew:	-0.264	Prob(JB):	0.000341
Kurtosis:	2.737	Cond. No.	1.20

Notes:

[1] Standard Errors assume that the covariance matrix of the errors is correctly specified.

Log_Count: the logarithm of the number of displaced persons sent to Bogota by municipality.

log_pop_origin_st: logarithm of the total population of each municipality of origin.

distance_st: the distance from each municipality of origin to Bogota.

*Regression variables were standardized to compare the magnitudes of coefficients.