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Violence, Power and Participation: Building Citizenship in Contexts of Chronic Violence

Jenny Pearce
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Citizenship DRC

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Summary

This paper is about civil society participation in two contexts of chronic violence: Colombia and Guatemala. It explores the extent to which civil society organisations can build citizenship in such contexts and simultaneously address violence. It argues that civil society organisations can play a vital role in building citizenship and confronting violent actors and acts of violence. However, in order to address chronic, perpetuating violence and interrupt its transmission through time and space, it is important to clarify the relationship between power and violence. Conventional forms of dominating power correlate with violence. Loss of such power or a bid to gain it can lead to violence, particularly where social constructions of masculinity are affirmed by such behaviour. The paper asks whether the promotion of non-dominating forms of power are needed if we are to tackle the damaging effects on human relationships and progress of willingness to inflict direct physical hurt on the Other. Non-dominating forms of power focus on enhancing everyone's power potential and capacity for action and promoting communication. If non-violence and non-dominating power gradually become the social norm, this might enhance citizenship and participation in ways that tackle other forms of violence, such as structural violence.

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1 Introduction

> The only way to stop the war is political: to continue in these spaces of citizenship participation, to know the context and to learn to act within it.[1]

> Family Violence generates people or subjects with attitudes which are not favourable to participation: when a child is silenced, he/she will not participate because he/she knows that adults will not listen, or when a woman denounces ill treatment and the officials put the person who did the ill treatment in the right, she will begin to lose confidence in officials and not participate.[2]

> The State is responsible for violence; it also affects parents and the teachers do not have the vision nor preparation to seek viable solutions … the children learn violence … there is violence amongst the children in the school, yes, this is a very violent municipality. There has always been violence, but there is more violence amongst the poorest kids. The violence passes through the members of the family because it is a vicious cycle. And some of us are afraid to denounce things, it's a risk.[3]

These three quotations are from civil society organisation (CSO) activists living in two of Latin America's most violent contexts: Colombia (war torn) and Guatemala (post war). They reflect a spectrum of violences from war-related to state to neighbourhood, to school and to household. The persistent and recurring character of these violences, measured across three dimensions of time, space and levels of intensity, suggest that they could be called 'chronic'.[4]

The last quote refers to 'vicious cycles' of violence which result when violence has become embedded or routine in several socialisation spaces. Inter-generational

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cycles of violence are created when, for example, patterns of behaviour of parents, especially fathers, are reproduced by their children or vendettas are carried forward through the generations without interruption or resolution through the rule of law. Despite these violent contexts, however, all these CSO activists are committed to civic participation. How do they use space when it is often so bounded and limited by violence? How, when violence destroys 'social fabrics', do people nevertheless manage to rebuild enough to rekindle social interaction? And can such civil participation interrupt the inter-generational cycles of violence and build the foundations for legitimate and effective states able to provide physical as well as material security to all citizens?

This paper explores how meaningful citizenship of this kind can be constructed in contexts of chronic violence, using data from a field study of CSOs in Colombia and Guatemala. It explores whether and how CSOs work *on* as well as *in* violence. Building citizenship in chronic violence contexts, it argues, requires simultaneous attention to citizenship *and* to violence so that the intergenerational transmission of violence can be interrupted as well as rights embedded in social consciousness and practice.

Liberal citizenship is based on the idea that the relationship between state and citizen and between citizens themselves is regulated by the rule of law, the recognition of rights, and the legitimate monopoly of violence by the state. In some contexts, state formation processes have failed to guarantee either liberal or substantive citizenship (Kabeer 2005) i.e. the *effective* rather than formal exercise of rights and voice. Contexts of chronic violence place particular constraints on citizenship, both in terms of state-citizen and inter-citizen relationships, curtailing the freedom to speak, act and interact which must be its life-blood. Post-cold war state building discourses in the West have come to emphasise what Michael Mann (1986: 477) calls the *infrastructural* strength of states (power to coordinate civil society) over *despotic* power (power over civil society). This infrastructural strength of states arguably requires some comparable capacity within civil society. The meaning of rights and the role of state and private violence in limiting the exercise of rights needs to be understood sufficiently to ensure that despotic power never resumes and citizens relate to each other in civil or non-violent ways. Civil society organisations can extend citizenship by building that capacity.

In terms of Western historical development, civil society refers to the associative realm outside the state, market transactions and kinship and/or family bonds (Howell and Pearce 2001; Hann and Dunn1996 offer challenges to the Western models). Individuals voluntarily join with others in 'highly specific, unsanctified, instrumental, revocable links or bonds' (Gellner 1994: 100). This flexible and self-propelling associationalism was likened by Ernest Gellner (Gellner 1994: 97) to modular furniture, where you combine and recombine the parts. Civil society is therefore a heterogeneous arena, composed of formal organisations as well as informal movements, of uneven and unequal power, influence and beliefs. The struggle for liberal and substantive citizenship may not be part of the purposive action on the part of all these associations, and some may even support the agendas of violent actors. However, even a liberal interpretation of civil society, as an arena of unwilled action comparable to the invisible hand of the market, will stress its 'civil' or non military qualities, whose unintended consequences can

aggregate to form a counter-veiling power to the State and to foster non-violent civil interactions. A more left-wing interpretation would emphasise the importance of purposive and counter-hegemonic action from civil society organisations against the abuse of market as well as state power.

In the contexts we will be discussing, the State is not a benign force behind this 'civil-ising' process. State elites themselves use violence to preserve the status quo and unequal distribution of resources; they ally with private violent actors 'behind the scenes'; they tolerate and/or encourage routinised abuses by state security agents; they fail to deal with the sources of violence within society and even indirectly or directly gain from the illegal accumulation processes which take place through it. The violence within society is left embedded in socialisation spaces, creating a climate of insecurity which enables state elites to offer despotic power as a solution while they preserve their privileged access to wealth and resources. This may appeal even to some less privileged sectors of society who feel afraid and insecure, and for whom Hobbes' Leviathan appears to offer the most effective solution. In resisting such a pathway, CSOs help build societal democratic potential. However, this may not flourish in contexts of chronic violence without robust approaches to violence and insecurity.

Our two case studies countries, Guatemala and Colombia, exemplify these dynamics. They also provide evidence of how associational life not only survives in inventive ways in the midst of chronic violence but includes conscious action against violent state and non-state actors as well as those who use violence in the intimate spheres of the family. It is not only civil society organisations who do this. Individuals do act alone, also, but the risks are usually higher and the impact less extensive. The character of the local and national state (weak, collapsing, despotic, exclusionary) in chronic violence contexts also plays a role in shaping limits and possibilities of associative action. An enabling local state, even in an adverse national state context, can make a huge difference in the effectiveness of civil society organisations. The latter can in turn, strengthen the effectiveness of the state. And in today's global world, external actors also play a significant role. For example, donors may recognise and fund CSO initiatives, international human rights bodies offer protection to such initiatives and governments may act to isolate abusing states. This paper does not argue, therefore, that associations are the only form in which people act against violence, nor that associations are preconditioned to resist violence, nor that they can survive without external support. However, the 'civil' dimensions of the civil society arena and its promotion of public civil interaction and communication are components which contrast starkly with the way violence seeks to freeze interactions and social heterogeneity. At a minimum this preserves or creates possibilities for claiming and exercising rights and therefore citizenship and questions violence that might otherwise by sanctioned.

But while civil society organisations can work effectively to maintain the space, pluralities and social interactions which violence suppresses and even limit the use of violence, this does not address the 'chronic' quality of the violences i.e. its intensity and reproduction over time and space. Yet if chronic violence is to be overcome and prevented from transmission to the next generation and effective citizenship guaranteed over time, a lot more work is needed on how it has

become so embedded. This paper therefore straddles two terrains. The first is the empirical terrain of participation by civil society organisations in chronic violence contexts. The second is the theoretical terrain which might help us unpack the limitations of that participation and illuminate its greater potential. One of those limitations is a tendency to conflate power and violence conceptually, and to assume that by challenging certain kinds of power, violence is also challenged. This leaves civil society actors with a blunt conceptual instrument for addressing violence as opposed to acting within violent contexts. This paper will argue that it is important to challenge dominating power, the conventional form in which power is understood; loss of power and powerlessness do fuel violence. Dominating power becomes a highly prized commodity in contexts of chronic violence, where the legitimate monopoly of violence and distribution of resources is highly contested. To reduce the transmission of violence, however, new understandings of power in social as well as political relationships need to be understood. Power as capacity for action, for example, or as a potentiality which everyone can realise in themselves, is the opposite of violence. By transforming our understanding and use of power and promoting its non dominating forms, could non violence also gradually gain conventional status over time?

2 From violence to citizenship: participatory action in war-torn Colombia and post-war Guatemala

The two countries to be discussed here, Colombia and Guatemala, are among the most violent in the world and have been for many decades. Colombia is still immersed in a civil war which dates from 1964, while Guatemala's 36 year old civil war ended in a peace accord in 1996. Since then however, levels of violence have remained very high and in all the spaces of socialisation. We can define these two countries as in situations of chronic violence and section 6 gives the statistics for a range of violences in both countries over the five year period 1997–2002.

The chronic character of violence in both countries is corroborated by World Bank studies (Moser and McIlwaine 2004) which used a participatory urban appraisal methodology to elicit understandings of violence from people living in selected poor urban communities. In Colombia, they took communities living in the midst of four different kinds of violent contexts: three neighbourhoods of Bogota, the capital city, two neighbourhoods in cities long-connected with the drug cartels, two neighbourhoods in cities or towns with large numbers of displaced people and two neighbourhods in resource rich frontier towns. Through the participatory urban appraisal method, they found:

> Violence-related problems emerged as the single most important type of problem facing the urban poor. Within this category, drug use was identified as a major issue in many communities ... Focus groups in the nine communities listed an average of 25 different types of violence, with one community distinguishing 60 different types of violence. The various types of violence were

grouped into three-inter-related categories: political, economic, and social. Economic violence[5] was cited most often (54 per cent of all types of violence), followed by social violence (32 per cent)[6] and political violence (14 per cent).[7]

Moser and McIlwaine (2000: 2)

In Guatemala, there were nine research communities of four urban types. They included four localities directly affected by the conflict, one that was indirectly affected and one that was relatively untouched. The communities were located in the Western Highlands, the Southern and Eastern Lowlands as well as the capital region. Here the focus groups identified 41 different types of violence grouped in three categories, political, economic and social. The latter included alcoholism and sexual violence and was the most frequently cited, (51 per cent) of the different types; economic violence was associated mostly with gangs and robberies (46 per cent) and political violence referred to the police (3 per cent) (Moser and McIlwaine 2001: 8).

The researchers found similarities in the coping strategies which prevailed amongst the community focus groups in both countries and they sum these up as: avoidance, confrontation, conciliation and others, with the former by far the most common (Moser and McIlwaine 2004: 179). Avoidance included silence and changing one's movements. It is also interesting to note, that in the midst of widespread fear and mistrust in both countries, women-led community groups were found to play an important role in rebuilding social capital' (Moser and McIlwaine 2004: 174).

This paper is not based on the responses to violence of individuals within community settings, but on the role civil society organisations play when they develop purposive action for building citizenship in the midst of violence or mobilise constituencies for rights claiming while under threat from violence. This is a familiar context for collective action in the global South. Often such violence is treated as an unfortunate backcloth for collective action. But here in this paper it is treated as both contextual and substantive. Violence has a particular impact on space and participation, which I will argue later, is distinct from the exercise of dominating power and control. Building citizenship in such situations requires not only creative ways to act within

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5   'Economic violence related by most of the communities to drug consumption, particularly amongst young men. The causes of drug consumption were seen as intra-family violence and conflict, peer pressure and parental example. Other causes were given as the lack of organised recreational opportunities, especially sports and leisure facilities, and unemployment' (Moser and McIlwaine 2000: 3).

6   'Social violence describes the multiple violences experienced in the home context. Throughout the communities studied, young and old alike agreed that violence begins in the home...Urban residents identified some 20 different types of intra-household violence. Three types of intra-family violence emerged as most important: violence between spouses, violence against children and sexual abuse of children' (Moser and McIlwaine 2000: 31).

7   Political violence includes the 'perverse organisations' or those organisations which hurt the community as a whole and create 'perverse social capital'. Sixteen types of illegal groups were identified in the nine communities. 'Guerilla and paramilitary groups perpetrating political violence were universally feared in areas where their presence was dominant. Underlying this fear was the lack of trust among community members who were afraid to talk openly about the problem. The fear of reprisals eroded solidarity, replacing it with the belief that people must look after themselves to survive' (Moser and McIlwaine 2000: 4).

the violent context but also ways to reduce violence. I am exploring how civil society participation is affected by *and* acts on the violence which limits it.

The data for the discussion which follows comes from two field trips in 2005 which were part of a broader evaluation study of civil society participation in five countries of the global South.[8] In Colombia, the field research involved interviews with national civil society organisations in Bogota and field visits to local community-based and civil society organisations in Sincelejo, Medellín, Rionegro, Buga, Cali, and Jaimundi, as well as workshops which brought together a number of organisations in Cali and Bogota (Pearce and Vela 2005). A total of 24 organisations were included in the study. In Guatemala, it involved interviews and focus groups with 16 CSOs; this paper is based primarily on follow-up interviews and field visits with four CSOs (Gish, Navarro, Pearce and Pettit 2005).[9] Eight case studies from this study are included in section 5.

The data revealed a rich and varied spectrum of action in the midst of multiple forms of violence, from ongoing armed conflict to state, social and criminal violences after war has ended, to violence in the intimate space of the home. The creativity of CSOs stands out from the empirical evidence. Despite direct threats from armed actors or other risks, they use many spaces of participation to pursue a wide range of goals. These were mapped by the field researchers and are summarised for the two cases below in Table 2.1. Violence paradoxically both inhibits and promotes participation.

On the basis of the eight case studies in section 5, a number of important ways emerge through which CSOs build citizenship in chronic violence contexts. Case study one is of a locality in which armed actors have deeply penetrated the political, social and economic fields. Nothing takes place in any of these fields without taking account of the threat of violence. In such a situation, civil society organisations have to operate semi-clandestinely, and many feel the arena of 'civil society' has ceased to exist. But in so doing they maintain civil interactions; they prevent the complete closure and fixing of boundaries for such interactions; they inform the wider national and international community of the violence; and they expose the lack of legitimacy of the armed actors. The attention of one CSO to child and family violence, while narrowly focused given the context, allows the possibility of building connections between that and other forms of violence in the town. The second case study of Medellín shows that low profile work over years can lay the basis for enhanced citizenship building when the form of political leadership changes and new opportunities emerge. Medellín's CSOs worked in the

midst of multiple violences for almost two decades. As well as supporting civil organising in neighbourhoods contested by insurgents, paramilitary armies and state security forces, they promoted the meaningful use of new spaces for participation which had opened up with the Constitution of 1991. Colombia's paradox is that this innovative Constitution was partly introduced in an effort to bring previous armed actors into the political process. However the economic system remained deeply unequal and the practice of politics still centred around patron-client relationships of one form or another. The threat of violence intensified throughout the country in the wake of its promulgation. The long term work of these CSO's built up experience and capacity which could enable a more independent liberal minded leadership to implement a more radical form of participation and take new steps to address violence. This may be only one factor in the significant reduction in violence in Medellín. Only time will tell how sustainable it will be, but citizenship in Medellín is experiencing a real advance.

Table 2.1 Intra-spatial goals of CSOs in contexts of chronic violence

Colombia	Guatemala
● Decision-making	● Pressure
● Debate	● Protest
● Building agreements	● Lobbying, advocacy
● Influence	● Negotiation
● Interlocution	● Denunciation
● Lobbying	● Accompaniment
● Protest	● Mass communication (via the press)
● Accountability	● Information and knowledge
● Visibility	● Occupation
● Pressure	● Negotiation
● Articulation	● Proposition (of laws)
● Follow up	● Defence
● Forming public opinion	● Interlocution (between peasants and the state)
● Scrutiny and recommendations	● Community strengthening
● Resistance	● Cultural recovery
● Proposal	● Dignifying
● Negotiation	
● Peace-building	
● Complaint	
● Encounter	
● Mobilisation	

Case study three discusses the women of the organisation AMOR of the eastern part of Antioquia department, who have gone through formation processes with a CSO keen to empower women to enter the public sphere and gain a sense of citizenship. As they began to gain confidence, an insurgent group arrived, shortly followed by the state army and private paramilitary armies. They began to close down the public sphere. These women however have built their network around

challenging these actors and the violent abuse of women and children which accompanied their arrival. They have built capacity for action in the region and formed an important part of municipal efforts to build civil resistance against the armed groups. The link between activating power as capacity for action is summed up by one of the women who said, 'I began to gain tools and arguments for speaking. I worked in villages, and saw abuses of the army against women and children, robberies. We met and talked about what to do, that it was important to do something that would call attention to things because we had spoken to them (the armed actors) and there was no change.'[10]

The final case study from Colombia highlights the importance of civil society attention to the intimate violences within the family space. The organisation discussed here is made of young mostly African Caribbean men and women, who live in the midst of all kinds of violence but have focused their attention on the intimate sphere. Like the women of AMOR, they have begun to articulate the connections between the intimate violences and those in the other sphere. Capacity to make these connections depends a great deal on the victims of those violences, particularly women and children, gaining a capacity to act in the public sphere.

Our Guatemalan case studies are of civil society organisations building citizenship in a post-war context of political and social violences. Struggles to protect the environment and for land justice risk lives, and the civil society organisations involved in these struggles have to move between spaces and use varied forms of action to promote their claims. This is a country which only recently emerged from decades of dictatorship and war. The Peace Accord opened up spaces for participation, but the state remains weak and undermined by the ongoing power of the armed forces and the rise of illegal criminal groups. Extreme social injustice and poverty have persisted, making it hard to argue that formal participatory spaces are meaningful. Mayan women in the third Guatemalan case study work with victims of systematic state violence. They remind us that a prerequisite for participation is your individual sense of self-worth, something that violence, gender discrimination and racism erodes. They use therapeutic methods to help victims to gain inner confidence. 'Participation is to do with the construction of spaces in order to build a healthier more dignified life … including therapeutic spaces from within ourselves … so that we are prepared and in better conditions to participate'.[11] Our fourth case study is of a CSO working with women's organisations in the urban periphery of Guatemala City, where hundreds of women have been murdered in what some refer to as 'femicide'. The women are encouraged to act collectively in the face of public and private violences and this has enabled them to take on the politicians and demand recognition of the claims of women. 'We went round to the Councillors and asked for an appointment. They kept us waiting until 8.00 pm and didn't want to meet with us because we wanted a Women's Office. Now, they listen to us and give us space to organise as women. Now we have begun a training school. And everything began because of the public violence.'[12]

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10   Interview, 7 April 2005.
11   Maya Kaq'la, 22 August 2005.
12   Focus Group with 12 women from municipalities in Chimaltenango, 23 August 2005.

The same CSO has helped young people in another region of the country to become human rights observers. The young people have gained understanding of the importance of defending rights against the abuses committed by gangs, the state and parents.

All these case studies illustrate how CSOs foster the rights consciousness, individual and group confidence, and public action which build citizenship in these particularly adverse contexts. When contexts change, there is accumulated capacity to take advantage of new moments to push the possibilities further. Participation in violent contexts has to confront power as well as violence. The way power affects participation has been thoroughly explored by the IDS Participation Group (Brock, Cornwall and Gaventa 2001; Cornwall 2002; Cornwall and Schattan 2004). Steven Lukes' (2002) three dimensional view of power has been influential in unpacking the subtle as well as obvious ways that dominating power operates and persuades people to accept decisions against their objective interests. Gaventa (2005) has translated this into 'the power cube', whereby three kinds of (dominating) power: visible, hidden and invisible, are on one axis, and space and place/levels on the others.[13] Gaventa's aim is not to 'represent' power, but to offer a devise for examining how power impacts on participation in different contexts. This devise was used productively in our own field research. But we also asked whether the exercise of power has the same impact as violence on participation, and also what might be the outcome if we thought of power as non-dominating rather than dominating? The case studies suggest that the relationship between violence, power and participation is quite complex. Unpacking that relationship might enhance the contribution of civil society participation to the more longitudinal effects required to address chronic violence.

3 Violence, power and participation

Violence is often interchanged with power when power is seen as a way that A can effect B in a manner contrary to B's interests (Lukes 2005: 109), i.e. dominating power. Is violence equivalent to dominating power or does it impact on participation in a distinct way? We must begin this discussion with clarifying how we understand these two concepts.

3.1 Violence: some key conceptual issues

The contexts of chronic violence discussed in this paper, are also contexts of high levels of racial and other discriminations, poverty and inequality. The discussion around the meaning of violence therefore leads us to the problem of whether we

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13   Visible power is the observable form of power, the rules, structures, institutions and procedures of decision-making; hidden power is the way powerful people and institutions maintain their influence by controlling who is invited to the decision making arena and what gets on the agenda. Invisible power shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation (Gaventa 2005: 9).

use a restricted (direct physical violence) or wider (symbolic violence) or very wide (structural violence) definition. All these forms of violence matter. They impact on participation and the aggregated effect of them perpetuates violence in our case studies. But while they all need to be addressed, focusing on one form of violence and the particular tasks required to tackle it may open the way to addressing the others. A second conceptual issue arises from the way violence takes place in social relationships and in spaces which are constructed through such relationships. This raises a key question for this paper which is the way violence is transmitted through these spaces as well as through time. But is this universal across cultures? The final reflection on violence is whether there are grounds for thinking about violence as a cross-cultural phenomenon of the human condition.

3.1.1 Violence: a 'wide' or 'restricted' definition?

Violence is somatic, it relates to the body. However, the debate on whether violence is best understood in a narrow sense as the intentional infliction of physical injury on the body of self or other, or should be widened to embrace all ways in which human physical suffering is induced, has been ongoing for several decades. Johan Galtung launched this debate with his 1969 article on Violence, Peace and Peace Research (Galtung 1969). Galtung wished to draw attention to the injuries and pain caused by socially unjust structures (structural violence) as well as direct person-to-person violence. In a later paper (Galtung 1990), he argued that both structural violence and direct violence can be legitimised and made acceptable to society through the symbolic sphere of human life, and he added the concept of 'cultural violence' to express this. Galtung does not actually subsume all violence into one concept, e.g. 'structural violence'. 'Direct violence' is retained as a distinct form of violence, however, it is extended to reveal its impact on a range of human needs: on survival, well-being, identity and freedom. Structural violence for Galtung has exploitation as its central characteristic; it can also leave marks on the human body, but also on the mind and the spirit.

We are reminded that there are many means other than direct person-to-person violence by which pain and suffering are inflicted on the human body; very few of these are recognised as violence. Infant mortality, for example, as an avoidable form of premature death has only relatively recently been deemed unacceptable (Scheper Hughes 1992: 275). What is considered violence has a great deal to do with 'recognition and misrecognition' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:168).[14] Pierre Bourdieu (2004) has made a powerful case to include 'symbolic violence' in our understanding of violence, given its effects on the body which are even not recognised by those who experience them. Symbolic does not mean the opposite of real and actual, he argues. It is a 'form of power that is exerted on bodies, directly and as if by magic, without any physical constraint' (Bourdieu 2004: 340). It

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14 Misrecognition, argues Bourdieu, is 'the fact of recognizing a violence which is wielded precisely inanasmuch as one does not perceive it as such. What I put under the term of 'recognition', then is the set of fundamental, prereflexive assumptions that social agents engage by the mere fact of taking the world for granted, of accepting the world as it is, and of finding it natural because *their mind is constructed according to cognitive structures that are issued out of the very structures of the world'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 168).

works because it releases dispositions in the body which have already been deposited by the structures of domination. Bourdieu graphically describes how these translate into physical manifestations.

> The practical acts of knowledge and recognition of the magical frontier between the dominant and the dominated that are triggered by the magic of symbolic power and through which the dominated, often unwittingly, sometimes unwillingly, contribute to their own domination by tacitly accepting the limits imposed, often take the form of *bodily emotions* – shame, humiliation, timidity, anxiety, guilt – or *passions and sentiments* – love, admiration, respect. These emotions are all the more powerful when they are betrayed in visible manifestations such as blushing, stuttering, clumsiness, trembling, anger, or impotent rage, so many ways of submitting, even despite oneself and 'against the grain' [*a son corps defendant*], to the dominant judgement, sometimes in internal conflict and division of self, of experiencing the insidious complicity that a body slipping from the control of consciousness and will maintains with the censures inherent in the social structures.
>
> Bourdieu (2004: 341)

Recognition and misrecognition of violence is also apparent in the differential way in which violence is rejected, accepted or even lauded. As Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 2) put it,

> What constitutes violence is always mediated by an expressed or implicit dichotomy between legitimate/illegitimate, permissible or sanctioned acts, as when the 'legitimate' violence of the militarized state is differentiated from the unruly, illicit violence of the mob or of revolutionaries. Depending on one's political-economic position in the world (dis)order, particular acts of violence may be perceived as 'depraved' or 'glorious.
>
> Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 2)

We have to be alert therefore to selective definitions of violence and the contestations over legitimacy and illegitimacy. The argument for a wide definition of violence is sometimes part of a broader challenge to what is conceived as a liberal blindness to violences other than those determined and identified as such by the state, whose own violence enjoys legitimacy even when it is invoked unjustly, is used disproportionately and to defend privilege. The difference between legitimate and non-legitimate violence, just and unjust violence is not so clear cut. If violence is understood as a means to an end, the question is left open as to who is to judge what are just or unjust ends.

A wider understanding of violence is important. However, we can differentiate the forms in which human pain is caused and in the process continue to highlight one form: direct physical violence. For the purpose of this paper, where we are trying to explore how violence impacts on participation in a distinct way to power, we need to be clear that we are talking about intentional direct physical hurt on the body and, for this paper, on the body of the Other.[15] The violence we are concerned

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15   Violence can be inflicted on one's own body, of course.

with is inextricably related with the 'structurally ambivalent relation of self and other' (de Vries and Weber 1997: 13) and thus can only be explored, as will be discussed in a later section, in the context of human relationships and social interactions.

To highlight direct physical violence does not imply that its effects are in any sense straightforward. Even direct violence can have longer term effects on the body other than the immediate moment of infliction, and indeed 'violence can never be understood solely in terms of its physicality – force, assault or the infliction of pain – alone. Violence also includes 'assaults on the personhood, dignity, sense of worth or value of the victim' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004: 1). These other effects need to be understood although this is not easy. A child's learning difficulties may be due to experience of childhood abuse, but this may not be apparent from observation. A catatonic state induced by experience of violence, may be seen as mere silence unless its relationship to the violent act can be traced. As the women from Maya Kak'la have emphasised, individuals bring all kinds of experiences of abuse to the participatory space, and they often need therapeutic healing before people can use that space effectively. Researching violence is very challenging, and as de Vries and Weber put it,

> … although violence determines the structure of everyday life, of the individual and collective self, from within, its very ground, manifestation, and effects are often more elusive than can be grasped by cognitive or hermeneutical procedures for establishing and understanding reality. In that sense, violence – whether past or present, hidden or manifest, excessive or mitigated – can be said to impose a certain difficulty of articulation. Its catastrophic and traumatic aspects call for more than moral indignation, theoretical cognition, or even aesthetic imagination. What seems to be required, in excess of these categories, is a sensitivity to the indeterminate 'feelings', 'signs of history', 'ruins,' and 'silences' for which no generally accepted or accessible idioms are ready to hand.

> de Vries and Weber (1997: 13)

A focus on violence as direct physical hurt highlights one major source of fear and insecurity which inhibits the participation of those who might want to address those other causal factors. It also enables us to explore the impact of this kind of violence wherever it occurs, rather than to be selective of the spaces where it is to be explored, and in so doing encourages us to reflect on our responsibilities as human beings for the persistence of this particular source of suffering. It is one form of violence which could be diminished, and this is one of C.A.J. Coady's most persuasive arguments against the wider definition:

> It may well be that quite different techniques, strategies and remedies are required to deal with the social disorder of (restricted) violence than are needed to deal with such issues as wage injustice, educational inequalities and entrenched privilege. The use of the wide definition seems likely to encourage the cosy but ultimately stultifying belief that there is one problem, the problem of (wide) violence, and hence it must be solved as a whole with one set of techniques.

> C.A.J. Coady (1999: 31)

Not everyone would agree that 'restricted' violence can in reality be addressed without dealing with structural violence. However, it has been equally clear that efforts to deal with structural violence have failed to eliminate 'restricted' violence.

3.1.2 Social relationships and the transmission of violence

An argument in favour of the wider view is that it enables us to see the continuum of violence, between the direct political, structural, symbolic and everyday violences. It makes us think about how, for instance, the violence of poverty, inequality, hunger and disease translate into intimate and domestic violence (Scheper Hughes and Bourgois 2004: 1). These are types of violence and they help us in the classification and ordering process and to pose the issues of linkages. However, a focus on direct physical violence highlights the complementary factor in the transmission of violence; its exercise in particular social spaces and social relationships. Everyday violences take place in spaces of the home, the neighbourhood, the school etc. Political violence emanating from state and non-state armed actors also takes place in spaces, sometimes the home, but more often the street, the neighbourhood, police stations, prisons etc. And spaces are about social relationships and interactions, and thus when violence penetrates those spaces it also colours and contaminates those relationships, or conversely those social relationships are already contaminated by violence which is then further reproduced. The interaction of different types of violence with the spaces in which they are executed allows transmission and reproduction of violence over time through the social relations embedded in those spaces.

Bourdieu maintains that the logic of gender domination is the paradigmatic form of symbolic violence, and thus embeds that form of violence in male/female social relationships. This, he argues, is because symbolic violence is accomplished through a relation of domination which is beyond consciousness and will (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 172), and in which even the body has come to 'think itself' in terms of the social relations of dominated and dominant. These relations are in a constant reproduction, and we could argue that acts of direct physical violence reinforce them at given moments. We need to better understand those moments, of course. Violence against women in the domestic sphere and in the battlefield, has only relatively recently been acknowledged for the problem it is, and we have hardly begun to address the evidence that the overwhelming majority of violence is perpetrated by men (Pearce 2006). Social constructions of masculinity often reward men when they exercise violence, in contrast to social constructions of femininity, just as men are more 'masculine' when they use dominating power and women are more 'feminine' when they are submissive.

When we discuss the impact of violence on participation, we need to understand the social relationships in which it is being perpetrated and by whom it is exercised. If men are the main agents of violence, how does that impact on women's participation in particular? Direct physical violence has been used by all human beings, including women. What are the social relationships and socialisation processes, the identities and social hierarchies which trigger its exercise as opposed to other ways to pursue domination, control, challenge or resistance? This leads us to speculate on the reverse. What changes need to take place in social relationships for violence to be condemned in many more spaces than it is today? Different

forms of participation in violent contexts may help us to learn about the process of de-legitimising violence in different spaces. It is noteworthy that attitudes toward some forms of violence have indeed changed over time, as Elizabeth Stanko in her studies of violence in the UK points out.

> So-called street violence – where stranger attacks stranger – still elicits widespread condemnation and fuels fear. However, the growing intolerance of violence towards children and within intimate relationships demonstrates that attitudes have indeed changed. The UK legislation that recognised racist violence as a 'special' form of aggravation in an offence is another illustration that tolerance is now different from before. There are some normative features in how agreement is reached and disagreement is voiced about the impact of violence on groups of people. In some ways, the willingness to make 'ordinary' violence visible heightens awareness about the damage of violence, and this is a good thing. It demonstrates that we are now in a position to challenge the impact of violence for groups of people where before, such violence was 'tolerated' as a condition for living in the world.

> Elizabeth Stanko (2003: 12)

Many of the case studies illustrate the way CSOs are contributing to de-legitimising violence in the intimate spheres as well as violence in more public spheres of human interaction. The women of AMOR, for example, have established linkages between the two through the collective acts of denunciation they have made, against the violence between armed actors and their victims, and the collateral violence of increased abuse of women and children.

3.1.3 Violence and culture

The violences that are sanctioned and condemned vary over time but also across cultures. Is it possible to talk of the effects of violence on participation, as if violence is a universal, sociological category? If a society in question does not view something as 'violent', or sees it as sanctioned rather than punishable, then how will it affect participation? Is our discussion around violence merely a reflection of Western, Anglo-Saxon social constructions of the meanings of violence which we then universalise? Violence, it is important to note, may be a physical act but it is also an expressive and performative one, with meaning for its perpetrators and its victims, and even rules and systems (Whitehead 2004). Anthropologists point, for instance, to the way most societies organise violence, specifying the weapons and those who can and cannot be hurt (Riches 1986). Sometimes, also, violence is exerted invisibly in non-Western societies through witchcraft and sorcery, and that makes us reflect on the meaning as well as the effect the act of violence is expected to deliver to its victim.

The anthropologist, David Riches (1986: 9–10), argues that a cross-cultural definition of violence is possible. This is based (echoing our own emphasis on the relational features of violence) on the underlying tensions being played out between performer, victim and witnesses to violence. It is possible even when there are some societies who do not possess a word equivalent to the Anglo Saxon word 'violence'. Riches asks us to focus, as we are trying to do in this paper, on the act

of violence itself,[16] performed in a 'basic triangle of violence'. He argues that one aspect of this triangle is the ability of all involved to recognise the act of violence, even if it occurs in different levels (e.g. family or community) and even if one's own experience is limited to one level. This may be less clear in ritualised acts of violence which are not meant to hurt as such, but even in these cases they are often designed as threats of violence or to encourage readiness to be violent. For Riches, violence is cross-culturally a social and cultural resource of great potency and efficacy because it is both instrumental and expressive (Riches 1986: 11). Images of violence communicate messages very rapidly as they are so readily understood across social and cultural divisions.

The argument that we can focus on violence as an intentional act of injury on the body of the Other within a set of social relationships, does not of course tell us about when and why it is exercised. The role violence plays in any social context will need to be explained in ways appropriate to that context. However, the argument that there may be something universal in the use of violence, as we have defined it, across cultures and spaces of social interaction, would suggest that addressing it is of particular significance to human interaction. And if we can explore how humans interact when living in conditions of chronic violence, and how nevertheless, some people manage to maintain civil and public sociability we might learn more about how violence can be addressed. Civil society participation may become a counter performative set of actions to the violent ones.

3.2 Is violence just another form of power?

We have clarified our definition of violence. We turn now to the difficult question of whether violence is just another form of power or whether it has distinct qualities whose effects on participation need to be understood differently. Would such an enhanced understanding then impact on reducing it and its intergenerational transmission? In the quotes below, both Hannah Arendt and Michel Foucault take the view that violence can be differentiated from power.

> Power needs no justification, being inherent in the very existence of political communities; what it does need is legitimacy. The common treatment of these two words as synonymous is no less misleading and confusing than the current equation of obedience and support. Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than any action that then may follow. Legitimacy, when challenged, bases itself on an appeal to the past, while justification relates to an end that lies in the future. Violence can be justifiable, but it never will be legitimate. Its justification loses in plausibility the farther its intended end recedes into the future. No-one questions the use of violence in self-defence, because the danger is not only clear but also present, and the end justifying the means is immediate.
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> Arendt (1969: 52)

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16   Riches defines violence as 'an act of physical hurt deemed legitimate by the performer and illegitimate by (some) witnesses' (Riches: 1986: 8).

A man who is chained up and beaten is subject to force being exerted over him. Not power. But if he can be induced to speak, when his ultimate recourse could have been to hold his tongue, preferring death, then he has been caused to behave in a certain way. His freedom has been subjected to power. He has been submitted to government. If an individual can remain free, however little his freedom may be, power can subject him to government. There is no power without potential refusal or revolt.

Foucault (1990: 83–4)

The idea that violence and power are distinct even opposites is counter-intuitive, given that violence, amongst other things, appears often to be about making A do something contrary to B's interests. Yet why is direct physical force used to do this sometimes and not others? The answer could be that violence is the opposite of the kind of power which is least understood and acknowledged i.e. non-dominating power. This kind of power is more about the potential capacity all human beings have to act rather than their capacity to dominate an Other. It is the latter which, when threatened or denied, generates violence.

3.2.1 Conflicting and consensual views of power

It has been suggested (Haugaard 2002: 2) that we are doomed to accept that the meaning of power changes in different contexts to such an extent that there is no single definition of power which covers all usage. We had similar problems with respect to violence and whether a relatively universal definition is acceptable, or merely masks the partial way in which some violences are given weight over others by ruling elites and counter elites. Hannah Arendt stands out in our discussion because she specifically pitted violence against power and argued that they are opposites. The reason for this is that Arendt had a consensual not a conflictive view of power.

Haugaard (2003: 4) argues that in fact Arendt's view of power does allow for conflict and that the kind of consensus Arendt refers to is an ontological consensus rather than about outcomes. This widens the scope of conflict in her understanding of power. 'A shared interpretative horizon which enables members of a society to make sense of the world in a largely similar way is a form of consensus which does not preclude conflict with regard to specific goals. In fact, unless conflict is entirely based upon physical coercion, conflict presupposes predictability which, in turn, is premised upon some form of consensus on social order' (Haugaard 2003: 4).

Arendt's consensual power, for Haugaard, is thus rather an act of structural confirmation of the polity, such that the conflicts and divisions which do occur take place within a framework of peoples' ongoing willingness to validate its structures, if only tacitly. Arendt's basic concern is with the construction of power and 'the consensus building force of communication' (Habermas quoted in Hanssen 1997: 249). Power as potentiality originating in some ontological consent to act in concert with others, is thus the recovery in some way of the capacity for action in everyone rather than the few who appear to exercise it. We do not have to continue to tacitly confirm structures (Haugaard 2003) and we do not have to see power always as negative, as psychotherapist Rollo May expressed it some decades ago.

Far from treating power only as a term of abuse, one which is to be applied to our enemies (i.e. they are power-driven, but we are motivated only be benevolence, reason and morality), I use it as a description of a fundamental aspect of the life process. It is not to be identified with life itself; there is much in human existence – like curiosity and love and creativity – that may be and normally is related to power but is not to be called power in itself. But if we neglect the factor of power, as is the tendency in our day of reaction against the destructive effects of the misuse of power, we shall lose values that are essential to our existence as human.

May (1974: 20)

Power, for Arendt, emerges when human beings come together. It keeps the public realm in existence as the space where acting and speaking people realise their potentialities. 'Power preserves the public realm and the space of appearance, and as such it is also the lifeblood of the human artifice, which, unless it is the scene of action and speech, of the web of human affairs and relationships and the stories engendered by them, lacks its ultimate *raison d'etre'* (Arendt 1958 reprinted 1998: 204). Unlike force or strength, power means potential rather than a unit that is measurable and finite, and where it is not actualised it 'passes way' (Arendt 1958 reprinted 1998: 200). Power makes political action possible and is therefore a pure end in itself, not a means to something. But this has led Habermas to critique her for 'reducing politics to a pristine, violence-free realm' (Hanssen 1997: 249), because she removed anything that is strategic from politics by calling it violence. 'Arendt pays the price of screening all *strategic elements* out of politics as 'violence', severing politics from its ties to the economic and social environment in which it is embedded via the administrative system, and being incapable of coming to grips with appearances of *structural violence*' (Habermas quoted in Hanssen 1997: 249).

This critique does seem to reflect a failure in Arendt's work to address the material and structured way power embeds itself in social relations and institutions to protect the interests of the few, becoming in the process 'dominating power' which limits rather than generates the potentialities of the many. Dominating power and violence do not appear to be in radical opposition, but two ends of a spectrum perhaps, with the gap between narrowing or widening according to whether those with power need to defend themselves against those trying to gain it. However, Arendt's view of power as potentiality, which arises from the concert of human beings, is very similar to some contemporary and feminist views of power as generative and about capacity for action. Her argument that *that* kind of power is the opposite of violence makes more sense. Arendt is interested in the non-coercive force of inter-subjective communication and consensus building; she had a strong interest in participatory democracy and outbreaks of civic action (Canovan in Arendt 1958 reprinted 1998: viii). But power is vulnerable to violence. Violence can destroy power, she wrote (Arendt 1969: 56), although it can never substitute for it (Arendt 1958 reprinted 1998: 202). She argues that force and powerlessness often go together politically (Arendt 1958 reprinted1998: 202), and tyrannical government is an expression of that.

This is another counterintuitive but nevertheless provocative insight. Violence appears as power diminishes, or as legitimacy weakens at the same time as the

human capacity to act and speak together is eroded. This does have resonances for contexts of chronic violence. Arendt is here referring to absolute tyranny, but some extreme cases of violence (see the case of Sincelejo, Colombia) suggest that it is indeed impotence (the opposite of potentiality) which is generated through violence. Impotence contradicts 'the essential human condition of plurality, the acting and speaking together, which is the condition of all forms of political organization' (Arendt 1958 reprinted 1998: 202). Civil society participation might then be said to recreate power as potentiality when it brings people together to act and speak in defiance of the logic of violence.

In a similar vein to Arendt, Barry Barnes, another consensual theorist of power (Barnes 2002: 124) argues that the powerful do not have power as such but the discretion to use power which they can do in dominating (power over) or non-dominating (power to) ways. Power or rather social power (that which resides in a society) is the capacity for action within it, argues Barnes. The important additional element here, is that this view of power does not deny its uneven distribution, but it points to the fact that very often that unevenness is routinised and unquestioned or tacitly confirmed by the powerless or power poor in such a way that they are not aware that they could also be participating in the constitution of power. When we talk of participation, we are thinking about challenging this routinisation and enhancing the capacity for action of the subjugated, the poor and the powerless. When a ruler or a government perceives that this challenge is gaining ground, that is precisely the moment when violence may be used to preserve the power of the status quo and this is a sign that their power has been diminished.

3.2.2 Powerlessness and violence

One reason why Arendt's view of power as the opposite of violence is questioned is that while it makes some sense when thinking of oppressive violence emanating from the state or para-state and private armed actors, what about violence in the name of liberation? Guerilla insurgents, national liberation struggles and revolutionary uprisings may use violence, but the justification could command a great deal of consent. This use of violence may well also be a response to powerlessness. Arendt would still argue that it is very hard to create legitimate polities out of violent uprisings however justified. Some would argue that the most successfully legitimated are those which use the least amount or almost no violence; Gandhi's resistance to colonial rule and Mandela's leadership of the African National Congress and the Eastern European revolutions of 1989 would be examples. The decision of Mexico's Zapatistas in their Sixth Declaration from the Lacandon of 2005, to re-balance the political and military weight in their struggle, is a contemporary example.

A very different connection between powerlessness and violence is the link highlighted by psychotherapists, for example, who have worked with male serial killers, between lack of self-esteem and status and violence (Pearce 2006). If society affirms men in their masculinity through the quota of dominating power available to them and their willingness to use violence as a means to gain such power, then powerlessness may well contribute to male violence. This tendency may be highlighted in young males who need to establish their dominating power with respect to their peers.

Powerlessness does not always result in violence, however. The actualisation of power or making use of capacity to act is what prevents it from dissipating. That is what we are talking about when we discuss civil society participation as a means of overcoming powerlessness through participatory action in contexts of violence. Arendt's view of power remains counter-intuitive and normative to many because people are so used to the idea of power in the form of domination, direct, latent or indirect, with the aim of ensuring compliance and assume it resides only in the individual or institutions who use it. That those who lack embedded and dominating power might also have power is often ignored. In other words, we recognise power as potentialities much less than power as domination. What is interesting about consensual views of power, is that they allow us to recognise that even the dominated have power. This idea is well expressed by Barry Barnes.

> Our very language and linguistic idiom are structured around this emanationist conception. Dominant figures are 'powerful', as if jugs of power have been poured down their throats. They 'possess' power, like the finery they wear and the silver in their dining rooms. Power is 'divided' or 'distributed' amongst them like the spoils of war or the food at a banquet. Custom being what it is, one must needs employ this emanationist idiom, at least to some extent. But it remains the case that power, capacity for action, is actually right down there amongst the supposedly powerless, and that it is only discretion in use which is strongly concentrated at the higher levels of society.

> Barnes (2002: 128)

This helps us to explain why, in violent contexts, people do manage to overcome the impotence generated by violence and create plurality, social interaction and actualise their power. Indeed, the fact that they do so in such contexts highlights further the characteristics of power that are emphasised in this paper. Arendt herself was committed to a view of humanity as capable of fulfilling itself through active citizenship and working together to solve problems.

In our discussion of participatory space in violent contexts, Arendt's view of power will only offer partial illumination, but it does focus our minds on the idea that power as potentiality is both a source of participatory action and speech in such contexts which protects and/or restores those critical dimensions of human interaction, plurality and sociability. She also enables us to see violence as a response to powerlessness, not only of those threatened with the loss of dominating power but also from those frustrated in their ability to fulfil their potentiality through action and speech. Her views have some backing in the studies of violent behaviour by psychotherapists (Rollo May, for instance).

> … for violence has its breeding ground in impotence and apathy. True, aggression has been so often and so regularly escalated into violence that anyone's discouragement and fear of it can be understood. But what is not seen is that the state of powerlessness, which leads to apathy … is the source of violence. As men make people powerless, we promote their violence rather than its control. Deeds of violence in our society are performed largely by those trying to establish their self-esteem, to defend their self-image, and to demonstrate that they, too, are significant. Regardless of how derailed or wrongly used these motivations may be or how destructive their expression, they are still the manifestations of positive

interpersonal needs. We cannot ignore the fact that, no matter how difficult their redirection may be, these needs themselves are potentially constructive. Violence arises not out of superfluity of power but out of powerlessness. As Hannah Arendt has so well said, violence is the expression of impotence.

May (1974: 23)

3.2.3 Power, violence and space

We have already referred to space with respect to violence. Violence takes place in spaces which are composed of social relationships; it is a social product that is also fundamental to the exercise of power (Cornwall 2002). John Gaventa (2005) has come up with a definition of space from the perspective of citizen action and participation. ''Spaces' are seen as opportunities, moments and channels where citizens can act to potentially affect policies, discourses, decisions and relationships which affect their lives and interests' (Gaventa 2005).

The Participation, Power and Social Change (PPSC) Team at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) have made an important contribution to the debate on participation which has deconstructed space in terms of who shapes it, why and for whom? So spaces can be 'provided/closed', 'invited', 'claimed/created'. And power within the spaces can be 'invisible', 'hidden' and 'visible'. I wish to complement this understanding of space from the point of view of violent contexts. I will use Doreen Massey's propositions (Massey 1999: 28) on the politics of spatiality as my benchmarks. They reflect many of the same theoretical sources as the Participation, Power and Social Change team have drawn on and are consistent with the group's perspective. The three key propositions from Massey are:

1. Space is a product of interrelations. It is constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny.
2. Space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity … it is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of more than one voice. Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space.
3. *Because* [Massey's italics] space is the produce of relation-between, relations which are necessarily embedded material practices *which have to be carried out* [Massey's italics], is always in a process of becoming; it is always being made. It is never finished, never closed.

Massey (1999: 28)

It is precisely these propositions which are contradicted by violence. Interactions are limited, controlled, or prohibited in violent contexts. Violence is about homogeneity. Violence puts fixed boundaries on space, boundaries which may or may not be visible but which nevertheless people recognise as life risking frontiers should they transgress them.[17] The fluidity and *constructedness* (Massey 1999: 29) of space

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17 There are many examples in civil wars or deep-seated violent conflicts where these 'invisible' but life-threatening boundaries exist e.g. the bus shelter in Belfast, which I visited in 2003 and which is known to belong to the Protestant community without any external indication for the outsider to the sectarian divides. Catholics risk serious injury if they use it.

disappears and people learn to live and move in restricted areas. Space as a 'public' open encounter is reduced and 'private' space enlarges its role in everyday life. In addition, time also takes on distinct dimensions; curfews and increased violence in the hours of darkness, all impact on when people feel they can use space and restrict their movements. Many accept the 'normality' of violence and this anaesthetises, generating the 'impotence' which Arendt refers to. Violence generates emotional responses of insecurity, fear, terror, which people internalise and carry into spaces. The homogenising impact of violence is reinforced, and links violence with processes of forced displacement, 'ethnic cleansing', migration and exile all of which have spatial implications.

Where participation takes place in such contexts, it acquires a range of additional qualities to participation in non-violent contexts. It is an act of refusal and challenge to homogeneity and in itself begins the process of (re)introducing, action, speech and plurality into space. As such, it can have historical as well as immediate significance. It provides a 'counter-performance' of civil action to violent action, and in so doing questions the role of violence in human relationships. It lays the seeds of civil interaction and proto-citizenship. And as violent actors fail to construct legitimate power out of violence, so the real political struggles begin. More people mobilise and in a greater variety of spaces. Civil society participation thus can widen the space for interaction without violence and thus becomes a peace-building tool. Peace-building after conflict is then about building the conditions in which people can live together without violence.

4 Eight case studies of civil society participation in the Colombian and Guatemalan contexts of chronic violence

Case study 1: Government by violence

This first case study of Sincelejo, Colombia exemplifies a context in which violence of all types has gradually overwhelmed the space for public social action, and civil society participation is too weak to contest armed actors. Violence is *the* form of government in this departmental capital which was once the heartland of one of Latin America's strongest peasant movements. In the 1980s, it also boasted a civic movement which could organise a week long civic strike in 1989 against municipal corruption which had left the town with no water supply. Today, these movements have been decimated. 'There is no civil society here,' we were told, 'but nor does the local government have any credibility'.[18] Many social leaders have been assassinated

18   *Pastoral Social,* 3 April 2005.

and the paramilitary have moved in with the support of local cattle ranchers and the local political elite.[19] In the name of defeating insurgent armed actors, the victorious armed group and its allies took control. The consensus is that they now control the municipality socially, economically and politically. Some talk of a new form of government in Sincelejo: *narco-paramilipolismo*, the nexus of paramilitary, politicians and drugs traffickers. In Sincelejo itself, some people felt that it was corruption even more than violence which had the most negative impact on poverty and participation. 'Corruption which generates poverty and these two things generate strong limits to participation, for the zero credibility (in the political system)'.[20] Sincelejo has received some 22,000 displaced persons from the violence in the surrounding regions.[21] They live in situations of extreme marginality in the peripheral neighbourhoods (cordones de miseria) of the North and South, areas known for gang violence and economic misery. The human rights situation in Sucre and Sincelejo itself remains very serious. The Pastoral Social of the Bishop has an observatory on human rights which has documented the increase in killings in the Department from 275 in 2003 to 279 in 2004, and 72 in the first three months of 2005, of which 17 were in the town of Sincelejo itself. In such a small town, where people know each other, this creates a lot of fear.

Civil society organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGO) have to keep a low profile in their work. They have to rely on local trust to inform them when it is safe to go into certain areas. The NGO community in Sincelejo has been fractured; although a network exists formally, people do not work together in practice. There are 'tabu subjects; when you speak of the paras you do so in a low voice'.[22] The offices of a number of NGOs were broken into recently and their computer hard discs stolen. The only institution which maintains some room for manoeuvre is the Church. The Bishop set up a Sucre Conciliation Commission in 1996 which tries to bring a few respected and independent people together to discuss critical issues; but it is very careful about what those are. The Bishop is also the force behind the new Peace and Development programme for Montes de Maria, where he is trying to maintain strategic autonomy in a region where the FARC guerrillas still maintain a strong presence and where the government is anxious to win back control.

The church and a handful of small NGOs are the civil society organisations which keep alive the participatory space in the midst of this violence. Much of their work is to monitor and disseminate information about violence which would otherwise be suppressed, and thus to preserve some minimal rights. But the church also keeps a civil space open which brings a few individuals together. The national and international legitimacy of the Catholic Church helps protect this space. At the community level, associational life in Colombia is often penetrated by political or armed actors. Here, one national Colombian NGO does work very cautiously on

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19   Evidence of how this worked came to light in 2006, when it was shown that the elected representatives from the department and supporters of national President Uribe, had in fact done deals with the paramilitary to get elected.
20   Fundimur, 2 April 2005.
21   Local CSO activist, 1 April 2005.
22   Local CSO activist, 1 April 2005.

intra-family violence and child poverty. It does not link this violence to the other violences in the town. However, there is an emergent consciousness in Colombia about connections between them. Through the national non-governmental network, this small local experience may sow seeds which bear fruit when safer conditions are opened up. The rekindling of capacity for action in the town may depend on shifts in the national context. The survival of even limited civil society action becomes vitally important in contexts such as Sincelejo.

Case study 2: Citizenship building amid multiple violences

In contrast to the previous case, Colombia's second largest city of Medellín with a reputation for being the most violent, began in the early years of the new millennium to reap the benefits of persistent civil society participation throughout its worst period. This was facilitated by the election to mayor of Sergio Fajardo in 2003, an independent figure who represents a significant shift in power from the traditional political elite of the city. In this city, CSOs have worked in one the world's most violent and corrupt contexts for over two decades to maintain civic space and capacity. Mayor Fajardo has a fixed four-year term to transform culture and practices and relies a great deal on the support of the city's CSOs, some members of which have now gone into his administration.[23] In turn, it is also clear that without the active support of a legitimate political authority, CSOs in themselves face great difficulty in bringing about wider contextual changes. The local dynamic of an independent leadership and strong civil society organisations has, allowed for some important advances in opening up the space for the exercise of citizenship. This is despite an authoritarian national government which began a much criticised process of demobilisation of the paramilitary in 2002, which nevertheless has been used in Medellín to reinvigorate efforts to diminish violence.

Medellín is the home of some of Colombia's historic CSOs. The Popular Training Institute (IPC), Corporación Region, and Conciudadanía, for instance, have over 20 years experience and are highly respected in the city and some of the rural regions of Antioquia, the department of which Medellín is the capital. All three played an important role in the social mobilisations and discussions which led to the National Constituent Assembly which agreed the new Constitution of 1991. Subsequently they focused on the divulgation of its key components to the population in some of the most marginal areas or *Comunas* of Medellín.

Since the 1991 constitution, Medellín has been the site of an interesting effort to develop the participatory planning system which was formally recognised by that constitution. Medellín has been one of the few places where the municipal planning process was strengthened and through law 023.97 allowed for follow up monitoring of the municipal development plan once it was agreed (*Veeduría al Plan de Desarrollo de Medellín*). The monitoring takes places with the participation of 22 social

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23   Alonso Salazar, Secretario de Gobierno Municipality of Medellín (Chief Executive of the Municipality), 4 April 2005. Salazar was also clear, however, that the municipality could not govern 'for its friends' and had to have a wider perspective on the city's needs.

organisations, CSOs and private sector associations or *gremios*. In 1994/5 a Network of Municipal Councils of Participatory Planning was created (Red de Consejos Municipales de Planeación Participativa) and Medellín also created a Local Participatory Planning System at the sub municipal level.[24] Medellín CSOs played a major role in pushing for these advances which aimed to ensure that participation in the municipal development plans became meaningful and avoided a 'rubber stamp' role or a focus on narrow sectoral interests.

These processes have been important to the exercise of citizen and civil society participation in Medellín, but they have faced very serious limits from violence. Throughout the 1990s, Medellín was a city with an average annual murder rate of some 4,000. Multiple armed actors fought for control of territory in the *comunas* and sources of illegal wealth accumulation. Some were linked to the national armed actors of left and right, and some to local militias and criminal gangs. The city's young men of the marginal neighbourhoods or *comunas* as they are known locally, grew up in an armed culture in which many lost their lives or took the lives of others. The traditional political elite, penetrated by corruption itself, offered no sustainable response to this situation. In this context, CSOs had to maintain the struggle for human rights protection and themselves suffered numerous threats.[25] At the same time they had to deepen the participatory spaces and work against a tide of disillusionment. It is not surprising, as Corporación Region argued, 'there is a lack of social and political forces who appropriate the 1991 constitution, in order to create real transformations in the social, political and economic and structures and cultures. They will not do it unless there is a strong and persistent citizen pressure'.[26]

In the climate of constant insecurity in the city, private right-wing paramilitary groups began to take hold of increasing numbers of *comunas* with a mission of 'social order' implemented through armed power. The paramilitary were divided between a wing which was more heavily focused on drug trafficking and one that used drug trafficking to enable it to fight the guerillas. These blocks were themselves in violent confrontation by the beginning of the new millennium. The arrival of President Uribe to the Presidency, was a signal to the paramilitary that their political project and the legitimation of illegally accumulated economic assets had gained space, and their trust in Uribe made it possible for the President to negotiate a demobilisation agreement with them. At the same time, a military operation in the Comuna 13 of Medellín in 2003 was used by President Uribe as a pilot case of his commitment to defeat the FARC guerillas, and Operation Orion did indeed dislodge them from a militarily strategic position in the city and one in which the civilian population had suffered the consequences of daily armed confrontations, acts of extortion and threat. The paramilitary blocs of Medellín, including many known drug traffickers, subsequently agreed to demobilise. But the

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24 The importance of this was witnessed in field trips to the 13 Comuna in 1997, 1999 and 2003, where the ICP has been working with the local planning group, the *Realizadores de Sueños* (the Realisers of Dreams).

25 Four members of the IPC were kidnapped by the paramilitary in the late 1990s and only released after a lot of pressure. To enter the IPC is to go through a security system comparable to some airports.

26 Interview Region, 5 April 2005.

demobilisation is the source of a new form of threat to civil society participation in Medellín. Many have gone back to the *Comunas* with few economic prospects and bearing personal histories of violence. They remain in many senses 'paramilitary', able to access weapons if they choose and continuing to use the threat of violence to pressure residents. 'Paramilitarism,' the IPC told us, 'is like the landscape, it's there but you don't see it'.[27] Yet limits of a kind have been placed on the automatic recourse to violence of these actors in the past, and efforts have been made by the municipality and some CSOs to offer retraining and rehabilitation.

Medellín illustrates that in contexts of chronic violence, the enclosure of space is never complete. This often makes the context very dangerous as the boundaries are never quite clear. The experience of organisations such as ICP, Region and Conciudadanía has enabled them to gain sensitivity to space and the visible and invisible frontiers created by violence. They have used this sensitivity to keep civil space alive and then push forward its boundaries when political conditions made that possible. This happened when the population demonstrated their discontent with the old political elite and voted Sergio Fajardo into office. The local state has thus benefited from the long-term work of the CSOs and has developed some bold participatory iniatives, such as the participatory budget begun in 2005.

The CSOs that were part of this field study in Medellín represent a generation of social activists, whose initial reference point is the social mobilisations of the 1970s and 1980s. They represent a generation profoundly committed to processes of change and with a strong critical consciousness around dominating power. They have managed over 20 years of autonomous organising to maintain the right to a civil space in Medellín, in often dangerous and volatile circumstances; they have monitored human rights violations, researched and analysed, and undertaken work in the *Comunas* aimed at restoring capacity for civil interaction. They have worked to make the 1991 Constitution an effective instrument for participation, despite the ongoing culture of armed and non-armed clientelism. The IPC organised, for instance, Schools of Citizenship Formation and they disseminated the contents of the Constitution locally and through participation in the national network *Viva la Ciudadanía,* (Long Live Citizenship - now an NGO). By participating in and strengthening the many formal spaces for municipal planning and accountability, they have helped build a citizenship consciousness. By 'politicising' participatory spaces, through generating debate about resources and their distribution, they have prevented them remaining highly instrumental and technical.[28] The CSOs play an important role in the participatory innovations of the present municipal administration, helping to shift the municipality away from the traditional clientelist political practices that have drained politics of so much legitimacy. They have also played an important role in the construction of social subjects. They see their organisations as participatory protagonists. But they also aim to create actors for change and 'spaces of articulation of social movements and grass roots activists with the representative state'.[29]

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27   Interview IPC, 6 April 2005.
28   IPC, 6 April 2005.
29   IPC, 6 April 2005.

A field visit with the IPC to the 13 *Comuna* showed that they were not only working to make formal spaces meet the needs of the less powerful, but they were working to build citizenship from below, in this case in a neighbourhood which had suffered the most extreme of violences. The IPC were working with a network of women trying to supplement their work in the local packaging factories, the *maquilas*, by organising their own clothes production enterprise. Members of the 13 *Comuna* local development planning group: *Realizadores de Sueños* (the Realisers of Dreams) were present, and a group from another *Comuna,* number 4. It was evident that despite living in situations of everyday threat and violence, as well as suffering the stigmatisation of coming from these notorious *Comunas* where guerrillas, militias and paramilitary, had fought for control, they remained conscious of the importance of their self-organisation and independence. *Comuna* 4, for instance, had taken part in the participatory budget in the city and participants had compiled a strong but constructive critique of the process which they were submitting to the Consultative Council which was following up on the budget process. The critique had been developed through a long process of evaluation meetings in the different parts of the *Comuna.* They told us that one of the benefits of the process of the budget had been to learn to prioritise and take the interests of everyone into account. Their document reflects the seriousness with which they have taken the process and their wish to have a voice in improving it. This is despite the multiple violences that they have lived through and continue to experience. Capacity for action in these areas was dormant for many years, but continued to be nurtured by the CSOs who risked working in the violent areas. As the municipal context became more benign, such power has been reactivated and is helping in the process of building citizenship and civic consciousness against violence.

Nevertheless, it is not clear that building non-dominating power is a self-conscious project amongst Medellín's CSOs. It is not easy for the generation of protagonists in these CSOs to reflect self critically on some of their own practices. They themselves have recognised that in Medellín, there is 'much participation, little transformation'.[30] The same leaders are often participating.[31] Dominating power is challenged in the wider world but not in the near and intimate world. The implications to participation of power relations of all kinds, and particularly those between men and women is clearly an area which has been only partially addressed by some of the CSOs.

Case study 3: Feminine contributions to citizenship building in multi polar armed conflict

Antioquia and in particular its Western region *(Oriente Antioqueño)* is one of the most violent departments of Colombia. The Western region was the site of many civic struggles in the 1970s and 1980s. Electricity became a point of particular

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30   IPC interview, 6 April 2005.
31   A fact recognised by Alonso Salazar from within the municipality; he spoke of the 'bureaucracy of participation' to convey the sense of lack of leadership renovation. Interview, 4 April 2005.

contention; hydroelectric projects displaced communities while only some benefited from the electricity generated. The guerrillas had established a base in many parts of the region by the 1990s and by mid-decade the region became a centre for all the armed actors, with two fronts of the ELN, two of the FARC, a strong army and police presence and two fronts of the paramilitary. The latter began an offensive in 1998 and the area became *'tierra militarizada'*[32] (militarised land), with the civilian population caught between the armed groups and accused of collaborating with one or the other. Massacre and terror were the outcome.

There has, however, been an interesting counter process to this militarisation. The *Oriente Antioqueño* does not have a legal identity as a region and indeed communication in this mountainous area has been difficult. One municipality has a 'monument to the mule' in its central square, the main vehicle of communication for much of the twentieth century. An interesting part of the process of the region has been efforts, supported by Conciudadanía, to build a sense of cultural identity and belonging which could enable a civic and civil response to the militarisation to emerge. The territorial concept of 'province' did not reach the statutes, but in many respects this region is a de facto province or sub region, whose identity in the course of the 1990s has been shaped by these civic/civil responses. These have often been led by mayors who were being forced to co-exist with armed actors and who, supported by or driven by municipal mobilisations, came to negotiate with and stand up to those actors. The armed actors were destroying sources of employment and infrastructure, notably the electricity pylons targeted by the guerrillas; both badly affected the peasant economy.

A notable experience in the 1990s was that of San Luis. In this municipality, the guerrillas were taxing the local factory and the population asked the owners to pay the municipality rather than the guerrilla. In another incident in 2001 in the same municipality, the guerrillas told the population within a certain radius of the police station to evacuate their homes as they were going to blow the station up. The population refused to move and instead negotiated a cease fire with the guerrillas for six months on the condition that they would try and bring the police which had been heavily militarised, under civil control. The San Luis Conciliation Commission was an organisational form through which the community could build its response to the armed actors.

These and other cases began to strengthen the civil resistance in the region. The mayors, under constant threat of kidnap, created a Sub-regional Council of Mayors. Constituent Assemblies were called in a number of municipalities to involve all the social sectors in a statement of popular and civil sovereignty against the armed groups and a pact of governability between the mayors and the citizens. The mayors also created a Network of Municipal Assemblies which called for a regional Constituent Assembly, a process which fed into the Departmental Constituent Assembly in 2003. 'You learn to be a citizen by practicing it' was the view of Conciudadanía in supporting these processes, and in this way the exercise of citizenship was linked to peace-building. The work of Conciudadanía, particularly

32   Interview Conciudadanía, 8 April 2005.

with the women of AMOR, an organisation promoted by this CSO in 1995/6 is exemplary in its efforts to consolidate women as social protagonists in the region. The discussion with these women was a significant example of grassroots civil society participation through the development of feminist consciousness and capacity for action. Twelve women from war torn municipalities throughout the Oriente Antioqueño recounted their experiences,[33] beginning with Conciudadanía's training programmes, organised before the intensification of the conflict. Many of the women had come out of violent relationships and were bringing children up on their own. 'I threw off the fear and continued to participate. In order to do so, I got up very early to leave the breakfast, the lunch and everything ready so that there would be no problem.' The training helped them to 'look beyond the house and outside: De la *Casa a la Plaza'* (from the House to the Square, in other words from the private to the public sphere). Until then, they had 'only known the church'; they didn't know what the mayor did. The women gradually came together in networks of citizenship formation, gender tables *(mesas)*, and circles of *convivencia*. From this they began communicating and dialoguing with armed actors. They have taken direct action against them in what are examples of counter-performative action against violence, occupying the highway, marching to demand the return of kidnapped mayors, demonstrating against sexual abuse of children in the town. Two women recounted their experiences.

> This is a municipality which has been severely affected by the war. I lost my husband and two sons, and I left my work as a community mother, I left everything, I was reduced to nothing. Other women tried to get me to go out, but no; the mayor invited me to a place I could relax and then to the leadership school, and I got involved in *Conciudadanía* and Amor. I lost the fear and felt able to speak with anyone and now I work with people affected by violence … you never forget, although you have to accept; the memory of lost loved ones is a sacred memory. I began to gain tools and arguments for speaking. I worked in villages, and saw abuses of the army against women and children, robberies. We met and talked about what to do, that it was important to do something that would call attention to things because we had spoken to them (the armed actors) and there was no change. We organised to block the motorway and 2,000 people came out to listen to us; in a short while the army was there, some 500, and they threatened us and said we were guerrilla advisors. I stayed there with another companera; the men left terrified, and we two stayed and said we wanted to talk with them and find a solution to the problem of the army abuses, and we got them to listen and the commander promised to do something … We were displaced for five months and I was the spokeswoman to the armed groups to get them to let us return. The ELN (guerrillas) asked me why did I know so much? I said I was the President of the women. The return took place and we have organised so that the women will not displace themselves. When 20 days later there was a leaflet saying we had 9 hours to leave … we are firm and strong and they haven't been able [to force us].

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33   The interviews took place in Rionegro 7 April 2005. The quotes will not be attributed to individual women.

In this testimony, the idea of finding voice emerges as key to confronting the violence. The Mayor and the CSO played their role in supporting this woman, and helping her regain her will to act, connect to other women and challenge the violence. The women talked a great deal about the importance of starting to say the things that everyone knew but were too frightened to speak about. Another woman who had become a municipal councillor through her activities with Amor, described how the women had begun to take on the sexual violence in the municipality.

> I knew the war when it reached the municipality; it substituted the violent part for the affective part of the human being. We organised a non-violent action rejecting sexual violence against young girls. For fear, the women wouldn't denounce this. So, with the lady Mayoress, the municipal secretary and the health secretary, we made a t-shirt against the abuses, with letters which denounced it, and organised a municipal march and we stopped in front of the places where those responsible work and we said we knew who they were. The adults carried the banners and the children pointed out the abusers, and they already know that they cannot go into those places alone. The men were quiet. The women opened things up; there was another action against single parenthood.

The CSO Conciudadanía, helped the women to recover voice and speech and to become protagonists in their own right with self-understanding and capacity to resist very adverse and painful circumstances. This kind of social actor formation reflects the CSO's clarity on the gender issue and the linkages it has made between working with women and building a peace culture which challenges patriarchy and tackles political and social violence. Through (re)gaining the capacity to speak and act, the women of AMOR are connecting people, reclaiming public space and re-weaving the social fabric.

Case study 4: Acting on intimate violences

Colombia's third city, Cali, has a very distinct political and social culture to Medellín and a different axis of economic development, based on large scale agro-export plantations. Cali once had a strong civic culture. In 1988–89, the Chamber of Commerce, Universities, the local action councils, and the big NGOs such as *Foro,* and the local municipality had promoted a process called 'The Cali that we want' (*'El Cali que queremos'*) from which 100 strategic projects for the town had been agreed. But 'it remained a document'.[34] The rise of the Cali drugs cartel had a devastating impact on such initiatives and the city as a whole, undermining civic values and creating an 'easy money' culture. Drugs dollars penetrated the economic and political life of the city in multiple ways in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, creating a culture of violence and municipal corruption on a grand scale.[35] Despite

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34 Directora PROCALI-PROVALLE, the Association of NGOS of Cali and the Valle del Cauca, interview 12 April 2005.

35 The Foro Cali estimates that a campaign to become a municipal councillor (concejal) in Cali costs 100,000 US dollars.

the dismantling of the Cali cartel in the late 1990s, the drugs industry has fallen into the hands of multiple bosses down the line who are battling for control and generating much violence in the process. The city is recovering from the economic crisis caused by the collapse of the cartel, but once again a mafia economy is in resurgence. In the midst of great poverty, drug trafficking is the means of social mobility and to maintain consumption and lifestyles. The paramilitary mostly collaborate with them and take on the guerrilla forces who contest their domination. In the poor urban neighbourhoods this means that young men are drawn in behind the drugs traffickers and armed groups, who each have their *'oficinas de cobro'* (cash desks/offices). The young men compete to be taken on by the bosses but first have to prove their credentials in terms of their capacity to use violence.

In the midst of the violence, spaces for participation have multiplied in Cali as elsewhere under the impetus of the 1991 Constitution. Mostly, they are instruments for the dominating power of traditional leaders and the gap between such power and intimidation and violence is very narrow. But nevertheless, many CSOs are working to use these spaces. There are Planning Councils in the *comunas* (neighbourhoods) and in the municipality, working 'tables' *(mesas de trabajo)* and meetings with CSOs around particular themes and issues. People 'have taken up the offer of participation and in concrete and conjunctural moments they achieve things, but mostly they don't. The channels which connect the supply and demand for participation are still clientelist'.[36] A community leader has to choose between taking a project to the planning committee of the *comuna* who will revise it and then send it to the sub-regional committee and then to the municipal committee or he can go directly to the Councillor who will include it in his budget. Social Policy Councils are formal spaces for bringing different interests together in the social policy field but 'the convocation is in their (municipal administration) hands and they don't work if the officer is not sensitive to the issue'.[37]

A space that has been promoted by the CSOs, such as the *Redes del Buen Trato* (Networks for Good Treatment, referring to intra-family and community violence) has fared rather better. As Procali/Provalle told us, 'Yes, they function and they have strength and they generate a sense of belonging within the *comunas* being worthwhile and they link the organisations and institutions in the *comunas* together, give direction and promote treating people well and prevention (of abuse).' Another CSO active in the Redes said, 'They have taken the theme of family harmony *(convivencia)* into the public realm, into society … (proposals) have been included in the Municipal Development Plan. And participation in the municipal network enables people to measure their political influence'.[38] However, one of our informants also suggested that too much still depended on the good will of municipal officials. 'They [the networks] focus on very particular things, although there is some articulation. The visible head, the coordination is in the hands of an official of the Health Secretariat, who is committed and that's why it works. It's a problem of will and decision and the continuity of individuals'.[39]

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36   Foro Cali, 13 April 2005.
37   Directora ProCali Pro Valle, 12 April 2005.
38   Interview with EDUPAR, 11 April 2005.
39   Diana Arboleda.

Cali has many CSOs and NGOs. However, the lack of unity of purpose and the obstacles in terms of poverty, violence and corruption are huge. 'Social actors are dispersed: it is the town with the most NGOs in the country, but dispersed, the *gremio* (association of NGOs) is neither representative nor does it take positions. People get de-motivated. When they participate in the Planning Committees and see the politicking, they don't do anything, they just withdraw'.[40] Each administration brings its own agenda so that there is no policy continuity, and although there is now a challenge to the hegemony of a traditional elite, the influence of drugs money and power hangs over each municipal administration. In this situation, the formal spaces for participation are particularly frustrating and the challenge of developing common agendas towards them is a very great one.

Edupar is an NGO whose history dates to the efforts to build a *'Cali que queremos'* ('the Cali that we want' programme). It has lived through the difficulties of working at the community and family level when the political as well as economic context is so adverse. The programme to build a common Cali vision had begun just before the 1991 constitution and *Edupar* admits they had taken a fairly legalistic approach at first and had aimed to ensure people knew their rights. But the persistent violence in the *comunas*, the rise of drug trafficking and neo-liberal economic policies which advocated cuts in social welfare expenditure, led to some shifts in their thinking. There was at least a generation of social leaders which had participated in the Programme between 1993 and 1994 and had gained some critical consciousness. They began to pressure the municipal administration for resources. They used some of the rights they had been trained in, such as the right to petition, to challenge the politicians. *Edupar* itself took a more 'humanistic' vision, and came to view participation as essential to the very essence of being human:

> Participation is a fundamental human need, of being human, and not only to defend rights (but also) to be recognised and to be assertive before others; if not, participation in the family has no sense, it only has sense if democratic relations are constructed. To create social fabric, to strengthen communitarian organisations and civil society so that it can influence the public sphere; that the father of the family who has problems with his son doesn't see this only as a family problem but he connects with others and engages in collective public action. Our first emphasis is on communitarian organisation and social participation; but over time we have seen the need for organisations to strengthen their political participation and public involvement.

> *Edupar* Interview, 11 April 2005

Edupar tries to connect violence in the family and community levels to the public sphere, by training promoters from the communities to take the problem of violence to the officials. In this way they are trying to link the challenge of *convivencia* (living together in peace) with democracy itself. *Promotores de Convivencia* (Associations of Peaceful Living Promotors) of the Norte del Cauca has grown out of *Edupar's* grassroots accompaniment in Jamundí, a town a few hours from Cali,

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40   Interview *Educar*, 11 April 2005.

with mostly women and a few young men of African Caribbean origin. The volunteers they work with live in contexts of extreme violences of all kinds, from the family to the armed political violence of the groups in conflict. The promoters described their work.

> There is no public policy (on violence) because *convivencia* is seen as something to do with the home; but it is coming out into the public and that is why politics is so important. The officials dedicate themselves to the big public works, but they do not invest in people … the majority are men. The fact that this is not a public issue is because women are in the house. What do we do, become councillors?.' 'Yes, I would like to be Governor, because we live in a very machista world, we have difficulties leaving our homes. The biggest obstacle we face is being women, they see us as incapable, powerless, but we are showing them that this is not so, we manage the money for the market and we do it well.[41]
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> Focus group meeting with Asociaciones de Promotores de Convivencia, Norte del Cauca, 11 April 2005

The theme of feminist consciousness around power is present in the discourses of these women. But so is the need to engage the state and develop public policy around intra family and community violence. Participatory action is complemented by a sense that achieving some power themselves at the level of the local state might be the only way to achieve their goals. Some proto discursive consciousness of power is emerging, which does not by any means imply that the Peaceful Living Promoters of the Norte del Cauca are near to achieving a transformation in power thinking in their region.

Case study 5: Environmental citizenship in the midst of post war violence and impunity

Madre Selva (MS) is a civil society organisation in Guatemala composed of a small group of committed catalytic agents who define themselves as 'a collective: a citizen group who have organised themselves to participate actively, peacefully and ethically' in protecting the environment, and who have turned the environmental issue into one of citizen debate and concern.[42] 'We are a very small group but people think that we are very big and people think that we are strong, including our enemies'.[43] In Guatemala, where traditional agro-export crops are no longer an adequate form of integration into the global economy, it is natural resource extraction which offers the most potential for Guatemala's wealthy elite. However, a lot of the minerals are on ancestral lands of the country's indigenous population.[44]

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41 Focus group meeting with Asociaciones de Promotores de Convivencia, Norte del Cauca, 11 April 2005.
42 *Madre Selva* (2003).
43 Interview with MS, 22 August 2005.
44 Measurement of the numbers of indigenous in Guatemala is notoriously problematic given complexities around labels of *ladino* and *indigenous*. A recent UNDP study put the figure at 40 per cent indigenous or 4.4 million people out of 11.2 million (UNDP/PNUD 2005: 63).

Despite Peace Accords in 1996 which ended three decades of civil war, the army, criminal gangs and clandestine armed groups continue to exercise violence with impunity on behalf of themselves or the wealthy elite. The work of *Madre Selva* is dangerous and this small group face constant threats. At present the leader of the organisation has to move house all the time because of the threats against her and the organisation's offices have been bugged. 'I don't live in my house with my daughters. I am just moving from house to house to hide myself. Just now they have installed an apparatus in the offices of Madre Selva and they are listening to us'.[45]

Madre Selva is an example of civil society action which aims to generate a capacity for collective action despite high levels of violence and ethnicised dominating power: those who govern Guatemala are an elite of white and mixed white-indigenous or *ladino* ethnicity. It was the first organisation to make the ecological issue into a political issue[46] i.e. an issue that could be subject to public debate and scrutiny. The organisation has taken on certain emblematic campaigns, learning as it went along about how to be an effective citizens' group. They do not claim to be experts, but have aimed to demonstrate that nevertheless they can effectively monitor proposals which could adversely affect poor communities and the environment.

The first case that MS took up was in 1996, when they came to the defence of the fishermen in Rio Dulce when the Simpson Forestry Company decided to develop a paper factory which would have contaminated the river. The organisation in this case acted as a link between the Environmental Commission of Congress and communities who were very afraid of speaking up. It found an ally in an indigenous woman on the Environmental Commission, and they took her to the area to meet with the communities. Although they did not win this struggle, *Madre Selva* gained a lot of legitimacy for their courage in taking on the company.

The second issue they took on was a proposal to explore oil in the middle of a nature reserve, Lake Izabal. This case they won and that really established MS in the mind of many Guatemalans. Oil had never been a topic of citizen discussion in Guatemala, whether, for instance, it was a good or bad thing to explore for oil. MS was able to show that oil exploration can and should be a concern for active, public spirited citizens as well as those defending their particular rights. In this case, the local community organised 'The Friends of Lake Izabal' because they were so scandalised at the proposal, including local traders and professionals, who then sought the accompaniment of *Madre Selva*.

A third issue which the group took up was also a response to new concerns in the community in Lake Izabal, that mining projects were being proposed. *Madre Selva* was now learning about the need to change and enhance their activities. They were being called frequently by families who had sold their land to mining companies, for instance, personal tragedies where people lost their livelihood. But mining was an area they knew nothing about, and here, participation at the regional and international level played a role in enhancing their capacity to take up the issue.

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45   Interview with MS, 22 August 2005.
46   Interview with MS, 22 August 2005.

Already, members of Oil Watch, a Latin American CSO, they were only five people when Oxfam invited them to a seminar on mining in July/August 2003 and a follow up later.

In the wake of these workshops, MS managed to get the list of mining concessions from the government, once again using a Congressional ally, a woman whose son had been killed by the army in the 1970s. They discovered that some 320 concessions were being discussed behind closed doors and would have been signed by President Portillo before he left office in December 2003. These concessions involved dubious deals between oligarchic families, foreign companies and the state, controlled by the most corrupt President since the Peace Accords, who is now living in exile in Mexico and under investigation by the Guatemala government. The organisation took on the concession to a Canadian gold mining company, Glamis Gold, in San Marcos, which had already begun building the infrastructure for gold extraction and were destroying the forests and taking the water from the surrounding villages, with high risks of contamination. The campaign against the gold mine and against the Concession law, and to establish new terms on which to grant mining concessions, showed MS building key alliances, entering new spaces of dialogue, accompanying the local communities, and enabling Guatemalan citizens to challenge and keep their independence from the World Bank which had given a loan to Glamis Gold. When the Bank organised a forum to discuss natural resource exploitation, MS organised a parallel forum, around the theme: 'In my community they are going to build mines and they have neither informed me nor consulted with me'.[47]

Madre Selva has helped awaken the indigenous communities to the threat to the integrity of their lands from the powerful economic interests of the country and internationally, but they are not sure how to 'confront the style of power' in Guatemala, a style where the gap between dominating power and violence at the level of the state and private armed actors is very narrow. 'We do not have doctorates in mining, but we are human beings. We do not lie. We have a proven credibility. We are courageous. We can begin something, but we do not have a way to confront the style of power here ... I am afraid that there will be more violence at a certain moment, we are dealing with oil, mines, water, African Palm ...'[48]

MS has combined a range of strategies at different levels and spaces to achieve change, from organising its own parallel forum to that of the World Bank to participating in a high level dialogue. It is committed to 'legal tools such as the strategy of citizen participation in defending the environment', and to peaceful resistance (*Madre Selva* 2003). It has helped people to understand they have rights when it comes to natural resource exploitation, in a country where the elite has never recognised that the country belongs to other people than themselves.

Two indigenous protestors have already been killed in the campaign against Glamis Gold in 2005. It is not possible to argue that through their creative use of a range of participatory spaces, MS have overcome state and private violence against social

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47   Interview with MS, 22 August 2005.
48   Interview with MS, 22 August 2005.

activism, or the potential for a future more violent response from activists who find themselves powerless in the face of state and elite intransigence. However, we could look at social activism not in terms of immediate outcomes, but in terms of ebbs and flows, emergent processes, new activist repertoires and responses, which over time build new forms of social interaction in the public realm. This may at first be low level resistance to the silencing, fear, homogenising and encircling logic of violence. It might merely be a counter-performative set of actions to the acts of state and private terror which perform to the population as a whole in order to deter them from social action and interaction. Without the work of organisations such as MS, however, violence and dominating power will come ever closer together, so that the space for social action without fear to one's life reduces ever more. By generating capacity for action, MS at least drive a wedge between the two, so that they can at least begin to stand up to the powerful and encourage others to do the same.

Case study 6: Land struggles, citizenship and violent reprisals

Conic is an indigenous peasants' organisation in Guatemala which works for the right to a voice in agrarian policy. The land question remains one of the most problematic in contemporary Guatemala, as it has been throughout the country's colonial and post colonial history. High levels of concentration of land and wealth in the hands of a few families have left the rural, and mostly indigenous, population on lands that can barely offer subsistence, or working for landowners who pay a pittance and show no respect. The Peace Accords of 1996 offered an historic opportunity to address this problem through various instruments and dialogue spaces. Conic is one of nine peasant organisations which form the (Confederacion Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinos, CNOC national peasant confederation, and has been a key participant in the national dialogue spaces. They have also supported land occupations after analysing anomalies in land titling, the dispossession of peasants from common and state lands by large landowners, and abuse of peasant labour rights. Conic is thus critical in enhancing the capacity of peasants to be considered as citizens in a situation where oligarchic political and economic power remain a major obstacle to the democratisation of society and the fair distribution of its wealth.

There have been some very limited advances in land transfer since the Peace Accords, with some 230 farms transferred to the peasants, many of them through land occupations.[49] Conic has itself recovered 101 farms over 13 years of action, benefiting some 750 families or 40,000 individuals.[50] These farms produce a range of crops from coffee, cardamom, sesame (ajonjalí) and maize. Land occupations take place for a variety of reasons and involve a careful prior study by Conic.

> We analyse the region, and the documentation of the families, we do a prior investigation of the property, how the names of the owners were registered,

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49   Rafael Dario Chanchavac, CONIC, 24 August 2005.
50   Rafael Dario Chanchavac, CONIC, 24 August 2005.

and when we detect anomalies we occupy. *Finqueros* (landowners) have to pay labour dues *'prestaciones laborales'*, and often they don't and the peasants demand labour rights, and we also enter into land occupations for that reason. When *finqueros* occupy or have occupied state lands, empty lands, peasants have the right to these. We inform the families of what might be the consequences in terms of repression. We then have a dialogue with *empresarios* (lit. businessmen, or owners); some discuss with us others don't. These are the procedures and strategies. There are some very radical *empresarios*, for instance around the *finca* Nueva Linda here in Retalulheu, the majority of owners of large stretches of land are Spanish, foreigners. Nueva Linda was occupied because families demanded the reappearance of a *finca* worker. The judges declared against the owner because there was evidence he was responsible for kidnapping the worker. The peasants came together to ask for his reappearance. But the repression was massive, 9 peasants died. It was the National Police. We still haven't got those responsible to prison.

The only arm the peasants use (in occupations) is the machete, their work instruments. But they (the government) said there were families armed (in Nueva Linda), there was a problem of some families who went their own way. In no moment in Conic do we have a strategy of generating violence, or to arm the peasants. The policy is to occupy, resist and work the Mother Land. Nevertheless, we have to recognise that in the middle of an occupation, there are some who might have a weapon, as in Nueva Linda, some did, this led to the separation from the group which we led. We don't support this because the consequences are violent. If people are armed the army and police come and that's the last thing we want.

Rafael Dario Chanchavac, CONIC, 24 August 2005

Peasants who had participated in the Nueva Linda occupation recounted their experience in a field visit to *Finca* Nueva Cajola.

The life of peasants is not valued by the Government of Guatemala, the authorities, or the rich owners of the country ... we are a new association that arose because of repression with the kidnapping of the Administrator of a farm ... for that reason we united to try and clarify what happened to the compañero peasant ... they disappeared him and managed to evict us violently ... we suffered where 9 peasants died, defending our right ... we were left shocked and traumatised by what happened ... where are the bodies of our companeros? And they said that we were violent and they tried to exterminate us by burning the small huts ... the authorities do not value us peasants, and 25 peasants were wounded with bullets by the eviction, and some died a few days later because of their wounds ... we are nomads because we have no where to meet, but our compañeros help us, Conic has given us direction. Behind all this is the demand for land ... we do not want to go around begging in the lands of others, but we need help from Conic because we have no where to live and we also have children and the right to a dignified life.

Nueva Cajola 24 August 2005

Conic was able to make an immediate appeal to the government to accept responsibility for the Nueva Linda massacre which took place on 31 August 2004, and to make the argument that although it is true some peasants had arms, this did not merit the reaction which took place. As Juan Tiney of Conic explained,

> In the moment that the eviction and massacre took place, Conic called upon the Cabinet, that the government had to accept its responsibility. The argument that the people were to blame because some had arms, is totally false. It was desperation of some of the peasants, but not the dimension to lead to helicopters, planes, soldiers by land in tanks. It was an atmosphere of war against families who were dominated by hunger and poverty … the government must assume responsibility to compensate the people and return dignity to the people … we have not managed to get them their land back or clarify the kidnapping. The landowners have their private police, there are more private police than national police, and this makes the risk of criminal acts greater. There is no military structure, each landowner kills who they want, but this is a responsibility of the state.

> Juan Tiney, Conic, 24 August 2005

Land occupations are an instrument that Conic uses due to the economic and armed power stacked against them and resistance to serious agrarian reform. Juan Tiney explained their role in their strategy as a means of pressuring the government and landowners to negotiate, not as a goal in themselves. 'It is good to understand that *de facto* acts are not the objective in themselves, but are instruments of pressure to resolve the problems, to make the government and the landowners sit down and negotiate and discuss; we won't give up those measures, its not just to invade land as people say, but as a measure of pressure to help resolve problems'.[51]

This is confirmed by the range of other participatory spaces and levels in which Conic operates, and also by the fact that Conic sees access to land as only one of the agrarian issues, rural development is a major concern. 'Ownership is only one issue, the integral development of peasant communities; diversity of production, technical assistance, these are other policies which the Accords did not contemplate. There are deficiencies on the part of the State and a lack of political will to help agricultural communities develop'.[52]

Land occupations have provided some minimal food security but do not bring development. Demonstrations are another means by which Conic and their social base put pressure on the government for further support, but the risks are great, as one woman from Nueva Cajola described her experience of protesting in the Central Square of Guatemala City and the death of her child in the square, a testimony to the desperation many peasant women and men feel.

> God gave us life as a woman, the life of a woman is also important because she also has ideas of struggling for her children and for the future … to gain the land … because we do not have land to live, for that reason we are struggling

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51 Ibid.
52 Rafael Dario Chancavac, 24 August 2005.

… so that our children have land … we suffer in order to gain a small piece of land … and they ask us why are we struggling?… we experienced for ourselves and the moments that they insulted us, saying we are thieves … the beginning of the struggle was clandestine during the war, but now the struggle is in the full light of day … we went to Guatemala to the Central Square for several days, and the army insulted us, and my child died, she got ill because she had no food. We were in the Square and they were controlling us, surrounding everyone, but I kept struggling for the land … police do not respect us … because there was nothing to cover the child with it got ill and died … but after that I did not regret the reasons the baby died … because we negotiated the land … after the child died the police investigated why … and I explained that it had got ill because I had no land … I felt that it died for the struggle … like a sacrifice for the struggle … and that the death of a child is not in vain.

Woman from Nueva Cajola 24 August 2005

Conic has developed participatory methods, along with other peasant organisations, to try and work through short, medium and long-term approaches to agrarian reform. As part of the CNOC, Conic has developed three sets of proposals, one for agricultural development, one for labour issues and one around food security. Conic accompanies 185 communities in 16 Departments with the aim of strengthening the organ n of men and women in the community and of forming leaders. They have recognised the importance of women's participation and women are now active leaders in Conic. The field visit to Nueva Cajola, demonstrated the active involvement of women at the level of the base and the leadership of the community. Mostly indigenous women spoke in the meeting in their language which was then translated. Many had learnt about rights from Conic as well as gained access to land and minimal improvements. An emphasis on culture was very evident and the meeting began with a Mayan ceremony.

Conic also works at the level of local municipal government and the Municipal Development Councils, particularly in areas where indigenous mayors have opened up a space for such participation, such as Sololá and Atitlán. In addition, Conic has participated in all the spaces of intra sectoral dialogue opened up through the Peace Accords. Rafael Darío Chanchavac from Conic and a participant himself in many of these spaces explained the importance but difficulties of these spaces for peasants and the limitations of a constitutional framework which does not enable the poorest to gain a real voice despite the dialogue spaces. Rafael pointed out how things have changed in the new government of Oscar Berger which took office in 2004 and which is 'totally private sector (empresarial), so that negotiations have stagnated and repression against the peasant movement has intensified, particularly in the Keq'chi area, evicting peasants from the land'.[53]

Conic combines many spaces and levels of participation. Many of these are characterised by the threat or use of violence, mostly against the peasants by the army, police or private guards of the landowners, but in some instances by the

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53   Rafael Dario Chancavac, 24 August 2005.

impatience of desperate peasants, many having experienced already the horror of repression during the war. Conic is thus a vehicle for enhancing the capacity for action of peasants and encouraging non violent and strategic ways of pressing for their rights so that elites begin to recognise they have to deal with the peasants as citizens. This will not, of course, diminish in itself the recourse to dominating power of such elites, but if it widens the space for participatory action without fear, it may build the grass roots consciousness that is needed to challenge that form of power.

Case study 7: Recovering from violence and gaining citizenship

Maya Kak'la is a CSO formed by a handful of Mayan women in 1996. Space is very important to their understanding of participation, but this includes the idea of the inner space of each person. 'Participation is to do with the construction of spaces in order to build a healthier more dignified life … including therapeutic spaces from within ourselves … so that we are prepared and in better conditions to participate'.[54]

Since the Peace Accords, women have been invited into more spaces in Guatemala, but this is often tokenistic, and the women of Maya Kak'la recall the fear and self consciousness which restricted their real participation. 'There is prior work to be done before participation; I even write before saying anything for the big fear of making a mistake. It is necessary to work on the energy of fear in order to be able to talk, because women have not developed that' (Interview Maya Kaq'la 22 August 2005).

The women have chosen to tackle some very difficult topics within the Mayan tradition, using the Mayan cosmovision. 'We need to recover the capacity of women through the '*sanacion* Maya' (lit Maya Cleansing), for instance menstruating women were not allowed to participate because it is said that it is bad' (Interview Maya Kaq'la 22 August 2005).

Childhood upbringing and parental gender discrimination affect women's capacity to participate as they grow older, as Marta and Gloria explain. 'Why do we not speak now when we were parrots when we were children? We have internalised repressions, They gave us words: 'stupid, you can't, you don't know, poor thing you are a woman'. And then through our bodies and energy, especially if you have brothers who go out to play and you remain in the kitchen.' 'I am from a family of four women, but my father would have liked us to be boys. I lived in the anguish of not being valued … I had to move my life forward with much energy and build my space and reconstruct my life because it was blocked and contaminated.' (Interview Maya Kaq'la 22 August 2005).

Maya Kaq'la have used this self-reflection to understand the problems facing Mayan women both within indigenous communities and in spaces with *ladino* men and women. Their work with the personal lives of Mayan women makes use of the Mayan cosmovision, but not as a religion or rigid form of spirituality, but to

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54   Maya Kaq'la 22 August 2005.

enhance the capacity for action of the women or their power as a potentiality to transform their situation. The Mayan cosmovision, explained Eugenia, '... is a way of life ... when we are around the fire, then we feel completely different, we are ourselves with the fire. It is much more than rational, I cease to think, I cease to struggle against my own powers and the powers of the others ... we aim to influence in this type of space which exists in the Mayan cosmosvision, but then more than a ritual, to make it into something practical.'

The women have taken years to gain *'the confidence we which now enjoy'*, and have faced many obstacles. The group published a book in 2004 which contained some sexual images of Mayan women. They faced hostility from Mayan men who 'speak badly of the photos in our book, as an attack against the people ... they disqualify our values and do not get to the bottom of what we are doing ... they think they know what an indigenous woman must think and act ... Mayan philosophy is full of values which are badly interpreted in order to use against us.' But they have used these values to open up issues around identity and sexuality amongst indigenous woman, issues that have never been publicly discussed in the past.

They work a great deal on the question of violence, starting with violence at the intrapersonal level. The women are clear about the role of violence in Guatemalan society, but as Adela explains, they want to move away from the cult of victim-hood. 'First how we have been violent to each other, and this weighs upon us all our lives, and that has made me violent even with myself, even in the way that I step into a truck'. But Guatemala's history of violence 'has been a mechanism to maintain military power over the population, parents against children, me against my cat ... it is my responsibility how I destroy or construct myself ... it is not that this whole packet of violence is my fault ... nothing justifies this violence which I have lived or which has brought consequences upon me for having been born a woman ... or to continue as a victim ... that is not an option for me. It's important that I have the chance to feel a victim but not to remain a victim.'

Maya Kaq'la are seeking to shift this sense of victim-hood amongst Mayan woman so that they can participate in Guatemalan society in new ways, gain that sense of citizenship that comes from internalising the sense of rights it embodies and legitimises the action that makes it effective. But the cleansing process is a necessary first step, which enables the women to deal with the historical traumas of the war.

Case study 8: Building a human rights culture within a violent culture

The Legal Action and Human Rights Centre (CALDH in its Spanish acronym) is one of the first human rights organisations in Guatemala, set up in 1989. It also has come to develop a sense of its role in enhancing capacity for action. 'The only way to make changes in Guatemala is to strengthen the capacities of people, of groups, from a rights perspective, not the demand for rights but how to exercise them ... the majority of people do not exercise their rights here in Guatemala'.[55]

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55   CALDH, 23 August 2005.

This focus on exercising rights has evolved over many years of working in the human rights field, and represents some shifts in thinking and practice within CALDH. For instance, in the mid 1990s, CALDH worked a great deal on the idea of 'local power', or an alternative power at the municipal level built from the perspective and actions of local grass roots organisations. But as Mario Marin, put it, they have shifted from 'local power' to 'citizen participation'[56] which involved a recognition that, however flawed, it was difficult to replace existing institutions, and instead it was necessary to work to change and democratise them.

CALDH is concerned therefore to help grass roots groups to enhance their impact so that rights protection becomes embedded in the society and its institutions. 'Many proposals come from the same people, 'tables' (mesas), groups, etc, but do not impact on the representative level … How can we open new spaces of reflection in order to gain representation?'[57] The organisation's analysis of the present situation in terms of participatory opportunities in Guatemala recognises some progress, but also the huge obstacles which remain. Their priority for building change remains with local and grassroots action. 'There is installed capacity now, the consultations around mines and hydroelectric projects [illustrate this], but they still come up against a very big wall … representation is still a worrying theme … we must promote participation but it must be born in the villages'.[58] The weakness of the state, in a paradoxical way, allows for greater civil society participation. But the lack of a national project has been a real weakness. '… in this context, the dialogue tables (mesas) remain ineffective and empty … also, there were no spaces to come together to form a proposal for nation building … that is the great barrier which exists today … we have made proposals to the government of Guatemala, taking diversity into account, but dialogue became a means of avoiding conflict and not for the building of a proposal'.[59]

CALDH's work is continuously threatened by violence, particularly in the last few years. It received over 30 threats in 2004 and they have continued in 2005. It has been one of the organisations most targeted by Guatemala's clandestine groups, and it is the only one not to have been given some formal police 'protection'. The organisation works in the localities and with some of the population groups most seriously affected by violence: young people, women and those in the *maquila* zones.

> Violence is all around us, the criminalization of youth for lack of opportunities for example, and it is most worrying, when young people, women, want to do something better with their lives; .violence jumps out from all sides … we are seeing a pattern, because its happening in the maquila zones … also there is violence against defenders of nature … They listen into us … they follow us … we have to stop our activities … ex pacs [members of the former Civil Defense Patrols] have come here [to CALDH's offices] in a violent way … our role as CALDH is to try and transform us into a non violent culture … but at times we have to go to the streets when there is no possibility of negotiating with the

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56 Mario Marin, CALDH, 26 August 2005.
57 CALDH, 23 August 2005.
58 CALDH, 23 August 2005.
59 CALDH, 23 August 2005.

authorities. What is most worrying is that the topic of repression is returning and the vast majority do not want more violence ... but there are groups who say that those who want to help build peace, we are terrorist. We are in a delicate and fragile situation'.[60]

CALDH, 23 August 2005

CALDH is in the frontline of the efforts to build a rights-based state and society in Guatemala, through working with grassroots groups who they help to know and then to exercise their rights. They do work in formal and informal spaces, but mostly they focus on creating spaces for the groups they wish to become the social change protagonists. This has placed them in a vulnerable situation regarding the state and clandestine groups who see them as a challenging organisation with strong local and grassroots connections and influence. The relationship of CALDH with its grassroots allies, was explored through conversations with the *ladina* and indigenous womens' groups which CALDH supports in Chimaltenango, Amitlan and San Juan Sacatepequez, urban centres which ring Guatemala City, and in Sololá in the Western Highlands, with young people from various municipalities around Lake Atitlán who had been organised by CALDH into election observers and more recently into human rights observers.

In a focus group with twelve women from a number of municipalities in Chimaltenango, it was possible to see how people generate capacity for action through learning a sense of rights. The women first talked as individuals and why they had made the choice to come out of their private space of the home to participate in the public space. The responses revealed a range of paths, but most of which were lit by their understanding of 'rights'.

Before, I did not know that I had rights because I am a woman alone ... Now I have relaxed and I have learnt many things, for instance, if I am threatened, I can make a complaint. I received a threat against my 12 year old son, and they asked for money, and I went to the community court and they said that it hadn't happened and the child was lying. Then I made them sign something in case anything happened in the future. I began to participate because I wanted to know my rights, there is so much discrimination because I am an indigenous woman without education. I feel sad and bad, but in this group, they say that because I am an indigenous woman, I have value, and self-esteem, and I am worth something.

Focus Group with Women from Chimaltenango, 23 August 2005

Another woman recounted her experience working for the *Banco Comunal* which gave small credits to some of the women traders of Chimaltenango. But some of the bosses were withdrawing peoples savings, and to deflect the blame from themselves, they accused her of losing the money. 'I cried and got very depressed and I wanted to die with fear, and CALDH showed me what to do and advised me. I recovered the credits and I confronted the Public Ministry when they accused me.' (Ibid)

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60   CALDH, 23 August 2005.

Another woman explained how her involvement in the women's group of CALDH had helped her see herself as a victim of domestic violence and become a leader in her community.

> I was suffering a lot of violence in my home but I wasn't aware of it as such, I believed it was part of my culture. Then my husband experienced trauma and began to drink. A woman who speaks is a nag, stupid, a gossip. So I didn't talk about it. But I was invited to a [women's] group and I realised that I am a victim of domestic violence, through what the other woman said, and that I have a great treasure inside me. I am a leader, and I resolve other's problems but I couldn't solve the problems in my house. Many of us are putting up with a lot, and the economic situation holds us back … the spaces in Guatemala are very closed and it should be an obligation of the state and it is the responsibility of the Guatemalan government that we have no capacity and we have responsibility also to contribute and help.
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> Ibid

Violence is a major theme for the women and CALDH has helped the women to become aware that they are victims of human rights violations when they experience violence. It is clear from the discussions with the women, that it is the women themselves who then take forward their new ideas into the public spaces. 'Apart from the trainings which CALDH gives us, we seek meetings with the mayor, to take to him a series of things that we want to do as a group, such as inviting women from the rural areas who are living in great poverty. Many things have changed, but the violence does not give us freedom to move about; they rob us. They kill women but no-one investigates.' (Ibid)

Many women have been killed around Chimaltanengo and the *maquila* zones, in acts of violence which some call 'feminicide'. One of the young women in the group is often followed by men in cars, and is verbally abused and threatened on the telephone. There are many youth gangs in the area. CALDH works with the women around violence, but also around labour rights, and encourages them to participate in the municipality. But the Municipal and Community Development Councils remain mostly under male control. 'We would like the opportunity to work, so that they value us as women, but they haven't allowed us into the Councils, because it is not written down that women should participate.' (Ibid)

But some breakthroughs suggest that change can take place, for instance this story from San Juan.

> Spaces in San Juan? We organised several fora for the electoral period and the mayor of GANA got re-elected. We went round to the Councillors and asked for an appointment. They kept us waiting until 8.00 pm and didn't want to meet with us because we wanted a Women's Office. Now, they listen to us and give us space to organise as women. Now we have begun a training school. And everything began because of the public violence. We were supported by CALDH, and that's why we have gained understanding. If we lose time, it is because we want to do something. They discriminate against us because we are poor and keep us waiting, but it is improving.
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> Ibid

CALDH's programme with women has incorporated some 450 women into organised local groups. Our conversation with some of these women revealed that many had very personal journeys which led them to these groups, but that the idea of 'rights' helped them to find a sense of dignity and self-worth and to overcome fear. It is a language of affirmation and legitimates their participation. This initial journey is then reinforced by the experience of collective enterprise and action, in workshops with other women, in street protests, in lobbying the mayor, and in defending themselves against abuse and injustice. Public roles, such as on the community and municipal councils are still mostly inaccessible to women, but each breakthrough strengthens the consciousness of the women and sense of capacity to do things and to stand up to the powerful. The interest in political participation has clearly been awoken in the women and they see it as a critical step to bringing about change.

In the 2003 electoral period, CALDH began to build a group of youth electoral observers. They have followed this up with the building of a human rights observatory based on young people's participation. In a focus group discussion, eight young people from San Juan La Laguna, Solola, San Lucas Toliman and San Pablo Laguna, discussed their experience in this process and how they saw the future. The young men and women were aged between 18 and 30 and were all indigenous, around half of them were teachers.

We asked them about the situation for young people in the area, and we heard stories of desperation and violence, and deep social changes in the situation young people are growing up in, such as this story from San Juan La Laguna.

> Several young people have committed suicide, and people say its because of despair or drugs or satanic rituals. But when we asked, they said that it was a 'punishment' for something that happened with our grandfathers ... but what is happening in San Juan is family disintegration, lack of jobs. In the past we used to work in the coffee harvest, now there is the maquila. But many are tempted by vices, drugs, alcohol etc.

> Just to be young is an obstacle and they assume you are various things because you do not have experience, and only the older people and the leaders are taken into account ... but I ask, if we do not prepare young people, who follows when the elders die? They do not take us into account or ask about our needs ... the spaces are very limited ... young people need a space to express and present ideas.

> The State is responsible for violence, it also affects parents, and the teachers do not have the vision nor preparation to seek viable solutions. The children learn violence ... there is violence amongst the children in the school, yes, this is a very violent municipality. There has always been violence, but there is more violence amongst the poorest kids ... The violence passes through the members of the family because it is a vicious cycle. And some of us are afraid to denounce things, it's a risk.

> Conversations with members of the Youth Human Rights Observatory, Solala, 25 August, 2005

In San Lucas Toliman, a young woman recounted how the emergence of gangs affected the municipality and all the young people in it, particularly as adults have started to take the law into their own hands and carry out 'social cleansing'.

More groups of women and young people in San Lucas would like to work, but there is no fund for young people or their activities or football, they don't give them space because there is a problem of gangs, the 18, the Salvatruchas. They paint the walls and six months ago a companero was killed because he was not in the right gang … at night you hear them and they consume marijuana and alcohol, and afterwards they (people in the municipality) killed six persons (presumed gang members) and they said they were going to 'cleanse' the town because the Government of Guatemala was not doing anything … there is only agriculture for the young people … when there are no jobs, the young people go to the towns, to the US. But there are rumours, of peoples defenders with ski masks between Cocoles, San Lucas Tolíman, Santiago Atitlán, and they have put up notices that they will wipe out delinquency in the entire region.

Ibid

Many of the group had been involved in the electoral observatory, and this had been a very formative experience. One young woman had witnessed fraud and had now joined the human rights group. 'I worked in the polling booth and I acted as secretary. My job was to check the identity cards of the people who arrived. San Lucas has 3 villages, and a woman with her son arrived very nervous, and I checked her identity card, and asked her if something had happened, and she said she was called something which wasn't on the identity card, she got more nervous. It turned out she had already voted …' (Ibid)

The Human Rights Observatory is a new initiative for young people and very much centred on the formation of citizenship consciousness amongst youth. CALDH is now working in 15 municipalities and has a network of 150 representatives. The Solola office will receive human rights complaints from people in the region. These are some of the comments on the Observatory:

At the moment we are disseminating the themes of the genocide as human rights promoters, and then training young people in their rights. (we receive) complaints on violations of womens rights. We give a diploma to young people around human rights themes; after training we go into monitoring, the rights of different groups in health, young people, disabled etc.

Its about observing the rights of the population … to denounce the things that happen. We received 30 complaints this year and we report to CALDH … and they follow it up, family violence, rapes, lack of services or attention in the tribunals.

I began to participate in this observatory one Sunday. They told me about it, and there were some trainers and talks. I am a teacher and it is an important theme for me and for my kids … I am broadening my rights and sharing with the children, and raising the issues with the parents, there is a lot of mistreatment of children by their parents, and then the children have problems at school.

Ibid

The young people were learning a lot through this process. They were being connected with the country's past through the ongoing work around the genocide;

and they were being given a place in the country's future. This is a major contribution to citizenship construction amongst young people who might otherwise never see themselves as such. An understanding of the importance of 'rights' had, as with the women above, helped them to legitimise a public role as defenders of those rights. Their exposure to the everyday abuse of rights, from the family through to more public violence and abuse, via the complaints that the Observers receive, gives them knowledge of the public consequences of what might otherwise remain invisible. The young people had begun to analyse and understand the negative impact on Guatemala of the everyday abuses. While their ability to resolve the problems is not great and they are afraid of the consequences and risks they run, they are nevertheless committed to doing what they can in the context. The trajectory of a few into broader public roles, such as participation on the local councils, is also a significant outcome of CALDH's work. As young people gain confidence, so they can bring energy and insight into the structures of political power which can help those structures to work better for people.

5 Conclusion: could a non-dominating theory and practice of power enhance citizenship and reduce violence?

Building citizenship in contexts of chronic violence throws up deep challenges. Effective citizenship is the ability to exercise rights in a meaningful way. This can be limited by various forms of dominating power, but violence, it is argued, offers qualitatively distinct limits. Participating in chronic violent contexts requires not only the building of citizenship but the diminishing of violence itself, which otherwise is reproduced through time as well as through spaces of socialisation.

The case studies have illustrated the many ways in which civil society organisations directly and indirectly challenge violence in all the spaces and levels of socialisation. Violence does not make participation impossible, although it acts to do so through its instrumental and expressive qualities which have the effects of sealing space, freezing social relationships and homogenising populations. While it generates impotence, empirical evidence has shown that it does not in fact destroy all power as potentiality.

By connecting people, restoring plurality and opening invisibly sealed boundaries, civil society organisations reactivate such power. In the process they can potentially have a direct influence on violence. They can encourage victims to overcome fear, to recognise even, as one of our interviewees from Guatemala said, that the violence they experienced as an individual victim[61] had a socially recognised label

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61   There are some violences which have no 'witnesses', so that David Riches (1986) triangle model of violence does not apply.

and that others suffered it, making it a social and public problem which needs to be addressed. They bring people together to make violences visible, public and political problems. By disseminating a sense of rights, CSO's enable people to feel they can legitimately challenge violent actors as well as those who use dominating power over them. By building citizenship, they may not eliminate violence and it may even increase at given moments, but over time and as more and more (re)gain a sense of their potentiality, so the exercise of violence becomes more difficult and will receive more sanction. Civil society organisations can thus help build public opinion and a less atomised population capable of resisting state and private armed actors as well as abuse by husbands and parents. None of this is sufficient for addressing violence. A state formation process must take place which is able to offer an effective legal framework against violent acts. CSOs can also help in that process, by making issues of security, human rights, and the rule of law issues which citizens are involved in addressing. Our cases also show how a collaborative local state can greatly enhance the capacity of CSOs to bring about change.

Civil society participation can at least, therefore widen the gap between violence and dominating power, driving a wedge of civil action and civil spirit between the two. CSOs can be most effective in driving the wedge when they build a citizenship consciousness about rights and enhance capacity for action. By encouraging those whose potential has been limited or frustrated by dominating power and/or violence to see themselves as rights bearers with capacity to act, they also reduce the possibility that unfulfilled potential, not only dominating power under threat, is translated into acts of violence by the powerless.

Civil society participation may challenge dominating power and reduce the risk that it will descend into violence, and it may do so by enhancing power as potentiality. However, without a 'discursive consciousness of power' (Haugaard 2003), there is no guarantee that it will not reproduce dominating power and thus perpetuate a source of future violence. There was much less evidence that such discursive consciousness was emerging amongst the CSOs who were part of this fieldwork. While many had a critical consciousness towards dominating power, this was not very often self-reflective, and its gender dimensions were often absent. New thinking around power as potentiality was more apparent among the women peace activists of Amor in Colombia and the Mayan women peace activists of Guatemala. A new non-dominating theory and practice of power derived from the theorised practice of the dominated may be the factor that will most influence our capacity to build societies without violence and overcome chronic violence. We will recognise that this is the case if power-as-potentiality and not dominating power becomes the norm in human relationships, and the argument that power is the opposite of violence is no longer counter-intuitive but a banal statement of the obvious.

Appendix 1: Statistics: chronic violence in Colombia and Guatemala over five year period[62]

In this paper I have defined chronic violence as three dimensional, including space, time, and intensity components. The working definition is that 'Chronic violence is present where rates of violent death are at least twice the average for high and low income countries respectively; where these levels are sustained for five years or more and where frequent acts of violence not necessarily resulting in death, are recorded across several socialisation spaces, including the household, the neighbourhood, the school, inter community and the nation state public space (which brings in disproportionate, sanctioned and non-sanctioned acts of violence attributed to state security forces)'. The following statistics, (which like all statistics on violence should be treated with caution as so much goes unreported), takes the five year period 1997–2002 as far as statistics were available for such a time series. It gives an indication of the intensity of violence and a range of spaces in which it is embedded.

Colombia (population 2003: 44.2 million)

Table A1 Annual homicide rate in Colombia, 1997–2002

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Number of homicides	25,379	23,096	24,358	26,540	27,841	28,837

González Reyes (2006: 2)

Table A2 Displaced people in Colombia, 1997–2002

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Registered displaced people (Red de Solidaridad Social)	15,260	35,675	31,546	331,383	375,187	424,354
Estimated number of displace people (CODHES)	257,000	308,000	288,000	317,375	341,925	412,553

González Reyes (2006: 3)

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62   My thanks to Brigitta Von Messling for compiling these statistics.

Table A3 Massacres perpetrated by the AUC 1997–2002

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Number of massacres	114	115	168	236	185	115
Number of victims	563	682	929	1403	1039	680

González Reyes (2006: 2)

Table A4 Kidnappings in Colombia, 1997–2002

Perpetrator of the kidnapping	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Various organisations	0	10	5	4	0	11
Family	18	29	16	45	13	39
Descendants	51	142	202	175	56	54
AUC	19	64	148	190	233	165
Common criminals	259	307	337	303	294	410
Unknown	419	602	751	1123	476	429
ELN	426	700	791	897	921	788
FARC	431	1014	966	844	927	990
TOTAL	1,623	2,868	3,216	3,581	2,920	2,886

González Reyes (2006: 4)

Table A5 Children kidnapped in Colombia, 1997–2002

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Cases	162	184	249	346	309	394
Total	1,623	2,868	3,216	3,581	2,920	2,886

González Reyes (2006: 4)

Table A6 Assassinations of local officials in Colombia, 1997–2002

Year	Mayors	Former Mayors	Concejales	Former Concejales
1997	10	No data	40	SD
1998	8	No data	19	SD
1999	9	No data	25	SD
2000	18	1	17	0
2001	6	1	10	0
2002	12	0	80	0

González Reyes (2006: 7)

Table A7 Experiences of former child soldiers in Colombia

18% Have killed someone at least once

60% Have witnessed a murder or assassination

78% Have seen mutilated corpses

25% Have witnessed kidnappings

13% Have participated in kidnappings

18% Have witnessed acts of torture

40% Have shot at someone

28% Have been injured in combat

González Reyes (2006: 3)

Table A8 Homicides of indigenous people in Colombia, 1998–2002

Perpetrator of the homicide	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
AUC	37	27	50	59	78
Unknown	20	25	53	57	75
FARC	7	14	30	32	16
ELN	2	0	2	3	2
Other	2	9	9	3	9
TOTAL	**68**	**75**	**144**	**154**	**180**

González Reyes (2006: 10)

Table A9 Political homicides in Colombia, 1997–2002

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
CINEP	1,522	1,100	1,549	2,201	2,026	1,388
Comisión Colombiana de Juristas	2,571	2,245	2,915	4,879	4,676	4,383

González Reyes (2006: 13)

Table A10 Number of FARC guerrilla troops in Colombia, 1997–2001

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Troop number	10,800	11,300	12,000	16,492	16,980

González Reyes (2006: 3)

Table A11 Victims of anti-personal landmines in Colombia, 1997–2002

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
Injured	58	40	27	102	237	481
Dead	32	17	23	30	51	130
TOTAL	90	57	50	132	288	611

González Reyes (2006: 2)

Table A12 Domestic violence cases in Colombia, 1999–2002

	1999	2000	2001	2002 (Jan.–Oct.)
Number of cases (acc. to the Fiscalía General)		49,883	120,596	78,154
Number of cases (acc. to the Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses)	61,818	68,000	69,681	

(Mujereshoy 2006)

Internally displaced women in Colombia are particularly vulnerable to further violence, as evidenced by a recent study which shows that 52.3 per cent of IDP women have been victims of domestic violence, compared to 41.1 per cent of non-displaced women. Moreover, one out of every three IDP women has been forced to have sex with strangers, according to official government statistics quoted in the two reports.
www.peacewomen.org/resources/Colombia/UNHCRVAW04.html

Guatemala (population 2003:12 million)

Table A13 Human rights violation reported to MINUGUA, 1997–2001

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001 (Jan.-June)
Number of violations reported	386	341	383	412	202

MINUGUA (2001: 51)

Table A14 Total number of murders, Guatemala 1997–1998[63]

	1997	1998
By use of firearm	2,806	2,392
By use of blunt weapon or strangling	1,146	871
Other	3,955	5,037
Total	**7,907**	**8,300**

(UNDP/PNUD 1999: 254)

Table A15 Total number of people injured, Guatemala 1997–1998

	1997	1998
By use of firearm	3,592	2,816
By use of blunt weapon or strangling	1,893	2,020
Other	6,671	8,192
Total	**12,156**	**13,028**

(UNDP/PNUD 1999: 254)

Table A16 Types of crime in Guatemala, 1997–1998

	1997	1998
Robbery	2,971	3,130
Assault	1,127	1,311
Disappeared people	1,454	1,794
Rape	167	220
Explosives	78	36
Stolen cars	6,720	7,263
Stolen weapons	1,117	1,338

(UNDP/PNUD 1999: 254)

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63 The number of violent deaths in the Department of Guatemala alone reached 2,251 between January and August 2005, 1,853 men, 750 of whom were killed by guns, and 398 women, 70 of whom killed by guns. Prensa Libre 29 August 2005 These are figures released by the Public Ministry, and do not include the violent municipalities of Mixco, San Juan. Sacatepequez, Villa Nueva and Amitlan, which have their own Public Prosecutors (*fiscalia*) and hence their own statistical record.

Table A17 Causes for violent deaths in Guatemala, 1999–2001

Cause of death	1999	2000	2001
Suicide	384	412	551
Homicide	1,774	2,123	2,319
Accident	2,841	3,056	2,772
TOTAL	4,999	5,591	5,642

(UNDP/PNUD 2002)

Table A18 Cases of domestic violence reported to PROPEVI, Guatemala, 1999–2001

	1999	2000	2001
Number of cases reported	587	3,529	11,598

(UNDP/PNUD 2002)

Table A19 Lynchings in Guatemala, 1996–2000

Year	Lynchings	Attempted Lynchings	Total Number of Lynchings	Number of Deaths	Number of People Injured	Total Number of Casualties
1996	21	14	35	23	24	47
1997	22	56	78	30	80	110
1998	38	29	67	54	73	127
1999	71	34	105	48	188	236
2000	24	28	52	32	83	115
Total	176	161	337	185	448	635

MINUGUA (2004: 48)

Table A20 Women killed in Guatemala, 2000–2002

	2000	2001	2002
Number of women killed	213	307	317

CALDH (2004)

Table A21 Kidnappings in Guatemala, 1997–1999

	1997	1998	1999
Successful kidnappings	346	165	85
Failed kidnappings	49	15	20
TOTAL	395	180	105

Vela *et al.* (2001: 308)

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