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NEGOTIATING PATHWAYS TO MANHOOD: VIOLENCE
REPRODUCTION IN MEDELLIN'S PERIPHERY

Exploring habitus and masculinity to explain young men's decisions
to join armed groups in poor urban neighbourhoods of Colombia

Adam David Scourfield BAIRD

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Candidate: Adam David S. BAIRD

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Abstract: In recent years urban violence has become understood as a 'reproduced', multi-causal and socially generated phenomenon. Less is understood about why young men reproduce the majority of this violence. This thesis uses original empirical data based on thirty-two life-histories of youths living in two poor and violent neighbourhoods in Medellín, Colombia. It argues that urban violence is reproduced by male youths because it is linked to 'masculinity'; that is, the process of 'becoming men' where youths strive to fulfil productive or 'successful' models of masculinity. These processes are related to contexts of poverty, inequality and exclusion, so this thesis does not reduce the generation of urban violence to masculinity alone. Rather, understanding masculinity provides us with further insight into the reproduction of violence. This thesis further argues that male youths are disposed by their *habitus* - after Pierre Bourdieu - to negotiate a pathway to manhood that largely reflects traditional masculine values in their context. Striving to achieve prevailing versions of manhood contributed to some of these youths joining armed groups, such as gangs. The gang acted as a mechanism to fulfil their dispositions to become men, by providing them with a way to perform a version of 'successful' masculinity. This is prevalent in urban contexts of exclusion and high levels of social violence, because there are limited opportunities to achieve legal and dignified versions of manhood,

whilst there are significant opportunities to join the local gang. The youths interviewed that did not join gangs tended to come from families that taught them to reject violence at a young age, whilst supporting them in pursuing alternative pathways to manhood. Youths that joined gangs tended to have more problems at home and often had family members already in gangs.

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Introduction

In recent years, urban violence in the global south and particularly in Latin America, has come to be understood as a ‘reproduced’ phenomenon. Burgeoning studies from many disciplines have contributed to our understanding of urban violence as multi-causal and socially generated. This thesis argues that focusing on masculinities – the construction of masculine identity - can cast light upon the way in which violence is reproduced in contexts of urban exclusion and poverty. Further, the thesis argues that youths are disposed by their *habitus*, after Pierre Bourdieu, to reproduce local prevailing versions of masculinity, and in doing so in contexts of exclusion and violence some youths reproduce that violence.

This thesis sets out to understand how male youths ‘become men’ in the periphery¹ of Medellín, in Colombia, where levels of male gang violence have been extremely high for over three decades, contributing an original set of data containing life-history interviews with local male youths.

Masculinities are significant because the overwhelming majority of victims and perpetrators of deadly urban violence are young men; male youths are violent towards each other. In Medellín, from 5,450 homicide victims in 1990, 5,155 (95%) of these were men and 3,550 (65%) were between the ages of 15-29 (Revista Planeación Metropolitana, 1991: 3). This

¹ The word ‘periphery’ is used to encapsulate conditions of exclusion, poverty, inequality, and in the case of Medellín, high levels of social violence. The word ‘marginalised’ to describe the urban poor was not used because it is contested: Janice Perlman stated that “poor slum dwellers were not marginal at all, in the sense of being separated from mainstream, formal, modern urban society; they appeared to be actively tracing ‘pathways of survival’, trying to connect the city of affluence to the city of poverty” (in Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 15). John Hagedorn argues that ghettos are not “socially isolated zones completely cut off from the rest of the city” (Hagedorn, 2008: 121). Koonings and Kruijt, refer to the “urban excluded” not ‘marginalised’ (Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 3).

demographic trend has remained remarkably constant in the last two decades². Beyond Medellín, at a global level, young men remain the protagonists of violence. The WHO reported that “Males accounted for three-quarters of all victims of homicide, and had rates more than three times those among females. The highest homicide rates in the world – at 19.4 per 100 000 – were found among males aged 15–29 years” (Krug et al., 2002: 6).

Given the overwhelming amount of youth male-on-male violence, it appeared logical to explore what it is about the construction of masculinity that has made this possible. This thesis argues that adolescence is the period of ‘masculinisation’ where boys negotiate their pathways to manhood and establish their male identity. We might ask more accurately therefore; what is the relationship between *processes of masculinisation* and violence, in urban contexts of exclusion and poverty? Given the ‘male youth’ aspect of social violence, this thesis has potential resonances for other cities where young men are also the protagonists of violence.

Increasingly, literature on urban violence has come to link socio-economic conditions, namely inequality, poverty and exclusion, to violence. These are understood as ‘structural’³ factors in this thesis.

² In a longitudinal study between 1990-2002 the vast majority of homicide victims in Medellín were consistently young males between 15-34 years old, a trend which remained unchanged in 2009 (Suárez Rodríguez et al., 2005: 203; Hylton, 2010).

³ Galtung has further described factors such as inequality, exclusion, racism or sexism as forms of ‘structural violence’ (Galtung, 2002). Moser et al. add that political legacies provided the foundations for present day violence in Latin America and the rapid rise in urban violence is interrelated with factors such as rapid urbanisation, poverty, exclusion, weak governance, the increasingly organised nature of crime and increased drug proliferation (Moser and van Bronkhorst, 1999: 1).

Despite these statistics on male youth violence, very little literature is dedicated to how masculinities interact with contexts of exclusion and poverty to generate violence. This thesis does not argue that masculinities alone generate urban violence; but rather, it is the way that particular socio-economic conditions in the periphery interact with 'masculinisation' that can cast light upon the generation of violence. This thesis asks; what is it about 'becoming a man' in contexts of exclusion that lead some youths, but not others, into violence? In doing so the arguments put forward here should be considered complimentary to urban violence literature that, correctly, has begun to understand the connectedness between violence and social exclusion.

This thesis also takes on board recent conceptions of violence as a 'reproduced' phenomenon, in an effort to understand why violence persists in certain contexts. This is apt for Medellín, which has suffered consistently high rates of violence since the 1980s. Chapter 3 contextualises the research in Medellín, a city which achieved the record of the highest per capita homicide rate in history in 1991, at 381 per 100,000 inhabitants (Suárez Rodríguez et al., 2005: 203). Chapter 3 also explains the array of different illegal armed groups that have been active in Medellín's periphery since as early as the 1950s, including gangs, militias, paramilitaries and self-defence groups and their relation to the broader armed conflict in Colombia.

If we are to understand how violence is reproduced, we need to grasp why is it that new generations of young men replenish the ranks of street gangs or other illegal armed groups. Medellín's history demonstrates that

consecutive generations of young men have been consistently drawn into armed groups in their neighbourhoods; and that violent young men switch easily from one armed group to another.

Evidence suggests that violence is linked to masculinity in some way, hence, if violence is *reproduced*, what might be the role of masculinity in that reproduction? This is a central question in the thesis. There has yet to be a significant study which analyses how masculinities are *reproduced* and what relation this might have to generating violence and contexts of social exclusion⁴. Chapter 1 of this thesis outlines such lacunae in the literature and builds a case for the significance of this study.

French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' from his *Theory of Practice*, were used to analyse the empirical data. These are explained in detail in Chapter 2. One of these 'tools' is *habitus*, which explains how individuals are *disposed* to reproduce existing social practices, which is used to understand the reproduction of masculinity. However, it should be made clear that Bourdieu is not the subject of investigation in this thesis. Young men are. It is about how the empirical research casts light upon the role of masculinities in the reproduction of urban violence.

The key findings from the empirical research suggest that young men in Medellin's periphery are disposed to reproduce prevailing versions of masculine identity that reflect their local context. The youths interviewed sought to 'masculinise', to find a pathway to manhood, and 'live up' to

⁴ Barker and Jensen talk about the relationship between masculinity and violence in contexts of exclusion, but do not focus significantly on the social *reproduction* of masculinity and how this may be related to violence (Barker, 2005; Jensen, 2008)

these versions of masculinity. To 'live up' to a productive version of masculinity in a context of poverty and exclusion was challenging for these youths given the dearth of opportunities. However, whilst they all negotiated a pathway to manhood, they did so in different ways. Despite the fact that the youths interviewed came from similar socio-economic backgrounds, their *opportunities* to 'masculinise' were markedly different. Those who joined armed groups had little family support to pursue 'positive' livelihoods, and nonviolent and legal pathways to manhood. Furthermore, their family members were often already members of armed groups acting not only as male role models, but also providing them with a direct route into these armed groups. In contrast, the youths that did not join armed groups often received strong support at home, which led them to reject armed groups as a pathway to manhood in adolescence. This laid the foundations for them to pursue 'positive' livelihoods and masculine identities as they grew up. Let us consider the empirical data in more detail.

Empirical Data

In the academic year from 2007 to 2008, ethnographic research was conducted in two peripheral neighbourhoods in Medellín, in the north-eastern and north-western districts, which have historically suffered from some of the highest rates of violence in the city. During this period, participant organisation was conducted at two community organisations to facilitate interviews with local male youths. The methodology is explained in Chapter 5.

Thirty-two youths, in two sets, were interviewed in total to map out their life histories. The first was a group of youths whom had violent histories via their membership to armed groups – these are termed ‘violent’⁵ youths. The second group of ‘prosocial’⁶ youths was chosen precisely because of the seemingly opposing life-choices they had made, although this is not to suggest a clear-cut ‘good’ Vs ‘bad’ binary exists between them and the ‘violent’ youths. These youths were called ‘prosocial’ because they participated in a community development organisation, working in youth and social work, human rights and community cohesion projects.

Twenty-five ‘violent’ youths were interviewed, although seven of these provided limited amounts of data about the individuals and were not used for analysis. This was due to problems in some interviews such as researcher nerves or a lack of cooperation on part of the interviewee (see Chapter 5). In total seventeen ‘violent’ and fifteen ‘prosocial’ interviews are used extensively in the thesis because they provided substantial amounts of data about the individual’s background, contributing an original data-set to the field for scrutiny. This is of particular value because few researchers have managed to conduct these types of ethnographies in dangerous contexts, particularly when studying armed actors.

⁵ The term ‘violent’ youth is placed inverted commas because it did not seem wholly satisfactory to label these youths ‘violent’ alone, because their histories were nuanced and complex. However, they *did* have violent histories, so ‘violent’ was used as shorthand to distinguish them from the ‘prosocial’ youths interviewed.

⁶ The word ‘prosocial’ has been borrowed from other literature to describe these youths engaged in ‘positive’ social activities (see Daly and Wilson, 1997; Barker, 2000).

It should be noted here, that this thesis focuses on young men in particular. It does not focus significantly on women's interaction with violence. Women were considered where the young men interviewed referred to them, such as the sexual objectification of young women by many gang members. Exploring girls and mothers' interactions with violence and violent groups in more depth through direct interviews with them would have positively informed the research, but that was beyond the scope of the thesis and my capacities as a lone researcher given my time limitations in the field.

What did the data from the field reveal about the process of youths growing up in Medellín's poor neighbourhoods and opting to join the gang or not? The data shows that *both* sets of youths clearly sought to 'masculinise' – to go through a process of 'masculinisation' and 'become men' - and both did so reflecting traditional and contextual elements of masculinity; they all coveted status, respect and male dignity. Chapter 6 analyses the data sets for the 'violent' youths and Chapter 7 for the 'prosocial' youths. These youths tended to reproduce prevailing masculine values, or through a Bourdieuan lens, they had a masculine *habitus*⁷. Their interviews showed that their dispositions to 'masculinise' were not opposed. Both sets of youths pursued prevailing masculine values, but did so in different ways due to the influences upon them as they grew up. In other words, they took divergent routes to manhood - something different was occurring in their lives that led them down different paths. As the analysis developed, it was clear that the

⁷ "Masculine *habitus*" has also been identified by Coles (Coles, 2009).

opportunities available for 'prosocial' youths to 'masculinise' were in fact markedly different to those of 'violent' youths. These have been identified in the thesis as 'masculinisation opportunities'.

How did these divergent 'masculinisation opportunities' arise for these two different sets of youths? Despite living in similar socio-economic conditions the family upbringing of the youths was considerably different. 'Prosocial' youths viewed their childhood upbringing and home life in a much more positive light than 'violent' youths. 'Prosocial' youths tended to receive significant support at home, for education and pursuing a range of 'alternative' interests to hanging out on the street corner – such as participating in church groups or socialising with youths who liked different music to the norm. A commonality that all 'prosocial' youths shared was their rejection of violent groups when they reached adolescence. This stemmed from influences at home and the support and affective relationships they experienced. These experiences growing up proved to be the foundational base for the construction of a moral self and led them to pursue 'positive' or at least nonviolent masculinisation opportunities in later life.

Whilst tendencies emerged from the data, plotting a series of clear-cut 'causal factors' would be problematic. The social world and individuals are complex and they will not fit neatly into a set of explanatory factors, nor should they be forced to. The youths upbringings were neither entirely 'positive' nor 'negative'; violent fathers could also be caring fathers; 'violent' youths' older brothers in gangs sometimes tried to stop them

following in their footsteps; and 'prosocial' youths could also display *macho* traits.

Of these tendencies, it was the 'prosocial' youths' *rejection* of violence that came across most strongly. Joining a gang or other armed group as a 'masculinisation opportunity' was closed in adolescence due to their abovementioned rejection of violence. This meant they had the possibility to encounter and enter the 'prosocial' community organisation at a later stage in their lives, if at times entering this organisation came through 'chance' exposure to it. Some of these youths might also have chosen other nonviolent, but less 'prosocial' pathways in life, if they had not come into contact with the community organisation. In fact, most youths in the communities where the research took place, neither joined the gang or the 'prosocial' community organisation, demonstrating that there are many different pathways to manhood in contexts of exclusion and the majority do not involve joining a gang⁸. Unfortunately, the implications of this are that only a minority of youths need to opt to join the gang for high levels of urban violence to continue. This is a serious challenge for those seeking to interrupt violence reproduction. Once youths had entered the community organisation they found positive, nonviolent male role models and corresponding masculinisation opportunities to fulfil their *dispositions* – the masculine *habitus* - to become men. The organisation was central to the development of their 'prosocial' behaviour.

⁸ One complexity of this study is that a small percentage of youth actually joined gangs, but an even smaller percentage joined community development organisations. 'Prosocial' and 'violent' youths were divergent from the 'normal' youths in terms of their social practices.

The youths who became 'violent' lived in similar socioeconomic conditions to 'prosocial' youths. They demonstrated, in their majority, negative opinions about their family life. These experiences at home proved significant. Half of these youths had older family members, normally brothers, in gangs. These family members were male role models, shaping what these youths understood as 'doing masculinity'. They also provided exposure to armed groups and hence 'opportunities' to fulfil this masculine identity. The majority of 'violent' youths also had little support at home in terms of developing alternative interests to the street corner, or support for education or extra-curricular interests. When these youths came into contact with the ubiquitous street gangs on their doorsteps, they did not reject them as a possible masculinisation opportunity as the 'prosocial' youths had done. They had not developed the same rejection of gangs and violence that 'prosocial' youths had learned at home. Between the 'prosocial' and 'violent' youths, the critical point of divergence along their pathways to manhood tended to be between the ages of 12 and 15, where they opted to join or reject the gang.

The reproduction of masculinities and violence

It is precisely *how* masculinities interact with contexts of exclusion in the urban periphery that can help us explain the generation of violence. Let us refine this: What constitute 'masculinisation opportunities' is a subjective process and varies dramatically according to the socio-economic conditions in which the youth is brought up. The peripheral urban context in Medellín is one of exclusion, poverty and inequality.

These conditions are emasculating⁹, they make it more challenging to achieve the social status required to 'be a man' according to traditional expectations. In terms of the concepts put forward here, emasculation can be understood as the reduction of licit, or legal, 'masculinisation opportunities'. Therefore, male youths negotiating a pathway to manhood in such contexts must *contest* emasculation. This contestation of emasculation can also be understood as the search for male forms of 'dignity'. The empirical interviews showed that both 'prosocial' and 'violent' youths wanted to become men, with a sense of pride, esteem and dignity, and to do so they had to 'live-up' to traditional masculine expectations.

For many of these youths living-up to masculine expectation was a burden. They were vocal about the lack of economic opportunities in their context. However what was notable was how the 'violent' youths admired the local gang leader – or *duro* – above all in their neighbourhood.

The 'violent' youths were very clear about why they admired the *duro* and what they valued as being a 'successful' man. These were localised signifiers of 'doing masculinity' which included access to material goods such as fast motorbikes, expensive clothes and trainers, but were also symbolic such as 'respect' for being a 'tough guy' in the gang, and sexual access to the most coveted women in the neighbourhood.

Bourdieu's 'tools' of *capital* and *field* were used to analyse this data.

These locally valued signifiers of 'manhood' can be understood as

⁹ Various authors have commented on the emasculating effects of poverty, exclusion, inequality, and even regional processes of deindustrialisation (see Cleaver, 2002; Hagedorn, 2009; Jensen, 2008; Barker, 2000).

masculine *capitals*, within the *field* of masculine competition – that is, they measured themselves competitively against other men in their locality whom they consider their peers, competing for these masculine *capitals* (women, motorbikes, et cetera). The accumulation of masculine *capitals* by the gang and the *duros*, gave them a dominant position in the local *field* of masculinity in the minds of the ‘violent’ youths interviewed. The ‘prosocial’ youths confirmed that most young men in their neighbourhood looked up to the *duros*. This meant gang membership stood out as a ‘masculinisation opportunity’ or ‘the best’ pathway to manhood for many youths growing up in these neighbourhoods. Lamentably, to secure these *capitals* the gang depends on the deployment of violence to control organised crime such as racketeering and drugs sales. Gang membership and violence emerged as seemingly powerful tools to obtain these *capitals*. Whilst using violence can be a masculine act in itself, none of the youths interviewed said that they wanted to join the gang because it was an opportunity to ‘use violence’, but a many of them said they joined the gang to access material goods, women, ‘respect’ and the like.

Gang violence seen from this perspective is an externality or by-product of youths’ masculine assertion in conditions of emasculation. Arguably, upon entering gangs, youths were not be striving ‘to be violent’, but they were striving ‘to be men’, even if this happened at a ‘less than conscious’ level. Gang violence was a mechanism ‘instrumentalised’ or ‘operationalised’ to accumulate masculine *capital*, and this process contributes to the continuum of violence. When these arguments are taken into account it would follow that if we can provide youths in

Medellín's periphery with dignified and nonviolent ways of accumulating masculine *capital*, that is, positive pathways to manhood, this could prevent them from joining armed groups and hence help interrupt the reproduction of violence.

The lure of the gang acts as a 'carrot' to male youths brought up in these contexts, whilst emasculation acts as a 'stick' by denying them other pathways to manhood. Where masculinity is wrested from these youths through emasculation, this antagonises their masculine *habitus*. Their *dispositions* to become men will force their way to the surface. In the absence of licit opportunities and in the presence of the gang, the 'one employer that is always hiring'¹⁰, there is a certain 'masculine logic' to joining the gang. It is unsurprising that in conditions of exclusion and in the presence of illegal armed groups, that male youths are the protagonists of violence.

The 'violent' youths interviewed sought to emulate the prototype gang *duro*, in an attempt to garner masculine *capital*, and therefore reproduced the prototype's masculinities and consequent violent behaviour. Underpinning this is the masculine *habitus*. The gang subculture became a fertile place for learning to use and reproduce violence for boys and youths. Therefore, the reproduction of violence is a social practice related to the individual subjects' masculine performance.

¹⁰ In contexts of exclusion in the urban periphery there are often opportunities to join the gang – Hagedorn has said this is the one employer that is 'always hiring' (Hagedorn, 2008). One of the interviewees, Pepe, said that the gang was also the 'first' employment opportunity for many youths (Personal Interview, Pepe, 11/04/2008).

The linkages between masculinisation and violence reproduction become compounded where illegal armed groups exist over a number of generations in a given geographical area. This has been the case in Medellín. Chapter 3 argues that the continued presence of illegal armed groups in Medellín's periphery – especially since the 1980s – with the replacement of one violent group by another, has led to these groups becoming 'structures of violence'¹¹. They have become 'institution like', embedding themselves in communities across generations. This compounds the control of such groups over local *capitals* and the *field* of masculinity, therefore shaping the *doxa* – or 'rules of the game' – in terms of 'what it means to be a successful man', and crucially *how* to achieve that 'success'. Where illegal armed groups become 'structures of violence' in the periphery, this improves the efficacy at which they can draw up successive generations of young men into their ranks. These young men then reproduce violence, accumulate *capitals*, dominate the masculine *field*, and shape the *doxa* for future generations.

These arguments do not claim to be hard and fast rules. No one is permanently bound by *habitus*; it is *dispositional*. Nor can *habitus* explain the entirety of a subjects' repertoire of social practices. Neither can all of the behaviour of male youths be reduced to their personal process of

¹¹ A number of authors refer to gangs or irregular armed groups as structures or being structure like. Jensen refers to 'structures of dominance' (Jensen, 2008: 10); Gutiérrez Sanín to 'paramilitary structures' (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2009); Hagedorn to 'institutionalised' gangs (Hagedorn, 2008); less directly O'Donnell refers to arbitrary and violent non-state 'systems of power' (O'Donnell, 1999); the concept of gangs as structures with reproductive and ontological capacities has been put forward by Rodgers (Rodgers, 2003). The theoretical claim developed in Chapter 3 is the concept of the gang or local armed group as a structured and structuring entity that generates violence. This is outlined in Chapter 2.

masculinisation. However, *habitus* helps us understand how particular masculine behaviour is reproduced with continuity across generations. It would be remiss not to recognise that male youths' pursuit of manhood significantly informs their social performance, including their decisions to join gangs. Ergo, boys will strive to become men by reproducing masculine practices, and in their attempts to do so some of them will reproduce violence. Grasping these gendered and reproductive dynamics of violence can enhance structural explanations of urban violence. These are significant claims.

What are the implications of this study? Chapter 8 considers how this thesis might contribute to local organisations and practitioners in the field working in violence reduction. We must factor into our thinking that youths will be disposed to masculinise according, largely, to existing masculine values. They will seek out masculinisation opportunities and strive to accumulate what constitutes masculine *capital* in their context. The challenge is to tackle armed groups as masculinisation opportunities and 'standard bearers' of masculinity, and to provide alternative options that confer *capital* and dignity upon male youths where gangs and socio-economic exclusion are prevalent. We can think of this in terms of generating more possibilities for young men in these contexts to achieve dignified masculine livelihoods. Beyond this we may need to challenge power relationships and the dominating nature of traditional masculinities themselves, but that issue is beyond the remit of this thesis.

Chapter 1

Urban Violence, Violence Reproduction and Masculinity

Introduction

Urban violence has risen dramatically since the end of the 1980s. In urban contexts, particularly in large cities of the global south, these causes have been increasingly linked to poverty, exclusion and inequality. More recent literature has begun to analyse violence as a 'cyclical' or 'reproduced' phenomenon in an attempt to fathom its persistence in particular settings, but violence itself has proved to be conceptually 'slippery'.

Although the vast majority of victims and victimisers of homicidal violence are young men, little attention has been paid to the subjectivities of violence reproduction in relation to masculinities. Whilst some authors have studied the relationship between masculinities and violence in contexts of exclusion such as Barker and Jensen (Barker, 2005 ; Jensen, 2007 ; Jensen, 2008), such studies have not been significantly linked to the reproduction process. To be clear from the outset, this thesis does not claim that masculinity accounts for the generation of urban violence alone, it does not. Violence is multi-causal and complex. However, young men are consistently in the 'eye of the storm' of urban violence so the relationship between being 'male' and the use of violence that needs to be explored further. To that end, gender and more specifically masculinity or 'masculinities' play a significant role in how such violence is generated or reproduced.

This chapter first considers the rapid conceptual development that has taken place in recent years as scholars have sought to explain the phenomenon of

rising urban violence. In doing so contemporary understandings of the *structural* causes of violence - such as inequality, poverty and exclusion - and then violence as a reproduced phenomenon will be considered. The chapter will then focus on studies of masculinities and violence. Bringing these fields together this chapter states that the contribution of this thesis to literature on urban violence is to examine how masculinities are reproduced in contexts of inequality, poverty and exclusion, and how male identity is a significant factor in the continuum of urban violence itself.

Dimensions of urban violence

Towards a Structural Understanding of Urban Violence: Inequality, exclusion and poverty

Rising urban violence since the end of the 1980s has come to characterise many cities in the developing world. By the 1990s many of the most violent cities were found in Latin America (Rodgers, 2001: 5; Moser and McIlwaine, 2001: 6), although there were other violent cities located in South Africa, the Caribbean and to a lesser extent in Chicago in the USA (Hagedorn, 2008: xxiv-xxv). Unsurprisingly then, a substantial amount of literature has been dedicated to understanding the phenomenon of urban violence, and much of this literature has focused on Latin America.

In the poor and excluded areas of cities such as Medellín, Cape Town, Río de Janeiro and Kingston, criminal and social violence is often severe. When referring to political history, scholars have linked this present-day violence to the political violence of authoritarian dictatorships, a legacy which still

permeates Latin America's fledgling democracies (Koonings and Kruijt, 1999). Numerous actors use "post-authoritarian violence" to pursue a number of goals, which has been termed the "democratisation of violence" (Rodgers, 2003: 113-114; Koonings and Kruijt, 1999: 11).

Where political legacies provided the foundations for present day violence, the rapid rise in urban violence is interrelated with factors such as rapid urbanisation, poverty, exclusion, weak governance, the increasingly organised nature of crime and increased drug proliferation (Moser and van Bronkhorst, 1999: 1). These contemporary factors can be broadly understood as 'structural' that contribute to urban violence. Emerging literature in the 1990s points to the unprecedented magnitude of contemporary urban violence, the processes of violence normalisation, the role of drugs, gangs, mafias and political violence, the inefficacy or total absence of the rule of law, social cleansing, and the roles played by fear and the embedded nature of gender-based violence (Winton, 2004 ; Rodgers, 1999 ; Moser, 2004); or as Hagedorn formulates "migration + cities + poverty + slums + discrimination + youth = gangs" (Hagedorn, 2008: 6).

This developing body of literature increasingly understands violence as a socially generated phenomenon: "Violence is not a spontaneous phenomenon but, above all a product of society... a distortion of social relationships... The offender has often been stimulated by the social environment [which] legitimizes violence" (Carrion, 2002: 93; Vanderschueren, 1996). Urban violence is now understood as multifaceted and multi-causal, and is frequently referred to as common, endemic, unbound, everyday, ubiquitous and as 'violences' (Pearce, 2006a ; Tores-Rivas, 1999 ; Moser and McIlwaine, 2001 ; Moser and McIlwaine,

2004). Some scholars highlight social norms that support violence (Schiff, 2003: 163, 172; Viveros Vigoya, 2001: 116; Kivel, 1992: 118, 121); others go further and suggest that violence has become normalised, banal or reproduced in some communities (O'Donnell in Pecaut, 1999 ; Pearce, 2006b); others seek to understand violence through gang 'culture' and gangs themselves as 'social movements'¹ (Hagedorn, 2008: 136-7)

Violence has increasingly been correlated with inequality and exclusion from diverse fields in the social sciences, and recently in epidemiology (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 134; Marmot, 2004 ; De Keseredy and Schwartz, 2005: 360; Daly and Wilson, 2001: 24-25). By 2004 alone, there were "fifty or more such studies that have examined homicide rates in relation to income inequality [concluding] that this is a robust relationship.... Several research reports refer to it as the most consistent evidence of an environmental influence on violence" (Wilkinson, 2004: 4-6). Social-psychological studies have also related risk factors linked to youth aggression and antisocial behaviour, to contexts of exclusion; and psychologists, economists, criminologists, anthropologists and even evolutionary psychologists have found that inequality escalates homicide (Tremblay and Nagin, 2005: 354-355; Daly and Wilson, 2001: 25). Inequality and exclusion are bound in a negatively reinforcing relationship to depleted social capital – the connectedness and capacities of social actors - and perpetuating social violence.

¹ Hagedorn uses theoretical concepts from Alain Touraine and Manuel Castells to conceptualise gangs as 'social actors' and 'social movements' (Hagedorn, 2008).

Scholarship focusing on Latin America has advanced the debate on urban violence, particularly investigating what were termed earlier as structural causes of violence. Gutiérrez Sanín and Jaramillo point to a long list of authors who claim that inequality and not just poverty, is a foundational cause of social violence (Gutiérrez Sanín and Jaramillo, 2004: 18). Barker argues that in Rio's *favelas* "frustration and anger over an unequal distribution of opportunities are the breeding grounds for violence, rather than abject poverty per se" (Barker, 2005: 63-64). Koonings and Kruijt who have studied urban violence in the global south extensively, agree that recent scholarship goes beyond the superficial equation of poverty, marginality and violence to look at connections between deprivation, exclusion and contending forms of power and control (Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 2).

Moser and Rodgers suggest a foundational cause for violence and insecurity in cities across Latin America is rapid and poorly planned urbanisation, leading to an excluded periphery largely abandoned by state, facing the rise of gangs and vigilante groups. This exclusion is tied in with processes of globalisation, prompting frustration and economically motivated violence, weak household structures, poor conditions and overcrowding, and the erosion of social capital (Moser and Rodgers, 2005).

Janice Perlman's study in 1976 in Rio de Janeiro first showed that prevailing images of tradition, marginality and a culture of poverty did not fit poor survival strategies (Perlman, 2009). "Poor slum dwellers were not marginal at all, in the sense of being separated from mainstream, formal, modern urban society; they appeared to be actively tracing 'pathways of survival', trying to connect the city of affluence to the city of poverty" (Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 15). In other

words “[ghettos are not] socially isolated zones completely cut off from the rest of the city” (Hagedorn, 2008: 121). Furthermore, whilst violence has a destructive effect on the initiatives of the urban poor, frequently their creative agency is a notable element of their day-to-day life, as Davis notes “even within a single city, slum populations can support a bewildering variety of responses to structural neglect and deprivation” (in Hagedorn, 2008: 26). Therefore, studies of the urban poor should not be exercises in denying them ‘subjecthood’ or agency. In Colombia this creative ‘shantytown agency’ has been named *rebusque*, and is common parlance amongst the urban poor. To call the urban poor ‘marginalised’ may obfuscate their agency. Perlman reflected that this ‘myth of marginality’ has changed into the ‘reality’ of exclusion and violence (in Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 25).

A number of terms to describe poor urban neighbourhoods have arisen such as the ‘urban periphery’, ‘grey zones’ or the ‘urban excluded’. The poorest communities are almost completely devoid of state engagement. Koonings and Kruijt explain that inequality and poverty in cities are expressed by the formal Vs informal, legal Vs extralegal, inclusion Vs exclusion, lawful Vs criminal, uncivil Vs civil. They cite three pivotal fields which define patterns of urban poverty, inequality and exclusion: assets and livelihood strategies, social mobilisation and political participation, and insecurity and violence. Hence urban poverty has increasingly been related to forms of exclusion and understood as structural and systematic (Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 15-18, 21-22).

Significantly, such conditions are further marked by the absence of the rule of law. This ‘governance void’ (Moser and Rodgers, 2005) where “the state is

unable or unwilling to fulfil its part of the social contract” (Jensen, 2007: 47) leads to the emergence of ‘informal institutions’, organic forms of ‘street politics’, vigilantism or ‘defensive gangs’ (Moser and Rodgers, 2005: 13, 47, 74; Rodgers, 2007 ; Jensen, 2008 ; Hagedorn, 2008). However, this should not be understood as social chaos. Violence does not just operate *in lieu* of the state in an anomic social world; it has created alternative ‘parallel’ forms of order, control, resource distribution, legitimacy and identity (Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 2). Over time, violent actors can become ‘institutionalised’; institutions that become embedded in communities, often within a framework of broader political interests. We need look no further for evidence of this than *favelas* of Rio, the *slums* of Mumbai, the *garrisons* of Kingston and the *comunas populares* of Medellín. In a Weberian sense, These groups are a “continuation of politics by other means” (Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 2, 26). Given these complexities “institutional approaches to the conundrum of urban violence (such as security sector reform) alone, therefore, have mostly fallen short of the mark” (Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 2). Particularly “zero tolerance or ‘urban counter-insurgency’ strategies on the part of security forces mainly respond to requirements of political image-making and generally fail to provide an effective strategy for ‘law and order’” (Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 14-15). Furthermore, they dismiss environmental and sociological explanations of crime (Jensen, 2008: 72).

In the late 1990s, approaches to youth led urban violence began to focus on the environment in which youth behaviour was learned. Moser and Bronkhorst advocated a holistic approach to dealing with such violence based on the context in which it occurred:

“A more holistic approach to the problem is based on the premise that youth behavior is learned and “does not occur in a vacuum but in the context of the youth’s family and family dynamics, peer group, neighbourhood and social opportunities. The more desperate the context, the more support the youth will need to survive and prosper (Burt 1996, p.1)”... youth who face environmental, social, and family situations that hinder their personal development and successful integration into society as productive citizens” (Moser and van Bronkhorst, 1999: 6).

A number of authors have sought to establish models, systematise ‘risk’, ‘vulnerability’ or list ‘external’ or ‘structural’ factors – even though “the causal links among these phenomena are dauntingly complex” (Daly and Wilson, 2001: 6; see Integrated Model for Violence Causality Applied to Gang Violence in Moser and van Bronkhorst, 1999: 6; Moser and Rodgers, 2005: 138; Dowdney, 2007 ; Moser and McIlwaine, 2001 ; Barker, 2005 ; : 355). Diego Vigil says that “basically the street gang is an outcome of marginalisation”; Hagedorn agrees “Vigil has it just right” (2008: xxxi).

However the focus on the structural causes of urban violence must be nuanced with gendered interpretations of masculinity to further understand violence itself. Some authors have begun to bring these approaches together (Barker, 1998 ; Barker, 2005 ; Pearce, 2006a ; Jensen, 2007 ; Jensen, 2008). These contemporary understandings of urban violence, often at odds with traditional or criminological approaches to ‘securitisation’², have come a long way in explaining violence. Identifying these structural factors linked to exclusion is vital, but alone fall short of a full explanation of how violence arises.

This rapidly growing body of academic literature, as McIlwaine points out, is rarely interdisciplinary (in Winton, 2004: 165). If violence is indeed multi-causal,

² ‘Securitisation’ here refers to responses to urban violence and crime led by the state that focus on punitive policing methods, often failing to deal with or even recognise the ‘structural’ causes of urban violence. In Medellín traditional ‘securitisation’ policies have been carried out by a combination of the military, the police force and paramilitary groups. Such ‘securitisation’ policies have been developed by politicians with state security forces, without the participation of those most affected by insecurity itself. See (Pearce, 2009: 7).

we must connect the dots between disciplines. Considering that young men are at the 'eye of the storm' surprisingly little of this contemporary scholarship focuses on masculinities. Undoubtedly, more nuanced understandings of urban violence through the lens of masculinities, particularly in terms of the reproduction of violence itself can deepen our understanding of social violence. This thesis seeks to connect social reproduction and masculinities together in contexts of chronic urban violence, standing on the shoulders of the literature outlined above, which has explored the 'gang' phenomenon and the structural conditions contributing to high rates of urban violence. To make these connections, first we must consider approaches to understanding violence as 'reproduction', then how masculinities relate to violence.

Towards an understanding of violence 'reproduction'

Scholars have struggled to explain why violence has become so enduring and consistent in excluded urban contexts. To explain the apparent continuum³ of violence, scholars have begun to explore how it may be reproduced, why, and under which conditions. If violence is reproduced across generations - becoming 'intergenerational' - can such violence be interrupted between generations? This is a struggle to conceptualise violence beyond 'production' towards the 'reproduction' of existing violence.

Galtung first talked of a 'culture of violence' (Galtung, 2002), where culture refers to the inheritance, learning and reproduction of social norms, beliefs, customs, practices and histories. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois list a number

³ Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois claim that violence is mimetic and reproductive "so we can rightly speak of... a continuum of violence" (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004: 1).

of terms used to try and pin down its 'slippery' nature such as cycles, spirals, mirrors, and the abovementioned 'continuum' of violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004: 1); whilst others have contributed *habitus* of violence and the concept of three dimensional 'chronic violence' (Pecaut, 1999 ; Galtung, 2002 ; Nordstrom, 1994 ; Nordstrom, 1997 ; Barker, 2005: 77; O'Donnell in Rodgers, 2003: 113; Pearce, 2006a).

However, despite the plethora of terms to convey how violence may be 'reproductive', surprisingly little empirical substantiation or praxis is presented. References to the 'reproduction' of violence are often left as "theoretical icing on the empirical cake" (Maton, 2008: 63). This is not to dismiss these theoretical claims, on the contrary this thesis supports and aims to contribute to our understanding of violence as a reproduced phenomenon, but more empirical scrutiny is required to substantiate or refute these claims. How is violence actually reproduced through generations in contexts of existing violence, poverty and exclusion? In particular, the subjectivities of reproduction remain unexplored; how do individuals come to reproduce violence, or not, for that matter?

Structures and processes of structuration are inherently linked to social reproduction (Giddens, 1991). Recently Rodgers has explored the conceptualisation of gangs or illegal armed groups as social 'structures', forms of 'insurgent citizenship', developing the concepts of Giddens, Holsten and O'Donnell (Rodgers, 2007: 242, 357; Rocha and Rodgers, 2008: 91). Whilst gangs may be "ephemeral alliances" between individuals, the gang structure often remains in place, what Hagedorn calls "institutionalization", borrowing from theories of organisation (Hagedorn, 2008: xi, 7, 18-19). Such gangs range

from being “socially constructive”, laying down informal rules, protecting assets and allowing the construction of livelihoods (Rodgers, 2008: 242), to predominantly “destroy[ing] livelihoods and identities” (Jensen, 2008). Perlman has noted that gangs in Rio’s *favelas* provide no welfare whatsoever (Pearlman, 2009: 63). Most gangs fall into the middle-ground combining elements of “both predation and welfare” (Davis in Hagedorn, 2008: xi). Irregular armed groups develop a functionality and logic around violence which drives their structures of dominance on the streets through a localised monopoly of force (see also Davis in Hagedorn, 2008: xi; Jensen, 2008: 10; Moser and Rodgers, 2005). In other words, such groups depend on the deployment (or threat) of violence to establish ‘local rule’ - the control of a particular territory, i.e. neighbourhood – where they run organised crime such as extortion, racketeering and drug dealing. To date the concept of gangs as structures with reproductive capacities remains largely undeveloped, and significantly has not been merged with gendered perspectives around masculinities and violence.

Before moving on to consider the relationship between masculinities and violence, it should be recognised that there are numerous other predictors of violence, such as scholarship from behavioural, developmental, social and even evolutionary psychology, right through to epidemiology. Of course this thesis cannot cover all of the suggested predictors of violence from these fields, but here some of the strengths and limitations of behavioural and developmental psychology, as well as epidemiology are flagged up.

Behavioural psychologists argue that adults supply the prototype for aggressive behaviour and men’s use of violence is firmly established by the time of adolescence (Sparks, 2003: 243; Hoffmann et al., 1994: 293). Furthermore,

youth violence, delinquency and anti-social behaviour are related to coercive, violent and antisocial parenting practices and family dysfunction (Zoccolillo et al., 2005 ; Moser and van Bronkhorst, 1999: 13; Hoeve et al., 2009: 750) and conversely that supportive parenting behaviours are negatively linked to delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009: 750). In practical terms this means that where family support is absent, youths find solace in structures outside of the home which can lead them to join gangs in contexts where they are prevalent. This can be understood as a type of 'gang surrogacy': (Dowdney, 2007: 82-83).

In particular poor paternal support or bad male role models, abuse and violence towards children are related to their future delinquency and violence (Hoeve et al., 2009 ; Alexander et al., 1991 ; Avakame, 1998 ; : 367). Being a victim of violence is the most powerful predictor of violent adolescent behaviour (Brook et al., 2003: 1470, 1473). Furthermore, father absenteeism has been linked with 'hypermasculine' and "rigidly over-compensatory masculine behaviours" (Billier, 1993: 2). Such analyses should be understood in relation to broader structural determinants in society if we are to come closer to understanding why 'social violence' is higher in some areas than others: contexts of exclusion and poverty negatively impact upon family life and the family's capacity to support their children.

Evidence suggests that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between public and private violence (Zoccolillo et al., 2005: 356). If 'violence learning' begins in the domestic sphere it can be transferred to the social sphere and compounded through peer groups. Peer socialisation plays a crucial role in compounding violence learned at home (Hoffmann et al., 1994: 291; Brook et al., 2003: 1474-1475; Jimeno in Winton, 2004: 177; Vanderschueren, 1996:

100). Pearce comments on “the question of linkages between ‘violences’ in different spheres of human socialization [where] the 'home' and the intimate is arguably the formative space for gender socialisation, and the most dynamic force for replenishing the circulation and flow of power and violence over time and space” (Pearce, 2006a: 66).

Certainly, the risks and vulnerabilities created in contexts of exclusion, poverty and violence mutually reinforce risks and vulnerabilities that act as predictors of violence in the home. The stress put upon the domestic sphere breaks up families and their ability to parent effectively in already difficult circumstances.

Domestic and social ‘violences’ are interrelated. However, the relationship between masculinities and violence needs to be broached if we are to understand how young men so predictably and unswervingly reproduce violence as a demographic group. As has been outlined previously in this chapter, the vast majority of victims and victimisers of homicidal violence are young men, but our understanding of the subjectivities of violence reproduction in relation to masculinities remains limited. Whilst masculinity does not account for the generation of urban violence alone, young men are consistently protagonists of violence, hence there is a relationship between being a young ‘male’ and the use of violence, that needs to be explored further. To that end ‘masculinity’ or ‘masculinities’ are significant in violence generation and ‘reproduction’. This is central to the thesis hence the role of ‘masculinities in violence’ is expanded upon below.

The role of masculinities in violence

Whilst this thesis locates itself principally within the field of literature on urban violence, it combines the field of 'masculinities' and theory around 'social reproduction'. We need to grasp the subjectivities of why individuals become violent to explain the reproduction of violence itself. If the majority of social violence is generated by young men, this can only be done by establishing what it is about being a youth and being male that has an affinity with, or leads to a propensity to deploy violence. What does the field of masculinities bring to our understanding of violence, and how might studying masculinities better help us understand urban violence in contexts of exclusion, especially in Medellín where violence is so severe?

There is a substantial body of literature which covers masculinities and violence that is not specifically linked to the urban violence literature. The literature on masculinities and violence forms a strong consensus around the linkages between forms of masculine performance and the deployment of direct physical violence.

This section of the chapter will explain claims that violence is linked to 'dominating' or 'hegemonic' masculinities as a mechanism to maintain male privilege (Archer, 1994a ; Connell, 2005). These concepts are important to understand how dominant versions of masculinity in marginalised contexts are related to violence. If certain versions of masculinity are linked to violence, understanding how masculinities are reproduced will provide an insight into violence reproduction itself.

One of the limitations of the literature on masculinities and violence is that there is still relatively little research conducted on 'male-on-male' violence. Much literature has emerged through critical men's studies steeped in feminist traditions, with a focus on power and subjugation, and the development of concepts around patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities. From this approach most masculinities and violence literature has focused on male-on-female violence. This scholarship has been foundational in terms of understanding 'why men are violent'. The strengths of this will be drawn upon below. These analyses have been applied to understanding and combating men's violence against women – particularly domestic forms of violence. However this scholarship has been limited in its conceptual application to what might be termed 'male homicidal violence'. In other words, conceptual tools around masculinities and violence need to be applied further to understand why the vast majority of lethal violence occurs between young men. Moreover, injuries from violence, road accidents and often suicide rates disproportionately affect young men⁴. There has been a certain lag in the application of this scholarship to date. Whilst some research does grapple with this, notably Barker and Jensen who will be discussed below, the vast majority of studies on urban violence where it has reached chronic levels focus on other factors – such as the structural ones mentioned above. Even 'critical gang studies', or the 'gang ethnographers', leave the issue of masculinities largely undisturbed. There

⁴ The WHO reports that male suicide rates are consistently higher than female ones across the world. http://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/suicide/suiciderates/en/; that "young males are at higher risk for road traffic fatalities than females in every age group under 25 years" <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2007/pr17/en/index.html>; that "for every young person killed by violence, an estimated 20-40 receive injuries that require hospital treatment" http://www.who.int/entity/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/factsheets/en/youthviolencefacts.pdf (all cited 20/08/2010).

appear to be unstated assumptions around the masculine dimension of urban violence in much of this literature; there are many studies of young men in gangs but less about what it has to do with being *young* and *male*. Where masculinities are recognised as a factor, they are rarely explored in depth.

This is somewhat surprising given the fact that empirical data – particularly from epidemiological studies from scholars such as Wilkinson, or the World Health Organisation (WHO) which referred to violence in 2002 as “a global public health problem” – has confirmed the dominance of male youths as victims and victimisers in homicidal violence for a number of years (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 131; Krug et al., 2002: 1). However, to be fair to scholars of violence, this perhaps reflects the fact that ‘understanding violence’ is a developing rather than well established field of study.

Hegemonic masculinity and violence

Study on masculinities has emerged from Feminist scholarship and to a lesser extent from Gay and Queer scholarship (Viveros Vigoya, 2001 ; Hearn, 2005: 50). From this tradition, Jeff Hearn argued that men’s studies should be critical (Hearn, 2005: 49). Like Feminism, critical men’s studies recognise the centrality of gendered power issues, namely the concept of ‘patriarchy’ and its benefits, also known as the ‘patriarchal dividend’ (see Archer, 1994a ; Connell, 2005 ; Hearn, 2005: 51), where masculinities are structured and reproduce male domination and privilege through “an array of power relations and dominant interests” (Edley and Wetherell, 1996: 98; Wadham, 1996). Although some feminist scholars suggest that until inequalities between men and women are

redressed, the needs of boys and men are secondary. Most researchers now say that women's wellbeing cannot be improved without including boys and men (Barker, 2005: 7).

The concept of hegemony was adopted and applied to masculinities by Robert Connell who coined the term 'hegemonic masculinity' in the mid-1980s (Connell, 1987) in an effort to try and understand the process of historical change in patriarchy (Connell, 2005 ; Hearn, 2005: 56). Hegemony, after Gramsci (2005) is concerned with the "overarching ideologies, ideas and practice performed 'with consent', 'without coercion'" (Hearn, 2005: 53). Hegemony is essentially about establishing and maintaining domination by a ruling group with "the ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality..." (Donaldson in Hearn, 2005: 54).

"Hegemonic masculinity is the culturally identified form of masculinity in a given and historical social setting" (Messerschmidt, 2005: 198), which men are encouraged to 'live-up' to through various social pressures (De Keseredy and Schwartz, 2005: 256; Coles, 2009). Such pressures can also be understood, not solely as a privilege, but also as a 'burden' (Horrocks in Heartfield, 2002). In Bourdieu's work on *Masculine Domination* he states that "male privilege is also a trap... imposed on every man by the duty to assert his manliness in all circumstances" and that the "will to dominate, exploit or oppress has relied on the 'manly' fear of being excluded from the world of 'man'" (Bourdieu, 2001: 50, 52). Hegemonic masculinity is honoured, glorified, offers high levels of social and economic privilege, and is constructed in relation to women, subordinate homosexuality and marginal masculinities based on class or racial distinctions

(McKay et al., 2005 ; Barker, 2005: 16; Schiff, 2003: 170). Dominating power relations exercised by men cover diverse areas including; man over woman, adult over youth, bosses over workers, whites over non-whites and heterosexuals over gays (Kivel, 1992: 77). Connell adds: “Man’s power and dominance can be structured and interpersonal, public and / or private, accepted and taken for granted and / or recognised and resisted, obvious or subtle. It also includes violations and ‘violences’ of all the various kinds” (Connell, 2005: xix). The patriarchal *libido dominandi* – desire to dominate - is at once structural, symbolic and embedded in many societies (on symbolic domination see Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2004: 273). The exercise of male domination is conceptualised by Bourdieu as ‘symbolic violence’ which is historical and a product of reproduction (Bourdieu, 2001: 33-34), it becomes the ‘order of things’ where relations of domination appear natural and are ‘thereby naturalised’ (Bourdieu, 2001: 8, 35).

“The strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it. The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it was founded...” (Bourdieu, 2001: 9)

Whilst there are ‘multiple masculinities’ covered below in this chapter, western cultural ideals of hegemonic masculinities are the most widespread and reproduced form of men’s practices (Hearn, 2005: 61) in an increasingly globalised world. Social-psychologist Brannon (in Edley and Wetherell, 1996: 101) posits four basic characteristics of becoming a man: no ‘sissy stuff’; the ‘big wheel’ – success, status, income earning competence; the ‘sturdy oak’ – strength, confidence, independence; ‘give ‘em hell’ – aggression, violence and daring. A nuanced and somewhat exaggerated form of hegemonic masculine identity is widespread in much of Latin America; it is more commonly referred to

as *macho* behaviour, or *machismo*, which will be drawn upon later in the thesis (on Colombia and Mexico see Gutmann and Viveros Vigoya, 2005 ; Gutmann, 1996 ; on Brazil see Barker, 2005: 20; on Nicaragua see Thompson, 2002 ; Welsh, 2000 ; and Hume, 2009). However, we should be careful not to 'essentialise' nor oversimplify concepts of masculinity in the Latin American region, there are multiple meanings of masculinity. As Gutmann points out, no single Mexican male identity exists (Gutmann, 1996: 245; see also Gutmann and Viveros Vigoya, 2005: 115). Nevertheless, hegemonic types of masculinity are those most reproduced in Latin America grounded in gender inequalities within societies in the region:

“Despite the fact that there are multiple concepts of masculinity, and despite the recent increase in encounter between men and women in time and space, however, there has often, in Latin America, been a tendency to reproduce relations grounded in hegemonic masculinity; that is, to ignore and subordinate women” (Gutmann and Viveros Vigoya, 2005: 118)

“In both social and personal histories, what it means to be a man in Latin America can often best be appreciated in relationship to hegemonic masculinities in the region. The dominant male ideological expressions of these hegemonic masculinities – for instance, homophobia, machismo, and misogyny – are not simply individual expressions of interpersonal relations in families and households but also pertain to the very foundations of gender inequalities within these societies and internationally” (Gutmann, 2003: 3).

These hegemonic masculinities are synonymous with social status, respect, money, sexual access to women and often violence. For example, in Nicaragua “violence is considered one of the main dimensions of machismo... men have to exercise this, particularly in front of other men, through stereotypical behaviour such as: drinking alcohol, sexual promiscuity, sports, gambling, and dominating women” (Thompson, 2002: 171). If hegemonic masculine characteristics can become nuanced depending on the region, then this implies

that there is contextual definition, or localised nuances, to masculine performance.

There has been much scholarship on why men commit violence against women (Archer, 1994a ; Montoya in Thompson, 2002: 169); those concerned with power relationships between men and women (Hearn, 2005); and scholarship around 'pro-feminist' men (Pease, 2000). As mentioned above, there has been less scholarship using masculinities to explore inter-male violence and in particular why men are the majority victims and victimisers of homicide. However, some contemporary studies on masculinities have begun to explore men's violence against other men.

Masculine performance varies substantially within the same context and masculinities are not inherently violent, callous or exploitative of women. Whilst there is a strong relationship between direct violence and masculinities, as will be demonstrated, the causes of violence are complex and multifaceted, and cannot be explained by masculinities alone. Indeed, most men should not in fact be classified as violent (Websdale & Chesney-Lind in De Keseredy and Schwartz, 2005: 354), and even in the most violent contexts only a minority are systematically violent (Barker, 2005: 24). In general, there are more nonviolent pathways to manhood than violent ones. However, male violence itself is not rare, but rather widespread, so should not be termed 'deviant' (De Keseredy and Schwartz, 2005: 354), male violence is not a collection of pathologies.

Dominating masculinities give men "admiration, esteem, and social power" over subordinate social groups (Kaufman in Messerschmidt, 2000: 85; Hearn, 2005: 51). Kivel argues that the root of male violence is based in the systematic power imbalance between groups of people which create vulnerabilities, citing

relationships where power is exercised *over* others (Kivel, 1992: 77, 79. My italics). Barker also argues that “violence is nearly always gendered, as it also takes place within specific dimensions and conditions of power, social class structure and cultural context...” (Barker, 2005: 6). Men who are in a position of power and privilege use violence, or the threat of violence, to maintain their privileged status or ‘patriarchal dividend’, while conversely the powerless often see violence as the most efficacious way to improve their situation (Weber and Gamson in Turpin and Kurtz, 1997: 7; see also De Keseredy and Schwartz, 2005: 353; Barker, 2005: 138; Archer, 1994a: 321). When deployed, “violence is the ultimate attempt to control. It is ‘power over’” (Kivel, 1992: 84) and “...serves to demonstrate their control over others and in that control resides power and so, self-esteem” (Campbell and Muncer, 1994: 322-323).

Using violence can be a normative aspect of hegemonic masculinity and ‘acting like a man’ (Schiff, 2003 ; Connell in De Keseredy and Schwartz, 2005: 356; Messerschmidt, 2005 ; 2000 ; Archer, 1994a ; Barker, 2005). Archer states that “male violence is acted out against a background of beliefs about the importance of aggressive and violent acts for maintaining status in the male group, and a sense of masculine identity” (Archer, 1994b: 121).

Marmot states that “the biggest single factor related to homicide is maleness... These murders occur under the shadow of status competition” (Marmot, 2004: 102). Using violence to feel powerful and develop some form of esteem, is part of the self-regulation of the ego (Hoffmann et al., 1994: 291). Psychiatrist James Gilligan states that acts of violence are “attempts to ward off or eliminate the feeling of shame and humiliation – a feeling that is painful, and can even be intolerable and overwhelming – and replace it with its opposite, the feeling of

pride' (in Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 133). Frequently, "the exercise of power erupts into overt violence where status and identity are uncertain", or when a man's masculine identity is threatened (Archer, 1994b: 125; De Keseredy and Schwartz, 2005: 359). In essence, violence is often linked to the masculine status project, a pillar of dominating masculinity. Another is sexual performance. Physical violence and sexual performance are considered to be the "essential criteria for "doing masculinity"" (Messerschmidt, 2000: 105), where sexual access to women is the epitome of male power hence young men compete for sexual partners (Kivel, 1992: 114; Mesquida & Wiener in Barker, 2005: 5).

"Gender socialisation is the cornerstone of male violence and sexism as it serves to normalise violence and patriarchal beliefs and patterns...this involves dominance and mastery over others whilst maintaining self-control and composure in all relationships, including sexual relationships... when there is a threat to their ability to control, many men respond with a wide range of coercive, abusive, and violent behaviours in an attempt to reclaim control and thus self-worth" (Schiff, 2003: 163).

Perhaps most succinctly put by Archer, this literature shows that "the most important feature of masculinity is that it is an achieved rather than an ascribed status. It arises from behaving in a particular way" (Archer, 1994b). To that end male social violence is not 'mindless violence', it is directed and functional to achieve inter-personal ends; money, pride, status, etc. (Campbell and Muncer, 1994: 322-323).

Problematizing 'masculinities' as a concept

Masculinity and masculinities are used in a variety of ways and frameworks across literatures including psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology and history (Hearn, 1996: 203). Gutmann outlines four types of

use for the concept of masculinity; masculinity is anything men say or do; masculinity is what men think, say and do to distinguish themselves as men, so some men may achieve masculinity at some times more than others; masculinity as a quality certain men have more than others, by being born that way or through achievement; and some emphasise role of women in the negotiation of masculinity for men in their lives (Gutmann, 2003: 2-3).

The approach to understanding masculinity used in this thesis is largely sociological, and particularly uses the concept of masculinity as an 'achieved' identity. This is linked to the social 'performance' of masculinity requiring an 'audience', which will be unpacked further in the following chapter. 'Sociological' approaches to masculinity generally referred to the "cultural construction of men, the construction of men as gender' (Hearn, 1996: 204). 'Masculinities' in this thesis then, refers to the 'construction of the male identity' in a given society or culture; in this case the process of 'becoming a man' by 'performing as a man' according to the locally specific construction of male identities in the urban periphery of Medellín. This approach is focused, but is employed to understand how masculine performance is related to some young men joining armed groups and using violence, whilst others do not. This approach will become apparent in the analytical and concluding chapters later in the thesis. Such approaches are not uncommon, for example, many have used conceptual understandings of hegemonic masculinities to show how it is utilised in specific cultural contexts in Latin America (Gutmann, 2003: 3). There are of course multiple meanings and a range of masculinities. Let us briefly unpack what this means.

When we theorise men and masculinity a sociological approach should rightly talk of ‘masculinities’ rather than ‘masculinity’” (Hearn and Morgan, 1990: 8-9). This should be explained and a caveat posed. Like all identities, masculine ones have to be constructed and negotiated via interaction in different socialisation spaces, and at any one time there can be multiple expressions of masculinity itself (Hearn and Collinson, 1996: 66; Hearn, 1996: 207). ‘Multiple masculinities’ refer to the “temporal, spatial and cultural diversity of masculinity” (Hearn and Collinson, 1996: 66). Masculinity is constructed in relation to both femininity and other forms of masculinity and embedded in power – such as hegemonic and subordinate outlined by Connell (Connell, 2005). However, masculinity is not the simple opposite of ‘femininity’, there are many different types of gender identity expressed within and between cultures; masculinities shift and interconnect with multiple sites (Tolson in Hearn, 1996: 205; Hearn and Collinson, 1996: 66). Therefore we should problematise masculinity as a concept and caution against reductionism and “importing taken-for-granted understandings of masculinity – men as competitive, striving, future-oriented and aggressive – into our analyses” (Hearn and Morgan, 1990: 8-9). There are a range of masculinities then, and men do not perform all hegemonic traits all of the time.

In short, a particular conceptual use of masculinity is employed in this thesis to analyse young men’s actions the social world, but no reductive conceptual claim is made that there is ‘one overarching version’ of masculinity that all men adhere to, nor that any man is ‘permanently bound’ to one type of masculinity or masculine ‘performance’.

Gender socialisation and Violence

Whilst all individuals are capable of physical violence, men generate more violence than women due to gender socialisation (Schiff, 2003 ; Sparks, 2003 ; Hearn, 2005 ; De Keseredy and Schwartz, 2005 ; Barker, 2005 ; Messerschmidt, 2005). Broadly speaking the literature suggests that male violence is learned, it is a social construction; “women can be violent, but women are not trained to be violent; men are” (Kivel, 1992: 82). “Embedding masculinity in the body is a very social process, rather than biological... constantly implicated in historical change” (Connell in Hearn, 2005: 56). “Men construct varieties of masculinities through specific practices as they simultaneously reproduce, and sometimes change, social structures” (Messerschmidt, 2005: 198).

The U.S. National Research Council concluded that “modern psychological perspectives emphasize that aggressive and violent behaviours are learned responses to frustration, that they can also be learned as instruments for achieving goals, and that the learning occurs by observing models of such behaviours...” (Tremblay and Nagin, 2005: 85-86). Barker agrees that most violence is socially learned - by exposure to violence, or by seeing it as an effective means to an ends (Barker, 2005: 63).

Discursive approaches to masculinities “suggest that men are not permanently committed to a particular pattern of masculinity. Rather they make situationally specific choices from a cultural repertoire of masculine behaviour” (Connell, 2005: xix). In other words men use the ‘tools at hand to do masculinity’.

Archer suggests that socialised male activities are often necessarily violent or risky. “Cultural values in young male groups are likely to involve exaggerated emphasis on masculinity being attained through violent and risky activities” (Archer, 1994b: 125). Various scholars comment on the ‘cult of masculine toughness’, to be dominant, hypercompetitive, emotionally absent, providers and protectors and sometimes violent (Kivel, 1992: 114; Schiff, 2003: 163; Flood, 1993 ; Barker, 2005: 17). Certainly there are peer group pressures to achieve the identity associated with the locally dominant masculine ideal. Young men learn quickly what William Pollack calls the ‘boys code’ or ‘rules’ to masculinity, and what they must do to be ‘a real man’ (Barker, 2005: 18; also see Sparks, 2003). This code is sometimes referred to as the “gender structure, gender hierarchies, the ‘mandates of masculinity (or gender)’ gender roles, and social norms” (Barker, 2005: 17-18).

Factors linking masculinity to violence in part help us explain why men are the violent ones in society. However, we need to link violent ways of ‘doing masculinity’ to contexts where violence is most chronic hence these concepts need to be dovetailed with contemporary understandings of urban violence. Let us consider this in the next section.

Linking structural understandings of urban violence to masculinities

In the mid-1990s as studies of masculinities and violence gained momentum, Archer stated that men are more violent on the margins of society (Archer, 1994b: 121). Subsequent studies have gone on to verify this. Marmot stated “the biggest single factor related to homicide is maleness; the second is youth.

Young men kill each other. But not always and everywhere. Young men in inner cities kill each other..." (Marmot, 2004: 102).

Becoming a man means taking on more complex and demanding roles for boys. Marginalised youth are frustrated over social exclusion (Moser and Rodgers, 2005) and their lack of access to power, income and women. They are aware of their limited ability to change this and construct a masculine identity according to prevailing cultural norms. Wilkinson puts it another way, explaining that most violence emanates from young men at the bottom of society with no access to 'status suppliers' (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 134); whilst Pearce asks pertinent questions: "...if we did not ask how young men and young women differentially interact with structural violence, we would miss some key points. What is it that young men can achieve in such conditions of inequality and impoverishment through violence and gang culture that women cannot?" (Pearce, 2006a: 70).

Poverty, exclusion and economic change have particular effects upon men which scholars have grappled with. Cleaver talks about the 'demasculinising' effects of poverty and economic change on men; Barker refers to the 'demasculating' effects of marginalisation; whilst Jensen calls this process more accurately 'emasculatation' (Cleaver, 2002 ; Barker, 2005 ; Jensen, 2008). Scholars were beginning to understand processes of exclusion through a masculinities lens, but why is exclusion emasculating?

There are significant social pressures for young men to live up to a hegemonic, dominant or 'productive version of manhood', the 'burden' of masculinity. This was conceptualised by Margaret Mead's 'rites of passage' which stated that culture shapes behaviour and masculinity (Barker, 2005: 16; Schiff, 2003: 163).

In the absence of opportunities to 'achieve' this identity in positive ways, young men may be tempted to turn to illicit and violent methods (Barker, 2005: 9-10, 65; Archer, 1994b: 135; De Keseredy and Schwartz, 2005: 361; Messerschmidt, 2000 ; Thompson, 2002). This is similar to traditional feminist conceptions of the 'crisis of masculinity', such as the emasculating impact of deindustrialisation upon black men in the USA (Hagedorn, 2008: 103). This can lead to anti-social behaviour; "...those who are disadvantaged tend to collapse into more primitive and aggressive jungle dominated social structures: violence is pronounced in young males at the margins of society" (Gilbert, 1994: 371). For example, in the poor Cape Flats communities in Cape Town, Pinnock "sees gangs as aberrant rites of passage from childhood to adulthood, in which they come to provide the (highly negative) means for many coloured boys to reach social maturity. The gang rites of passage leave the boys in an 'eternal limbo,' whereby they forfeit any chance of entry in to polite society" (in Jensen, 2008: 73).

Young men from poor neighbourhoods frequently suffer from stigmatisation, negative stereotyping and racism (Jensen, 2008; Barker, 2005: 43). Pickering has referred to these as a 'stereotype threat' (Pickering, 2007). So how might young men and boys live up to hegemonic masculine cultural norms and achieve 'productive versions of manhood' when they are emasculated by structural violence, and cultural and racial stigmatisation?

Violence and anti-social behaviour for many male youths is a deliberate 'reputational project' "particularly for those young men who see mainstream goals and identities as beyond reach" (Barker, 2005: 66-67). Being a 'tough guy' is better than going unnoticed, it is simply a way to gain some kind of social

status and “to be recognised for something” (Barker, 2005: 67). Part of the reason young men turn to violence or gangs is an attempt to negotiate a sense of powerlessness, to subvert subjugation. We should ask; is it ‘more masculine’ to use violence than to suffer ‘low status’?

Jensen has developed these concepts, linking the struggle against racial and structural subjugation to a struggle for dignity (Jensen, 2008: 196). Gang membership is a male repost or ‘protest masculinity’ for the subjugated when confronted with unattainable hegemonic masculine norms. “Although marginal in the social and racial economy of Cape Town, their control of certain spaces, based on their capacity to use violence, made them hegemonic in relation to other residents. Hence the imaginaries of the agterbuurte [local gang member] all contributed to the construction of an alternative, protest masculinity” (Jensen, 2008: 92). The gang becomes a site for heroic identification in opposition to dominant society (Jensen, 2008: 17).

These masculine responses have been linked to ‘exaggerated’ forms of traditional or hegemonic masculine performance. Male youths that join gangs in contexts of exclusion are not in fact challenging many aspects of hegemonic masculinities, they are enhancing them: “In their quest for money, women and respect, gang-involved young men display extreme or exaggerated versions of traditional masculinity... Becoming a gang member, and using violence... is partly a conscious choice to adhere to an exaggerated – but ultimately traditional – version of manhood” (Barker, 2005: 71, 82-82).

Further, Mo Hume studied “a marginal community in Greater El Salvador [and]

found that: data from interviews and focus groups highlight the fact that exaggerated sexual prowess and violence against women were central to men's identity" (in Pearce, 2006a: 70). In Kingston, Jamaica, Dowdney observes that for many adolescents growing up in poor communities, "notions of 'manhood' are tied to gaining respect, women and guns... as a way for young males to assert their masculinity" (Dowdney, 2007: 83, 116).

Gang members are sought after sexual partners for young women and emulated by young men, so young men join gangs or commit violent crime for status and access to women (De Keseredy and Schwartz, 2005: 359-360). Such is the relationship that violent acts themselves are seen as a form of power. Wielding a gun is an obvious way for a young man to gain power, which confers status, identity, income and access to women. "In some societies – such as the Middle East, parts of the Mediterranean, Latin America or the Pakistan/Afghan/Caucasian regions – females expect males to behave in a hyper-masculine way, to the extent of considering this not just normal but even highly desirable behaviour" (Basta, 2000: 44).

The irony of these youths' struggle to achieve a form of dominant manhood through violence is that it compounds the negative stereotyping they struggle against; they "stake their claims to a place in a moral universe, then reproduce the very structures and discourses that necessitated the strategies in the first place" (Jensen, 2008: 19).

Literature in this field has only emerged in the last few years and is still very limited. Nevertheless, conceiving violence in contexts of exclusion as a form of masculine response is a significant step forwards in terms of understanding why

young men generate so much violence in contexts of exclusion. Here, a definitive link between masculinity, violence, and literature which links exclusion to social violence – the urban violence literature – is being made. However, as will be pointed out below, if masculinities are linked to violence in these contexts and other literatures claim that violence is ‘reproduced’, the link between the reproduction of masculinities and the reproduction of violence has not been made explicit. We need to understand how masculinities are reproduced in such contexts to further understand the continuum of social violence in contexts of exclusion.

This does not mean that attempts have not been made to challenge ‘male violence’. In the field of masculinities and violence, much of which is not linked to contexts of exclusion, the literature has focused on providing boys and men with critical and cognitive skills to be able to challenge hegemonic masculinities and norms that promote violence, whilst seeking to generate alternative forms of masculine identity such as ‘new masculinities’ (Brook et al., 2003: 1476; Mattaini and McGuire, 2006: 184; Guerra, Tolan & Hammond in Sparks, 2003: 243; Eisenberg and Mussen, MacDonald in Gilbert, 1994 ; Kivel, 1992: 84,116; Erikson IN Barker, 2005: 22; Hoffmann et al., 1994: 299). At the same time, much of the literature on youth violence in contexts of exclusion has focused primarily on structural ‘risk-factors’ and ‘vulnerabilities’ to youths as a consequence of focusing on the structural determinants of violence.

However, few consider how masculinities, violence and exclusion are interrelated beyond Barker and Jensen, and there is even less empirical work to investigate why one excluded male youth becomes violent whilst another does not. Perhaps the lesser-asked questions are those pertaining to the stories of

resistance and 'success' in such contexts. As Marmot commented "why not ask why one individual flourishes in adverse circumstances where another goes under?... Instead of asking why the murder rate is so high in Chicago, I should ask why some refrain from killing" (in Barker, 2005: 36).

Attempts so far that explore these questions have referred to levels of individuals self-esteem, the capacity for youths' critical thinking, the (lack of) availability of positive alternative male role models, and the availability of non-violent or 'prosocial' socialisation spaces. Moser and van Bronkhorst comment that youths with lower esteem and weak self-regulation are more likely to be violent (Moser and van Bronkhorst, 1999: 12). Low self-esteem in youth is related to their context. Wilkinson argues that "shame and humiliation become more sensitive issues in more hierarchical societies: status becomes more important, status competition increases and more people are deprived of access to markers of status and social success" (Wilkinson, 2004: 13). "For many children and youth living in marginalized neighbourhoods – where role models and heroes are gang members – joining a gang is often the only way to achieve some status in the community and gain self-esteem" (Moser and van Bronkhorst, 1999: 12 –13). However these scholars still leave the role of masculinities largely unpacked.

Barker observed that youth in marginalised and violent contexts in Rio de Janeiro who rejected violent groups demonstrated "critical and reflective thinking", and "show a degree of meta-cognition, that is they are able to think about how they think. They also showed a high degree of awareness in their own emotional life...", advocating that young men find types of nonviolent

masculine identity (Barker, 2005: 2, 147, 149). Further, he suggests that having a positive male role model at home can be significant:

“One is having family members or other influential individuals who modelled or presented alternative, more equitable and non-violent views about gender roles to the young man. This might be a father, an uncle, a teacher, a pastor or priest or imam, or a mother or grandmother, who suggested that other ways of being women and men are possible. A working mother who took on roles often attributed to fathers or men, or a father or uncle who was involved early on in the care of his children, sends powerful messages to sons and daughters about the fluidity of gender roles.” (Barker, 2005: 146)

Jensen and Barker both note that youths that manage to stay out of gangs and crime are often religiously active, good students, shy – or alternatively had strong personalities that enabled them to negotiate coexistence with gangs without joining them, or simply “have the luck of finding non-violent and pro-social peer groups...” (Barker, 2005: 83; Jensen, 2009). Moser et al. suggest that youth programs can provide alternative paths to gangs, based on cultural activities and efforts to improve the community (Moser and van Bronkhorst, 1999). The significant other influence noted by Barker was parenting: “For many young men, family ties were reported to be the reason they stayed out of gangs” (Barker, 2005: 75). Jensen agrees, “with the proper moral support and principles from one’s parents it was indeed possible to become a man on the Cape Flats” (Jensen, 2008: 171).

Conclusions: Reproducing masculinities, reproducing violence

The above literature has made significant progress in understanding the foundational causes of violence and has begun to understand violence as reproduced, and some authors have made masculinity their lens of study.

Literatures on urban violence, critical gang studies, masculinities and violence as well as broader references to epidemiology, behavioural psychology and the like, have been used in this chapter to demonstrate where they can be brought together to give us a better understanding of the phenomenon of urban violence in contexts of exclusion.

However there are limitations. We must ask more about the relationship between *processes of masculinisation* and violence, in urban contexts of exclusion and poverty. In order to understand the continuum of urban violence, we need to grasp how masculinities themselves are reproduced in such contexts, and why some processes of masculinisation are linked to violence whilst others are not. In part, we can unpack these relationships by understanding why some young men join armed groups whilst others do not, by asking what the differences in their processes of masculinisation are and why?

Empirically, this thesis contributes an original set of data to the literature through the life-histories of thirty-two young men in Medellín's periphery. Conceptually, this thesis uses Pierre Bourdieu's sociological 'thinking tools' which explore social reproduction, to investigate how these young men reproduce masculinities, and particularly, why this process was linked to violence in some cases and not others. By examining young men's processes of masculinisation we can better understand how masculinities are reproduced, which can cast light on how violence is generated in Medellín's periphery. In doing so this thesis contributes a conceptual lens with which to understand the continuum of urban violence.

The theoretical framework in the next chapter introduces Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' of *habitus*, *field*, and *capital*. Barker has referred to *habitus* as a 'code'

boys are expected to adhere to become men in an attempt to understand violence, but leaves the concept unexplored (Barker, 2005: 17-18). These 'tools' cast light upon how youths are disposed to reproduce localised versions of masculinity.

Chapter 2

Negotiating pathways to manhood and reproducing violence in the periphery

Introduction

This chapter aims to unpack and understand violence as a process of reproduction in relation to masculinities using the concepts of French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu developed ‘thinking tools’ to explain social reproduction through his Theory of Practice (1977: 72). One of these tools is *habitus*, a system of dispositions or deeply interiorized master-patterns, that act as the generative principle for an individual’s social practice. Whilst these dispositions are not completely fixed, inflexible nor permanent, they are durable and reflect the social world in which the individual is brought up. Hence individuals will be disposed, whilst not being bound, to reproduce the practices, customs and culture of their social sphere.

However, where *habitus* has been used to explain ongoing social violence it has been used notionally. For example Nordstrom & Robben mention a ‘*habitus* of violence’ without unpacking what this actually means (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995), whilst Barker refers to *habitus* as the ‘mandates of manhood’ when explaining male youth violence without taking Bourdieu’s concepts further (Barker, 2005: 17-18). As Maton notes:

“Studies purporting to employ Bourdieu’s approach sometimes simply point to practices... *Habitus* is thereby stripped of its relational structure, its crucial relationship with field in generating practices and its dynamic qualities. Used alone, *habitus* is often little more than theoretical icing on an empirical cake. The concept can be removed from such accounts without any loss of explanatory power” (Maton, 2008: 63).

Firstly this chapter explains Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' of *habitus*, *field* and *capital*, concepts he developed to understand the social world and not as grand theories per se; secondly it considers the role of 'masculine *habitus*', how this shapes male behaviour and the 'masculinisation' process; and finally it explores how masculinisation is influenced by context and the opportunities available to each individual. The concluding comments link these processes together to provide a theoretical approach to how masculinities may be linked to the reproduction of violence in contexts of exclusion, poverty, and where high levels of violence already exist. These contextual factors are relevant to the thesis because they reflect Medellín's periphery where the empirical data was collected.

Bourdieu's 'thinking tools': Habitus, field and capital

Habitus

"All of my thinking started from this point: how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?" (Bourdieu, 1990: 65). Bourdieu sought to understand interactions between people and social phenomena. He was concerned particularly with how behaviour by individuals became regulated leading to the ongoing construction of practices in the social world. Whilst he recognised the tendencies and patterns in social behaviour which led to continuity and the reproduction of practices, he also understood that individuals are not bound to act in a particular way and that agency exists. Bourdieu was primarily concerned with how the individual agent came to reproduce practice. He set up a framework, or a set of 'thinking tools' to analyse how this took place

empirically. This is Bourdieu's strength. His concepts are not grandiose theoretical models, but rather practical tools with which researchers can analyse the reproduction of practice in the social world, and the possibility of "'seeing' the ongoing construction of any number of aspects of the life-world" (Thomson, 2008: 75). His 'thinking tools' are *habitus*, *field* and *capital*.

Conceptually *habitus* is not a new idea, Bourdieu stands on the shoulders of a number of history's great thinkers who refer to something akin to *habitus* including; Aristotle, Ockham, Aquinas, Hegel, Merleau-Ponty, Husserl and Elias, Durkheim, Weber, and Mauss (Jenkins, 1992: 74; Maton, 2008: 56). *Habitus'* etymology stems from the Latin for a habitual or typical condition. It refers to an individual's predisposition, tendency, propensity or inclination (Maton, 2008: 51).

Habitus is:

"A system of *dispositions*... of being, seeing, acting and thinking, or a system of *long-lasting* (rather than permanent) schemes or schemata or structures of perception, conception and action" (Bourdieu, 2005: 43).

Bourdieu describes *habitus* further as "a peculiar philosophy of action... sometimes characterised as *dispositional*"; as "*non natural*, a set of *acquired* characteristics which are a product of social conditions"; "a dynamic system of dispositions that interact with one another, [*habitus*] has, as such, a generative capacity" (Bourdieu, 2005: 44, 45, 46); *habitus* is the "generative principle of regulated improvisations" (Bourdieu, 1992: 57)¹.

Habitus is a tool to understand why individuals reproduce practices without being bound permanently by structures. It is not discursive, but rather tacit and non-cognitive, therefore such social practice is not consciously orchestrated.

¹ Swartz adds that *habitus* is "a set of basic, deeply interiorized master-patterns; mental habit; cultural unconscious; habit-forming force" (Swartz, 1997: 101).

This differentiates *habitus* from overt rules such as laws that may condition an agent's behaviour.

Habitus is encoded, learnt, or socialised into actors from childhood. It is primarily generated in the formative years of a social actor through *experience* and teaching, as a result of engagement with his or her environment. "Moreover primary socialization in the family is for Bourdieu deeply formative... and our dispositions are not blown around easily on the tides of change in the social worlds we inhabit" (Maton, 2008: 59). "Socially competent performances are produced as a matter of routine, without explicit reference to a body of codified knowledge, and without the actors necessarily 'knowing what they are doing'" (Jenkins, 1992: 76). Here past experiences are embedded into an actor's *habitus* where "the less than conscious dispositions of the *habitus* are what produce practices" (Jenkins, 1992: 76).

This links the past to present performances, generating continuity of practice via the agent. The individual's knowledge of the social world informs their *habitus* and thus their performances. *Habitus* creates regularity in social practice:

"The *habitus*, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (Bourdieu, 1992: 54).

Habitus is a set of acquired characteristics, not biological in nature, but the product of social conditions. For this reason *habitus* may be totally or partially common to people who have been the product of similar social conditions. This can help us explain why distinguishing characteristics of communities are reproduced through its individuals. So, whilst *habitus* is an internalised

phenomenon specific to each agent, it also acts at a community level, shaping that community and acting to reproduce patterns of behaviour inherited from the past. Social life cannot simply be understood as an aggregate of individual behaviour.

Class-based and structural analyses have demonstrated such patterns. As Swartz explains: the individual adapts to limited opportunities whereby “structural disadvantages can be internalised into relatively durable dispositions that can be transmitted intergenerationally through socialization and produce forms of self-defeating behaviour” (Swartz, 1997: 103). “Working class kids tend to get working class jobs... middle class readers tend to enjoy middle brow literature, and so forth – yet there are no explicit rules dictating such practices” (Maton, 2008: 50). Could these concepts offer an insight into why poor and excluded youths join gangs more readily than their middle class counterparts?

Bourdieu sought to understand the complex relationship between social structures and agency, but what sets him apart from other scholars such as Giddens who develops the concept of *structuration* (Giddens, 1984), was that Bourdieu was primarily concerned with how the *individual agent* came to reproduce practices. *Habitus* acts as a *dialectic* or ‘bridge building exercise’ between structure and agency bringing together objective social structures and subjective personal experiences to help us understand social continuity (Coles, 2009: 34; Jenkins, 1992: 74; Maton, 2008: 61). *Habitus* acts as an “internalised structure, the objective made subjective” or the “the *dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*” (Maton, 2008: 53). This can even be a somatic process or *hexis corporal*, where the past is inscribed into the body via posture, gait, stance, facial expressions, et cetera.

Habitus then, is *structured* by one's past and present social conditions and becomes *structuring* insofar as it is *modus operandi*, and thus generative of thought and action (Grenfell, 2008: 45; Maton, 2008: 51, 59).

'Ontological complicity' emerges between *habitus* and the social world. The reproduction of practice and structures leads to 'routinisation', which leads to ontological security (Giddens in Haugaard, 2002: 148). This is a mutually constitutive relationship where the social world structures the *habitus*, then the *habitus* goes on to generate practices that reproduce that social world. Cycles in the social world are generated through the dialectic between agent and context.

"The social spaces are structures (like the *habitus*) and the relation between the social spaces and *habitus* lead to practices. There is an "obscure relation" between the *habitus* and the social spaces we inhabit, one of "ontological complicity" (Bourdieu, 1982a: 47) because the field structures the *habitus*, whilst the *habitus* is the basis for how agents understand their lives" (Maton, 2008: 52).

Field & Capital

Field - le champ - is itself is a social space, a 'little world', a metaphor for the domains of social life (Thomson, 2008: 68, 70; Swartz, 1997 ; Smith in Coles, 2009: 35).

"[The social world] consists of multiple social fields such as the economic field, the education field, the field of the arts, bureaucratic and political fields, and so on. These fields have patterned, regular and predictable practices. Fields are also inter-dependent. "For example, what kind of schooling people receive in the education field can make a lot of difference to how they are positioned in the economic field... Bourdieu posited a social world (the field of power) made up of multiple fields: large fields could be divided up into subfields (for example, art into literature, painting, photography and so on)... Further, such fields are "profoundly *hierarchized*, with dominant social agents and institutions having considerable power to determine what happens within it, [however] there is still agency and change" (Thompson, 2008: 70, 73).

Fields are sites of competition for *capitals* and profoundly hierarchic, where agents use varying strategies to maintain or improve their position through the accumulation of *capitals*. Bourdieu states that “capital is the resource that is the object of struggle within field and which functions as a social relation of power” (Coles, 2008: 36). These *capitals* are “economic (money and assets); cultural... social (e.g. affiliations and networks; family, religious and cultural heritage) and symbolic (things which stand for all of the other forms of capital that can be ‘exchanged’ in other fields, e.g. credentials)” (Grenfell, 2008: 69). This is not to be confused with other understandings of *capital* such as Putnam’s use of ‘social capital’, which refers to the collective value of social networks working together “as a kind of collateral” (Putnam, 1993: 169). Wilkinson’s concept of ‘social status’ (below) in terms of individuals vying for scarce resources reflects what can be understood through a Bourdieuan lens as individuals competing for *capitals*. This is significant because vying for *capital* in the ‘masculine field’, which will be discussed later, can be understood in more empirical terms as male status competition in its given context.

“The answer is that social status and friendship are, in effect, two sides of the same coin. Social status (like dominance hierarchies and pecking orders among animals) are orderings based on power, coercion, and privileged access to scarce resources regardless of the needs of others. In contrast, friendship is based on social obligations, on reciprocity, mutuality, sharing, and recognition of each others’ needs” (Wilkinson, 2004: 9).

Individuals *strategise* when navigating particular *fields*. For example, what strategy might a growing boy use to accumulate the masculine capital to

'become a man' in his given context? Here Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' are beginning to gain empirical purchase.

Bourdieu developed these 'tools', in part, because he himself felt that neither the constraints of structuralism nor the freedom of choice under existentialism fully explained the marriage choices of individuals in France and Algeria. Whilst 'rules' were interpreted with a degree of flexibility, individuals were clearly not 'free to choose' (Grenfell, 2008: 44). "What became clear for Bourdieu was that... the outcome of a social issue of who one individual would marry depended on a whole series of personal and contextual conditions; and the best way of thinking about this question was not in terms of a rule or personal choice, but a *strategy*" (Grenfell, 2008: 44, italics in original).

"Bourdieu often uses the analogy of a game and the notion of "strategy" to emphasize the active, creative nature of practices. Each social field of practice (including society as a whole) can be understood as a competitive game or "field of struggles" in which social agents strategically improvise in their quest to maximise their positions.... The source of the "feel for the game" or "*practical knowledge*" is the habitus. 'The habitus as the feel for the game... is the social game embodied and turned into a second nature'" (Grenfell, 2008: 54).

"Habitus is not based on conscious reasoning but rather is impulsive and non-reflexive; it is a strategy without having a strategic intention" (Coles, 2009: 34), it operates at a 'less than conscious' level when agents strategise. For example, a male youth will have a less than conscious strategy to accumulate masculine *capital* in the *field* of masculinity to achieve manhood and this will shape his practices in the social world. In other words, some of his practices are strategically informed by his *habitus*, which disposes him to 'be a man'. If individuals feel well located or 'at home' in a given setting, this demonstrates a coming together of the *habitus* and the field, where the individual becomes attuned to the *doxa*, the unwritten 'rules of the game' (Maton, 2008: 57).

Bourdieu & Wacquant stated when investigating the *field* “analyse the *habitus* of social agents, the different systems of dispositions they have acquired by internalising a determinate type of social and economic condition, and which find in a definite trajectory with the field... a more or less favourable opportunity to become actualized” (in Thomson, 2008: 75). As Thompson suggests “the field *mediates* what social agents do in specific social, economic and cultural contexts. In other words, *field* and *habitus* constitute a dialectic through which specific practices produce and reproduce the social world that at the same time is making them” (Thompson, 2008: 75). Agents are very aware of their opportunities in relation to their context and in pursuing these options reproduce the social world. This will be linked later to what are termed in this thesis as ‘masculinisation opportunities’ in contexts of exclusion.

In other words, we need to understand the dispositions or *habitus* of an individual, then how this leads them to operate within the *field* and their competition for *capitals*. This opens up “the possibility ‘seeing’ the ongoing construction... of the life-world” (Thomson, 2008: 75).

These ‘tools’ will be used to analyse the empirical data from interviews with young men in poor, excluded and violent parts of Medellín, in Colombia. In short, we need to understand the type of masculine *habitus*, or dispositions, these male youths have developed and to understand the ‘hierarchised’ *field* of masculinities in which they operate, and what constitutes masculine *capital* in that *field*. It will be argued that these youths are disposed to masculinise (that they have a ‘masculine *habitus*’) and must do so in a context which is itself emasculating because of stymied opportunities. Their contestation of emasculation leads to a particular *strategic* negotiation of masculinities in a *field*

Chapter 2. Negotiating pathways to manhood and reproducing violence in the periphery of masculinity, that is often dominated by armed actors, who control significant economic, symbolic and social *capitals*.

Before considering masculine *habitus*, let us pose a caveat: Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' should be used with prudence. Not all social practices can be reduced to *habitus* alone, ergo *habitus* cannot explain the production of all social phenomena. Individuals can act against their dispositions, compelled by other forces or circumstance in the social world. The social world and individuals are complex where exceptions should be expected when conducting empirical research. Not all actions of individuals will therefore represent a manifestation of what they are *disposed* to do. Bourdieu's tools are limited, imperfect, can 'overcomplicate' analysis (Maton, 2008: 64), and will not solve all of the conundrums of social reproduction. *Habitus* should only be used, as Bourdieu advocates, as a 'thinking tool' insofar as it helps us explain how social action is reproduced. As such, these 'tools' are particularly useful for inductive forms of social research as they lend themselves to unpacking and analysing empirical data. Violence is multi-causal therefore masculine *habitus* and young men's pursuit of local *capitals* in the *field* of masculinity can only ever be part of multiple explanations of the generation of violence.

Masculine Habitus

Bourdieu links gender to his *Theory of Practice* when he refers to the different dispositions imposed, inculcated or inscribed upon men and women by society (Bourdieu, 1977). Men will have masculine dispositions or a masculine *habitus*

(Coles, 2009: 33-34), although the dispositions of a man's *habitus* cannot be reduced to masculinity exclusively.

“...male sociodocry owes its specific efficacy to the fact that it legitimates a relation of domination by inscribing it in a biological which is itself a biologized social construction. The double work of inculcation, at once sexually differentiated and sexually differentiating, imposes upon men and women different sets of dispositions with regard to the social games that are held to be crucial to society, such as the games of honor and war (fit for the display of masculinity, virility) or, in advanced societies, all the most valued games such as politics, business, science, etc. The masculinization of male bodies and feminization of female bodies effects a somatization of the cultural arbitrary which is the durable construction of the unconscious” (Bourdieu and Wacquant in Pearce, 2006: 68).

Being disposed to ‘be men’, male youths will thus engage in a process of masculinisation as they grow up; they will compete *strategically* for masculine *capitals* in the masculine *field(s)* in which they are situated. This can be used to explain why certain masculine performance, namely violence, is reproduced. Whilst this is complex and there are multiple versions of masculinity, the majority of boys will be disposed to become men, by and large, by reproducing existing or ‘traditional’ performances of masculinity that they have been exposed to while growing up.

As shown by the literature in the previous chapter, when youths strive to be men they reproduce culturally mandated versions of existing masculinity and the corresponding social practices are reproduced through masculine performance. Such masculinities have also been called ‘prescriptive’ social norms, ‘routine’ masculine practices, the ‘code’ or ‘mandates’ of masculinity, the ‘rules’ to be a ‘real man’, et cetera (Wetherell and Edley in Lusher and Robins, 2009: 392; Barker, 2005: 17, 18, 64; Sparks, 2003). Barker proposes that:

“A set of behaviours, rules of conduct, cultural shibboleths, and even a lexicon... is inculcated into boys by our society... In effect we hold a mirror to our boys... an image that our boys feel under great pressure to

emulate... most young men do not have the ability to see beyond the matrix or to see the gender matrix for what it truly is – a socially constructed set of mandates shaped and created by individuals, social structures and historical and local contexts” (Barker, 2005: 10, 18)

Male youths are *disposed* to masculinise in a way that reflects and reproduces existing masculine performance. Whilst some behaviour may be overt, these dispositions operate at a less than conscious level as per the operational fundamentals of *habitus*. Hence men will not be wholly conscious of the ways in which their behaviour and the choices that they make are shaped by their own masculinisation process. This is another way of understanding how the ‘burden’ of masculinity functions and is reproduced. A youth may demonstrate significant agency in joining and partaking in gang activities but may not be conscious of the fact that they are disposed to do so, in part but not exclusively, by their masculine *habitus* and their desire to pursue a male reputational project.

To summarise, men act in a ‘manly’ way without necessarily being conscious of it. Inevitably, the majority of male youths strive to become men according to the dominant norms around masculinity in their context. This is part of their *habitus*, and their subsequent practices reflect and reproduce masculinities in their context. Of course this is not an exact science and masculinity is evolving and shifting, but the concept of *habitus* is flexible enough to allow for this being a ‘dispositional’ and not ‘fixed’ condition. What it means to ‘be a man’ in a given society may evolve over time but is unlikely to change radically overnight. *Habitus* is a tool that helps us understand how masculine behaviour is reproduced in particular contexts with continuity across generations. The manhood of yesterday resembles the manhood of today, which will resemble the manhood of tomorrow.

It is important to link these concepts to locality and map out how they might work in specific contexts.

Performing masculinity and classifying masculinities

In the previous chapter the conceptual use of masculinities in this thesis was outlined. Understanding masculinities as a 'performance' is the principle approach used in the thesis to analyse the data in later chapters and the conclusions.

Bourdieu states: "Manliness, it can be seen, is an eminently *relational* notion, constructed in front of and for other men and against femininity, in a kind of *fear* of the female, firstly in oneself" (Bourdieu, 2001: 53). In other words, performing masculinity – also referred to here as 'doing masculinity' – requires pairing with this 'audience' of men, women and 'in oneself'. 'Performance' also operates at a community level; for example, in Medellín's periphery members of armed groups often take highly visible positions in street corner café's or bars drinking beer, they wear expensive clothes and ride expensive motorbikes around the local neighbourhood, often with pretty young ladies on the back. Gutmann says that some men in Mexico 'performed as men' because they "want to be *macho*". He asks rhetorically:

"What does "we want to be macho" mean except that "to be macho" is an ideological stand that can be sanctified only by others – men and women – and by oneself? [it appears that] youths rummage around in an identity grab bag, pulling whatever they seize upon as long as it is culturally distinct" (Gutmann, 1996: 235).

However, given the time and resource limitations I encountered as the sole researcher in the field in Colombia, specific interviews aimed at analysing the

'audience' in this pairing and their relation to male youths 'performances' were not conducted. Admittedly this would have positively informed the thesis but was beyond the scope of the research at the time. However it does provide an avenue for research development in the future.

It is important that conceptions of masculinity are not reduced to one overarching version as commented upon in the previous chapter. Gutmann and Viveros Vigoya state that "there is a tendency in research on masculinities in Latin America to oversimplify supposed common traits found among men in the region and to equate manliness with particular national or regional qualities" (Gutmann and Viveros Vigoya, 2005: 115). Not all men perform all the traits of hegemonic masculinity in their culture all of the time, no overarching framework of masculinity governs the entirety of their behaviour. There is a "complex interplay between young men's agency and social structure in their identity formation" (Greig, 2010: 70).

In other words not all *macho* men are *macho* all of the time. Masculinities are mutable and transposable across different situations or contexts, interconnecting with multiple sites (see Hearn and Collinson, 1996: 66). A man may 'perform' masculinity using violence through the gang, but also caringly look after his children. Gutmann identified that for many men in Mexico, being a committed parent was a central characteristic of being a man, but that this operated differently according to class – for poor men it was not rare to take care of their children, whilst wealthier men employed maids as child carers (Gutmann, 1996). Colombian literature on youths in armed groups, particularly the *sicario* assassin for hire, points to their violent behaviour and sexual objectification of women and girls on the street, which contrasts with the loving

care they show to their mothers in the home (Salazar, 1990 ; Vélez Saldarriaga, 1999 ; Gaviria, 1991).

Gutmann argues: “What is known and what is most culturally significant today is that gender identities and relations are characterised by inconsistency... Mexican machos are not dead... but claims about a uniform character of Mexican masculinity, a ubiquitous *macho mexicano*, should be put to rest” (Gutmann, 1996: 263). If are multiple meanings of *macho*, no single male identity exists and we should not stereotype or use strict taxonomies (Gutmann, 1996: 251).

“[There are] alcoholic fathers who rock their babies to sleep, mothers who beat their boys, boys who race their sisters to pick up the tortillas, young men drugged out on *cemento* who breed children they will never know, and mothers and fathers determined not to raise their boys to be Mexican machos... In this way alone we will be able to *include* both the men who carry their babies in *canguros* and the men who never change diapers, the women welders and truck drivers, the men who beat women and are the only wage earners, the women who become community leaders *and* divorce their husbands, and the homophobic talk of youth whose younger siblings are bisexual” (Gutmann, 1996: 245-6)

In other words masculinity can be classified in different ways, we are likely to encounter ambiguity and contradictions in male behaviour, and some elements may be understood as more ‘performative’ than others; such as young men in armed groups publically displaying status goods. This does not mean however, that their performance through the gang represents the entirety of their masculinity, but rather, the way they perform as men and it’s relation to the armed group is used in this thesis analyse how certain aspects of masculinity relate to violence.

Whilst it is important to recognise the complexities of masculinities and the range of meanings of *macho*, we should not lose sight of the hierarchies within masculinities that frequently emerge. Hegemonic and *macho* forms of

masculinity are widespread, often emerging at the top of the hierarchy in Latin America - and as will be argued in Chapter Six, local gangs are frequently the 'standard bearers' of masculinity in the eyes of violent male youth. Whilst not being necessarily universal across the region and recognising multiple masculinities across ethnic and racial lines, *macho* is still the most common form of sexism, misogyny and patriarchy in Latin America (Gutmann, 2003: 18). Furthermore we can also point to some "central defining features of masculinity for many men and women in various parts of the Americas", such as work and financially supporting one's family which is a key dimension of adult masculine identity (Gutmann, 2003: 13, 14). The centrality of being a 'breadwinner' comes through strongly in the narratives of young men later in the thesis.

Localising Masculinities

Scholars have noted that masculinities are often discussed at an abstract structural level, whilst there is a lack of contextualisation or consideration given to the strategies men use to negotiate masculinities in their everyday lives (Lusher and Robins, 2009: 387, 389; Coles, 2009: 30). For example, the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' is useful for understanding big picture accounts, but is insufficient to explain how individual men negotiate masculinity in their specific local settings (Pringle in Lusher and Robins, 2009: 393). 'Local' settings are a regular set of gender arrangements in spaces such as families, organisations or immediate communities:

"Local settings, or gender regimes, are the "regular set of arrangements about gender" found in an institution, such as school or work, corresponding to the "usual feature of organisational life" (Connell 2002a, 53). Local settings are the level of analysis "constructed in the arenas of

face-to-face interaction of families, organisations, and immediate communities, as typically found in ethnographic and life-history research” (Connell and Messerschmidt in Lusher and Robins, 2009: 405).

These gender regimes in local settings are part of wider patterns known as the “*gender order* of a society” which endure over time (Lusher and Robins, 2009: 405). In other words, whilst locally specific, such relations reflect broader gender norms in society.

In Medellín broader gender norms of traditional masculinity such as strength, breadwinning and status are reflected in a nuanced way: “Being a man means being strong, bringing home money, being a protector, a womaniser, a chauvinist, macho, manly, having power and being respected (sic)” (Personal interview, Sammy, 03/06/2008). These versions of masculinity are dominant and are notably patriarchal, commonly understood as *macho* or *machismo* (Viveros Vigoya, 2001; Gutmann and Viveros Vigoya, 2005), reflecting Connell’s ‘hegemonic masculinities’ (Connell, 1987; 2005). Male youths will be disposed by their masculine *habitus* to seek valued forms of male recognition through their performance, an expression of their *libido dominandi*; where male versions of identity, belonging and status are linked to the ‘desire to dominate’ and ‘symbolic violence’².

Whilst hegemonic masculinities influence micro level practice, men are not locked into a particular masculinity; “discursive approaches to masculinities suggest that men are not permanently committed to a particular pattern of

² Bourdieu and Wacquant argue that gender domination is a paradigmatic form of ‘symbolic violence’. “[Symbolic violence] is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity... quite simply, by the *order of things*... the male order is so deeply grounded as to need no justification: it imposes itself as self-evident, universal... It tends to be taken for granted by virtue of the quasi-perfect and immediate agreement which obtains between, on the one hand social structures such as those expressed in the social organisation of space and time and in the sexual division of labour and, on the other, cognitive structures inscribed in bodies and in minds” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2004: 272-273).

masculinity. Rather, they make situationally specific choices from a cultural repertoire of masculine behaviour” (Connell, 2005: xix). Hegemonic masculinities function as a dominant ideal of masculinity at a macro level. This influences male practices at a micro level where individuals must “negotiate their own gendered selves” (Lusher and Robins, 2009: 393). Connell states that “there is generally a hegemonic form of masculinity, the most honoured or desired in a particular context [masculinities are] configurations of practice generated in particular situations” (in Lusher and Robins, 2009: 405). In other words when ‘becoming men’ youths must navigate contextually specific conditions and consider the opportunities available to them. Ethnographic research can explore how this navigation takes place in local settings.

Coles takes these ideas and combines them with Bourdieu’s ‘thinking tools’ to account for a variety of localised ‘dominant masculinities’ (Coles, 2009: 31). Coles agrees that hegemonic masculinity is one form of masculinity culturally exalted over others, which disregards the complexities of various dominant masculinities that exist:

“For example, within the offices of a multi-national corporation, dominant masculinity may be epitomized by the slender, fit, young, aggressive, businessman dressed in his designer-label suit. However, within a working-class pub, dominant masculinity may be epitomised by the unkempt, middle-aged man with a large beer belly who can consume vast quantities of alcohol. Hegemonic masculinity may be that which is culturally exalted at any given time, but dominant masculinities need to be drawn from this and contextualised within a given field (or subfield), as well as located culturally and historically. It is possible to be subordinated by hegemonic masculinity yet still draw on dominant masculinities and assume a dominant position in relation to other men...

This may mean that men’s lived experiences of masculinity may be far from perceived as having a relegated status in comparison to other men’s masculinities... Within any given field, there are those in positions of dominance and those who are subordinated... As there are a multitude of fields in which masculinities operate, so too are there necessarily different versions of dominant (and subordinate) masculinities” (Coles, 2009: 32-33, 39-41).

Ergo, even men who are subordinated to overarching hegemonic masculinities because of racism, class or poverty can *perform* in a way specific to their context that reflects the dominating nature of hegemonic masculinity. In other words they demonstrate 'localised dominant masculinities' within their subordinated or emasculated setting.

This can be unpacked further using *habitus*. Whilst the dispositions of the *habitus* are durable they are also 'transposable' – they can become active in the wide variety of social spaces, or *fields* that individuals occupy "to form practical dispositions and actions to everyday situations" (Coles, 2009, 39). *Masculine habitus* creates a particular performance depending on each setting, situation or context.

In accordance with what Coles has stated, a lower class youth might join a gang as a mechanism to masculinise – and they are *disposed* to do so by their masculine *habitus* - whilst the upper class youth may strive to become a corporate executive. Their masculine *habitus* will be similar insofar as they are both performing traditional versions of masculinity, but they do so in a nuanced and contextually specific way.

Essentially they are both fulfilling the male reputational project by accumulating masculine *capital* specific to their environment by using the 'tools at hand' and the opportunities available to them.

Some youths may seek to be more dominant in their local setting than others, to obtain more masculine *capital* than others, to become the local manifestation of broader hegemonic norms, to be the 'macho' man, the alpha-male, or the 'gang

leader'. To do so they will seek to emulate and thus reproduce localised versions of masculinity that dominate the *field* (of masculinity). In emasculating contexts of exclusion, high levels of violence and the penetration of gang structures and organised crime, local versions of dominant masculinity are not represented by corporate salaries and designer suits, they are represented by these gang structures, their relative material riches and 'status' as dominant men in the community. Whilst gangs have "their own localised histories of accumulation and marginalisation" (Jensen and Rodgers, 2009: 221), they also have underlying similarities in most cases - that is performing their version of localised dominant masculinity which is maintained by crime and violence. This will be explained further below.

The disjuncture in masculine performance of the corporate executive and the gang member living in the same city is a representation of the disjuncture in their context, life experiences and opportunities, not in their masculinity. The more divergent their conditions become the more divergent the performances the same masculine *habitus* will generate. Where inequalities in a given region or city are rife, we can expect masculine practices to vary accordingly. This is a significant claim in the theoretical argument of this chapter, and will be used below to explain why male youths in excluded and impoverished contexts are more likely to opt to join gangs than their middleclass counterparts in Medellín.

Masculinity is complex and multifaceted like identity, and all boys must negotiate their way to manhood with a sense of esteem and dignity. However, 'violent' youth's masculinity is patriarchal, about being the 'big man', the 'feared man', the 'macho man' in the community; dominating and becoming dominant in the *field* of masculinity and in the community as a whole. At the same time, men

who do not demonstrate a significant desire to dominate *capital* in the *field* of masculinity may of course be patriarchal at home and use domestic violence.

In contexts of exclusion and poverty where licit pathways to manhood with esteem and dignity are scarce, youths are more likely to find illicit pathways to manhood by joining the gang: This likelihood further increases where gangs and violence are particularly prevalent and gangs dominate symbolic, social and economic masculine *capitals*.

Context and opportunity

Masculinisation Opportunities & Contesting Emasculation

The pursuit of manhood depends upon the tools at hand based on each individual's situationally specific life experience. This is unique to each individual, but will also be dependent on the contextual and structural factors they encounter in the social world. The pursuit of manhood then, depends on each individual's *masculinisation opportunities*. A poor youth joining a gang whilst an upper class youth becomes a corporate executive, is illustrative of the different masculinisation opportunities available to them as they navigate a pathway to manhood.

Manuel Castells calls the slums of the global south a ““Fourth World” of extreme poverty, resentment, and brutal, day-to-day struggle for survival” (Hagedorn, 2008: xxvi), and also a struggle for dignity (Jensen, 2008: 196). This limits what can be termed positive, licit, nonviolent, or for want of a better term, ‘prosocial’³ masculinisation opportunities. In other words such contexts are *emasculating*,

³ ‘Prosocial’ as defined in the Introduction

demonstrated by the literature in the previous chapter. When there is also significant social violence and the presence of armed groups, this increases negative, illicit, violent or antisocial masculinisation opportunities, engendered in particular by the 'nihilistic power' of such groups. As Hagedorn says "the gang is one business that is almost always hiring" (Hagedorn, 2008: xxv, 132). However, this is not to suggest that there is a binary between 'prosocial' and 'antisocial' masculinities; if a youth is not in a gang, he can still carry out malevolent patriarchal practices and a gang member can still be a caring father.

Nevertheless, these contexts have a dual effect on male youths leading them to join gangs; the relative 'riches' of the gang act as a carrot, and emasculation as a stick. Youths' *habitus* disposes them to navigate a pathway to manhood, therefore in doing so they must *contest* or *negotiate* the effects of emasculation in their context. Boys and youths will strategise to become men in a 'less than conscious' way, based on the resources available to achieve their gendered self.

Whilst masculinisation processes alone cannot entirely account for why a youth joins a gang, the process of joining a gang can also be understood as a struggle for dignity or a 'dignification' process in emasculating contexts. An excluded youth and former gang member from Bogotá put it like this: "Look, ask yourself this 'Is it more dignified to beg or to rob?'" (Personal interview, Cardenas et al., 07/07/2006).

Joining the gang can be a form of 'protest' masculinity against such emasculation, similar to Wacquant's notion of a 'collective identity machine' produced by the stigmatisation of the ghetto (Hagedorn, 2008: 120). Frustration over social exclusion leads youth gang members to turn stereotypes upside

down by becoming 'bad mother fuckers' (Jensen, 2008: 98). Young men in gangs seem to say: 'Instead of me fearing you, you'll fear me' (Barker, 2005: 40). Totten concludes that 'negative' and 'protest' male identities are "an aspect of their identity construction, expression, and reaffirmation", as a response to blocked access to the 'patriarchal dividend' (Totten, 2003: 85).

Whilst using violence can be a masculine act in itself, youths may not necessarily want to be violent. However in emasculating contexts, violence is the salient and seemingly powerful tool to obtain the *capital* and 'patriarchal dividends' of dominant masculinity. Therein there is masculine 'logic' to joining the gang. If masculinity is wrested from these youths this antagonises their masculine *habitus*. It is unsurprising then that they may take more extreme measures to secure masculine *capital* such as joining the gang. Gang violence seen from this perspective is an externality or by-product of youths' masculine assertion in conditions of emasculation. Arguably, upon entering gangs youths may not be striving 'to be violent', but certainly they were striving 'to be men'. Violence is a mechanism 'instrumentalised' or 'operationalised' to accumulate masculine *capital*, and this process contributes to the continuum of violence.

Empirical data from Jensen and Rodgers helps illustrate these claims. Although Jensen does not apply Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' explicitly, he observed that being a drug dealer was "one of the privileged ways of accessing masculine capital" and that this type of "dominant masculinity" was a mechanism to escape the racially stereotyped, marginalised and emasculated man (Jensen, 2008: 50, 176). Like the aforementioned gang member from Bogotá, who asked 'is it more dignified to beg or to rob?', in these contexts many youths feel that

they have no other options and drug dealing becomes the only 'worthwhile' way to earn a living:

“What the fuck do you do when you don't have any food and there's no work to be had? You have to find some other way to look out for yourself, that's what! That's where selling drugs comes in, they're the only thing that's *worthwhile* doing in the neighbourhood” (Jensen and Rodgers, 2009: 224, my italics)

If the alternative to drug dealing is to be underemployed, work for a poverty wage or beg, this will certainly not garner significant masculine *capital* and hence become less attractive as a masculinisation opportunity. These options do not offer youths in such contexts the possibility to emerge from emasculation with dignity. Drug dealing, gang membership and the like operate in concordance with the generative base of masculine *habitus* in such contexts, and thus will tend to be reproduced as social practice as boys strive to become men.

In part, young men's gang membership and violent crime in poor and excluded contexts needs to be understood as a protest against emasculation, a protest underpinned by their masculine *habitus*. It is an attempt at Foucauldian “subversive recodification” of their subordinate position of power in the broader *field* of masculinities, and in society as a whole (Foucault, 2000: 122-123). This ‘masculine subversion’ perspective of gang membership compliments more structural socio-economic perspectives, where the rise of gangs in the periphery has been linked to ‘insurgent citizenship’ and ‘revolutionary statement’ (Jensen and Rodgers, 2009: 233; Rodgers, 2003: 130; see also Holsten, 1999).

However let us pose a caveat here; this thesis does not suggest that gang

membership and their corresponding activities are a 'grand emancipatory project' against gendered and structural subjugation. Gangs themselves compound underdevelopment and social problems. However, chronic social violence is a clear sign of social ills.

Although such men remain marginalised in the context of broader hegemonic masculinities, violent, drug dealing gang members create their own 'localised dominant masculinity' in their community, a type of hybrid hegemonic masculinity. Philippe Bourgois has observed the "misogyny of street culture and the violence of everyday life", expressed in particular through sexual violence carried out by gang members (Bourgois, 2003: 213; Bourgois, 2004); and John Hagedorn makes reference to "Gangster [rap] culture [as] the essence of patriarchal masculinity" (Hagedorn, 2008: xxviii)⁴.

"Although they can be said to be fighting 'against' wider structural circumstances of economic exclusion and racism, most of the time the behaviour patterns of gang members are clearly motivated principally by their own interests rather than the active promotion of any form of collective good" (Jensen and Rodgers, 2009: 231).

Their activities have "toxic social consequences... while the gangs claim to protect their local communities, their presence and practices are what allows for further oppression" (Jensen and Rodgers, 2009: 230). Whilst we should be wary of romanticising gangs, we should recognise that they are a product of exclusion and a localised form of dominant masculine identity that reflects the negative aspects of hegemonic masculine norms. As Totten suggests, "Masculinity type is thus a key predictor of youth violence. Economic and social marginalisation, through their threats to masculine identity, can be contributing factors to abusive behaviour in some men" (Totten, 2003: 89). The

⁴ Although Hagedorn juxtaposes this with some forms of hip-hop, which are opposed to misogyny, violence and drugs (Hagedorn, 2008).

gang's dominant masculine performance is provoked by the emasculating effects of social, economical and racial marginalisation. This structural marginalisation is an 'enabler' of violent male practices amongst disaffected youth in the periphery. As Barker laments "For too many, like Joao, the promises of goods to make their lives better, to attract girls and to be real men, remain well out of reach" (Barker, 2005: 40).

Masculine *habitus* infers that men are *disposed* to reproduce these pillars of masculinity, reflecting individuals' experience of the life-world. However, upon reproducing these masculinities or performing the practices generated by their masculine *habitus*, their practices vary greatly even in the same context. Barker cites what he calls 'competing' versions of masculinity - a violent one and the traditional 'hard worker', in *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. Despite this competition, he observed that both versions in fact have "much in common"; that all male youth, violent or not, feel pressures to achieve the same basic mandates of manhood – to be strong, hold down a job, gain 'respect', achieve status, attract women, et cetera (Barker, 2005: 17-18). A pertinent question to ask ourselves is: Why are some youths from the same context violent whilst others are not? Even if their *habitus* is similar, why are their practices divergent?

Firstly, the socialisation space of the gang is a dominant influence in the world of its members – it often makes up the core of both 'work' and social activities. Micro-level socialisation spaces such as these (or a school, an office work environment, et cetera), are referred to as *sub-fields* by Bourdieu. Each *sub-field* has a particular *doxa*, or rules of the game - a gang has its own subculture

Chapter 2. Negotiating pathways to manhood and reproducing violence in the periphery and a *modus operandi* of crime, delinquency and violence. In the gang in particular, masculinities are an exaggerated, hyper-⁵, malevolent or perverse manifestation of traditional masculinities.

Secondly, being violent and aggressive can act to turn male stereotypes – of the subjugated or ‘powerless’, poor and excluded youth - on their heads, and is a particular facet of male performance in many gangs. Violent male youths are taught to “glorify violence and define their identities through this behaviour” (Totten, 2003: 88).

“Becoming a gang member, and using violence... is partly a conscious choice to adhere to an exaggerated – but ultimately traditional – version of manhood... They recreate and sometimes exaggerate these identities from a wider social context that promotes violent and misogynistic versions of manhood... The key issue for those young men using violence is that they are seeking to achieve manhood through violent means – they are robbing killing and dying to live up to a specific, socially reinforced version of manhood” (Barker, 2005: 82-83).

Being the ‘tough guy’ forms part of a subcultural repertoire that confers masculine *capital* upon the performer. For example the *duro* or ‘tough guy’ in Medellín becomes the boss of the gang and reaches such a position by being the *más malo* - the ‘badest’ (Personal interview, Junior Carrito, 19/06/2008). Alba Zaluar said “young men who participate in *commandos* in *favelas* buy into or are socialised into a ‘warrior ethos’, an identity and set of codes which involves, among other things, a willingness to use violence to achieve one’s goals, including having access to consumer goods” (in Barker, 2005: 69). Such subcultural codes and *capitals* are common to gangs across the region, and

⁵ Hagedorn refers to violent and ‘hypermasculine’ rap lyrics, and the “violence and a brutal culture of hypermasculinity” in some gangs (Hagedorn: 2008: xxviii, 137). For ‘hypermasculinity’ also see Basta (Basta, 2000: 44).

indeed the world, however each gang has its nuanced specificities. For example, in Medellín, particular value is given to *rematar*, to 'more than kill' someone: "they shot him 26 times, *lo remataron* (sic)" (Personal interview, Havana, 12/06/2008). Such sub-cultural values and capitals generate 'prototypes' of manhood. "People cognitively represent social groups in terms of prototypes. A prototype is a subjective representation of the defining attributes (e.g. beliefs, attitudes, behaviours) of a social category that is constructed from the relevant social information..." (Hogg, Terry, and White in Lusher and Robins, 2009: 396). Such prototypes and subcultures of exaggerated, perverse or hyper masculinities are a context specific exaggeration of hegemonic or dominating masculinities. Younger gang members will look to emulate the prototype *duro* or *más malo* in an attempt to garner *capital* within the subfield of the gang, and as such will reproduce the prototype's masculinities, and of course his *más malo* violent behaviour. Underpinning this is the masculine *habitus*. The gang as a subfield, subgroup or subculture becomes a fertile place for learning to use and reproduce violence for boys and youths.

Conversely, where youths join alternative subfields or socialisation groups with different masculine performances, role models, et cetera, they are likely to reproduce this subfield. Youths who join church groups, for example, will reproduce and perform 'church like' practices. As this thesis goes on to differentiate between 'prosocial' and 'violent' youths it will consider why some youths joined the 'prosocial' subfield – a community development organisation, whilst others joined the violent gang, and how and why their distinct practices developed.

Gangs and the Reproduction of Violence

The *field* of masculinities in chronically violent communities which also suffer from exclusion and poverty is often dominated by the ‘standard bearer’ or “ever present role-model” (Hagedorn, 2008: 132) of an exaggerated form of traditional masculinity engendered by the gang or irregular armed group. Male strategies, competition and performances in such contexts are influenced significantly, although of course not solely, by these dominant versions of masculinity. However we must bear in mind that gang influences also have impacts on a number of other aspects in communities that are of course not limited to the masculine *field*. As has been outlined above in reference to masculinisation opportunities, the influences and impact of the social world on individuals are shaped by their contexts and the nature of the *field* of masculinities they may operate in. Such experiences remain unique to the life experience of each individual - some youths may be more influenced by gangs than others. Whilst the influences of the gang in the *field* are not binding, they have a significant impact.

Where gangs become embedded over time they can acquire structuring and even ontological⁶ capacities. Therefore gangs can have significant influence in the *field* of masculinities and consequently exert a significant influence over male youths and the development of their masculine *habitus*. Furthermore, violence has the capacity to ‘dwell’ in the collective and individual memory,

⁶ Rodgers has referred to ‘ontological assets’ when observing gang activity in Managua, Nicaragua. The gang and its violence were converted into a ‘symbolic index’ “providing a primary source of what Giddens (1991: 38) has termed “ontological security.” As such, the gang became the institutional medium through which practical and symbolic rules and norms for living were laid down locally, allowing for the coherent – albeit limited – formulation of sustainable livelihoods by *barrio* inhabitants and the management of their limited asset portfolios.” (Rodgers, 2008: 245).

which entrenches the impact of fear and revenge over time. Collectively these processes contribute to the broader ontological and normative impact violence has upon communities. This brings together structural understandings of how gangs function in communities with Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' to explain how gangs can be reproduced through agent's practices, in this case male youths. When we talk about the intergenerational reproduction of violence, more specifically this means the reproduction of violence as social practice through repeated masculine performance.

Gangs as social structures and the standard bearers of masculinity

In poor and violent neighbourhoods local armed groups such as gangs often dominate local versions of masculine *capital*, including access to money, 'power and respect', sexual access to women, status and material signifiers such as fast motorbikes, brand clothes, expensive trainers, et cetera. Their acts of crime and violence secure much of this *capital*. It is important to mention that these signifiers of masculine *capital* are not restricted to the gang subculture as a *sub-field* of masculinity, but rather gain influence in communities precisely because they are desired masculine *capitals* by boys, youths and men within and outside of the gang. As such these *capitals* reflect the broader *field* of masculinity in the community, although gang members dominate or accumulate large amounts of such capitals, symbolising the exaggerated, but still traditional, masculinities that gang members perform.

The accumulation of masculine *capital* leads gangs to become local beacons or standard bearers of masculinity. As such, they will become salient to boys and

youths growing up who seek masculinisation opportunities. This is compounded in contexts where armed actors have become embedded in communities over time. Some authors suggest that where this occurs armed actors can acquire 'structure like' qualities, becoming ontologically significant in host communities. Here it should be added that such 'embeddedness' enhances armed actors' capacities to accumulate masculine *capital*, dominate the local *field* of masculinity and have an impact upon what it means to 'be a man' in that context, thus contributing to the generation of masculine *habitus* of male youths who are exposed to their influence. Let us develop these arguments.

If gangs can become structures with structuring capacities this means they can condition the purposive action of agents in the social world. Structures and processes of structuration are inherently linked to social reproduction (Giddens, 1991), hence gangs generate and reproduce certain types of behaviour. One of these is an exaggerated traditional masculine performance sustained by the use of violence. As covered in Chapter 1, a number of authors refer to gangs or irregular armed groups as structures or being structure like (Jensen, 2008 ; Gutiérrez Sanín, 2009 ; Hagedorn, 2008 ; O'Donnell, 1999). To date however the concept of gangs as structures with reproductive and ontological capacities has been put forward by Rodgers, but remains at its genesis and has not yet been merged with gendered perspectives on violence.

"I would argue that at their most basic, Colombian and Nicaraguan youth gangs can both be seen as representing similar forms of social structuring that are intimately linked to wider contexts of crisis and breakdown that characterise both Nicaragua and Colombia. As such, they are critical social phenomena to consider if one is to understand the developmental predicament of these societies... As such, rather than seeing youth gangs as a "dysfunctional" or "pathological" social phenomena, I would argue that they should in fact be seen as normative forms of institutionalised social interaction and social structuring" (Rodgers, 2003: 129-130).

The theoretical claim made here is to develop the concept of the gang or local armed group as a structured and structuring entity. Whilst gangs may originate organically from communities and have positive impacts, invariable gangs 'go bad'. Even if they lose legitimacy amongst the host community they still retain their structural integrity and structuring capacity. In other words they become 'structures of violence'. However, a clarification is required here; 'structures of violence' refers to 'institutionalised' gangs whose structure itself has persisted over time although individual membership may be ephemeral. Such gangs – or other armed groups such as paramilitaries or militias – are not just 'kids causing trouble on the corner', but rather organisations with hierarchical structures that control organised crime, may have political interests or linkages, or be related to nationwide armed conflicts.

As they are reproduced and recycled across generations of young men, the violent and criminal activities of these groups become deeply embedded in communities. Whilst gang conflicts in the periphery may seem to be chaotic and locked into an Arendtian pattern of 'unpredictable' violence (Arendt, 1970), the underlying structures and *modus operandi* of these groups are remarkably intransigent – as are the unchanging socio-economic conditions of the host community. As social structures, their embedded nature makes them largely intractable, they persist, as does violence. Where gang structures replicate over time and through generations they can become more socio-political in nature, although of course this varies from context to context. Through their accumulation of material wealth resulting from organised crime they gain socio-political influence amongst the local community, especially in contexts with endemic political corruption and clientelism, which is lamentably common in

Latin America's periphery. As the arbiters of security and insecurity, their securitisation rhetoric is still proffered to the host community as a case for legitimacy. Where such groups have become embedded, structurally they become more significant and the leaders of these groups can assume quasi-political functions, presiding over neighbours disputes like 'local mayors' or 'sheriffs', or giving impromptu handouts to loyal community members. The intransigence of these structures requires contextualisation and empirical research if we are to understand this process.

What is being suggested here is that the structural nature of some gangs and illegal armed groups perpetuates their capacity to dominate masculine *capitals* and the local *field* of masculinity. Overtime in communities where such groups exist across a number of generations, as is the case in Medellín, they begin to shape the very meaning of masculinity itself, linking male performance evermore closely to localised dominating masculinity and the deployment of violence. This is a dangerous precedent indeed, influencing future generations of male youths seeking to fulfil their masculine *habitus*.

A number of other perspectives on violence in communities demonstrate how violence itself tends towards reproduction and self-perpetuation. These perspectives support the notion that gangs have significant influence upon the communities in which they operate, which contributes to their domination on the local *field* of masculinities and the informing of masculine *habitus* for male youths.

Embeddedness is where an actor is anchored in a particular territory or place (Hess in Rodgers, 2007). Where gangs or other forms of illegal armed actors have become embedded in a community over a number of generations, taking on structuring capacities commented upon above, a certain type of 'routinisation' of gang activities occurs. Giddens states that processes of routinisation coincide with ontological security - agents become accustomed to 'what exists' in their social world through repetition (Giddens, 1984 ; also see Haugaard, 2002: 148). Further, Taylor has underlined that the primary measure of any form of social order is the degree to which it is imbued within the "social imaginary" (in Rodgers, 2007: 245). Gang structures embedded in communities across generations affect social order by occupying a significant position in the social imaginary. In turn the ontological impact on perceptions and imaginaries shifts the meaning, norms and 'legitimacy' of violence, setting the *doxa*, 'the rules of the game'.

Gang 'orderedness' *is* a social order; it is a type of irregular authoritarianism serving to accumulate masculine, social, economic and symbolic *capitals* for members of its structure. The gang can therefore also be understood as an entrepreneurial project, albeit a perverse one, that young men will see as a 'masculinisation opportunity' to acquire *capitals*.

Despite this process of routinisation and social ordering, we should be careful not to 'essentialise' violence as 'normal' or 'banal'. Even where violence becomes ubiquitous, endemic or chronic it often remains emotive, unpredictable and does not lose its capacity to traumatise. Discussions around the 'normalisation' of violence are particularly slippery and may serve to confuse more than clarify the process of violence reproduction. Nevertheless normative

parameters around the 'legitimate' use of force affect the amount of violence that is used in society.

The embeddedness of gang structures across generations and persistently high levels of violence shift local narratives around the appropriate and inappropriate use of violence in society, particularly in terms of 'acceptable' revenge attacks⁷. Gangs operate in the "microrealm of interpretation, typification, and cognition" where social discourses condition the cognitive and moral sanctioning processes of individuals around violent acts, which can create the weak 'moral regulation of society' (Alexander & Smith in Smith, 1997: 92-93, 95). This sets up a reproductive cycle where the 'absence of critical judgement' of violent actions from a strong articulate community (Kivel, 1992: 79, 120) leads men to use more violence, which further weakens society's regulatory capacity. Whilst violence may not be accepted by a community as 'normal', persistently high levels of community violence can weaken the regulation against such violence and its predominant actors – young men in illegal armed groups.

This means that membership to gangs and their violent behaviour is less sanctioned and hence more acceptable as a 'masculinisation opportunity' as young men in such communities negotiate pathways to manhood.

Violence elicits emotional responses from agents such as fear, trauma and sentiments of revenge. Such emotions are often deep-seated within agents and thus have an enduring impact upon their actions. This endurance enhances the

⁷ Conceptions around civil society legitimising or 'delegitimising' violence first came from Emile Durkheim, who claimed that narratives used to interpret acts of violence develop social norms about the appropriate and inappropriate use of violence (Durkheim, 1915).

impact of violence upon the community, its ontological position in the imaginary, and potentially then, the reproductive capacity of violence. Let us explore this idea.

Violence produces fear and trauma in communities. Where violence is chronic it becomes entwined with agents' perceptions of history. Riaño-Alcalá wrote that fear and violence 'dwell in the memory' of the population long after the actual acts of violence have passed (Riaño-Alcalá, 2006). This is corroborated by Wilkinson and Pickett who point out that "a recent down-swing in homicide rates in America... was not matched by a reduction in people's fear of violence" (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 131). Even when relatively few people are actually victims of crime, the fear of violence affects the quality of life for many more, particularly those most vulnerable, "...the poor, women and minority groups" (Hale in Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009: 131). Trauma of course, can have permanent effects, the implications of which both hard and social sciences still struggle to fathom.

Whilst this thesis does not claim to explain in detail the effects of fear and trauma on a community, it does suggest that by 'dwelling in the memory' of individuals, violence has a significant social-psychological impact upon communities - and thus individuals' - behaviour, which endures over time even when social violence ebbs. An example of this would be taxi drivers refusing to enter certain neighbourhoods and the perceived 'no go' areas within communities – even when violence declines people remain wary of re-entering such zones⁸. Fear is enduring and trauma can be permanent, sentiments of

⁸ On more than one occasion during my field research in Medellín taxis refused to take me to 'dangerous' parts of town to conduct my interviews, even though during 2007-8 when the field data was collected, there was a relative lull in violence.

revenge or vendetta can last for years. For example, in Medellín a common phrase is *el pasado no perdona*, 'the past does not forgive'. Revenge has been cited by many Colombian intellectuals as a principle motivator of violence (Salazar, 1990 ; Gaviria, 1991 ; Vélez Saldarriaga, 1999), and noted by Pearce as a 'vendetta culture' that reproduces violence across generations (Pearce, 2006: 70).

Gang members are a beacon of localised dominant masculinities for boys and young men, becoming "pivotal in masculine imaginaries and practices" (Jensen, 2008: 91). Furthermore the presence of these imaginaries is often enhanced by youths' lack of social and spatial mobility which stymies their world-view. Children and youths in the periphery are less mobile than better-off youths, and in some cases rarely, if ever, venture out of their neighbourhoods. This leads to local imaginaries taking on an enhanced ontological value as distinct orders in the social world beyond the neighbourhood are seldom experienced.

Violent men are feared figures. This is a form of symbolic masculine *capital*, and their domination of the masculine *field* garners them 'respect' and admiration from aspiring younger males. Even though violent youths are a minority, gang violence "has widespread effects and is nearly universally felt" (Barker, 2005: 77). "Despite their relative rarity, mob activities occupy an important position in local imaginaries because of the violence the community associates with them" (Barker, 2005: 53). "The *Homeboys* were also involved in a number of fights, adding to the symbolic construction of the group as a gang" (Jensen, 2008: 80). Gang leaders can acquire 'legendary' status: "Dickey the gang leader has a 'legendary capacity for violence'" (Jensen, 2008: 76). This status and their

material wealth contributes to gang members attracting large numbers of young women - although admittedly this is a complex process which often includes intimidation and abuse, some of which will be unpacked in the empirical chapters.

Conclusions

Masculinity and violence in contexts of exclusion

In contexts of urban exclusion, poverty and violence, nuanced versions of traditional masculinities specific to those conditions emerge, and in such contexts, gangs or other irregular armed actors accumulate significant Bourdieuan symbolic, economic and social *capitals*. Gangs achieve dominant positions in the *field* of masculinity becoming important signifiers or standard bearers of local masculinity, which itself is an exaggerated reflection of society-wide hegemonic and traditional masculinities. Lamentably, it is the violence the gang uses that underwrites and secures the *capitals* to achieve 'localised dominant masculinity'. Without wishing to be reductive, violence is an externality of this particular masculinisation process.

Reproducing violence through masculinity

If gang violence is related to masculinisation in contexts of exclusion, how might it be *reproduced*? Gangs in such socio-economic conditions are seen as a 'masculinisation opportunity'. This becomes reproductive as youths are *disposed* through masculine *habitus* to perform and reflect existing versions of

masculinity. They seek to 'behave like men', but do so using the tools available to them which are practically and ontologically defined by the structures in their social world. This forms the generative base of their masculine practices which in turn inform the *habitus* of future generations of young men in the community. In short the social world defines what 'being a man' is. This shapes youths' dispositional behaviour, leading them to then go on to 'instrumentalise' gang membership as a means to an ends – to become men.

This gendered dynamic contributes to the 'embedding' process of gangs into host communities. Where gang structures and chronic violence endure across generations they increasingly define the *doxa* – the rules of the game - shaping how male *strategies* in such settings ought to be oriented to achieve the accumulation of masculine *capital*. This compounds the gang's capacity to shape contexts and dictate, even at an ontological level, what dominant – read 'successful' - masculinity *is* in these communities. The impact of this upon boys growing up in these communities should not be underestimated. This process is compounded by structural violence where the 'world-view' or ontological horizons of many male youths in such contexts are stymied by their reduced social mobility.

Despite embedded and 'institutionalised' gangs acting as 'structures of violence' existing for a number of years, we cannot of course reduce all violence to gangs alone. Gangs' performance is a product of 'traditional' masculinities, specific contextual histories and structural violence which needs to be framed within the broader processes of global economic change and urbanisation. However whilst gangs are a product of these conditions, the paradox is that they go on to reinforce and reproduce the generative conditions for social violence.

Colombia, and Medellín in particular, suffers from reproductive social violence. Like any other case of chronic social violence, Medellín shares traits with other cities but is also a product of specific circumstances, such as linkages to the broader armed conflict and the rise of the narcotics economy. Increasingly the pathway to 'successful' versions of manhood in Medellín's *comunas populares* is symbolised through entrenched and sophisticated illegal armed groups, which often work with corrupt elements of the police or army (Corporación Con-Vivamos, 2010: 6), hence 'legal' and 'illegal' often blur. The reproductive capacities of violence and the entrenchment of illegal armed actors are mutually reinforcing. Civil society organisations and some governmental and state initiatives may aim to provide alternative livelihoods for young men but lamentably their responses are often overwhelmed by the capacities and influence of violent groups. The following Chapter 3 will explore the recent history of violence in Medellín to contextualise the research and to extrapolate how violence has persisted across generations.

Chapter 3

Violence in Medellín: The rise and resilience of armed groups

Introduction

This chapter charts the evolution of violence in Medellín and how young men in particular have been drawn into violence in recent history. It demonstrates how violence has been reproduced by illegal armed groups vying for control of illicit economies in Medellín's poorest neighbourhoods, the *comunas populares*.

In the last thirty years there have been a complex array of illegal armed groups fighting in Medellín's *comunas populares*. These range from street gangs, to right-wing paramilitary groups loyal to the state, and left-wing militias linked to the Marxist insurgencies of the broader armed conflict¹. Despite this array of armed groups, they depend upon and reproduce similar structures by running local organised crime and drug trafficking, and defending these interests using violence. The militias first entered the *comunas populares* proclaiming to defend local communities from crime and violence in the 1980s, however a failed peace process with them, and their own corruption through crime, drugs and violence, meant they became absorbed into criminal and gang structures, hence contributing to further violence. This will be discussed later in this chapter.

This history of violence in Medellín contextualises the concepts outlined in the previous chapter by seeking to explain how illegal armed groups came to

¹ Colombia has suffered from numerous internal wars since independence from Spain in 1810. The latest conflict involves Marxist insurgent guerrilla groups, the largest of which is the FARC-EP (the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) which were founded in 1964.

dominate, *embed* themselves and become 'structures' in poor communities over time. Particular reference is made to the masculine imaginary where the domination of local *capitals* by uninterrupted generations of armed groups has led them to emerge as leading symbols, or standard bearers, of masculinity. This has been compounded by the lack of licit opportunities in the emasculating socio-economic conditions of host neighbourhoods. Here we contextualise how these groups have effectively drawn up successive generations of young men into their structures by dominating localised masculine *capitals*, shaping the *doxa* - what it means to 'be a dominant man' and crucially *how* to achieve that. This chapter also outlines how punitive securitisation responses from the state and flawed demobilisation programs have been unable to disrupt these processes, and have further embedded irregular armed groups as 'structures of violence'.

Firstly this chapter considers the reduced livelihood opportunities in Medellín's poor communities; secondly how the rise of violent groups has impacted upon and shaped these communities with reference to the *field* of masculinity and its *doxa*; and thirdly how the responses to rising insecurity have led to the reproduction of violent groups such as militias and paramilitaries, further embedding the generative bases of violence.

Life in the Periphery

Medellín is Colombia's second city, nestled in the foothills of the Andes and is the regional capital of Antioquia. It is characterised by its successful industrial sector, particularly in textiles, and lies on the trade route from central Colombia to the Caribbean coast in the north (Hylton, 2007: 431; Rozema, 2008).

Antioqueños, as people from Antioquia are called, are renowned for their aggressive entrepreneurialism and economic expansionism. Medellín's development has been marked by nationwide conflicts, particularly by a period simply known as *La Violencia* in the 1950s, and since the mid-1960s by the armed conflict between the state and Marxist guerrilla groups. The violence led to significant rural to urban displacement which was enhanced by economic migration to cities throughout the 1960s and 1970s (Pearce, 1990). Medellín went through a rapid phase of urbanisation as a prosperous city. In 1951 the population stood at just over 350,000, but by 1970 had climbed to over one million (Granda Marin, 2001: 13). Today Medellín has over two million people divided into sixteen *comunas* – districts or precincts. New migrants or displaced populations still arrive in numbers today, building squatter settlements on the peripheral slopes of the city. It was in these areas on the fringes of society that significant urban crime began to emerge for the first time in the 1970s (Granda Marin, 2001: 13), although some chart the emergence of community “self-defence” organisations “to defend their territory from new land-grabbers or external interference” back as far as the 1950s (Medina Franco, 2006: 13).

Migrant populations were, and are, characterised by poverty, the absence of economic options and living in makeshift huts of corrugated iron and wooden planks. Political power had long been centralised into the hands of the wealthy regional economic elite who were preoccupied with the industrial expansion of Medellín whilst expressing little interest in the plight of the poor who were ‘systematically ignored’ (Granda Marin, 2001: 35; Angarita Caña, 2000: 37). “Economic resources in that period were concentrated with the few to the detriment of the many whom could not even satisfy their basic needs. This

generated or stimulated a deterioration in the social fabric of the city” (Revista Planeación Metropolitana, 1991: 3).

Some suggest persistent state abandonment created a true “social monster” (Pérez and Peláez, 1990: 213). Land ‘invasions’ by newly displaced persons progressively swamped the remaining recreational spaces such as plazas and parks, leading such areas to become ‘hyper-populated’ mazes (Personal interview, Tamayo, 03/04/2008). By 1990 there was a 35-40% unemployment rate amongst youths from the lower classes and only 38% of children were in secondary school (Marquéz Valderrama and Ospina, 1999: 14; Jaramillo Echeverri, 1990: 11; Orozco and Morales, 1990: 206). Former headmaster and later co-founder of the Mayor’s Office on Youth, Cesar Guisado, remembered that in 1986 there were over one thousand applications for just two hundred places at his school. If anything school was a place children would be fed, but teachers were forced to fund raise to feed their pupils (Personal interview, Guisado, 29/11/2007). Inequality in the city became more and more acute - many refer to a Dickensian ‘*dos urbes*’, the ‘two cities’, or the ‘two Medellín’s’ (Jaramillo Giraldo and Buritica Londoño, 2000: 284; Personal interview, Tamayo, 03/04/2008). Worsening income distribution between 1967 and 1989 affected the poorest sectors severely, a period which coincided with a rapid increase in violence and insecurity in such sectors (Marquéz Valderrama and Ospina, 1999: 10).

In short, for the dwellers of the poor precincts or *comunas populares*, there were few licit livelihood opportunities despite the significant ingenuity or

*rebusque*² they showed. This would later prove to be the perfect catalyst for gang and ‘narcotics industry’ recruitment whose relative riches were a stark contrast to extreme poverty.

The development of the narcotics industry gained pace in dramatic fashion in the 1980s. The small-scale marijuana trade routes of the 1970s were superseded by the far more profitable cocaine trade in the 1980s. Hundreds of millions of dollars began to flood into Medellín and unsurprisingly it became an economic motor and integral part of Antioquia’s capitalist economy (Estrada and Gomez, 1992: 177). Dwellers in *comunas populares* had to negotiate significantly reduced livelihood options whilst the riches of illicit opportunity were burgeoning around them. Unsurprisingly the narcotics industry became a large employer in the underemployed, peripheral and forgotten neighbourhoods of the city. The impact was dramatic. All of a sudden someone in the narcotics industry could make mind-boggling sums of money, when before they had struggled to put food on the table. The street-level contrasts at the time of the drugs boom are almost beyond fiction:

“What happened to us in the neighbourhood of Aranjuez during the 80s and 90s was really tough. It was the time of Pablo Escobar. Kids at that time began to work for the mafia as *sicarios* at a really young age, say, twelve or thirteen... a kid of that age would have a car or a good motorbike. At one point there was a kid who was only eighteen and he had a Mercedes Benz convertible... You would see money in incredible quantities... It was overflowing with cash, unbelievable...” (Personal interview, Mauricio, 20/06/2008)

This led to a proliferation of drug gangs and a clear criminal logic emerged around territorial control for the sale of drugs. Each gang fought over the control of their patch, which could be as small as one block (Personal interview,

² *Rebusque* is a term used throughout Colombia to describe the ingenuity of the poor to make ends meet.

Gaviria, 08/10/2007). The development of the drugs trade was an autarchic process in poor neighbourhoods, and the territorial fighting was over the control over local crime rackets and the lucrative local drugs market, not international trade. Only very few at the top of the narcotics tree were engaged in burgeoning and far reaching international trafficking (Personal interview, Pérez, 01/05/2008). Drug gangs dominated by male youths made their money from local sales, and then branched into other forms of local organised crime. The emergence of organised criminal economies in the *comunas populares* has always been 'organically' linked to territorial control. Such groups arose employing local male youths from the neighbourhood; as such they were 'organic' structures, brothers, sons and cousins from the community, fighting over the control of their 'patch'. Territoriality remains central to gang disputes, organised crime and urban violence in Medellín today.

For gangs there are a number of words such as *gallada*, *pandilla*, *combo* or *banda* (for a comprehensive typology see Perea Restrepo, 2007). *Parche* literally means 'patch', a group of friends who might hang out together on the street. They are often from the same block, or at least live in close proximity to one another and are bonded strongly by a sense of geographical identity (Perea Restrepo, 2007: 147). A minority of these will evolve from the *parche* into the *combo*, a *pandilla*, *gallada* or *banda* street gang. Some claim that a *combo* is actually an intermediate group between the *parche* and being a fully-fledged member of the *pandilla*, synonymous with the organised criminal gang (Tamayo, Field Diary 12/04/08 & 15/04/08). Youths who join gangs pass from the *parche* on their street corner into the neighbourhood gang, the 'organic' or

geographically rooted process where boys are socialised via these sub-groups into violent and criminal adulthood.

The influence of violent groups

The earlier quote from 'Maruicio' about the community 'overflowing' with money demonstrates the impact of the drugs and gang boom in Medellín. The effect of this on communities should not be underestimated, particularly upon the future protagonists of gang activity – young men and boys. These gangs began to emerge as 'new social actors', dominating the *field* of masculinity by accumulating the capitals required to be 'a successful man'. This was possible as traditional masculinities were incarnated by the activities of the gang, albeit in an exaggerated way. This needs to be explained further.

Many youths growing up in these neighbourhoods came from families that had been displaced from the countryside by the violence of the national armed conflict during the 1950s and 1960s. Rural culture in Antioquia is notably patriarchal, more so than many other regions of Colombia - the man is head of the house, 'macho', a 'hard-working', 'hard-drinking' breadwinner and a *verraco* - a tough guy (Urán Arenas, 2000). The *Antioqueño verraco* had a reputation for settling his disputes in the rural village using a machete. In 1990 Alonso Salazar wrote of the chronic violence in Medellín: "The violence that we see now is essentially male. Men are killing men... *El Guapo* in the rural areas, specialist in machete fighting was later *El Caiman*, the man who became the specialist at stabbing, and eventually the *pistoloco* [gunslinger] and the *sicario* [assassin]" (Salazar 1990: 43). This hegemonic and traditional version of manhood

transposed seamlessly to the recognised, respected and feared 'new social actors' of the *narco* gang. The father of one *sicario* interviewed was an infamous *mochacabeza*, a head-chopper with a machete (Personal interview, El Peludo, 03/06/2008).

In other words masculine *habitus* established through local, cultural and traditional signifiers of masculinity, primed new generations of male youths to transpose seamlessly into the masculine practices of gang life. The *field* of masculinities and what signified local masculine *capitals*, and *how* to accumulate them - the *doxa* - had changed significantly from the countryside to the poor urban neighbourhood. However the pillars of traditional masculinity, the masculine *habitus*, was not required to change. Traditional masculinities were seamlessly reproduced through gang practices even if these practices were exaggerated or 'perverse'. Gang life did not challenge masculine *habitus* but rather catered for its transposition.

How would a male youth in these circumstances, pressurised by the burden of traditional masculinity and at a 'less than conscious' level disposed by their masculine *habitus* to 'live up to' the fundamentals of masculinity, secure the masculine *capitals* in their neighbourhood such as income, male status and respectability? How might a youth strategise in such circumstances to emerge with esteem and dignity in the face of structural violence and its consequent emasculation? The lure of the gang and its masculine *capitals* would be a strong one: "Under these circumstances when the *narcos* [drug dealers in gangs] come along what do you expect youths to do?... The *narcos* threw parties with drinking and dancing and made offers for the young men to join

them” (Personal interview, Guisado, 29/11/2007). “Desperation, impotence, expectations, lead many poor kids to choose armed options and illicit activities. Here a *new social actor appeared...* [the drug trafficking gang] that had been there for a while, but was now recognised, *respected* or better said, feared” (Marquéz Valderrama and Ospina, 1999: 16, italics in original).

Joining a gang in desperate socio-economic conditions should not be solely understood as a question of ‘masculinisation’, it is also a livelihood option. Nevertheless, it was a livelihood option predominantly for *young men*, given the fact that the vast majority of members were male youths. Hence, gang membership should not be considered without recognising the implications of gender. The ‘option’ of gang membership became increasingly salient for male youths where licit opportunities to build positive and dignified livelihoods were reduced. Whilst we cannot reduce gang membership to the dispositional process of masculinisation through *habitus* alone, the gang is always a vehicle with which young men could assuage the burden of traditional masculinity, or satiate the disposition to masculinise according to traditional shibboleths – “to become visible in society, to gain recognition, even though this was done through illegal means” (Marquéz Valderrama and Ospina, 1999: 16). The gang may be a livelihood option, but simultaneously it is a dignified masculinisation opportunity.

Marquéz Valderrama and Ospina referred to the appearance of the recognised and respected ‘new social actor’ (Marquéz Valderrama and Ospina 1999: 16). The heralding of the leader of the armed group began to embed them into both the community and masculine imaginary. The gang leader as a dominant

symbolic figure situated a hybrid version of traditional masculinity, or 'localised dominant masculinity', at the neighbourhood level (and beyond via burgeoning reputation) in poor communities. These figures dominated the local *field* of masculinity with their disproportionate accumulation of masculine *capitals*; economic (income, expensive clothes, fast motorbikes, cars, party throwing), symbolic (beacons or standard bearers of masculinity), and social (status, power over others through coercion, financial handouts, et cetera). The extent of this domination and symbolic, social and economic *capital* accumulation stands out in the life-history narratives in chapters 6 & 7.

The proliferation of gangs and the ubiquity of violence in Medellín in the 1980s gave rise to the term 'culture of violence', first used by Victor Villa (in Jaramillo Echeverri, 1990). This was symbolised by literature and films based on youth violence and this new 'culture' boomed (Salazar, 1990 ; Gaviria, 1991 ; Franco, 2004), and it also led to the rise of *parlache*. *Parlache* is local slang developed in Medellín's *comunas populares* that emerged in the 1970s, popularised by the working-class poetry of Helí Ramírez (1979). It then expanded rapidly to reflect the rise in crime, violence and drug trafficking of the 1980s. It has not been lost on scholars that *parlache* has over one hundred words for killing, drugs and weapons. It does not have a single one for love (Henao Salazar and Castañeda Naranjo, 2001).

The significance of gang members and leaders in the imaginary of the community is symbolised through *parlache* – leaders are known variously as *el cucho*, *patrón*, *duro* or *cacique*, amongst others. These terms imply a masculine form of 'respect'. *Cucho* is also a respectful term for an older man. A *cacique* is

a male chief of a pre-Columbian tribe - also turned in to the verb *caciquear* - which means 'to be the gang boss in a given neighbourhood'. *Patrón* literally translates as patron, he who pays. Throughout the late 1980s until his demise in 1993, infamous drug baron Pablo Escobar was simply known throughout Medellín as *El Patrón*.

Parlache evolved as youths built their own language to reflect the daily realities they confronted. Bourdieu contends that the power to name things is the power to organise and give meaning to experience (in Thomas, 1993: 45). Hence *parlache* acts as a barometer of social and cultural conditions; it reflects the cultural arbitrary as spoken word, and is a product of social history repeated through language by the agent.

Responses to gang violence: Militias, paramilitaries and the state

The absence of the state in peripheral communities had led to the rise of 'self-defence' groups to provide 'security' for local inhabitants against crime as early as the 1950s and 60s. Arguably these were emergent securitisation structures, albeit informal organic ones made up of local men – fathers, brother, uncles, cousins and sons (Medina Franco, 2006: 13).

Soaring delinquency in the 1980s prompted the rise of these community 'self-defence' groups, which later came to be known as militias. Although some had begun independently, the militias rose to prominence in 1988 (Medina Franco, 2006) when FARC, the EPL (The Popular Liberation Army), the ELN (The National Liberation Army), and the M-19 guerrilla groups from the broader conflict entered Medellín. They supported existing militias and established more

groups as part of a military strategy to take over the city in their bid to overthrow the state. Key in the early expansion of the militias were the M-19, who set up camps to train new recruits in urban guerrilla warfare. These were principally disaffected young men from poor neighbourhoods.

Some militia leaders denied having links to rural guerrilla movements, but others said that they were born as a result of the influence of the EPL and FARC. The ELN in particular worked hard to generate a scenario of empathy for their activities within the local population. They presented themselves to communities as a security force and swore to expel drugs gangs and criminals. This was essentially a form of 'social cleansing', which involved expelling or assassinating 'undesirable', vagrant or criminal individuals from the community, such as rapists, murderers, thieves or drug addicts. Initially they won over the backing of local populations (Pérez and Peláez, 1990 ; Personal interview, Gaviria, 08/10/2007).

This discourse around 'self-defence and community protection' set the standard for all armed groups that followed, who would go on to use local security provision to justify their presence and actions. Social cleansing would later be carried out on a larger scale by state-loyal paramilitaries, the police, and ironically by gangs themselves who would 'punish criminals' on their patch. The reproduction of this discourse is paradigmatic of the process in these communities, where one armed group would take over the 'control' of a neighbourhood from another, in a continual process since the 1980s.

The late 1980s coincided with the rise of so-called *narco* 'armies'. They were called 'armies' because of the sheer number of youth gangs and *sicarios*, the infamous assassin for hire, which the Medellín drug cartel had working for them.

These stood in opposition to the militias who were not linked to drug trafficking and the main Medellín cartel, run by Pablo Escobar (Pérez and Peláez, 1990: 170-171). One spark which led to intense violence emerged after guerrillas kidnapped a high-ranking cartel member, whereby the cartel declared war on the guerrillas and militias, establishing the death squad *MAS* – Death to Kidnappers.

The period of the late 1980s is crucial to understand the rise of urban violence in Medellín. The militias, gangs, *sicarios*, police, army and later paramilitaries (expanded upon below) became locked into multiple battles in the poorest neighbourhoods of Medellín, as they fought for control.

The guerrilla incursion into Medellín was one of the principle reasons for the rapid rise in the amount of violent young men circulating the city in the early 1990s (Salazar 1990 ; Medina Franco, 2006). This process accelerated the militarisation of young men in the *comunas populares* and a significant rise in the use of guns. One former militia regretted the attempted guerrilla takeover of Medellín saying it had left a legacy of rising violence in the city (Personal Interview, anon., Field Diary, 03/10/2007). It also laid the foundations, commented upon below, for large-scale counter-insurgency military operations into militia strongholds in the city in 2002, marking a significant escalation in hostilities.

Whilst *sicarios* and gangs first appeared in the 1970s, by the end of the 1980s this had escalated to a generalised crisis of violence, crime and drug addiction (Jaramillo Echeverri, 1990: 85-86). The multiple battles between militias, gangs, the police, and social cleansing consumed the city. Medellín had become the most violent city in recorded history. The homicide rate in 1991 reached 381 per

100,000 inhabitants (see figure 1 below), an intensity which has not been surpassed since (Arias Orozco et al., 1994)³. In a city of 1.6 million a staggering total of 6,349 homicides were recorded that year, and in total between 1986 and 1993 there were 33,546 homicides (Marqu ez Valderrama and Ospina, 1999: 14). Street level reality slid into anomie under the swell of violence. A forty year old community leader from *comuna popular Manrique* reflected: “I am a citizen of Colombia, a man from Antioquia, and a survivor of *Manrique* (sic)” (Field Diary, 03/04/2008).

Demographically however, this violence was not indiscriminate, poor young men were the ones dying. The ranks of gangs and militias, and to a large extent the police and army, were made up of poor young men. Violence was not just gendered, it was located in the domain of those with least socio-economic opportunities. Of the 5,450 homicide victims in 1990, 5,155 of these were men and 3,550 of those between the ages of 15-29 (Revista Planeaci n Metropolitana, 1991: 3).

State responses and paramilitaries

Before violence became extreme in the late 1980s the state showed little interest in poor young men killing each other on the outskirts of the city, and whilst they knew about the emerging *sicario* phenomenon they did nothing about it.

³ For comparative purposes, Perlman refers to Rio de Janeiro being one of the most violent cities in the world where “rates of violence were so bad in 2004 before the Pan American games that the government proposed building... a wall around the *favelas*”. The homicide rate then was 37.7 per 100,000 (Perlman, 2008: 52), a tenth of the homicide rate in Medell n in 1991.

The state did not have the capacity or political will to diagnose and effectively deal with social problems that were generating violence. Instead youths from poor neighbourhoods were conceived as ‘the problem’ and not symptomatic of broader issues. The state responded by importing the militaristic counter-insurgency doctrine used in the broader armed conflict to establish law and order without addressing socio-economic problems. War on gangs, *narcos* and militias was declared.

“For over ten years, drug trafficking, gangs and general delinquency had grown beneath the impotent and complicit view of the authorities. It is only now that the state declares war, using counterinsurgency tactics to confront a phenomenon with profound social roots” (Salazar 1990: 38).

This statement encapsulates the punitive response of the state and the rolling out of military security strategy against a problem that, despite links to the broader conflict, was symptomatic of social ills.

Male youths from *comunas populares* were stereotyped as violent and dangerous assassins that could only be dealt with through deadly measures; either by the police or private justice (Pérez and Peláez, 1990: 240). *Sicarios* were hyper-publicised as the visible head of social problems and the state set out to eliminate them. This perspective on youth spread beyond the police and army to the population of the city in general. Essentially this led to the criminalisation of all male youths from poor neighbourhoods; no one would employ them, compounding problems of poverty and exclusion, and many innocent youths were caught up in ‘social cleansing’. This added to the problems of these youths, by pushing them further into exclusion and making them more susceptible to recruitment by armed groups. “[Social cleansing] is not a secret for anyone anymore... there is a violent response... and this adds

to the climate of terror which is apt for forms of fascism” (Jaramillo Echeverri, 1990: 86).

One example of such death squads was a group made up of policemen called *Amor por Medellín*, ‘Love for Medellín’. However, *Amor por Medellín* simultaneously took bribes from the biggest gangs they were purported to ‘cleanse’ the city of (Estrada and Gomez, 1992: 177). When police were killed by cartel *sicarios*, they retaliated by machine-gunning random groups of youths on street corners in areas where suspected *sicarios* lived. Ricardo, a local shop owner, recalled the assassination of his cousin by police officers in the mid-1990s. The police fired machine guns out of a moving car simply because his cousin was hanging out on a street corner with a group of young male friends (Personal interview, Ricardo, Field Diary; 12/06/2008). An ex-police officer also spoke about working in death squads: “We would kill over 100 marijuana smokers in a weekend... and then there would be a big scandal in the press when they said that [only] ten youths had been killed... We manipulated everything” (Personal interview, Richard, Field Diary; 05/04/2008). Furthermore, the militias that had established a ‘community defence’ discourse were corrupted by crime and drugs becoming “*más pillos que las bandas*”, worse thieves than the gangs themselves, according to social worker Miguel Tamayo (Personal interview, Tamayo, 03/04/2008).

Security discourse based on ‘community defence’ was recycled by different belligerents, and used to justify the extreme violence of the state’s counter-insurgency measures. Today ‘defence of the community’ is still claimed by gangs and paramilitary factions to justify their continued presence - the

discourse itself has become embedded in marginal communities. The yardstick of legitimacy of these groups often rests on their ability to assert a monopoly on violence thus reducing the incidence of 'chaotic' violence in a community. Any reduction in violence is generally greeted with approval by community members. However such reductions have tended to ebb and flow with conflict dynamics; where one gang, militia or paramilitary group asserted a localised monopoly on violence, violence itself would ebb, appeasing the host community and lending credence to their 'community defence' discourse. However, such reductions in violence based on the control of illegal armed actors are volatile and short term.

The violence of the different belligerents and their discourse had come to resemble one another. The police were arbitrary, corrupt and distrusted by locals who saw them as yet another party to the violence. State violence was counterproductive, the Secretary for Government in Medellín in 1990 admitted that the state itself was "generating insecurity" (Estrada and Gomez, 1992: 181). It did not stop the violence; on the contrary it embedded the *doxa*, the rules of the game, into the collective imaginary of peripheral communities. It had now become clear that he who has the greatest capacity to deploy violence, rules. This had developed across generations of gangs and militias, and now the intervention of the state actually reinforced, rather than interrupted, this imaginary. For Medellín's abandoned communities their first significant experience of state intervention was not one of social development, education or health provision, but a militarised and arbitrarily violent one, where one violent actor was usurped by another.

In an effort to tackle rising violence, in 1994 there was a hastily organised demobilisation process by the state with militia groups and some gangs. Although efforts were made to reintegrate the militia, not all made pacts with the government. Attempts were made to establish those youths that did demobilise as a community security force called *COSERCOM* under the supervision of the police. However, the reintegration program was weak, and a lack of commitment by both state and combatants led to the disintegration of the process. Consequently, most members of *COSERCOM* were killed, fled or rejoined gangs in the ensuing violence. Furthermore, during this period the M-19 withdrew from the city, taking their political and structural command with them, leaving behind large number of trained and armed young men to their own devices. Estrada and Gomez note this as one of the biggest failures of the M-19 as large groups of combat trained and armed young men reorganised into new gangs and mercenary groups (Estrada and Gomez, 1992: 18). The opportunity for them to use their combat skills was found in the drugs and extortion rackets of the gangs they had ironically once been at war with (Estrada and Gomez, 1992: 18). In the wake of these failures, in the 1990s infamous and well organised gangs such as *Los Nachos*, *Los Capuchos* and *La Terraza* emerged and high rates of violence persisted in Medellín.

Counter-Insurgency in the Periphery: A non-negotiated 'solution' to violence

Since the 1980s as part of the national conflict with the guerrillas, the state had supported the development of paramilitary forces who came to occupy a central role in counter-insurgency tactics, terrorising civilians who were suspected of

Chapter 3. Violence in Medellín: The rise and resilience of armed groups collaborating with the guerrillas (Romero, 2003). The paramilitary groups gained in strength and were increasingly deployed by the state in a dirty war, and by the late 1990s became collectively known as the AUC – United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (Human Rights Watch, 2001 ; Romero, 2003). At this time, in response to the state’s inability to remove the threat of the left-wing militias, the paramilitaries began to enter Medellín. Their arrival turned out to be a decisive military move in terms of the state’s war against the militia. It also represented the synchronisation of the legal with the illegal, whilst being a deeply political strategy rooted in Colombia’s violent political history, reflecting the interests and traditions of the country’s political and industrial elites. The emergence of paramilitary groups in Medellín is explained below.

Two paramilitary *bloques* or units were initially established in Medellín; the *Bloque Metro* led by Carlos Mauricio García Fernández - aka *Rodrigo Doble-Cero* - and the *Bloque Cacique Nutibarra* (BCN) eventually headed by Diego Murillo - aka *Don Berna* (Rozema, 2008: 439). The *Bloque Metro* was originally a rural paramilitary unit operating out of the Antioquia and Chocó regions surrounding Medellín, the BCN was urban unit initiated in Medellín.

The *Bloque Metro* and the BCN began to co-opt gangs, and hence territory, by putting them on the payroll and threatening them with extermination if they did not comply - although some claim that that the paramilitaries arrived at the behest of the beleaguered gangs who were being eradicated by the militias (Personal interview, Gaviria, 08/10/2007). In 1999, gang members became ‘paramilitaries’ under a new command structure, received better arms, training, along with the newfound acquiescence of the police and army. It was a potent

formula and the militias' days were numbered.

By 2002, the paramilitary takeover was almost complete, however the notorious *comuna 13* precinct remained a FARC stronghold, held by the heavily armed militias they supported. To a lesser extent the ELN guerrillas also supported different groups of militias in the *comuna 13*, from which a splinter group called the *Comandos Armados del Pueblo* (CAP) had emerged as a powerful group in its own right (Noche & Niebla, 2002: 14). In line with President Uribe Velez' bellicose policies of taking the war to the guerrillas, the armed forces responded in dramatic fashion, using US supplied Black Hawk helicopters to bombard the *comuna 13* during *Operación Orión* in October 2002. Before and after the bombardment, paramilitaries were deployed on the ground to secure control according to numerous reports and paramilitary commander *Don Berna* himself (Noche & Niebla, 2002 ; Amnesty International, September 2005 ; El Espectador, 02/03/2009). By 2003, the takeover was complete and a new paramilitary order was formed in the periphery. The counter-insurgency strategy used against the guerrillas for a number of years was successfully rolled-out in Medellín. A new cycle had begun. Yet another irregular armed group was 'bringing security' to local communities, whilst recycling old discourse and practices. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*

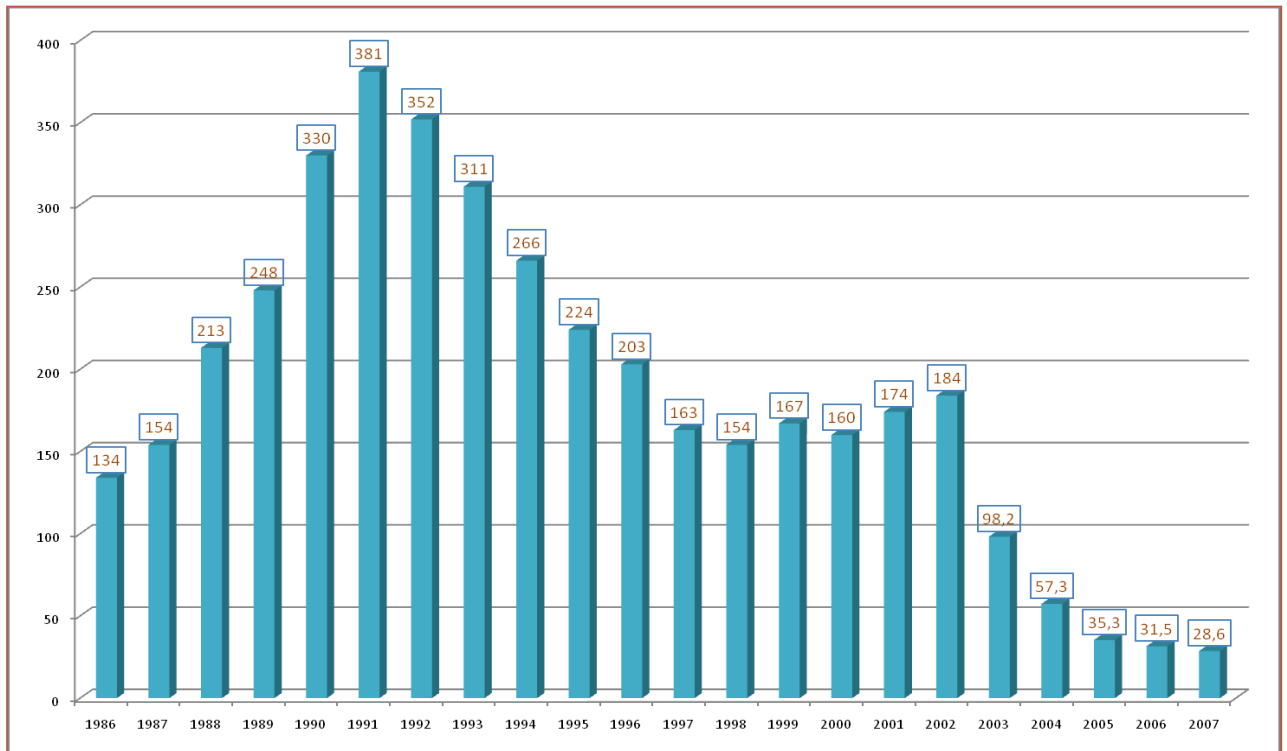
Paramilitary groups had made no secret of their use of the drugs trade to finance their activities. However, a growing alliance between drug barons and the BCN paramilitaries was blurring the lines between the two. In 2002, well known Medellín drug baron *Don Berna* essentially bought control of the BCN paramilitary unit by paying off it's commanders and putting the rank and file on

his payroll. Within weeks of *Operación Orión* and the subsequent 'paramilitary takeover' of Medellín in 2003, fighting broke out between the formerly allied BCN and *Bloque Metro* paramilitary groups. The commander of the *Bloque Metro*, *Rodrigo Doble-Cero*, saw himself as a paramilitary with political motivations, he did not approve of the take over of the BCN by *Don Berna* and paramilitary structures succumbing to the drugs mafia. However, he picked the wrong fight: given the bounty of drugs money to support its military front the BCN rapidly exterminated the *Bloque Metro*, securing control the peripheral neighbourhoods of the city⁴. *Doble-Cero* fled to the costal town of Santa Marta where he was assassinated in May 2004 (Rozema, 2008: 439). This process lead to the drugs mafia becoming indistinguishable from the paramilitaries. *Don Berna* had essentially acquired an irregular urban army to control his illicit interests.

The BCN's control of Medellín brought 'security' to the people as violence receded. However, as Cesar Guisado pointed out, the 'hegemony' of the BCN paramilitaries did contribute to sharply reduced homicide rates, but that this was not a sign of peace, but rather a particular phase of ongoing warfare (Personal interview, Guisado, 29/11/2007). The homicide rate dropped off dramatically. In 2002 there were 184 homicides per 100,000, which had fallen to 28.6 in 2007 (see figure 1 below).

⁴ The war between the *Bloque Metro* and the BCN is the theme of the documentary "La Sierra". See www.lasierrafilm.com (accessed 14/08/2010).

HOMICIDE RATE IN MEDELLÍN, 1986-2007



(Sources: INML - CIC – Attorney General’s office – Rates per 100,000 inhabitants SECRETARY OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT – SUBSECRETARY OF CIVIL ORDER – OBSERVATORY OF VIOLENCE)

The control of Medellín through the fragile monopoly on violence asserted by the BCN paramilitary group was commonly referred to as the ‘pacification’ of Medellín, a citywide testing ground for a non-negotiated solution to the armed conflict.

The paramilitaries new control of the city’s gangs led them to take over localised drug dealing and organised crime. In doing so they did not replace old structures, or even personnel, with new ones. They had simply won control over existing structures, drug routes and networks, by controlling the street gangs through force, coercion and perhaps most significantly, by putting them on the pay roll. Gang members made a fluid transition to becoming ‘employed’

paramilitaries. Financial, not political rationale, is central to gang or paramilitary membership today. As one gang member, turned paramilitary said:

Adam: Like *Don Berna* had lots of money through drug dealing so he could buy his way into power...

Carritas: Of course! He's the boss.

Adam: He can pay everyone.

Carritas: Of course, that's it. It's him that ran everything, so the high command had to pay attention to what he said because he was the one who controlled the money... So like I'm telling you, the boss is the one with the money. If you've got a boss who can't buy you a drink, who can't hand you a bit of money, phssssh [whistles out air], what sort of boss is that!... That's no kind of boss! (Personal interview, Carritas, 16/07/2008)

The few gang members that survived the violence from the 1990s were young men with transposable combat skills. They moved fluidly between the gangs, militia and paramilitary structures depending on who was in control at the time. They did not change their activities they simply changed *patrón* or boss. In an interview former guerrilla turned paramilitary commander, Fabio Orlando Aceveido, a.k.a. *Don Fabio*, referred to gang members or militias who joined the paramilitary command structure as “organic” paramilitaries because they were from, and remained in, their local communities (Personal interview, Aceveido, 21/11/2007). Locals essentially consider these young men a form of urban mercenary who side with whichever armed group comes to power in their area (Personal interviews, Tamayo, 03/04/2008 ; Camila, 11/04/2008 ; Pérez, 01/05/2008). Boys who had been ‘kids on the corner up to no good’ were rapidly leached into emergent ‘structures of violence’, embarking on ‘careers’ in armed groups where the logic of violence was a way of life. Yesterday’s errant boys became today’s mercenary youths.

For this reason in the thesis the terms ‘gang’ and ‘paramilitary’ are largely conflated. Although youth gangs now called themselves ‘paramilitaries’, they

were largely the same youths taking part in similar criminal activities as they had when they were 'just a gang'. The majority of the youths with violent histories interviewed during the fieldwork fall into this category – what *Don Fabio* called 'organic' paramilitaries above. Whilst the gang members who became 'organic' paramilitaries were often the same youths, there were of course certain implications of the paramilitary takeover; some youths felt pride at being 'paramilitaries', actively labelling themselves as such; being linked to the feared paramilitary structure facilitated the extraction of extortion monies from frightened community members; the paramilitary commanders largely controlled the criminal activities of its 'organic' members, supplying regular 'wages', access to more sophisticated weaponry and even military training outside of the city.

The complexity of Medellín's recent history explains why "violence is a slippery concept" that many scholars have grappled with (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004: 1). Young men move fluidly between armed groups and new generations are swiftly drawn into their ranks. Evidence of paramilitary linkages to the state's counter-insurgency strategy and the broader conflict began to slip into the background as age-old criminal disputes over territory emerged. Boundaries were blurred and moving constantly. The shared history of criminal and political violence in Medellín is demonstrated by the lexicon of violent youths who simply refer to all criminal, political and inter-gang violence as 'warfare': "*Sí, me han tocado muchas guerras*", Yeah, I've been in a loads of wars (Personal interview, El Loco, 03/06/2008).

The demobilisation process with the paramilitaries

Whilst this fighting took place, President Uribe pushed for the demobilisation of paramilitary groups with the agreement of *Santa Fe de Ralito* signed with paramilitary commanders in July 2003 (Rozema, 2008: 430). A number of paramilitaries were actually demobilised before the polemical 'Justice & Peace' law was passed through a majority *Uribista* congress, which provided a legal framework for the process in June 2005 (Rozema, 2008: 431). Although the law was applicable to all combatants, including guerrillas, it was primarily designed with paramilitaries in mind whom had fought alongside, not against, state security forces. In fact, the law was negotiated closely with paramilitary leaders across the country, including *Don Berna*, to the consternation of victims' movements and human rights organisations. Now former gang members who became paramilitaries swiftly entered the process and were labelled 'demobilised'.

Many speculated that the demobilisation process was a ploy by paramilitary commanders to legalise accumulated illicit wealth and landholdings, whilst facing low or suspended prison sentences. Certainly, it was difficult to imagine how demobilisation could be negotiated with paramilitary combatants that were largely made up of former gang members who had reverted back to organised crime and drug dealing, even if they were controlled by paramilitary commanders.

Alongside the 'pacification' of Medellín, the demobilisation process contributed to a reduction in violence. Paramilitary commander Fabio Orlando Acevedo stated that combatants were ordered into the demobilisation process by the 'maximum leader' *Don Berna* and they duly took part whether they wanted to or

Chapter 3. Violence in Medellín: The rise and resilience of armed groups not (Personal interview, Aceveido, 21/11/2007). By 2007 there were just over 4,150 combatants in Medellín's demobilisation process and over 35,000 across the country (Personal interview, Gaviria, 08/10/2007 ; Alcaldía de Medellín, Programa de Paz y Reconciliación, 2007). Orders came from *Don Berna* to halt local assassinations 'without permission' at the end of 2002, as the demobilisation deal was struck with the government (Corporación Con-Vivamos, 2010), which contributed in large part to the decline in the murder rate (Personal interviews, Pérez, 01/05/2008 ; Mosquera, 10/10/2007).

Fabio Orlando Aceveido stated "There are no paramilitaries [they have demobilised]. Now there is *social control*" (Aceveido, 21/11/2007, my italics), highlighting that 'demobilised' groups were actually still in control of many neighbourhoods.

In 2008 fear of the 'demobilised' was palpable, as were pressures not to speak out against them. A 'culture of silence' developed (Personal interviews Tamayo, 03/04/2008 ; Pepe, 11/04/2008). As one journalist commented, "violence has gone down because the job has been done by the paramilitaries. Now the threat of violence alone is good enough. If you step out of line, now everyone knows what is coming" (Personal interview, Mata, Field Diary, 19/11/2007). The advent of the demobilisation process led to a shift in strategy by 'demobilised' paramilitaries which "marks a movement away from the physical elimination of social and community leaders towards the control and co-opting of social organisations with the idea of capturing the state and putting it at its service" (Personal interview, Angarita, 20/07/2006). Demobilised paramilitaries began to move into local politics running candidates in local elections, even establishing

their own 'social' and 'youth' organisations and taking over community organisations.

Whilst demobilised paramilitaries placed one foot in local politics and established their own organisations, they maintained the other foot in organised crime – extortion, drug running, loan shark services, money laundering, prostitution, et cetera. The key issue here is power. The BCN paramilitary groups established their hegemony in Medellín's periphery, this meant controlling organised crime and drug trafficking - 'the goose that lays the golden eggs' - which they would never give up by choice (Personal interview Tamayo, 03/04/2008). They had not relinquished this through the demobilisation process, and the substantial income that this generates buys political influence and votes, especially in needy neighbourhoods susceptible to clientelism. This in part explains the successful rise of 'demobilised' candidates into local political positions in the *Juntas de Acción Comunal* – JAC – the local political organisations. "This phase [of demobilisation] embeds income generation through the purchase of legal businesses. The paramilitaries create foundations and cooperatives... participate in community work and electoral processes... Human rights violations diminish as this paramilitary strategy neutralises the opposition" (Corporación Con-Vivamos, 2010: 2)

Of course on the surface in terms of homicide rates, Medellín appeared to be going through one of its most peaceful periods for decades, however, a "tense calm" (Personal interview, Tamayo, 03/04/2008) pervaded the streets in 2008. It was an open secret that demobilised paramilitaries maintained arms stashes across the city, one even said as much in an interview, despite the 'handing in

Chapter 3. Violence in Medellín: The rise and resilience of armed groups of weapons' during demobilisation ceremonies with the state (Personal interviews, El Loco, 03/06/2008 ; Mosquera, 10/10/2007). Whilst homicides reduced, the threat of violence remained and a certain number of assassinations were still 'sanctioned' by local 'demobilised' paramilitaries (Personal interviews, Pérez, 01/05/2008 ; Mosquera, 10/10/2007). As the Swedish Foundation for Human Rights stated "homicides have gone down but this is not security which stems from state security, but rather from extra-state security" (Fundación Sueca para los Derechos Humanos, 2008: 9). 'Demobilised' paramilitaries remained involved in illicit activities and as of 2009 a "very low percentage of the demobilised population has managed to stay away from violence" (Fundación Sueca para los Derechos Humanos, 2008: 8). Of the 4,325 youths in the demobilisation process almost half had left, over 300 had been arrested or expelled, and almost 400 had been murdered. Only 129 had graduated from the program (for a recent evaluation of the demobilisation process see Insuasty Rodríguez et al., 2010: 110-111, 116).

However, the Justice & Peace law was a 'hot potato' thrown to municipal governments by the Presidency, which had to decide how the demobilisation processes would be implemented. The *Programa de Paz*, Peace Program in charge of the demobilisation has been strongly supported by the municipal administration of former Mayor Sergio Farjardo (2004-7) and his successor, Mayor Alonzo Salazar (2008-11) - spending \$24,000 million pesos, or £8 million, in the first four years - and is generally considered to be the most complete in the country, with individuals working within the program committed to the successful demobilisation of combatants and "making important inroads" (Personal interview, Marquez Valderama, 21/07/2006). However this alone has

not been enough to disrupt the 'structures of violence' in Medellín's *comunas populares*.

Generations of armed groups in poor communities led to cycles of 'war' between rival gangs, militias or paramilitaries, and fragile but less violent periods of control by one group. However, the structural underpinnings of these groups remained constant or indeed became further embedded; they all relied on the deployment of violence, organised crime and the local recruitment of young men into their ranks.

Inherent are the contradictions of the state: On the one hand there were some valiant efforts made to demobilise and reintegrate combatants; on the other state support of paramilitary groups further embedded 'structures of violence' into the very communities where attempts were being made to demobilise youths. Given these contradictions, it was unsurprising that the period of 'relative calm' in Medellín was short-lived.

However, the 'relative calm' under 'demobilised' paramilitary control, was frequently viewed by locals as much improved. This is not uncommon to other contexts where "an increasingly frustrated and demoralised population will reluctantly turn to armed non-state actors who can provide security of a sort... that the state cannot offer" (Hagedorn, 2008: 21). One lady from the *comuna 13* said "at least we can leave the house without fear of being shot" (sic)(Field Diary 2007). Even community leaders who had denounced paramilitary activity stated that they "are a lesser evil than [the gangs and militias] before" and that "the policy of not assassinating so much is good" (Personal interview Pérez, 01/05/2008).

The array of different armed groups and numerous 'wars' since the 1980s, shifted the normative expectations of locals from the *comunas populares*. People began to think in terms of 'war' or 'not war' (Personal interview, Pérez, 01/05/2008). The control of their neighbourhoods by paramilitaries or the 'demobilised', therefore, has to be contextualised and put into their perspective. Paramilitaries use authoritarian structures controlling organised crime, drug dealing and extortion rackets at the point of a gun; but the 'control' of territory is always preferable to 'war' between two rival groups over that territory. In times of war, anyone who brings 'relative' security, gains some legitimacy amongst the local population, hence the security discourse of armed groups is effective in contexts where the history of chronic violence dwells in the memory, despite the conditionality that may be attached to that security.

In a period of paramilitary control under the *BCN* understood as 'not war', it was simply a matter of time before the 'war' phase returned. The paramilitary take over of local criminal structures and control of 'organic' gangs was a fragile monopoly at best, and disputes over the control of territory began to emerge as paramilitary control fragmented when the commander of the *BCN*, *Don Berna*, was extradited to the USA on drugs charges in 2007. The consequent doubling of homicides rates from 2008 to 2009 was the "product of the reorganisation of the criminal world as a result of the loss of hegemony... due the extradition of *Berna*" (Jaramillo in Corporación Con-Vivamos, 2010: 2, 4). These were gang members or 'demobilised' paramilitaries, who were no longer on the pay-roll of *Don Berna*. Five significant groups began to fight over the control of drug trafficking and local organised crime in the *comunas populares* in 2008; the conflicts between gangs run by 'Sebastian' and 'Valenciano' have been

Chapter 3. Violence in Medellín: The rise and resilience of armed groups particularly bloody (Cambio, 27/01/2010). In 2009 the majority of victims were men under thirty years old (Suárez Rodríguez et al., 2005: 3; Hylton, 2010) and in 2010 this violence continues unabated (Corporación Con-Vivamos, 2010).

Conclusions

Gangs and violence are symptomatic of deep political, social and economic problems. Short-term reduction in homicide rates can be deceptive indicators of social improvements particularly those that come from repressive, counter-insurgent or zero tolerance securitisation approaches. At best these are a form of 'liddism' (Rogers, 2002); keeping 'a lid on' existing violence without tackling the generative bases of violence itself. Repression at best can only contain violence (also see Friedmann and Wolff in Hagedorn, 2008: 120-121).

Hagedorn refers to Durkheim and Weber's studies where institutions are conceived less as 'bricks and mortar' and more as 'symbolic systems of authority', or 'systems of belief', going on to state that gangs generate these types of systems around their 'protection' of the local neighbourhood (Hagedorn, 2008: 9). In Medellín, such 'systems of belief' around what 'security' entails has been shaped by the discourse of armed groups – including the police and army - in peripheral communities. Such communities have become so fatigued by violence that they settle for negative peace, that is a cessation of hostilities, even if that means being subjugated by an illegal armed group. In other words 'anything but war' is preferential, within a 'war / not war' framework for understanding security.

The counter-insurgent strategy by the state of supporting paramilitary groups, acted to further embed armed groups into Medellín's periphery by facilitating their control of organised crime. Later the demobilisation process aided the progression of these paramilitary groups into the local political system. Initially for the state, it was preferable to deploy state-loyal paramilitaries to control violence and expel militias from Medellín, even though such groups have become a Frankenstein's monster, spiralling out of control and reinforcing 'structures of violence' citywide.

This history of violence in Medellín contextualises the concepts outlined in the previous chapter. Successive illegal armed groups came to dominate and embed themselves in poor communities, absorbing local male youths into their structures. Over time what it means to be a 'successful' man with 'status' and 'power' was ever more linked to the imaginary of the gang or paramilitary group in the local neighbourhood. These armed groups have depended on the recruitment of young men, suggesting that if male youths can be effectively stopped from joining them, this will interrupt the continuum of urban violence in Medellín.

However, whilst there has been much focus on armed groups in Medellín's history, the plethora of responses to violence from civil society organisations working with youths and also youth work carried out by the state, has largely been overlooked by international scholars. The following chapter charts the rise of youth work and responses to violence by these organisations and institutions. It critically evaluates this work, pointing to the need for a better understanding of masculinity to tackle violence.

Chapter 4

Evaluating Youth Work in Medellín: The need for a better understanding of masculinity to tackle violence

Introduction

The violence that erupted in Medellín in the late 1980s provoked a number of responses from the state and numerous civil society organisations. Indeed, the 1990s saw what could best be described as a boom in civil society activism and initiatives in response to this violence. One response of the state concerned punitive securitisation. The police, army and paramilitaries were deployed in the most violent precincts of the city and, as was argued in the previous chapter, the ‘paramilitary takeover’ pacified Medellín in the short run, but led to the embedding of ‘structures of violence’ into the periphery in the long term laying the foundations for the regeneration of violence. Towards the end of 2008 rates of violence had begun to rise again. Scholars, particularly international observers, have a tendency to reduce violence analysis to the armed actors belligerent in these processes, frequently citing the repressive role of the state, criticising ‘traditional politics’ and the role neoliberal expansionism plays in exacerbating inequalities; more recently there has been a focus on the shortcomings of the paramilitary demobilisation process (Hylton, 2007; Rozema, 2008; Amnesty International, September 2005). Whilst such analyses help us unpack the dynamics of violence in Medellín and in particular the abuses committed under the state’s securitisation doctrine, these understandings obfuscate the successes of civil society and state led municipal youth work. These are lesser-told stories concerning the rather remarkable developments at

the Mayor's Office as it sought to engage 'youth' positively as a demographic group in need of specific attention; not to mention the aforementioned 'boom' in civil society activism in youth and violence work.

This chapter charts the rise of the youth work phenomenon in Medellín since the 1990s. Whilst much has been written about violence in Medellín, much less has been written, nor systematised, about the development of youth work to keep youths out of violent groups. Therefore a number of interviews were conducted in 2007 with the pioneers of this work to chart the development of youth work since 1990. These processes are evaluated. This chapter then argues that by understanding the role of masculinities and social reproduction, practitioners and policy makers will be better positioned to interrupt the transmission of violence, particularly when targeting boys and male youth. This demonstrates the potential contribution this thesis can make to the field of youth and violence work, the implications of which are explored in the conclusions of this thesis in Chapter 8, after the empirical data has been analysed.

The development of youth work in Medellín since 1990

Civil society organisations

Although many non-governmental, church, community, trade union and other civil society organisations (collectively here CSOs) had been working with youth for a number of years, chronic levels of violence in the early 1990s prompted numerous responses being developed to deal with the 'new world of youth driven social violence' (Marquéz Valderrama and Ospina, 1999: 35; Personal

interview Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). Crucially, this response had the effect of opening up the state to change, placing civil society activists at the centre of youth policy development. Medellín's violence uncovered the total absence of state policy towards youth (Personal interview Cruz, 20/11/2007; Urán Arenas, 2000: 46); ironically the violence that blighted the poor also put them on the policy map. The 1990s became the equivalent of a gold rush on the development of youth policy from state and civil society sectors, including of course the academy, international aid agencies, and even multilateral organisations.

The initial responses from CSOs were assistance programs to 'cure' rather than prevent violence by targeting violent or 'problem' youth – principally gang members and militias – who were directly involved in the conflict (Angarita Caña, 2000: 37; Arias, 20/11/2007; Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). CSO experiences with gang members and militia were very problematic processes. Church groups in particular and other CSOs initiated pacts of non-aggression between rival gangs and militias between 1990-1994. Although these met with some punctual successes the impact was lost beneath the swell of violence (Personal interview Marquez Valderama, 21/07/2006; Mosquera, 10/10/2007). Fulbia Marquéz Valderrama from NGO *Corporación Región* has worked with youth and violence in Medellín since the 1980s, including several demobilisation attempts with gang members. She argued that removing the 'logic of conflict' from a drug addicted young man who has killed several people, whilst violence continues to rage all around him is an almost impossible task (Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). It requires huge amounts of resources and must be long term, spanning a number of years. Such programs were simply

beyond the resources and capabilities of CSOs. Marquéz recalled her mediation and reintegration experiences between gang members and militias between 1990 and 1994, via the newly established *Casas Juveniles* or Youth Houses, funded by the state in peripheral neighbourhoods:

“We put in a tremendous amount of effort... but there were old vendettas between the youths and it was very difficult to resolve their issues whilst they were still killing each other. If they didn’t kill each other then the police would, saying ‘if you do the crime, you do the time’. Even if a lad had gone through the whole [reintegration] process to get out [of the gang] they killed them anyway. It was a tough period and we had to relocate lots of kids because they were killing them. If they went back the militias would kill them, or another gang or the police... very few survived”
(Personal interview Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006).

NGO *Instituto Popular de Capacitación* – the Popular Institute for Education or IPC – worked with the state on the negotiation process with the militias in the early 1990s, starting a cooperative enterprise to reintegrate them into society. However, this process was also fraught with problems similar to those faced by Marquéz, as the militias ended up being sucked back into the conflict (Personal interview Arias, 20/11/2007). At the *Media Luna* ceasefire process in September 1994 mediated by the state and church, moments after an agreement had been reached between gangs and militias, fighting broke out outside the negotiation room and several youths were killed (Personal interview Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). Lengthy mediation processes held by community organisation *Con-Vivamos* at the *Casas Juveniles* were often broken by a single drunken or drug fuelled incident at night by one of the youths involved (Personal interview Mosquera, 10/10/2007). Given the resource intensive needs and limited successes of these initiatives many CSOs began to look for new approaches to youth work (Personal interview Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). Despite the stigmatisation of youth, this was prompted by progressive CSOs who recognised that most youth were in fact

not violent. Of some 509,000 youth in the city between the ages of 14-26 years old only of 8-12,000 had been directly involved in violence (Marquéz Valderrama, Field Diary, 12/09/2007). Such organisations began to shift their focus towards youths that lived in contexts of violence and poverty that could be classified as 'at risk' of joining armed groups. Youth work moved into the realm of *prevention* which entailed working on youth development, livelihoods, training, education and the like. Some of these programs were oriented specifically to prevent youths from joining armed groups, such as youth directed campaigns against violence, whilst other approaches were more indirect, focusing on providing alternative opportunities and livelihoods for youths so they would not opt to join violent structures.

Many CSOs had long been concerned with the political and social formation of youth, particularly those with left-wing ideologies, aiming to turn youths from poor parts of town into critical citizens that reclaimed their rights (Personal interview Arias, 20/11/2007). Crucially, such organisations were beginning to equate youths' quality of life with access to opportunities and livelihood choices as part of an emancipatory approach to combat violence (Personal interview Arias, 20/11/2007). Youth were to be 'empowered' to develop their own projects and made visible as positive, not dangerous or delinquent individuals:

“This was one of the focuses that we pursued... participation, because we said that one of the most fundamental things that they [youth] need is recognition and to be made visible in public, not as violent but as productive individuals that support the development of the city... participating... constructing new knowledge” (Personal interview Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006).

Academic studies of violence rose rapidly in Medellín throughout the 1990 (Jaramillo Giraldo and Buritica Londoño, 2000), and youth work from community organisations, NGOs, international aid agencies and even

multilateral development banks expanded. In 1998 the Inter-American Development Bank funded the 'Program for Citizenship' to prevent youth violence, together with the Mayor's Office (Personal interview Ruiz Botero, 03/10/2007). Analysis of violence became more sophisticated. In a review of Colombian literature in the early 1990s Angarrita Caña observed that Medellín's violence emerged due to multi-social causes, namely; marginalisation, poverty, unemployment, family breakdown and domestic violence, poor socialization of values, and poor education (Angarita Caña, 2000: 46). This thesis advocates multi-causal understandings of violence, but two decades ago these sophisticated analyses were already emerging in Medellín. CSOs began to talk about 'prevention programs' linked to holistic development as early as 1990 as a response to violence, marking a shift away from traditional punitive securitisation approaches (Salazar 1990; Angarita Caña, 2000). The concept of 'youth violence' itself emerged in 1992 with a focus on a youth 'subculture' of violence and 'micro-socialisation' (Angarita Caña, 2000: 302-303). In fact, by the mid-1990s there was so much analysis of the 'youth condition' that some said it was *sobre-diagnosticada* – over-diagnosed (de Dios Graciano, 1995: 420). The IPC has a small library crammed with these publications today. Notwithstanding, youth policy moved steadily towards more integral forms of development (Balbin Alvarez and Abad Gallardo, 1996), emerging analyses were cutting edge and responses to violence were innovative. Medellín was the most violent city in the world in the early 1990s. Arguably its analysis of urban violence was the most advanced in the world as well.

In a seminar on youth and violence in 1990, community organisations recognised that the state had made no efforts to help the local population participate or organise itself (Pérez and Peláez, 1990), hence community participation in the diagnosis and solutions to the conflict began to emerge (Jaramillo Echeverri, 1990). Local organizations stated that the two principle problems that fuelled the conflict were a lack of local education and employment (Jaramillo Echeverri, 1990: 230-231). This was a telling disjuncture from the state's approach at the time, which was repressive policing and continued social abandonment, whilst up to 90% of the municipal budget was spent on infrastructure projects infamous for corruption and embezzlement. The local population wanted to participate in municipal decision-making; they came from a part of the city that the state had never paid any attention to, let alone designed policies for. This was a resounding demand at a time when the Mayor's Office was under pressure to resolve the tremendous and highly publicised violence in the city, not least from Colombia's Presidency which sent Maria Emma Mejía to Medellín, as the special envoy for 'Youth & Family' in 1991.

Community organisations have made significant strides in Medellín despite the violence around them. One community leader said "I'm from Villa Guadalupe, the Paris of the [poor] north eastern precinct! We got this far because we fought tooth and nail for everything we have. We even took civil servants to court to get them to carry out their obligations (sic)"; another compared her battles with civil servants to obtain basic utilities, using a metaphor for making *sancocho* stew: "They won't just provide you with *sancocho*, you have to demand the

potatoes, then go back and demand the meat, then the carrots, then the water, and so on, and cook it yourself (sic)” (Field Diary, 05/04/2008). Another leader, septuagenarian Rosalba Henao, spoke animatedly of her success in getting the state to put in sewage and transport systems in her neighbourhood, albeit after a 38 year struggle (Field Diary, 05/04/2008). Despite the caveats faced, progress was being made.

Engaging the state: Pioneering municipal youth policy

Civil society influence, particularly from NGOs and academia has been pivotal in shaping municipal youth policy (Personal interview Cruz, 20/11/2007). Since the early 1990s a number of CSOs tried to influence fledgling government policy on youth, and more broadly speaking development, pushing for a focus on the most vulnerable populations (Balbin Alvarez and Abad Gallardo, 1996). From earnest beginnings, by 2004 CSOs were co-designing youth policy with the municipal administration (Personal interview Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). This in itself was a remarkable development given the mutual distrust between state institutions and CSOs, particularly given the high rates of human rights abuses in Medellín. Many CSO staff and activists, particularly those working in human rights, had been assassinated, ‘disappeared’ or abducted by state security forces and allied paramilitary groups. For example, in 1999, four researchers from the NGO IPC were abducted from their offices by a right-wing paramilitary group (CIDH, 1999).

Significant in this development was the new Colombian Constitution in 1991, which led to the coding of rights into common law, paving the way for the *Ley de Juventud*, or Law on Youth in 1996 (Pérez, 1996: 22). “It now became a battle for rights based in the constitution... we took a few years to get round to it, to understand that we had an important tool which from then on became fundamental for understanding public policies” (Personal interview Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). As Urán Arenas notes, the 1990s marked “a certain coming together... of proposals around human rights and political participation between NGOs and the state” (Urán Arenas, 2000). The development of governmental and non-governmental youth work helped the articulation of youth organisations in the violent periphery:

“There was a boom in cultural expressions which was very, very significant, very strong, in terms of their work, the groups, artistic expression, cultural expression, youth groups, lots... It’s one of those paradoxical things in Medellín: In the very same neighbourhoods where there is a high level of social exclusion and marginalisation, at the same time as all of this violence, youths have so many initiatives” (Personal interview Ruiz Botero, 03/10/2007).

By 2007 when the empirical data was gathered, there was vast range of organisations and institutions working with youth. In a generalised taxonomy here, these included; state institutions based at the municipal offices such as *Metrojuventud*; ‘corporate NGOs’, large and established organisations such as *Corporación Región* and IPC with full-time staff, having the capacity to produce research and fund their own youth projects; smaller NGOs carrying out work directly with youths; networks for youth education and training such as the *Alliance for Youth Mobilisation*; locally based community organisations such as *Con-Vivamos*; youth groups, organisations and networks such as *Red Juvenil* and *Picacho con Futuro*; political party youth groups such as *Jovenes*

Fajardistas; industry funded 'youth and family' welfare programs known as *Cajas de Compensación Familiar*; and a number of church based outreach programs such as *Corporación Don Bosco* or the *Association of Christian Youth*. There are numerous different programs working with youth in Medellín, *Metrojuventud* alone was running ninety-eight youth programs with municipal funding simultaneously in 2007. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to map all of these processes, some example organisations, the multiplicity of their methods and their target groups are shown in Annex 1. The table below highlights the development of municipal youth policy. What this does demonstrate is the significant, plural and innovative responses of many parts of society to working with vulnerable youth in the wake of the violence of the 1990s. It is remiss to leave out such developments in analyses of violence in Medellín, for without these initiatives the city would surely be a more violent place.

However, developing youth policy was far from plain sailing. Luz Marina Cruz the former director of the municipal Youth Office and Edgar Arias from IPC agree that the struggle for civil society participation in public policy has been a long one (Arias, 20/11/2007; Cruz, 20/11/2007). Arias noted the long ideological battle against traditional, top-down and anti-participatory attitudes in politics. There was also widespread ignorance amongst civil servants around youth issues. Youths were not seen as a demographic rubric that needed specific attention even though they were the protagonists of city's violence (Personal interviews Guisado, 29/11/2007; Cruz, 20/11/2007).

“In the late 80s when the violence became severe there were no policies or structures to deal with youths. We were the pioneers in this country in terms of having an office dedicated to youth... The bosses that have

come though here weren't interested in youth, they had no idea about social work... they were political appointments and some didn't understand social work at all..." (Cruz, 20/11/2007)

A Chronology of Youth Policy Development

1988 – Negative association of youth with rising violence	Inter-institutional Committee on Youth – PAISAJOVEN established
1991 - Intervention with a focus on assistance	Presidential Envoy for 'Youth & Family' Maria Emma Mejía sent to Medellín <i>Casas Juveniles</i> - Youth Houses established Youth Round Table
1994 – Intervention with a focus on participation	Mayor's Office on Youth Municipal Youth Council (CMJ) established
1995	Youth Clubs Youth Development Plan tailored for each city precinct Program 'Life for Everybody'
1996	'Law on Youth' coded from 1991 National Constitution
1998-2000 – Integral youth approach	Program for Citizenship. Financed by Inter-American Development Bank, IDB and Mayor's office Accord 02 in 2000 for Public Policy on Youth
2002-2003	Creation of Sub-Secretariat <i>Metrojuventud</i> in municipal government Youth Development Plan for Medellín and Antioquia region
2004-2007 – Youths as protagonists of city transformation	Increased youth participation Concretising of institutional youth policies

Adapted from presentation by *Metrojuventud* Director Luz Marina Cruz at the 'Review of Public Policy on Youth, 2007', Medellín. (01/11/2007)

By 1994 the Mayor's 'Office on Youth' was established with the input of NGO specialists, and even a demobilised militia commander (Personal interview, Cruz, 20/11/2007). The coming together of the state and CSO elements is still controversial in Medellín, particularly within the NGO community, however this process was a departure from the traditional antagonism of the past.

By 2002, the 'Office on Youth' had been upgraded to 'Sub-Secretariat' level and became known as *Metrojuventud*. The development of youth policy in the 1990s slowly opened "the doors for the application of social policy" (Jimenez, 1996: 52) laying the foundations for unprecedented state / civil society cooperation which continues today.

Political and administrative tussles became easier over time as youth work within the municipal institutions became more recognised. Furthermore, it became easier to develop youth work under the Mayors Sergio Fajardo Valderrama (2004-7), then Alonso Salazar Jaramillo (2007-2010). Fajardo was the first Mayor who had not come from a traditional political party and was succeeded by Alonso Salazar, a founder member of NGO *Corporación Región*. Only a few years earlier, it would have been unthinkable that someone from the 'NGO sector' would participate in a Mayoral election race, let alone win. Since the establishment of the Office on Youth in 1994, the municipal administration has come a long way.

Evaluating youth and violence work

The Janus Face of the state and ongoing violence

As commented upon in the previous chapter, the development of youth policy demonstrates one face of the state's response to violence. This, and the progress and achievements of CSO working with the youth population have been significant. This process is ongoing as Guisado reflected: "We have made significant progress in Medellín in last 15 years, but there is still a long way to go" (Personal interview, Guisado, 29/11/2007).

Certainly these initiatives had an impact upon the levels of opportunities for young people in Medellín and have contributed to reducing levels of violence. However, quantifying any such reduction against a backdrop of ongoing violence in the city is a difficult task. How many youths have been prevented from joining gangs or paramilitary groups by CSO and youth policy initiatives? Notwithstanding, as claimed above, without these initiatives Medellín would certainly be *more* violent and have *less* positive opportunities for youths.

Lamentably these initiatives have been hampered in their capacity to provide alternatives and livelihood options for youths. This is partly because many CSOs are under-resourced and struggle for survival, and despite the rise to prominence of youth policy within state institutions, it is still a battle to have youth projects prioritised and integrate their approaches with other state departments – such as health, education and policing. At the same time high rates of homicide continue amongst the youth population, and some community organisations have noted what they call the absence of an ‘integral state policy’ to target the ‘structural causes’ of violence such as exclusion, inequality and poverty (Con-Vivamos, 12/08/2010: 5). They argue that programs such as *Fuerza Joven*, ‘Youth Strength’, run by *Metrojuventud*, only provide temporary relief if structural causes of violence are not tackled more effectively, and as such fail to interrupt the “vicious cycle [of violence] in the poorest neighbourhoods” (Con-Vivamos, 12/08/2010: 5).

This is not a damning critique of current youth work which has taken great strides in recent years, rather it points to the severe challenges such work faces in contexts where the recycling of armed groups, their structures, and social violence continue; as do conditions of exclusion, poverty and inequality.

Tackling these 'structural causes' of violence is something youth policy cannot do alone. As argued in Chapter 3, the state's securitisation response to gang and insurgent violence relied on collusion with paramilitary groups that took over poor neighbourhoods by controlling local gangs. This underpinned the reproduction of violence, rather than disrupting its flow, by failing to establish the legitimate rule of law and embedding 'structures of violence' in communities. These were the very same communities where many youth work initiatives were struggling to operate.

This shows the contradictions or *Janus face* of the state; on the one hand the state embeds 'structures of violence' into the periphery, on the other it tries to stop youths joining such structures. However, continuing violence should not be reduced to the responses of the state alone; violence in Medellín is multi-causal.

Notwithstanding, the *Janus face* of the state has made it extremely difficult for CSOs, progressive youth policies and positive elements within the paramilitary demobilisation program, to interrupt the reproduction of violence through young men. Keeping youths out of violence whilst violence rages around them is a difficult task indeed, especially as Marquéz Valderrama posited earlier, when such youths have already joined an armed group.

The need for a focus on masculinities to interrupt violence

Despite the boom in youth work there has been little focus on masculinities in Medellín. Gender based work remains synonymous with feminism and women's issues (Personal interviews, Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006; Dias Chalarca,

03/10/2007). There have been emerging studies of masculinities in Colombia from a critical perspective, such as those under the rubric of *new masculinities* (Viveros Vigoya, 2001; Personal interview, Viveros Vigoya, 12/12/2007; Gómez Alcaraz, 2000). However, when these studies of masculinities consider violence they do not go beyond man-on-woman (domestic) or homophobic violence (Personal interviews, Dias Chalarca, 03/10/2007; Mazo, 13/11/2007; Muñoz, 17/07/2007). Critical understandings of masculinities have not been applied to male-on-male youth violence. Even the progressive youth alliance, the *Escuela de Animación Juvenil*, which develops innovative ways of working with youth have not considered masculinities. At the time of writing no specific program, amongst the hundreds, was being run in Medellín which explores why young men are the main perpetrators and victims of social violence through a masculinities lens.

So far, organisations and institutions working with youth in Medellín have failed to take into account masculinities when working with youth and social violence. Such organisations have not begun to consider youth processes of masculinisation during adolescence; nor the specific gendered (masculine) challenges that boys face living in contexts of exclusion, poverty and high rates of social violence, and how these issues are related to boys and male youths joining armed groups.

These shortcomings mean that youth work in Medellín, thus far, does not consider masculinities when trying to interrupt the transmission of violence to younger generations of boys and youths. Whilst organisations and institutions have provided new options, education, and training for young people, they have

failed to think in terms of masculine needs, or help them to contest 'negative' or 'violent' pathways to manhood.

Herein lies one contribution of this thesis to the development of youth work in Medellín; as a tool to understand how masculinities interact with the transmission of violence to boys and youths, and to provide insights into how this transmission may be interrupted. The conclusions in Chapter 8 explore the initial implications of this thesis for youth work. These implications are explored after the empirical data has been analysed and Chapter 6 and 7.

Before this, we must consider *how* the data was collected and analysed. The following chapter provides a methodological explanation of how the research was carried out.

Chapter 5

Researching Youth Violence Using Ethnography

Introduction

The field research for this thesis used ethnographic methods to investigate how masculinisation contributes to the reproduction of violence. How and why did the transmission of violent behaviour to male youths occur in a context of exclusion and intense social violence; and why do some excluded young men in such contexts opt for violence whilst others do not?

Three data sets were collected during academic year 2007-8. The first was a series of interviews with practitioners and academics working with youth and violence in Medellín from a number of non-governmental and community organisations, and also governmental institutions. This process took four months. The second and third data sets collected life history interviews of juxtaposed groups of youths over a period of seven months. Youths (13–29 years old; average age 21.5) were interviewed from the poor north-eastern *comunas* – or precincts - of Medellín. These youths had a history of involvement with violent groups such as gangs, militias and paramilitaries, referred to here as ‘violent’ youths¹. ‘Prosocial’ youths (19-31 years old; average age 23.4) were from the equally poor north-western *comunas*. These youths worked at a community development organisation engaged in social work, political participation, local development and human rights projects amongst other more informal activities such as community sports days or

¹ In short, these youths are referred to as ‘violent’ youths, although as outlined in the introduction, this does not mean to reduce these youths lives to ‘violence’ alone.

traditional games sessions for local children. The word 'prosocial' has been borrowed from other literature, for want of a better term, to describe these youths engaged in 'positive' social activities (Daly and Wilson, 1997: 83; Barker, 2000: 14).

These 'juxtaposed' groups were chosen because of their markedly different 'prosocial' and 'antisocial' activities – whilst recognising that there is no simplistic binary between 'good' and 'bad' youths. The 'prosocial' group was chosen in the hope that divergences in their pathways to manhood would be greater and hence easier to identify for the researcher. The 'prosocial' young men were chosen precisely because they were 'outliers' in the research, or what might be termed "positive deviants" from violent behaviour (also see Barker, 2000: 8). However the majority of youths in the neighbourhoods where the research took place join neither community development organisations nor armed groups. These youths are not a representative sample of the 'average' youth in their communities, they are both 'deviant' groups. This begs the question; in violent and peripheral neighbourhoods why are more youth *not* involved with gangs? This is a question that Barker has also posed when researching young men in *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro (Barker, 2005).

The 'prosocial' youths were interviewed to provide an understanding of why youths from similarly deprived socioeconomic backgrounds take markedly different paths in life. I used an ethnographic methodology, the principle method being *participant observation* for six months at two community organisations;

*Con-Vivamos*² (Let's Live Together) who facilitated my interviews with violent youth which will be explained below, and *Corporación Vida para Todos* (Corporation Life for All) – from now on *CoVida*³ - whose youth members themselves were the subjects of the interviews. Members of *Con-Vivamos* were happy for their real names and the name of the organisation to be used in the study, giving their consent. However, *CoVida* is a pseudonym to protect the organisation and youths interviewed. This is because these youths were often outspoken against local armed groups, so were worried about potential recriminations if any of the research from this were made public. Furthermore, all youths interviewed, both 'violent' and 'prosocial' have had their names changed to protect their privacy, as they also revealed intimate details of their lives. Anonymity was also a necessary measure for youths engaged with violence to talk openly about their lives which involved criminal acts. Participant observation was used in an attempt to 'get closer' to the realities of the communities, to understand the nature of local violence and to access the data, points which will be developed further in this chapter.

Young men are the overwhelming victims and victimisers in urban violence, the majority of whom come from poor sectors in large cities, particularly in Latin America as outlined in Chapter 1. Moreover, this demographic rubric is consistently the most violent, so being a youth and being male is tied to the continuum of social violence. 'Youth' is challenging to define exactly, but it is

² *Con-Vivamos* is community organisation based in the poor north-east of Medellín. It promotes local development, education, human rights, gender equality and political participation. <http://www.Con-Vivamos.org/>

³ *CoVida* [a pseudonym] is a community organisation in the poor north-west of Medellín working in development, community cohesion and political participation, particularly through the municipally funded '*Participatory Budget*'. *CoVida* is run almost entirely by youths with an average age of 23.

during this period boys become men by finding a pathway to manhood. This process will vary according to context and individual; some boys grow up faster than others. (The UN defines youth between the ages of 15-24 (UN-HABITAT, 2007: 5). In Medellín the vast majority of violence occurs between young men from 15-29 years old, a demographic trend that is largely reflected in homicidal violence across the globe⁴. Adolescent girls do not stray into violence in the same way as boys do. This led me to ask the question; what is it about 'maleness' and the process of masculinisation that may be linked to violence reproduction in the poorer neighbourhoods of Medellín? To respond to these interrogatives the empirical data focused on male youths to explore their masculinisation processes, that is, their individual pathways to manhood.

This thesis also serves as a critique of the Colombian state's abandonment of peripheral communities in Medellín, and its legal and illegal (through the support of paramilitary groups and extra-judicial executions) counter-insurgent securitisation response. Whilst state actions cannot be held entirely responsible for violence in Medellín, it has compounded and embedded violence across generations in peripheral communities, as claimed in Chapter 3. This thesis recognises and advocates the 'developmental' approaches of some state institutions such as *Metrojuventud* and many civil society organisations towards youth work and violence reduction; further, it aims to contribute to these approaches by providing a critical study of how some local masculine practices

⁴ In Medellín, from 5,450 homicide victims in 1990, 5,155 (95%) of these were men and 3,550 (65%) of those between the ages of 15-29 (Revista Planeación Metropolitana, 1991: 3). The WHO reported that males account for three-quarters of all victims of homicide, the highest rates found among males aged 15-29 years (Krug et al., 2002: 6).

reproduce male-on-male violence. This attempt to use knowledge for social change is not just a methodological concern, it is an ethical one.

Using Ethnography

Broadly speaking the research methodology used was ‘critical ethnography’ as defined by Jim Thomas:

“Conventional ethnography refers to the tradition of cultural description and analysis that displays meanings by interpreting meaning. Critical ethnography refers to the reflective process of choosing between conceptual alternatives and making value-laden judgements of meaning and method to challenge research, policy, and other forms of human activity... Conventional ethnography describes what is; critical ethnography asks what could be... Critical ethnographers use their work to aid emancipatory goals or to negate the repressive influences that lead to unnecessary social domination of groups... Critical ethnography is simultaneously hermeneutic and emancipatory” (Thomas, 1993b: 4).

The methodological approach employed in this thesis is a form of ‘critical qualitative research’. Whilst exercising humility with the claims of the thesis, the methodology is oriented towards the social change – in this case, helping community organisations and potentially state institutions in Medellín that seek to transform contexts of social exclusion, poverty and chronic violence. ‘Giving something back’ was always part of the research agenda. Therefore I went back to Medellín to *Con-Vivamos* and *CoVida* to present my emerging data findings in 2009, and then in 2010 took part in a video-conferencing event with *Con-Vivamos* delivering a more analytical paper on the research. From these meetings a working paper will be developed with practical implications for *Con-Vivamos* practitioners who work with youth and violence, deepening our joint understanding of violence reproduction and masculinity. To date, feedback has been promising and *Con-Vivamos* staff have expressed interest in developing a youth program that takes into account the relationship between ‘becoming a

man' and engaging in violence. The caveat, as is often the case, would be to secure funding for such a program. However, the development of a joint working paper has been proposed as a starting point to apply for funding from development agencies.

These research practices can be likened to what Lather calls 'forms of critical pedagogy' which 'transform the world' (Lather in Denzin et al., 2008: 5). Although I would not be so grandiose as to say my research is 'transformational', I hope that it will contribute 'a grain of sand', as the Colombians say, towards social change.

Ontology concerns 'what exists' or 'what is out there to know'; epistemology concerns 'how' we know it⁵. Most ethnography is an authored, subjective description, an analysis and explanation of observations in the field. It is an attempt to "penetrate to the deeper levels of meaning that lie beneath superficial surface appearances... the ontological assumption is that there is something else there that will take us beneath the surface world of accepted appearances and reveal the darker, oppressive side of social life." (Thomas, 1993b: 34). For example, despite the apparent 'relative calm' in Medellín between 2003-8 commented on in the previous chapter, the methodology used penetrated beneath the surface of this reality to expose a culture of silence and fear of violence from latent, but still threatening, illegal armed groups. Critical ethnographic methodology disinterred this reality.

⁵ Epistemology involves the study of theories of knowledge, the questions we ask about how we know, concerning the 'nature' of knowledge; the analysis, sources, viability, justification of that knowledge. Whereas ontology involves the study of theories of being, the questions we ask about what can really exist (Audi, 1999: 273; Smith, 2003: 279).

Having spent a considerable amount of time working in the two communities in which I was based, both night and day, I amassed a significant amount of insights and filled innumerable of pages of field diaries to help develop deep contextual understanding. The analytical chapters themselves focus tightly upon the interview data of the research subjects and I have not included significant swathes of background observations, opinions and developing contextual understanding from my field diaries. This is more common to anthropology or more traditional uses of ethnography, whereas I have borrowed these methodologies as a Peace Studies researcher. However, I would like to include an example of the abovementioned 'penetrating beneath the surface' of local realities that ethnographers working in violent contexts may be familiar with.

During my time in Medellín there was a *relative* lull in the homicide rate as paramilitary groups asserted a weak monopoly on violence in the neighbourhoods I worked in. As often happens, the threat of violence remained and was felt acutely by those who lived there who often talked about the 'tense calm' in the community. When I first arrived I was asked by a member of *Con-Vivamos* if I could sense the 'tense calm'. I could not. It appeared to me to be a poor, densely populated but vibrant local community. As the months passed, a number of people in the community were murdered; one in a bar which I had just left one night; the brother of a friend stabbed his girlfriend to death another night; a community leader was gunned down 'with the permission' of the paramilitaries running the neighbourhood on another occasion. As we were walking about the community to track down a local paramilitary to interview on afternoon, I was asked again by member of *Con-Vivamos* if I could sense the 'tense calm'. This time I could, and I was scared like everyone else.

This was very much a visceral grasp of the realities of these communities that builds up within the individual over time and despite the obvious negatives in the experience, this positively informed the research.

In Chapters 6 & 7 I have used 'thick' narratives from life history interviews (Geertz in Thomas, 1993b: 34); that is, presenting large blocks of each youths narrative in quotations in an attempt to bring the voice of the subjects to the reader. Of course it gives rise to issues of representation; how can the data be best presented to the reader with the least distortion? Do 'subjects exist', simply because the researcher deems them relevant? "You are there... because I was there" (Clifford in Linkogle and Lee-Treweek, 2000: 143-144). This also raises ethical questions of Western scholars 'claiming' indigenous knowledge (Smith in Denzin et al., 2008: 4). Notwithstanding the strength of ethnography is based in the researcher's capacity to bring narratives 'from below' to a broader audience. "Good ethnography allows the reader to draw conclusions from the data, because unless the materials speak to both the issues and the audience clearly, they are of no substantive value"(Thomas, 1993b: 63).

Methodologically, the reader of this thesis is subject to *my* interpretation of events in Medellín. For that reason it is appropriate to consider some of my own constructions that will have impacted upon the research.

I spent two years working in human rights in Bogotá from 2001-3 at international NGO *Peace Brigades International*. The human rights focus was highly critical of the state, the armed forces and paramilitary groups that worked in collusion with different parts of the state apparatus. Although they had existed for a number of years previously, during the 1990s paramilitary groups became the protagonists of the state's counter-insurgency strategy waged

against Marxist guerrillas bent on overthrowing the state. The 'dirty war' meant that numerous crimes of lesser humanity, such as massacres and widespread torture, were committed against the civilian population suspected of colluding with the guerrillas. This broadened to include left-wing political opponents of the traditional political parties and many civil society activists. Such state led crimes fall under the rubric of human rights abuses which my NGO work focused on. Within a short space of time working in Bogotá, in my mind the word 'paramilitary' became synonymous with 'evil protagonist' of Colombia's woes. I was highly suspicious, not just of the state security forces, but of all state institutions. The paramilitaries and army had murdered people I worked with and accompanied; one member of an Afro-Colombian community was shot in February 2002, and several members of another community were hacked to death with machetes including children in February 2005 (El Espectador, 01/08/2008).

Understandably, in violent contexts emotions run high and the researcher is not immune to this. However, it is important to avoid the trap of placing passion before science and to avoid axe grinding (Thomas, 1993a: 63). As a researcher I am here to shed light on the phenomenon of urban violence, to explain gang and paramilitary violence, not demonise the state or paramilitaries because of a personal agenda. This was something I was conscious of and made efforts to bear in mind during my research.

Bourdieu and ethnography

At this stage it is useful to explain methodologically, that Bourdieu was used in

this thesis to analyse the data sets collected. Bourdieu has long advocated the empirical application of his 'thinking tools'. They were after all, designed to help researchers think about the social world and not as grand theories per se. As outlined in Chapter 2, these tools - *habitus*, *field* and *capital* - help us scrutinise social relationships and how social reproduction may unfold through individual practices.

The methodology used in this thesis investigated how youths in contexts of exclusion find a pathway to manhood, and how that might be linked to violence, or not, as the case may be. To do this, semi-structured life history interviews were designed to uncover influential experiences growing up and during their adolescence. For example, these interviews investigated childhood family issues, how and why youths first joined the gang or conversely *CoVida*, who were their role models, et cetera. A precise list of questions is not given here, as these depended largely on how each individual interview developed, but these can be seen in the Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

It was particularly challenging to analyse youths' values and opinions around masculinity, and how this might be related to social reproduction and violence. Fortunately, ethnography lends itself to the study of locally produced practices and gender regimes where "individual gender performances are much more apparent in local settings than in regional or global settings" (Lusher and Robins, 2009: 405-6). To understand masculinity and violence reproduction, particularly with the violent youths, it was not possible to simply ask; 'what do you think the relationship between violence and masculinity is?' Hence a series of questions were designed to probe what might be valued versions of

masculinity for these youths, for example, which men they admired in the community and why?

Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' came to the fore when analysing the data sets once they had been collected. As Maton has stated, empirically one does not 'see' a *habitus* but rather the effects of *habitus* on practices and beliefs (Maton, 2008: 62). Therefore masculine practices and beliefs were teased out by studying what these youths valued as *capitals* in the local *field* of masculinity; what was the data telling me? How could this explain what versions of masculinity were being reproduced and why, and how they were related to violence? What are their strategies and performances? What do young men perceive as masculine *capital* and how do they accumulate it? The young men's responses often demonstrated what they valued as *capital* in their *field* of masculinity. For example, youths engaged with violence saw the gang leader as the most 'respected' man in the community, whereas 'prosocial' youths often respected and looked up to senior male figures in *CoVida*. As an example of this analysis, 'respect' could be understood as a form of masculine *capital*. Various other masculine *capitals* could be identified, particularly economic ones such as 'status goods' highlighted by youths in gangs – motorbikes, designer clothes, and the like – or *symbolic* capitals such as sexual access to the most coveted young ladies in the neighbourhood. Bourdieu's 'tools' helped explain why 'gang' masculinities were particularly salient and hence become sought after 'modes of masculinisation', or 'pathways to manhood'.

By understanding what it meant to 'be a man' for these youths and their strategies and practices to accumulate *capitals*, it was possible to draw parallels

between both 'violent' and 'prosocial' youths in the analysis. Bourdieu's tool of *habitus* helped explain these masculine dispositions and hence the reproduction of masculine practices and led me to develop the concept of 'masculinisation opportunity'. In effect Bourdieu was used to tease out meaning from the data to explain how the social reproduction process occurred subjectively through individuals, some of which led to violent practices, some of which did not. My overall understanding of these processes was enhanced through ethnographic immersion in the context, from observations and visceral interpretations, not just from the interviews alone.

Interviews with youth violence experts and practitioners

The first data set involved twenty-six interviews with experts and practitioners in youth work and violence in Medellín, from a range of NGOs, community organisations, government offices and academic institutions. Engaging local experts was a didactic process; over fifty hours face-time with them provided me with an intensive 'crash course' in Medellín's history of violence, youth work and responses to that violence. Whilst I was arguably the main beneficiary of this didactic process, some practitioners commented that our discussions had helped them reflect on certain issues, particularly around masculinity and violence. For purposes of contextualisation and developing my own ideas around youth violence, this process was invaluable and provided me the foundation for conducting my own interviews and selecting the organisations for participant observation. Understanding the responses to youth violence also helped define where this thesis could make a contribution to the practitioner or

policy maker – namely addressing masculinities in relation to youth violence - which has remained undeveloped. These interviews also became a ‘testing ground’ or ‘sounding out’ process for my hypothesis and helped sharpen my intellectual focus.

Interviewees were candid and forthcoming. With NGO and community organisations my background in human rights work in Colombia was a political signifier which facilitated the flow of conversation; I was perceived to be ‘on their side’ of the political spectrum in a very polarised society. Furthermore, I had met some of these contacts previously when conducting the fieldwork for my Masters degree in Research Methodology in 2007, which built up a certain level of familiarity. Snowballing was also a door opener. As I made friends with an increasing number of people in the NGO sector, they in turn put me in contact with their friends who were relevant interview contacts. Talking to a ‘friend of a friend’ always started interviews off in an open fashion. I also became a visiting research fellow at the University of Antioquia in Medellín, which facilitated contacts with a number of academic scholars.

It was important to bear in mind people’s political positions. Human rights activists were notably pessimistic or suspicious of all state intervention, including that of *Metrojuventud*, the Mayor’s Office on Youth. Those interviewed from state institutions by contrast, tended to have an overly optimistic view of their impact in the field, as if they were politically justifying their actions to the ‘outside observer’. My previous experience in Colombia was invaluable in helping to negotiate these discourses. Only in one case did I feel that I was deliberately misled - by Fabio Orlando Aceveido, aka *Don Fabio* - a guerrilla

turned paramilitary commander, and protagonist in the demobilisation process. However, by the time of the interview I had spent a number of months in Medellín and had established a body of research and experience to deconstruct his claims, hence the interview produced some telling data in terms of what he *did not* say, and how he tried to mislead me. For example, he stated, “there are no paramilitaries anymore”, although ‘demobilised’ paramilitaries were still controlling peripheral neighbourhoods with the threat of violence. He also said that the paramilitaries, and former commander *Don Berna*, had “never been involved in the drugs trade”. *Don Berna* was later extradited to the USA on drugs charges in 2007 and was the former head of the notorious Medellín drugs cartel, the *Oficina de Envigado*. Aceveido did provide useful information though, stating that “now there is *social control*” in poor neighbourhoods, inadvertently highlighting the fact that ‘demobilised’ groups were actually still in command (Personal interview, Aceveido, 21/11/2007, my italics).

As mentioned, this first set of interviews allowed me to locate and interview members of community organisations working in marginalised sectors of the city. One particularly insightful meeting with the director of *Con-Vivamos*, Luis Mosquera, provided me with the inspiration to work with them as a participant observer. Of all of the community organisations I spoke with, this one appeared to have the most sophisticated grasp of community dynamics and youth and violence. Moreover, I struck up swift rapport with members of the organisation as I had previously met a number of them at academic and activist events – particularly the latter, which are abundant in Medellín - and socially at parties, dinner parties and in cafes and bars. These contacts were facilitated by former work colleagues and friends I had in Medellín from *Peace Brigades International*. A local proverb says that ‘there is only one city in Colombia,

Bogotá. The rest are big villages', meaning you run into colleagues and friends regularly. The liberal and left wing NGO and academic circles had a strong sense of community. After only a few months I was an 'accepted face' on the scene – the cafés, restaurants, bars and parties frequented by NGO members, activists and academics. It certainly felt like a 'big village' as I ran into people I knew from different organisations regularly. The welcoming nature of these organisations is testimony to Colombian hospitality which often involves socialising and famously, drinking and dancing. As an ethnographer I found that this culture greatly facilitated my integration. For example, at my first meeting with Luis Mosquera I was offered lunch and introduced to the entire organisation, then taken on a tour of the neighbourhood to meet local community leaders. When I asked Luis if I could spend seven months working at the organisation, self-funded, he replied "Of course brother! We'd be delighted to have you. When can you start? (sic)" (Personal Interview, Mosquera, 10/10/2007).

Finally, which I will expand upon below, contextual knowledge makes the researcher safer in dangerous settings. Speaking to numerous youth violence experts provided the foundation for that safety.

Life history interviews with 'prosocial' youths

I chose *CoVida* because I had built up a relationship with some of its members when collecting data for my Masters dissertation the previous year. I was impressed by the organisation's achievements in community development and

how they had become central to the local *Social Action Plan* welfare program, along with their protagonism in the new *Participatory Budget*, both financed by the Mayor's office. Perhaps the most striking feature of *CoVida* is that it was run almost entirely by youths with an average age of 23. As I wanted to study 'prosocial' youths, *CoVida* appeared an ideal organisation in which to conduct participant observation.

Early discussions with members of *CoVida* also shaped the methodological design. Originally I had thought of collecting the data sets of 'violent' and 'prosocial' youths from the same neighbourhood. As inequality and exclusion correlate with social violence (Wilkinson, 2004) discussed in Chapter 1, choosing youths from the same neighbourhood would render socio-economic conditions for all youths as equal as possible, highlighting other factors that made one youth 'violent' and another 'prosocial'. However, I was warned-off this by *CoVida* members because of their acrimonious history with local armed groups. They had always refused to pay extortion money or let their property be used by gangs, militias or paramilitaries. This led to a dispute between Leidy, a former director, and the local militias that culminated in her murder in 2001. This nearly resulted in the closure of *CoVida* itself. In later years local paramilitaries wanted to 'takeover' the neighbourhood. *CoVida* was a symbol of resistance, refusing to take orders or pay extortion money, which generated a series of confrontations and later death threats, whereby the Secretary for Government (and later Mayor) Alonso Salazar personally went up to the neighbourhood and told the paramilitaries 'not to touch' *CoVida* (Personal interview, Hernando, 21/06/2008). As I carried out my participant observation with *CoVida*, it was wise not to try and interview youths in paramilitary groups in the same

neighbourhood because they would have identified me with *CoVida*, and therefore as an opponent. Of course this would have seriously hampered attempts to conduct candid life-history interviews with them as my sample of 'violent' youth. More to the point it could also have been dangerous to be identified as 'non-friendly' by an armed group with a history of violence and near total impunity. For this reason 'violent' youths were interviewed from the other side of town.

After visiting a number of marginalised neighbourhoods and speaking to different members of community organisations it became apparent that, although each neighbourhood had its own nuanced history, the north-eastern and north-western precincts where *Con-Vivamos* and *CoVida* were respectively located, were similar in terms of socio-economic conditions and violence. This led me to spend two days a week at *CoVida* and two to three at *Con-Vivamos*. I spent more time at *Con-Vivamos* because 'violent' youths were more elusive, so it took more time commitment to build up a portfolio of interviews.

In contrast, it was much easier to conduct interviews with the members of *CoVida*. I became friends with a number of its members, three of whom I became particularly close to – Pepe, Pelicorto and Hernando - proving to be my key informants. I would socialise with members of *CoVida*, I hosted dinners with them at my flat and they came *en masse* to the two parties I held that year. The relationships that I established with them provided the foundations for the quality of the interviews as trust was established. Interviews were also relatively easy to arrange, a number of them even came to my flat, whilst the others were interviewed at the organisation itself. However, I did feel that my input as a

participant observer was not particularly significant, largely because *CoVida* was in a 'quiet period' in terms of running community projects due to a lack of funds. Notwithstanding, I did help out on some projects and to organise a community event, but also spent some time 'hanging out'. Fortunately, 'hanging out' at *CoVida* was normal as the community centre functioned as a youth club and socialisation space for staff (working or not).

As I spent more time with the youths at *CoVida*, I realised that they had a strong ability to reflect analytically upon the realities of violence and exclusion in their neighbourhood. Not only were they living these realities and had avoided joining armed groups, they also developed critical and analytical skills at *CoVida* which they applied to thinking about their context. Therefore, I decided to ask them questions during recorded interviews, not just about their own life histories, but those central to this thesis. These included questions such as: Why did youths join gangs? What did they think were the differences between themselves and 'violent' youths, and how had these differences emerged? Why did young men tend to join and not young women, and what was the role masculinity in the regeneration of violence? Their responses developed into significant part of the research to which Chapter 8 is dedicated, which leads into the conclusions of the thesis itself.

Whilst I conducted my research at both *CoVida* and *Con-Vivamos* I did not live in either of their neighbourhoods. Admittedly, living in these neighbourhoods may have brought further insights through deeper immersion in their realities. However, there were pros and cons of opting not to live there. I was working with two different community organisations in different parts of the city separated by a two hour journey on public transport. It would have been

impractical to live near one organisation and then travel to the next so I chose accommodation in a neighbourhood roughly between the two. I also spent a substantial amount of time, both day and night, with these organisations in their communities so did not feel that I missed out significantly in terms of immersion. Furthermore, I found it useful to retreat from these neighbourhoods to 'switch-off' and take a mental break after a long and often exhausting day's work. I lived in a part of Medellín which did have its problems with violence (I counted five murders within a block of my house that year) but nothing like the scale of the communities I worked in. So in terms of feeling safe as the conspicuous foreigner, 'going home' relieved some of the psychological stresses of working in a dangerous part of town. I believe that living away from the organisations I worked with helped with my 'analysis on-the-go' and provided a space for reflection to write up my interviews and my field diary. Living in these communities would have meant sharing difficult and cramped conditions with a family of a colleague and finding a relaxed workspace, or 'downtime' in the evenings would have been difficult. Moreover, I was building contacts with violent youth through *Con-Vivamos* and the first contact with these youths was always through one of their staff members (see below). If I lived there I would have run into them on my own which of course could have enhanced the research, but it would also have been a security concern.

Entering dangerous spaces and generating safety mechanisms

The issue of researcher and subject safety in dangerous environments is not foreign to methodological literature (Lee and Stanko 2003; Lee-Treeneek and

Linkogle 2000; Rodgers 2001). Yet little is written about how to access violent actors, nor about the ethical issues that arise when researching violent subjects in conflict contexts. Conducting the research in the marginalized north-eastern area of Medellín was dangerous, especially for the conspicuous foreigner, due to high levels of violence and crime. Researchers have been murdered in Latin America and must be particularly cautious in conflict zones or areas of intense urban violence (Lee-Treneek and Linkogle 2000: 10). However, being 'streetwise' – using common sense, local knowledge and language skills – reduced risks when travelling around poor neighbourhoods (Baird, 2009).

The more challenging issue was how to access violent gang members, paramilitaries and 'demobilising' paramilitaries within the neighbourhoods while staying safe. My research period in 2008 coincided with the ongoing 'demobilisation' process of paramilitary groups and a lull in violence, which made it safer for me to enter the neighbourhoods. As explained in Chapter 3, this period of 'relative calm' came about through the paramilitary takeover of local gangs and the ensuing demobilisation process, which had begun in July 2003 (Rozema, 2008: 430). Some youths were in the demobilisation process for 'as long as it paid' and had no intentions of really demobilising – even talking about guns they had stashed away (Personal interview, El Loco, 03/06/2008). Some I believe, although a minority, were actually trying to go through with the demobilisation process and leave the conflict. For whatever reason they were 'demobilising', it appeared to make these youths more open in the interviews, as they were (supposedly) in the process of 'becoming legal'. Much higher rates of violence returned to Medellín in 2009 as 'demobilised' paramilitaries reformed into new gangs. I was fortunate to be able to conduct my research in

the period that I did, not only for access to violent youth but because it set the tone for their greater candour. This does not mean to suggest that the research was without risk. Homicide rates during the research were still very high and the paramilitary threat remained. Hearing gunfire was commonplace.

To stay safe, it was fundamental to use reliable gatekeepers to access paramilitaries and to understand their context. *Con-Vivamos* is a community organisation with twenty years of experience in promoting local community development, education, and social organisation, promoting human rights, gender equality and political participation. It is based in *Villa Guadalupe* in the marginalised north-eastern *comuna uno* precinct in Medellín. *Con-Vivamos* is a well-established organisation with professional and experienced full-time staff and receives funding from a number of international development agencies. This organisation was chosen as its members are entrenched in the local community and thus excellent informants on local realities. The north-eastern area of Medellín is a densely populated area of steep mountainside with houses literally stacked on top of each other. Such proximate living conditions make for a very close-knit community – everybody appears to know everybody. For example, members of *Con-Vivamos* went to school with present-day paramilitary commanders and today their children share the same schools. The organisation maintained open dialogue with paramilitaries as part of its security strategy, which they termed *bailándolos* - taking them for a dance (Baird, 2009). This meant maintaining a certain level of communication in order to identify potential dangers they might pose to *Con-Vivamos*, while retaining a critical view of their activities, often denouncing them. Participant observation brought me into contact with paramilitaries to arrange interviews and gave me an understanding of their context. But at the same time, working within the

community organisation acted as a security filter as experienced organisation members had become expert local security analysts. While participant observation helped keep my finger on the pulse of the community, it was important to check and re-check frequently what was 'ok' and 'not ok' with members of the organisation. Over time, my capacity to understand the 'rules' of local violence developed. Danger slowly became less unpredictable (Baird, 2009). However, it is important to note that dangers can never be totally manageable. While some violence may be partially predictable, other violence is spontaneous and emotive, and even the most prudent researchers could always be unlucky (Jamieson 2000: 64).

Con-Vivamos were excellent facilitators of my research. They organised numerous formal and informal interviews across the neighbourhood and surrounding communities, introducing me to their friends, communities or individuals with whom they worked. Being the sole researcher with a limited timescale of seven months this was an invaluable collaboration. Notwithstanding, *Con-Vivamos* would have conditioned my research to 'their' contacts, 'their' friends, et cetera; and whilst they were a positive conduit for the research, they were also a filter. However, given my previous work with youth and violence experts in Medellín, my contacts with numerous other people in their neighbourhood, and also across the city at *CoVida*, I did not feel that my research was significantly biased towards 'their version' of events.

Contacting' violent' young men

During my period of participant observation I often accompanied members of

Con-Vivamos on walks around the neighbourhood, to talk to local leaders and members of the community. Occasionally there were chance meetings with paramilitaries. When this happened, interviews were arranged which normally took place in paramilitaries' houses or even at *Con-Vivamos*' offices. On occasion, impromptu interviews would take place when walking through the neighbourhood, so the voice recorder always needed to be at hand. It generally took much more time and effort to secure the interviews than I had foreseen. The subjects tended to appear only in the afternoon and evening due to the patterns of their social and criminal activities. A member of *Con-Vivamos* would often take me to the house where they knew a young paramilitary lived. If they were not at home, messages would be left to try and arrange a meeting. Occasionally after a short search of the neighbourhood they could be located in a nearby café or on a street corner. Whenever they were located, respecting 'informed consent' (ESRC 2005), they would be asked if they wished to take part in the research. Although most agreed in principle to an interview, they often turned up late to the designated meeting place, occasionally under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and on numerous occasions they did not turn up at all. This meant I had to arrange a large number of provisional interviews to meet the research targets (Baird, 2009).

Interpreting partial or misleading data and managing fear

A clear understanding of the local context proved central to interpreting and understanding the interview responses of violent young men, which were often partial or misleading. Hence, a keen grasp of local realities to interpret such

responses took on enhanced value for data interpretation. Certainly, contextual knowledge provided the parameters for framing the interviews, getting to know local people overtime in the community and making good friends at *Con-Vivamos* in particular provided a 'beneath the surface' understanding of local realities, particularly those pertaining to violence and violent groups. Often residents were reluctant to speak up about violent actors for fear of reprisals in a largely lawless community, but overtime some began to speak to me more candidly. Contextual knowledge was crucial for understanding the narratives of youths with violent histories. For example, Armando spoke about the 'problems' he had with his billiards hall, which meant he had to flee the neighbourhood. The subtext to these comments is that billiards halls are notorious 'hang-outs' for armed groups and often act as proxy-offices for criminal deals. At that given time in the community, certain paramilitary groups dominated, so having 'a problem' in the billiard hall was likely to mean that his life was threatened because a criminal deal had gone wrong with a particular paramilitary (group). Armando was reluctant to say this directly during the interview.

When interviewing youths, gaining informed consent, explaining confidentiality and asking permission to record the meetings were turned into forms of 'icebreaker'. Interviewees were asked to invent their own pseudonyms and given a list of jovial nicknames to prompt them, and a notebook was produced to demonstrate the illegibility of my handwriting to open up the possibility of voice recording the meetings. Only one of the 25 'violent' youths interviewed refused to be recorded.

Learning *parlache*, local slang commented upon in Chapter 3, was vital in

understanding the interviewees. It was used so heavily it was more akin to a dialect, and tellingly, almost all words referring to violence were in *parlache*. I worked particularly hard to learn these words, buying two *parlache* dictionaries (Castañeda Naranjo and Henao Slazar, 2005; Henao Salazar and Castañeda Naranjo, 2001), the spectacle of which prompted laughter and a familiar atmosphere during interviews. At my leaving party, *Con-Vivamos* staff even presented me with a mock 'Parlache Level 1 Pass Certificate'. The early parts of the interviews tended to be tenser, so the more complex or delicate questions were held back until the latter stages. Often such questions were asked repeatedly in different ways, using language interviewees could understand, to tease out the required data. The quality of the data often depended on my skill to subtly cross-examine without creating a feeling of cross-examination within the subject - sometimes I was skilful, at other times I was clumsy, but I improved over time. I became a better ethnographer as the fieldwork progressed.

On occasion I was nervous about potentially irritating a subject with a history of violence by asking personal questions. This was more acute when the subject himself seemed tense. This occurred in one impromptu interview with a notorious *sicario* - assassin - who was edgy and aggressive. Where such tensions arose they diminished the quality of data obtained (Baird, 2009). In all, I conducted twenty-five interviews with violent youths, but only seventeen were of sufficient quality to be used in this thesis as life-histories. The beginning of an interview is shown below, which ultimately did not contribute significantly to the research. The interview started awkwardly and the respondent was aggressive and disinterested:

Adam: Ok, let's give you a nickname. I've already got *El Chino, el Ruso, El Calvo*...

Killer: Killer [interrupts].

Adam: Let's give you a name... What?

Killer: Killer.

Adam: Killer? Ok, we'll call you Killer then... How old are you, where are you from and all that?

Killer: Me?

Adam: (Pause. We are the only two in the room). Yeah you. How old are you?

Killer: I'm 25 man... (Personal interview, Killer, 18/07/2008).

Researcher nerves, whether rational or not, are not uncommon when investigating violent actors or working in violent contexts (Westerland 2000). To help manage fear it was useful for me to remember that the subjects had come voluntarily to the meetings and had been contacted through a trusted community organisation. When potential subjects felt I was a threat, they would simply refuse interviews and in such cases were left alone. I did experiment with 'snowballing' to contact violent young men. Although it produced good data, I felt more at risk because of being pulled into less familiar contexts with subjects unknown by the accompanying community organisation (Baird, 2009). However, while ethnographic research in violent contexts is risky, it also establishes the context for evaluating danger (Peterson 2000), which positively informed the research. But how much risk should researchers take to obtain their data? When I was in the field I acted within the boundaries of what I perceived as 'too risky'. But this often left a sense of dissatisfaction, and led to me wondering 'What if I'd have pushed a little harder or been a bit more risky, how much better could my data have been?' However, while researching in violent contexts is frustrating at times, I would posit that it is the researcher's

responsibility to err on the side of caution when in doubt.

Despite the candour of some paramilitaries about certain parts of their lives, they often used vague language around acts of violence they had committed rather than talking about them explicitly. Terms such as *la vuelta* - the rounds - were used, which can mean anything from collecting extortion money, to selling drugs or killing people. I had to listen carefully to the story to understand what *la vuelta* actually entailed. Due to a number of factors such as trust, shame, fear, political motivations and their legal and security concerns, paramilitaries would often spin or lie about issues around violence and criminal activity. This was something I detected in the first interviews I conducted. Persuading some youths to actually talk about acts of violence was challenging. In certain cases youths felt shame or regret about their actions and were reluctant to bring them up, however others took on a more boastful tone about violent acts they had committed. To help identify lying, contextual knowledge and background on individuals (if it can be accessed) are key. My gatekeepers at *Con-Vivamos* and certain local community leaders were pivotal in providing me with background about some of the subjects I was interviewing – for example, one community leader told me about *Manfre's* background as a paramilitary which he only alluded to in the interview itself; a member of *Con-Vivamos* informed me that the youth I was going to interview was a *sicario* assassin but he did not mention directly in the interview, nor that his father used to be a notorious street fighter with a machete which I found out later. In addition to the importance of background and contextual knowledge, social skills and visceral sensitivity for interpreting when an interviewee might and be lying were important. Although of course it is difficult to say exactly how many lies I may have erroneously

believed, but the research methods employed were very useful in filtering out misinformation. Finally, I would often discuss some of the data with one or two key member of *Con-Vivamos* to gauge their views and interpretations which helped spot any misleading comments or lies I may not have picked up. (Also see *Don Fabio* pp152-3 above on the challenges of lying subjects).

Certainly, as the interviews progressed from the sometimes nervous first few minutes, less incongruous, more confessional data would emerge to complete a previously mentioned story. This meant that data had to be pieced together after the interview to build up a more accurate version of events. Again, understanding the local context was crucial to filling in certain blanks - 'stand alone' interviews would have been misleading. Arguably, effective data interpretation in this context would not be possible using less ethnographic methodologies (Baird, 2009).

Ethics and building rapport with criminal and violent subjects

Hallowell *et al.* (2005: 149) comment that it is the way that we relate to and treat others that makes our research ethical. But how should the researcher relate to a criminal and violent subject? Building rapport with research subjects would improve my data collection, but how ethical is it to build rapport with a victimiser? How close is too close? These questions posed a dilemma for which no course of action seemed entirely satisfactory (De Laine 2000: 3).

To obtain good quality data in the interviews, I tried to empathise with paramilitaries to understand their stories, their histories, to see them as people

and not embodiments of 'evil' as mentioned above. I had to use friendliness, humour, 'good listening' and genuine efforts to empathise with their circumstances to understand them - while at the same time not getting 'too close'. I turned down invitations to go out drinking and maintained my critical view of their criminal and violent activity.

At first, I thought it would be difficult for me to 'humanise' them. However, I actually found it surprisingly easy to empathise and build rapport with these youths; to appreciate elements of their own victimisation, their own tragedies. Without exception – which will come across in their narratives in Chapter 5 - each interviewee had been a victim of violence and exclusion at some stage in their lives. They frequently emphasised their own victimisation and underplayed their acts that victimised others; so in fact, I found that the risk was not in 'dehumanising' them, but the opposite - over-sympathising. I had to be careful not to romanticise them as innocent victims of unjust circumstance, or fall into a type of Stockholm Syndrome, which would have distorted my perception of the subjects (Peterson 2000; De Laine 2000). A balance should be struck when interpreting these youths (Borrero in Salazar, 1990: 12). They were all part victim, part victimiser.

Some interviewees were met more than once around the neighbourhood and friendly language and closer ties were built. This arose from chance meetings in the street and the process of chatting with a given paramilitary more than once when trying to schedule an interview. A handful were interviewed twice and there appeared to be more rapport in the second interview. Had I the time and capacity, a series of interviews with each subject, rather than just one with each, would have ameliorated the data quality. However, as paramilitaries

proved particularly hard to pin down for even one interview, I quickly realised that it would be unwise to opt for a 'half now, half later' interview strategy as the 'half later' may never have materialised (Baird, 2009).

Immersion in context and building relationships

As the above experience suggests, ethnographic methodology via participant observation provided close contextual understanding that was essential to safety, accessing 'violent' and 'prosocial' youths for interviews, and crucially, for obtaining and interpreting the data. The methodology allowed me to get 'under the skin' of local realities which was facilitated by the trust and friendship that I built with my colleagues. The researcher will often find in contexts of ongoing violence that there is a general fear to speak out against its perpetrators, which presents a significant obstacle to accessing data. In marginalised Medellín, many community members do not want to speak out against paramilitary activity for fear of reprisals. Only when I had gained the confidence of local community leaders by meeting them a number of times did they begin to open up to me about what they really thought. Even at *Con-Vivamos* and *CoVida* it took a month or so before I felt I had established good relationships. At times, I felt that colleagues were testing me: Were my political beliefs similar to theirs? How committed was I to social change? Essentially, they were gauging to what extent I was 'one of them' and if could be trusted (Baird, 2009). Notably, candour about sensitive community issues – such as how paramilitaries were influencing local politics, or who was suspected to be behind the most recent murder – did not initially emerge from the more official meetings or formal

interviews I held. Instead they came from informal spaces: at lunch, when going on walks through the community, over a beer and a kebab, or frequently at some point on a night out. Socialising with my colleagues, including taking part in football matches and community events, was key to my acceptance and trust building. I even suggested and helped organise a community day between *Con-Vivamos* and *CoVida* and members of their respective communities. The day included football, a soup kitchen, exchanges of ideas and experiences of 'resistance', music, song and dance. It was a great success and helped build relationships between both organisations, and between them and myself.

The way in which the data was emerging meant that the 'quality' of that data depended significantly upon my social skills, something that academia could not train me for. How aptly could I manage the relationships in the socialisation spaces that constituted my research? I found that whilst I maintained favourable relationships and made friends with a number of people at both *CoVida* and *Con-Vivamos*, I relied on a handful of 'key informants' who I had built close relationships with. These were the relationships that came naturally. I made genuine friends at *Con-Vivamos* and *CoVida*, and as friends we confided in each other. Whilst I recognised that I would always be an 'outsider', on a number of levels I had penetrated a circle of trust and become an 'insider': "We write as privileged Westerners. At the same time, we seek to be "allied others"" (Denzin et al., 2008: 6). Of course, there are many issues and insights that would have fallen beneath my radar but the most fruitful insights during my research were dependent on the relationships that I had established with others in the field. The ethnographic methodology used, laid the foundations for those relationships.

Chapter 6

Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery

So I grew up in that atmosphere, of bandits, thieves, deaths, shootouts, drugs. Why not join them one day? When you're a kid you don't play with toy cars, you play gun-fighting games. And when you play cops and robbers you would say, as if you were the hero gangster Faber: "Ohhh, I'm gonna be Faber, I'm gonna be Faber!" No one wanted to be the police. So you can analyse all of that. There is that logic around 'badness'

(Personal interview, Sammy, 03/06/2008)

Introduction

This chapter uses life-history interviews from seventeen youths involved or formerly involved in armed groups¹. As commented upon in the methodology chapter these narratives are laid out in a 'thick' format in an attempt to not disturb the voices of the subjects (Geertz in Thomas, 1993: 34). The narratives have been organised under subject headings. Some dialogue has been trimmed back for practical purposes and clarity of illustration, whilst the grammatical errors in the text reflect how each subject spoke. Lamentably, the translation of the text does detract from the richness of *parlache*, the local slang, although an attempt has been made to translate the informalities and rich representations of their prose.

It has been argued that youths will be disposed by their masculine *habitus* to reproduce 'traditional' versions of masculinity. They will seek out a 'pathway to manhood', which depends upon contextually specific *masculinisation*

¹ These youths all had violent histories as outlined in chapter 5. Some were active gang members, paramilitaries or assassins, some were engaged in the paramilitary 'demobilisation process' and were trying to leave the paramilitaries, but most 'demobilised' carried on their violent activities regardless.

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery *opportunities* as outlined in Chapter 2. To what extent did the context of exclusion, poverty and violence impact on their masculinisation process? Were positive, licit, nonviolent, or 'dignified' pathways to manhood structurally limited? Simultaneously, were negative, illicit, violent and 'anti-social' opportunities abundant and dominated by the gang structure, imaginary, and its members? Did youths in such contexts opt to join the gang and thus reproduce violence, in part because of their struggle to become men? In short, this chapter investigates how masculine *habitus* and subsequent processes of masculinisation, are related to violence reproduction in urban contexts of exclusion and poverty.

This chapter first considers the youths' family problems growing up, including conflicts with their parents, and the impact of having family members who were in armed groups. Secondly it considers these youths' first steps towards engaging with violence; often by joining the gang or paramilitary group. Thirdly the chapter outlines how membership to the gang acted as a masculinisation opportunity for them as a supplier of masculine *capitals* and a source of identity and belonging.

Family problems: Growing up, conflicts with parents and the impact of older siblings in armed groups

The eight years of peak violence in Medellín occurred between 1988-1996. In 1988 the average age of the youths interviewed was 7.5 years, and in 1996 15.5 years old. Slightly less intense but still dramatic levels of violence persisted

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery beyond 1996 until 2002. In 2002 the average age for the youths interviewed was 21.5 years old excluding two outliers; José who was 40 years old and Junior Carrito who was 13. The youths interviewed tended to 'grow up fast' as can be seen in their narratives and were engaged with 'street life' before the age of fifteen (Havana, 12/06/2008). In short, their childhood and adolescence took place in an unprecedented period of urban violence. This happened right on their doorsteps and the searing violence in their communities filtered into all of their homes. They all came from the notorious *nordoriental*, the north-eastern mountainside of the city, arguably the most violent corner of Medellín.

Seven youths do not refer to violence or trauma in their early childhood. They state that early childhood was a positive experience. These were El Mono, El Peludo, Havana, Armando, Mauricio, Junior Carrito and Andrés. They referred especially to their mothers treating them well and trying to take care of them despite the challenges of poverty and exclusion. However their mothers' best efforts and pleas were not enough to stop these youths joining armed groups. Almost all of the youths interviewed did not blame their mothers for problems arising during their childhood or adolescence. Conversely, they only spoke of positive treatment at the hands of their fathers in two cases out of seventeen. Affection for mothers and resentment for fathers by 'violent' youth is a cultural characteristic that has been well documented in Medellín (Salazar, 1990 ; Salazar, 1999 ; Vélez Saldarriaga, 1999). As the saying goes "You've only got one mum. Your dad is any old son of a bitch" (Salazar, 1990).

Whilst a number of youths spoke positively about their early childhood and their mothers, the majority went on to highlight problems at home. Conflicts with their

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery parents tended to emerge as they grew older. Of the seventeen youths interviewed, their fathers were absent during their upbringing in eight cases, almost half. Fathers were violent, criminal or drug addicted in four cases and were only described as positive influences in two cases. Data was not available for three cases, in twelve of fourteen cases (86%) fathers were either absent or negative influences at home. Furthermore in one of the two cases where the father was a positive influence, elder brothers were gang members, providing the younger brother with a direct path into the gang.

Statistically the absence of positive male role models or the presence of 'negative' male role models in the formative years of the youths interviewed, accounted for all but one of the cases (93%) where data was available. This data tells us that they were rarely exposed to positive versions of masculine identity or positive pathways to manhood through their father's example. It also tells us that mothers' positive influences were frequently not significant enough to stop their sons joining armed groups².

In three of the more extreme cases, namely Notes, Jonny and Jesús, they suffered from abandonment by their parents and their resulting desperation contributed to them joining the gang. However, it was more common for conflicts to arise at home when their parents made an attempt to control them. Both parents tried to control Armando and Aristizabal but were not able to do so; Cuba and Notes' mothers threw them out of home when they found out they had joined the gang; and, El Mono and José joined gangs after their fathers'

² Further analysis of mothers in their sons' lives, could have cast more light upon youths' decisions to join armed groups or not. However, as outlined in the introduction, as the sole researcher in the field I was limited by time and resources in terms of how many people I could interview. Unfortunately, the mothers of violent youths were not interviewed.

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery had used violence to try and discipline them. Nine youths entered armed groups without their parents realising. Once they entered an armed group, parental control became very difficult. Here are some select examples of narratives from Jonny, Notes, Jesús, El Mono, Havana, Jarrón, El Peludo and El Loco.

Conflicts with parents

Jonny, Notes and Jesús were abandoned as children. Jonny states that other youths did not join the gang because they had family support:

Jonny: My parents are dead. I began to take care of myself when I was 15. They died in 1997... I haven't got support from my siblings not from no one... My mum died of cancer... and there were three siblings left at home... the eldest went to Manizales [another city]... The youngest was picked up by her godmother and I was left all on my own in the house.

Adam: And when you got mixed up in all that [with the gang] on the corner, what did your grandparents say, your brothers, the family?

Jonny: My family? Nah, nuthin'. I'd already been practically chucked away, alone. I'd already begun to get food on my own, at fifteen I began to work (with the gang).... My sister went to live downtown and that's where they killed her... so I was alone at home... I went hungry an' all that.

A lot of people said to me "Look don't go down that path, look you know that if you do you'll end up dead". But you know that a lot of people tell you what the right thing to do is, but no one will actually help you, no one lends a hand. So I began to get involved with the lads here on the corner [gang]

Adam: And why do you think you joined the gang and another kid on this block didn't?

Jonny: I've got some friends who didn't get involved because they had support from their family, because their family supported them a lot and they had the support of their mum and dad. Me on the other hand I didn't have the support of no one and practically not even anywhere to live...

I started to work nights taking care of the neighbourhood so that no one else came in and stole the busses... [The gang ran local protection rackets. Bus owners were subject to a weekly fee]... But a load of my mates didn't get involved in that stuff because they had a good family that helped them follow the right path. So we drifted away from them and they drifted away from us (Jonny, 07/06/2008).

Notes was 'thrown away' by his parents:

My mum became a *basuca* [crack] addict... when she was pregnant with me. But she couldn't bring me up because they wouldn't accept her in the [brothel] with me so... she abandoned me when I was two months old... So because of that I grew up with rage... because the person who gave birth to me practically threw me away (Notes, 16/07/2008).

Jesus cites his lack of support at home when his grandmother died as a turning point when he joined the paramilitaries:

Jesús: My mum died when I was born. My grandparents raised me... but my grandfather died so my granny and two uncles took care of us until we were 18... When my granny died I felt really lonely, alone. I was 18 or 19 years old and that coincided with me joining the paramilitaries. My uncles had begun to drift off bit by bit and although they helped me with rent there wasn't anything left over for shoes, to study and you know that to go to college you need a lot of support (Jesús, 15/07/2008).

Beyond sheer lack of support at home, others entered into serious conflicts with their parents. In such violent and impoverished contexts parenting proved extremely challenging. El Mono was one of the more extreme examples of a conflict with his parents, whereas Havana was more typical, being thrown out of home by desperate parents because he joined the notorious *La Terraza* gang.

El Mono:

El Mono: "My old dear got sick... stomach cancer... but she had started things up again with my Dad after 14 years of being separated... I didn't get on with him, because I was already grown up and he arrives to impose rules and that was real tough for a 14 year old... but I'm chaos... since I was a little kid I've always liked to hang out with the son of a bitches from the neighbourhood.

So I was left living with my dad... but I had to go out and get mine, things round here ain't so easy. My mum wasn't around and that was really in my mind, my mum wasn't around...

One day I got poisoned drinking river water [and my Dad wouldn't help me and] when I got home someone that day someone had blown up my dad's patio with a gas cylinder. And the beauty that had blown it up was me... [smiles proudly].

So me and another mate... started to get into trouble and he [father] was going to beat me with a belt... I was 18 then... I said I to him 'you ain't gonna lay a hand on me or I'll set on you like a pack of dogs'... And he said 'yeah! Is that so?' and took off his belt to beat me. So I punched him and he dropped, then he said he was gong to smash me up with a stick... A mate of mine had a revolver and I said 'lend me that I'm going back

home with it'. So I went home and my dad was there with a stick, and I said 'don't even think about hitting me with that stick...' I said 'If you hit me with that stick I'm gonna fuck you up, I'm gonna fuck you up big time'. And he said 'what you think you're a tough guy now? Go and get your mates' this, that and the other.... 'If you hit me with the stick I'm gonna shoot you', and he said 'oh yeah?!' [come on then] and when he turned round to grab the stick to hit me he turned back and saw me with the old boy [gun] in my hand. So I put the gun in his face and I said 'go on try and hit me with the stick and I'll put a bullet in you'.

Adam: Son of a bitch! So what happened?

El Mono: So he said fuck off out of my house and so I went off with my mates... And that was when all the problems began here [when he joined the gang] around 2000 (El Mono, 17/07/2008).

Havana:

Havana: My youth began at a very young age... growing up in a neighbourhood like *Manrique* is not a good childhood. Poverty, drug addiction, jealousy, crime, violence, everything... I was really fed up with my mum. I was pissed off when I went to school and a classmate brought marijuana from *La Terraza*... so we went for a smoke... and I liked it... So we went to buy more and I saw the whole group of *La Terraza*... he introduced me to this guy, to that guy... so my name became famous.

Adam: And your parents didn't say 'don't get involved with these people!'?

Havana: Yes, they started. 'Don't go down there to 41st Street...' And I said no I won't go [he lies]... Then they threw me out of home... when I was 14 or 15 years old (Havana, 12/06/2008).

It is also difficult for parents to know exactly what their children are doing. As in the case of Havana, the youths are unlikely to admit to being in a gang. Armando was asked what his parents' response was to him joining the gang: "Ahhhh, they nagged me a lot! But your parents are the last ones to realise what you are doing in the street... if I went to my mum's or dad's [they were separated] I wouldn't get it [the gun] out in front of them..." (Armando, 18/06/2008). Similarly Junior Carrito was just thirteen and his mother did not know he was working transporting guns and drugs for local paramilitary bosses. Aristizabal said "Ah well, with my parents things went really badly. They suffered a lot at the beginning [when he joined the gang]... They told me what was right and wrong and today maybe I've got a better idea what that means,

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery but kids are uncontrollable. My mum always said that if she saw me doing something bad she'd be the one to take me to the police" (Aristizabal, 15/07/2008)

Often the youths would be more dismissive of parents' attempts to control them or their parents did not appear to try particularly hard such as Jarrón, El Peludo and El Loco.

Jarrón:

Adam: Didn't your folks tell you not to smoke marijuana, not to get mixed up with gangsters?

Jarrón: Yeah, of course they were worried an' all that. But look, it's not logical that you live your daily life, go to school, directly or indirectly you're gonna come across that stuff. So they say, 'don't do this, don't do that' but you're not gonna really listen to all that and you just go along with things... (Jarrón, 19/06/2008).

Once youths have joined a gang their parents have much less ability to control them. El Loco claimed that when he first killed, his mother was very 'passive'. His younger brother, El Peludo, was a notorious *sicario* assassin working for the paramilitaries who had never been interviewed before (Field Diary, Miguel Tamayo 03/04/2008). The first quotation is a field diary extract that describes a chance meeting with him on a walk through the neighbourhood before I interviewed him two months later:

I also met a paramilitary guy [El Peludo]. I knew he was [a paramilitary] somehow. Miguel said hello and we chatted to him for a while... He was high on drugs when we met him. He couldn't really speak and kept on wobbling forwards. He had some expensive looking Oakley sunglasses on and looked quite trendy. He was also very young. Miguel said to me 'watch out, that kid is really dangerous' and I knew what he meant, Miguel looked scared. [El Peludo] looked to be early 20s to me. Fifty meters down the road we came across his dad, an old man with blue eyes. I said to Miguel, 'what does he think about his son' and he said 'come on, these kids are uncontrollable' (Field Diary, 03/04/2008).

El Peludo:

My parents said no, don't get involved in [the paramilitaries]... that it's a really horrible life. But like I said to my dad, listen up, I like doing the rounds [with the paramilitaries] so don't gimme so much grief. And so what? What are they gonna say to me? (El Peludo, 03/06/2008).

El Loco:

Adam: Didn't your parents tell you not to get messed up in all that stuff [with gangs]?

El Loco: Well yeah. They told me what to do as a kid, don't stray from the path... Yeah but, not always but sometimes you'd tell them what was going on in your life. Like when I killed for the first time. I told to my mum and she said 'My God, son! What do you mean?' She had to deal with all that, they we're gonna drag me out of the house [and kill me]...

Adam: So your mum was pissed off with you or what?

El Loco: My mum? No. My mum was always really passive... (El Loco, 03/06/2008).

Here the narratives are telling us that circumstantial factors linked to the broader socio-economic context and high levels of social violence made for volatile upbringings and meant that parents faced significant challenges in keeping their children away from street gangs and violence. Fragile family environments contributed to a lack of licit livelihood opportunities in later life for these youths, compounding the contextual challenges they faced living in the periphery. Therefore these youths were more likely to opt for the illicit opportunities offered by gang life. Their relative lack of support at home for positive livelihoods, or the difficulty that their parents had in supporting positive futures for their children becomes clearer as a factor that shapes these youths 'violent' or 'prosocial' futures, when compared with the narratives of 'prosocial' youths in the following chapter. 'Prosocial' youths enjoyed significantly more family support, which facilitated their engagement with 'positive' masculinisation opportunities.

'Gang scholars' have duly noted correlations between inequality and violence (Winton, 2004). 'Opportunities' to join the gang do depend on structural and contextual factors linked to socio-economic conditions and the prevalence of violent groups. This is compounded where families are unable or unwilling to support positive futures for their children in such circumstances. Let us unpack the role of the family further in relation to the youths interviewed here.

Family members linked to armed actors

Beyond the difficulties that parents face to bring up children in such challenging socio-economic and violent conditions, in 62% of the cases these youths were exposed to armed groups as children by family members. Seven of the seventeen youths interviewed had older brothers in armed actors – paramilitaries, gangs or militias - and in the case of Andrés his father was in a gang. Whilst all children would come into contact with armed actors on the street to a certain extent, there were significantly less family members in armed groups amongst the 'prosocial' youths interviewed.

No youth cited the influence of a *younger* brother as a reason for joining an armed group, influences came from older men in the family suggesting that they acted as male role models. None of the youths interviewed had a sister in an armed group. Caritas' case was a notable outlier as none of his six siblings joined an armed group as he did. Conversely all of Armando's five brothers were paramilitaries.

Andrés' father was a drug addict linked to a large gang, which Andrés was inevitably exposed to. This exposure made it particularly difficult for his mother

to discipline him and curb his ambition to join the gang. He later joined the gang and became a drug addict himself. His friends Mauricio and José were also present at times in the interview, both of whom were former gang members.

Mauricio: Pablo Escobar's henchmen used [Andrés'] house after they played football... in his house there are photos of all of these people... So you see, they were his role models.

Andrés: That example, I was always being set that example in my youth... One stayed at my house so I always saw guns, lots of stuff, so you begin to think you're a big somebody with all this stuff around.

Adam: And what were the examples of men like?

Andrés and José pitch in together: Of course, the motorbike, the gun, pretty girls, the money...

Andrés: So then as time went by I was around 16 years old, 15 or 16, I got involved in that lifestyle. I started to find my own way in it. They set me the example of those things, those thoughts, of how to get things, to want a motorbike, to be like them, I saw that example of how things were.

Adam: What did your old dear say when you began to get involved in stuff with gangsters?

Andrés: Well she began to tell me off, to try and punish me, but nothing... I'd started my life, to go out to the street and to get to know some mates, who were, well... [indicating they were in the gang]. My mum was the only one I really had a relationship with... she punished me, she grounded me, but... I didn't pay her any attention, in a sense I was already not paying her attention, I'd be out on the streets till sunrise...

I didn't do what my mum said from about 16, 17 years old. She started not being able to control me... I was already mixed up in stuff and that's how it was... doing what my dad did... little delivery jobs for the gang bosses at that time... so I stayed with them. I began to commit crime, to rob... (Andrés, 20/07/2008).

Although Jonny's mother had died, his sister was murdered and his older brother had fled to another city, it was his brother's gang membership that provided him with the link to gang life because it meant he 'got off on the right foot with' them.

Jonny: My brother had lived in our house with some people [gang members] and they killed a girl there... Because of what my brother had done I got mixed up in trouble just because I was his brother. Then my brother fled but I'd got off on the right foot with the lads [members of his

brother's gang] an' all that, and began to hang out with them on the corner here... I got to know more friends and we'd hang out on the corner (Jonny, 07/06/2008).

Mauricio sought to emulate his older brothers, both of whom were gang members because of the 'respect' they commanded. This led him to become a gang member even though his brothers did not initiate him into the gang.

Mauricio: Well at home my parents were never really bad role models... So in terms of what I'm about to tell you this has nothing to do with my parents... [I've got four siblings] but from those four there were two twins and they assassinated them. One died in 1997, assassinated, and the other died in 1998, assassinated...

When I was only a little kid... my brothers began to get involved with gangs doing [drug] deliveries, washing their cars, carrying a gun from one place to another for them. They began to set that sort of example for me... but also I saw everything that was going on in *Aranjuez* [a notorious neighbourhood].

Because of... the bad example they set me I thought I was a good kid at the time but I had some bad tendencies. I already fancied myself as a criminal [at 17] because I had a brother who was neighbourhood gangster. You would think that that was the best thing, because you felt respected, admired... So before looking to earn my own respect, I knew I already had it because of my brothers so no one would touch me. Me? At school I was the wildest kid, a plague. At that time people were scared to tell me off but I wasn't scared to have a go at them...

It was something you felt on the inside, because you're not really conscious of what's going on... What was left was a desire to be like him, a desire to be a gangster like him (Mauricio, 20/06/2008)

Notes' also admired his older brother who was in a gang:

Notes: My older brother's been disappeared for five years... when I was young... in the house they didn't say nothin' to him [tell him off for also being in a gang] and I began to admire that stuff. He had his revolver and he'd get in at 1am and they weren't gonna say nothin' to him... I didn't know what a revolver was then... the only person who had one was my brother because one day he lifted up his shirt and said 'hey hide this for me' (Notes, 16/07/2008).

These narratives highlight how siblings (and a father) can provide a direct link to the gang. Male youths are disposed to masculinise by their *habitus*, so will take advantage of the 'masculinisation opportunities' they encounter. In these cases older siblings acted as male role models demonstrating what masculine

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery *capitals* represented - money, 'respect', status, motorbikes, etc - where the gang 'was the best thing because you felt respected and admired'. For these youths the gang represented the 'first' or 'obvious' way to secure masculine *capital*. This process also weakened any regulatory attempts - which normally emanated from their mothers 'trying to control them' - to lead them away from gangs.

Navigating violence and exclusion: Youths explain why they joined the gang

The following narratives are complex, reflecting the real lives they depict but patterns begin to emerge explaining why these youths joined gangs. They refer to the challenges they faced growing up in poverty and trying to make a living; how they often joined the gang through friends who were already members, simply 'going with the flow' as part of a seamless socialisation process; how the sheer intensity and ubiquity of violence in their communities made some form of engagement with gangs unavoidable; and how the gang often seemed like the 'best' or 'logical' livelihood opportunity.

El Peludo's brother, El Loco, is ten years older than him and has a history of gang and paramilitary violence. When El Loco first joined a gang El Peludo was five years old. Their sister's boyfriend was a paramilitary leader with whom she had two children before he was killed. El Peludo became involved with his brother's paramilitary group, took drugs at a young age and quickly progressed to becoming a *sicario* assassin, 'work' that he still carries out.

Adam: Tell me about your youth and how you got involved with armed groups...

El Peludo: Ah, that all began because of my friendships since I was really little. Since I was about twelve I've been mixed up in this. It all began with my mates and that was going on a lot round here, with, with drugs an' all that you know. Nah, like I was saying it's all about who your friends are and that's where you get involved...

[There were] a lot of dead bodies round here you know. This was fucked up.... homes destroyed, Molotov cocktails, grenades, all that. Lots of bullets... oooh, that was a war and a half. More than anything because of the guerrillas, the militias, we fought against all those types...

Round here you saw everything... hard drugs, everything. Lots of violence, a lot of rape... a lot of dead people. My mates also grew up with all that and were mixed up in the war at that time. A lot are dead, only a few are about nowadays...

Adam: So why did you join?

El Peludo: Why did I join? Because of my friendships. I liked it, I liked it... The money, the work they give you and all that stuff. Benefits for your kids, your parents and all that. I've got a kid... I like that shit, well so far... Me and my mates have always been doing the rounds... whatever it took we always got stuck in, us same lads from the neighbourhood.

Adam: What do you like about doing the rounds?

El Peludo: What I liked was that we killed all of the bad guys and the bad militias and we came out on top... We went to war toe-to-toe and you could smell the bullets and you didn't know if you'd get shot or not... dead bodies everywhere...

Adam: But would you like to work?

El Peludo: Ahhh yeah work, yeah. I'd like to work but there's nothin' to do bro. I wish there was work. Round here it's tough. In Medellín it's really hard to work, I wish there was something to do, like I say it's tough, it's tough... I haven't got a job.

Adam: So what do you need to reintegrate yourself to the community, what's a dignified job for you?

El Peludo: A stable job and to get ahead, a good, good job that pays you some dough. You've got to be able to support the family, your kid an' all that... You need to have a job in a company or something like that so the community doesn't see you like a tramp, an undesirable who does nothin', that's shit. It would be cool to have a good job...

Adam: What sort of job would you be happy with?

El Peludo: Err... working in a bank... One of those jobs.

Adam: What do you like about that job apart from the money?

El Peludo: How they wear a suit, how they are polite and treat people well... I'd like to work in a bank, not just for the money but for the image that you get, working in a decent job at a good company.

Adam: You who's been mixed up in this stuff, what d'you reckon's the best way to get people out of gangs permanently? What d'you think? How hard is it?

El Peludo: It's well hard, well hard to get people out. You've got to find them work... It's work, work, you have to find us work for the lads and maintain us somehow. Give them money so they don't go out and commit crime... if not they'll be right back at it. This is some tough shit (El Peludo, 03/06/2008).

El Peludo talks with excitement and pride about 'doing the rounds' in the paramilitary group. Importantly he demonstrates the 'organic' nature of the groups where he has 'always' been doing it with his 'mates'. The gang was also a livelihood opportunity as a source of income, but he understood it as a social position of status, where his equivalent position would be a job in a bank with a suit, but such a position is way beyond his reach as a poor shantytown dweller.

El Loco entered the living room of his house where I was sitting with his brother El Peludo and was interviewed opportunistically. However, he had been taking cocaine which became evident during the interview given his accelerated speech and erratic, although not threatening, behaviour. El Loco was first involved in violence at the age of fifteen in 1991, the peak year of violence in Medellin.

Adam: How did you enter the armed group?

El Loco: I'm 32 years old and I started at fifteen, very young. In '91 or '92 a lot of wars began and almost all of my friends have been shot dead... We began as common thieves in the neighbourhood. There was another gang beyond the neighbourhood that always wanted more territory... so we went to war with them and listen up, there was a hell of a lot of war... A lot of youths were massacred here...

I was hit by a grenade... look it went in here [shows me scars on his torso where shrapnel had entered]... They tried to kill me... they shot me in the ankle [shows scars]...

Adam: Tell me the story of your life, the marijuana, the gang, the paramilitaries... why did you enter?

El Loco: No, no, its not that anyone wants to get involved in this, it happens to you, it happens to you. You might not want to but you have to get involved...

Adam: Why? If not you'll get shot?

El Loco: Yeah, and when you're in there's no leaving... I was with the *Bloque Cacique Nutibarra* [paramilitaries] for fifteen years. I had to follow suit with what was going on in the city [the paramilitary takeover]. There was a lot of urban conflict, wars in the precinct and all that, it was tough.

Adam: But you like being with them?

El Loco: Yeah always. Because of my friendships and we were all from the same...

Adam: Group of friends?

El Loco: Hmmm [indicating yes] always, the same bunch that grew up together.

Adam: So how does it happen that a kid hanging out on the corner ends up getting linked to the paramilitary project?

El Loco: Us lot when we joined we were just kids nicking a few things now and then. Us lot weren't even an armed group nor nothing... just a bunch of lads... But from one moment to the next the paramilitaries came in to employ us... and us lot got a leader...

Adam: How did you survive?

El Loco: God knows... but we had to do it if not another gang would have taken over the neighbourhood so we had to.

El Loco states that what he does pays the bills and puts food on the table.

Adam: How can you get lads out of gangs?

El Loco: Well you've got to help us finish our education and with most of us get us a job because even with education you can't get one... I've got a kid who's getting big so I've need a job to put food on the table at least... When I was with the paras I was on \$700,000 pesos a month... Enough for bills, to help out my old dear and to pay a few debts I've got on the streets... and to have a few drinks.

Adam: So what work opportunities have you got?

El Loco: With my education? I didn't finish school...

Adam: What sort of job would you be content with?

El Loco: Just a job like my cousin's got now at a company. It's a good company, they build factories, shops... he's doing a good job, I'd like that... But I've got no training to use those machines, I haven't studied for that... (El Loco, 03/06/2008)

El Loco's case shows how youth gangs are drawn up into larger more organised illegal armed structures – in this case the paramilitaries. Gangs of young men were actively sought out by the paramilitaries as part of the broader takeover process of Medellín. This consolidated El Loco's position from a rag-tag gang member on the streets into a 'career' violent actor, taking home a salary, whilst territorially he remained active in his neighbourhood with his childhood friends just like his brother. His transition into the paramilitaries was also conceived pragmatically as an opportunity 'to put food on the table', which he contrasts with limited licit job opportunities.

Armando joined the paramilitaries at the age of nineteen in 1996. All of his peers are paramilitaries and he says he has been in gangs since he was young. He was very nervous about talking on tape. He had expensive clothes on and *Puma* trainers that cost half the average monthly wage. Social worker and gatekeeper Miguel Tamayo was present during the interview.

Adam: Are there any opportunities for you?

Armando: No, that's the way it is... you have to take your chances [to become a paramilitary] and many people follow in your footsteps...

There are few opportunities because wherever you go the doors are closed ...there's a lad who was in a gang who went to study and does computing. When he goes to interviews they never, never call him back... You only have to... say that you're from *Santo Domingo* [a violent neighbourhood, and you don't get the job]

Adam: Why do young men get involved in these groups?

Armando: Because of poverty... also today kids are really crazy...

Adam: But not all poor people get involved in armed groups though, why do some join and others don't?

Armando: But also kids have got involved who've got everything at home. And their parents have given them the opportunity to go somewhere else, but they want to be [in the armed group]. It's not just for kids who have been kicked out of the house, that go hungry... but when I got involved it was to survive...

Adam: How do you stop kids going back to the paras?

Armando: ...That there is an opportunity to work... every day prices go up and there's more poverty and less jobs...

Adam: What would be a dignified job for you?

Armando: One that's got social security... at least be earning enough to eat... I'm humble because I've suffered with poor people so I know what it's like...

Miguel: ...if there isn't a job which dignifies the human being, that's the minimum requirement... if not things go back to violence.

Adam: How did you end up in the paramilitaries?

Adam: Because of the war... lots of people liked raping, robbing, and then you see all of that stuff and you can't go messing with the decent people... and a gang was going to kill me and take my billiards hall because I didn't pay the extortion fee... So I fled with my family... It's all mafia.

Adam: They're all the same thing right?

Armando: It's all mafia. Another group is going to appear and... they could be guerrilla, paramilitaries... (Armando, 18/06/2008).

Although he cites poverty and an absence of other opportunities as reasons for joining the gang, he also states that 'kids with everything' also join gangs. This indicates the lure of relative riches and status of gang life and that joining is not always a desperate 'last resort' livelihood. In fact, although many of these youths demonstrated significant agency in joining gangs debunking the idea that gangs are only for the weakest, most desperate or most 'at risk'. Youths join gangs as it may be seen as the 'best' livelihood opportunity for them in their context, and as will be expanded upon later in this chapter, the best way to accumulate masculine *capital* for ambitious young men.

Mauricio's older twin brothers were both gang members whom he sought emulate. He also talks about how he struggled with poverty which was a catalyst for his first involvement in crime demonstrating how a combination of gang related role models at home and limited licit opportunities contributed to his decision making process. He later joined the paramilitaries but then became an evangelical Catholic and entered the paramilitary demobilisation process.

Mauricio: [In] Aranjuez during the 80s and 90s, it was really tough it was the time of Pablo Escobar. Kids at that time began to work for the mafia as *sicarios* [assassins] at a really young age say twelve or thirteen... kids of that age would have a car or a good motorbike. At one point there was a kid who was only eighteen and he had a Mercedes Benz convertible. We were only kids at the time but of course we knew about the money going around. You would see money in incredible quantities. In fact, I don't think any neighbourhood at any time has handled the sort of cash that was going about in that period. It was overflowing with cash, unbelievable...

I grew up being set that example from those kids and my older brothers and the whole scenario of what was going down in Aranjuez at the time... A lot of kids went to jail, more died... Generations of young men were killed...

[I lived with Natalia in a one room place, we] had the cheapest bed, ate out of one bowl and shared a spoon... we even went hungry... At that time [my friends] said if I stole a car they'd give me \$180,000 pesos [the monthly minimum wage]. That was in '99 so I stole it. Natalia got pregnant too so times were even more desperate... but since I was younger I'd always fancied being a criminal...

Then they asked me to steal a Toyota Land Cruiser but that I had to kidnap the owner because it had a tracking device... So I stole the car but I didn't know how to drive. I learned on the job... We also used his credit cards and forced him to give us the pin code and we stole the money out of his account. I got \$1 million pesos and with that money I bought my first revolver...

Adam: You can see how you got involved bit by bit...

Mauricio: ...Well I always use this expression 'it's a honey trap'. First you taste it and want more but then you get stuck before you know it (Mauricio, 20/06/2008).

Like most youths, for Mauricio there were multiple reasons for joining the gang. He 'fancied being a criminal' from childhood due to the influence of his older brothers who were in a gang. These were 'pull factors' into the gang, coupled with socio-economic 'push factors' such as poverty, hunger and the inability to gain a dignified livelihood. Here it should be mentioned that on many occasions gang members often start out in the early stages of their 'careers' earning little money: "drug sales for most gang members... are just another low-paying job" – the relative 'riches' of gang life are often illusionary (Hagedorn, 2008: xv) - but the more they and the gang engage in criminal activity the greater the rewards become.

Jesús talks about his traumatic childhood with violence and death all around him. Jesús tried to hold down different jobs but they did not work out and he says there are very few opportunities for young men.

Jesús: I was a good kid but in my neighbourhood in 1994 [he was 12] you'd see a lot of dead bodies whenever you went out... I had some mates who had guns and they asked me to fire a shot and little by little you get sucked in.

We moved to Moravia [a slum built on a rubbish heap]. I laboured in the countryside... you'd see the paramilitaries.. and I ended up getting in contact with them too. I was picking coffee and a friend said that I should join the paras because that was where the money was at, plus free accommodation and all you had to do was fight. Well, my work [picking coffee] was already really hard...

Adam: Why do you think young men are the ones that join these groups?

Jesús: Because there aren't any job opportunities, at home they are humiliated... it's not easy to live without a roof.

Adam: So what job opportunities did you have before joining the gang?

Jesús: I had like three opportunities but I didn't really have much luck... I started to work at a carpenters' but the guy there was also the neighbourhood gun dealer so that was my first contact. You don't get mixed up in all this because you want to but because there aren't any job opportunities more than any other reason. You know, people judge you by the clothes you wear and if you are badly dressed they treat you like a loser... and they come by and offer you an opportunity to join the gang, they're gonna pay you decent money... give you good trainers... two sets of clothes, a gun, they give you a motorbike so you can get about (Jesús, 15/07/2008).

Jesús case demonstrates the challenges of holding down a licit job and how youths struggle against humiliation. Here an opportunity to join an armed group can be understood not only as a livelihood necessity, but also as a mechanism to obtain dignity.

Carritas joined a gang at the age of fourteen in 1998. Carritas reflects on the few options he had growing up stating that life was 'really hard' whilst joining the gang 'was easy' because his friends were already members. At a young age he also recognised his 'responsibility' to bring money home.

Carritas: Our life was really hard. You had to go out and get what you needed and to get something here is really difficult.... Listen up, difficult! ...I was already in the gang when my mum realised. I was 18 years old, I was old, I took responsibility [for earning money]

Adam: Why did you join?

Carritas: For security. Because in the neighbourhood where we lived there were a lot of wars... You have to go with the flow of your precinct. How could we be against the precinct? [How could we not join the paramilitaries when they took over?].

Adam: Yeah but not everyone was in the paras!

Carritas: Nooo! But I'm gonna tell you the truth. Lots of us didn't get involved because of necessity nor nothing like that, but because of friendships... because if you've got friends who are involved in that stuff then you're gonna get involved too. You want to be doing what they're doing. And if your mates are in there then you can speak to the boss and he'll let you join up straight away (Carritas, 16/07/2008)

In 1997 El Mono became involved in violence at the age of fourteen. He joined the gang that Jonny was in, and like Carritas became linked to the gang with his friends. The interview was conducted in a small kiosk over a couple of beers with Jonny who had introduced us.

El Mono: When us lot hung out on this corner there was a load of us but we were well behaved. We just liked to dance and drink a few shots of liquor.... But then the lads one block up said they were going to kill us...

Adam: But you two [him and Jonny] have been mates for a long time now?

El Mono: Hmmm [yes] of course, since we were kids

Jonny: We just shagged a few birds and that was it! [laugh together]

El Mono: Yeah fit birds like this one [blows kiss to passing girl who enters kiosk]...

Adam: But if you were good kids why did they want to kill you?

El Mono: Because when they arrived giving us some jip we went after them. If they have a go at one of the kids then that means they've got to deal with all of us.

Adam: Like camaraderie?

El Mono: Yeah, when one kicked off we all kicked off...

Adam: Why did you choose to hang out with that crowd?

El Mono: Ahhh, a cousin of mine [El Peludo] used to hang out with the bad lads [gang] around here... Because those guys would hang out around here and be nice to me and say 'come over here, have a bit of money, it's all good kid'. So I carried on growing up and you would always see them...

Adam: Like a role model, people always respect the hard man...

El Mono: Of course... But I didn't think about joining them but when I needed help in life they were the support, I felt their strong support... So then I began to get really mixed up in all that stuff. I saw my mates with their guns and I wanted one as well... (El Mono, 17/07/2008)

Like El Mono, Jonny felt the support of the local gang and because he was 'hanging out with them' was first involved in shootouts with rivals on 'the other corner' when he was eleven years old in 1992. Jonny says he joined the paramilitaries 'using his own initiative', showing how the paramilitary takeover further entrenched young men into armed structures.

Adam: And why do you think you got mixed up in this?

Jonny: Basically because I was hanging out with lads who were like that. So they'd say if I had any problems that I could go and live with them or whatever. So I felt the support from the gang as they say... so that was when we began to go down that route, we began to get into shootouts... I basically got into the paramilitaries using my own initiative... They [paramilitaries] began to talk to us and told us to join them... When we realised that they would kill us if not, we had to join them... they began to give us guns. We also got walkie-talkies to communicate... so we could control the area (Jonny, 07/06/2008)

Similarly to El Mono and Jonny, Jarrón first became engaged in violence with his groups of friends when he was thirteen after the militias killed his brother for being a 'marijuana smoker':

Jarrón: At the beginning we didn't have guns, but we got some through some mates...

Adam: And you lot set up the gang?

Jarrón: Exactly... We were just a bunch of well behaved lads who started a gang... kids who had never touched a gun but they felt under pressure from the militia because simply by living in *El Hoyo* we were gonna get killed. So us lads took the decision to take up arms... because at the end of the day who can resist the war?

Adam: Also because of the money involved and that stuff?

Jarrón: Well, where we were it was a war between the poor, we were like the Palestinians. Getting a gun was difficult because we'd never had the support of an armed group. To say that a big gang like *La Terraza* rocked up and said 'here take these guns' never happened to us. We had to make *tamales* [corn and chicken snack] the first gun we got was by selling *tamales*... (Jarrón, 19/06/2008).

Jarrón states self-defence against the militias was the main reason to form the gang, but his narrative also demonstrates that many other groups of young men would receive patronage from larger more organised gangs, such as *La Terraza*. Earlier, Jonny's case showed how this process of patronage occurred with the paramilitaries, demonstrating how relatively 'innocent' youths can be drawn up quickly into organised violent structures.

Havana joined *La Terraza* gang through friends at school which led him quickly into a life of crime, which he decided to leave after the brutal murder of one of his friends by a rival gang. "We set up vending points for cocaine and marijuana... [A rival gang] shot my friend 26 times from four cars, *lo remataron* (they more than killed him). Then I was afraid and I said, no more, no more, I'm going..." (Havana, 12/06/2008).

Notes was sixteen when he joined a gang in 1996 which he says was for his own security but then became embroiled in gang conflicts and was finally absorbed into the paramilitaries.

Notes: At [16] I had a fever for everything and I got a woman... She was 27 [but] I bumped into her husband [and] he said 'yeah, you son of a bitch... I'm gonna kill you'... He was the leader of a gang... and he came looking for me so I had to leg it.

I found a friend of mine... he gave me 100 bullets... So one day [the husband] came up to kill me but I was ready to shoot first... When I started my career I didn't just have a revolver but a machinegun in my hands... So all my mates said are you gonna work [for the gang] or do a normal job?... So I ended up joining one gang and the conflicts started there...

Adam: But didn't you have an older man in your life when you were 16 who said to you 'listen, you don't have to be violent to be a man'?

Notes: No, because my time in the neighbourhood there wasn't nothing but massacres... Some blokes arrived in front of our school... and grabbed a man, shot him twice, then cut off his head with a machete and played football with it... Us lot saw all that...

When you kill someone for the first time if that person begs for their life that stays on your mind. No matter how tough you are it torments you forever. So what are you going to do being a man and thinking about that?

I've had a career which was very fast... I know that one day or another I'm gonna see a family member of someone I killed and they're gonna blow me away...

Adam: Yeah... the past does not forgive...

Notes: [As] gangs began to appear... from the block below... they used to come up to our block and threaten us... We took up arms to defend ourselves... Since we were little kids they've been our local rivals so we're gonna to shoot them... After 2003 the paramilitaries arrived and the whole world began to work with them because they paid the gangs to control their territory... they arrived giving money and guns... opportunities... (Notes, 16/07/2008)

Junior Carrito (Junior) was an outlier in the research at thirteen years of age at the time of the interview. Nevertheless he represented the way many boys are groomed into armed groups at a young age. He first worked for the local paramilitaries when he was twelve years old in 2007. Junior talks in the third person using 'them' when asked questions about *carritos* as he does not want confess early on that he is in fact a *carrito*. *Carritos* translates as 'trolley', they children used to run errands, carry drugs or weapons by gangs as the police are not legally allowed to search minors. They also act as informants and lookouts and often progress up the ranks of the gang or paramilitary group. Social worker Miguel Tamayo was also at the interview.

Adam: How do the youngsters end up getting linked to these groups?

Junior: From very young, they like it... 'coz they grab a gun and they think 'man, that's cool'... and with the gangs like that. And money...

Miguel: How do they test someone to enter?

Junior: They put you on lookout to see if you are any good

Miguel: What do you mean any good?

Junior: Responsible. To be able to do deliveries [guns and drugs]

Adam: And how do you get along with these people, how do they treat you?

Junior: Nooo, they're very nice people... Whoever wants to join can join. If you don't want to you don't have to...

Adam: So at what ages do they link to these groups? 15?

Junior: No, at the age that they like... well first whatever little kids that wanted [to join could], but after they [paramilitaries] made a rule, no more kids, now they have to be older than 12.

Miguel: They made a rule! [Laughing] Older than 12! [Laughing harder] And who demanded that rule?

Junior: More than anything the mothers... because they were frightened, that they'd get killed or whatever

Adam: How many kids like that, let's say older than 12 were linked to these groups? 20, 100, more?

Junior: ...Let's say more than 100...

Adam: (sic) Kids are used to carrying things for the bosses because they don't get searched by the cops and that sort of stuff?

Junior: We carry things around...

Miguel: And the shooters, how are they transporting them?

Junior: Those too, mainly with little kids.

Miguel: And what do they give to the children?

Junior: A bit of money... \$1,000 - \$2,000 pesos ...[in a good week] \$15,000-20,000 pesos.

Miguel: And the girls?

Junior: They give the girls five [\$5,000]... they are carrying drugs as well... in their bras... more than anything in stadiums... concerts...

Adam: What sort of things do you carry that pay the best or is it all the same?

Junior: Carrying a gun [pays better], marijuana and coke.... They pay you real good... (Junior Carrito, 19/06/2008).

Contesting poverty, socialisation into gangs and the effects of violent structures

Why did these youths join gangs? All of the youths interviewed had to contend with the effects of poverty, social exclusion, the ubiquity of gang violence and gang 'opportunities' in their communities. Poverty and exclusion hampered the

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opportunities youths had to secure positive, licit and dignified forms of livelihood whilst the inevitable exposure to gangs in their local communities proffered opportunities to join them. Some youths faced particularly desperate situations where joining the gang was presented as a type of salvation, either to put food on the table or often in self-defence against youth gangs from other neighbourhoods. In particular Jonny, Aristizabal, Notes, Andrés and Carrito appeared to be drawn into the conflict by the sheer intensity and indiscriminate social cleansing and gang violence in their communities. Youths can find a 'family', job, or identity and belonging in the gang (Hagedorn, 2008: 3). However, the intense and indiscriminate violence was gendered, young males were stigmatised and seen as potential threats to be eradicated, particularly those 'hanging out' on street corners. Furthermore, as will be seen in the following section, the gang is a male socialisation space, a male opportunity and a provider of masculine *capital* that all these youths engaged with. Hence there will always be a masculine element to joining the gang, even in the most testing of circumstances.

There were a combination of reasons for joining the gang. These processes were nuanced and specific to each individual, each experience demonstrated a combination of limited licit opportunities coupled with an exposure to opportunities to 'earn a living' through the gang. El Loco joined to 'put food on table', Armando because all other 'doors were closed' and Mauricio struggled by 'going hungry', et cetera. Certainly these were 'push' factors related to social and economic conditions, youths struggling against structural violence.

Youths did not join gangs simply because they were 'desperate', many youths understood the gang to be a good livelihood opportunity – even described by

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some as a profitable 'career' - for them. Armando talks about 'taking his chances' and where even local 'kids with everything' joined the gang; Mauricio 'fancied being a criminal'; Jonny 'used his own initiative' to join the gang; El Peludo comparing his position in the paramilitaries to the equivalent but unreachable position of bank manager in the legal world. Emerging in some of the narratives here is a sense of pride, excitement and esteem attached to gang membership out of reach by legal means to these youths in their contexts. Gang membership is fuelled by social exclusion and a lack of 'dignified' livelihood options, but youths can demonstrate significant agency in joining gangs. For example, the process of grooming children – or *carritos* - into gang structures is a selective process where only the 'baddest', most 'agile' and 'craftiest' ones are chosen. This is demonstrated by Junior's narrative later in this chapter³. This debunks the idea that gangs are *only* for the weakest, most desperate or most 'at risk' youths in excluded communities. Gangs also cater for male ambition. As these youths have demonstrated there was no single factor or trigger that led to them to joining the gang, but rather a combination of factors.

Chapter 3 talked about 'organic' and territorial gang membership. This has begun to emerge in these narratives. For many of these youths the process by which young men are absorbed into armed structures is a seamless, almost natural, intergenerational socialisation process. This needs to be explained, as being a member of a youth street gang is not the same as the organised structure of overarching paramilitary or militia groups. Firstly all of these youths

³ Junior states that the *carritos* – the children running errands for the paramilitaries – are chosen to rise in the paramilitary ranks only if they prove themselves to be the most 'adept', 'craftiest', the 'baddest', and the most 'cleaver'. Out of five boys 'there'll only be one left over [chosen]' (Junior Carrito, 19/06/2008).

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery were 'socialised' into the gang – ergo, each had childhood friends or family who were linked to gangs, or childhood friends took up arms as a group progressing from 'kids' hanging out on the corner to small time thieves and robbers. Gang researchers such as Hagedorn have argued that the 'vast majority' of gangs are adolescent peer groups that have been "socialized to the streets" (Hagedorn, 2008: 132) For example, Carritas said it was 'easy' to join the gang as his friends were already members, Havana's classmates were in the gang, El Peludo and his friends all joined the paramilitaries at the same time, et cetera. In fact, this is such a prevalent factor that it appears unlikely that youths would join a gang if it was not a project they were socialised into with their friends – the pertinence of this will not be lost in the following chapter where the 'prosocial' youths went through markedly distinct socialisation processes, contributing in large part to them managing to avoid gang membership.

These socialisation processes must be considered with the socio-economic conditions, and linked to the historical and nationwide conflict that has shaped Medellín as outlined in Chapter 3. Rag-tag youth gangs were absorbed into more structured armed groups such as the militias, which were linked to the Marxist guerrillas of the national conflict, but this largely happened to an earlier generation of youths. Those interviewed were drawn into the paramilitary rank and file in line with citywide conflict processes linked to state-led counter-insurgency programs. The 'absorption' of gangs into the paramilitary structure is comparable to the process that occurred under the militias a decade earlier. As Carritas said, 'you have to go with the flow of your precinct. How could we be against the precinct?' – in other words, if where one paramilitary structure takes over, you simply join it. Of course these processes lead to the compounding and continuation of a logic of violence in these neighbourhoods. At the risk of

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery taking the 'organic' metaphor too far, young, excluded and largely disaffected male youths in these neighbourhoods go through a process of 'leaching' whereby they are drawn up from the grass-roots through a transitional process of socialisation into the still relatively disorganised local gang involved in petty crime, right through to the rank and file of paramilitary and organised criminal groups. For example, El Loco went from a youthful gang member into a 'career' in the paramilitaries.

Socio-economic exclusion and inequality, chronic violence, and the presence of significantly organised criminal armed actors are structural factors that lead young men into gangs. However these processes cannot be fully understood without grasping their gendered dynamics. Simply put, young women face similar hardships in contexts of exclusion but do not join gangs as readily as young men. Therein, the agency shown by youths when joining the gang is also a part of a masculinisation process. Many youths perceived gang membership as the 'best' livelihood opportunity available to them given their context, this also signified that it was the best way to accumulate masculine *capital* and hence to masculinise. This is a significant claim which will be considered next.

The armed group as a 'masculinisation opportunity'

The following narratives demonstrate the salience of the gang as a way of 'doing masculinity'. Common themes begin to emerge, some of which also became apparent in earlier quotations in this chapter. All of the youths bar none respected and looked up to the *duros* – literally 'hard men', meaning the gang

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery leaders or paramilitary commanders. From the data it is also clear that joining the gang was a reputational project to obtain status, respect, to be feared and notorious, to gain sexual access to women, and to access the relative riches from gang crime. Whilst some youths cited self-defence or protection from other gangs as a reason to join their local gang, these same youths put more significant emphasis on their reason for joining the gang to gain respect, nice clothes, access to women, et cetera, the local signifiers of masculine *capital*.

Mauricio became accustomed to the relative riches and reputational project of being a gangster. It was important to him to look good, have expensive possessions and he even drank expensive whisky in public to show-off. When he was offered a job as a street cleaner through the demobilisation program he said 'I'm not gonna sweep no streets'. Through a Bourdieuan lens, this would have meant a significant cut in his masculine *capital*.

Mauricio: Us lot... acquired expensive tastes. So we'd go out doing robberies and we'd be thinking about nice clothes, the best motorbike, if we were going to buy a gun it'll be the best gun. The key ingredient was that we liked exclusive gear. Today all of them [younger generation of gang members] are like that. For example look at these shoes [shows me his shoes] they're *La Coste* [expensive make]. They're from that life I've left behind... jeans for \$120,000 [cheap ones cost \$15,000]...

Mauricio was asked why boys from poor neighbourhoods are the ones who tend to join gangs:

Mauricio: I think [it's] a lack of education... men go to work, women to the kitchen. In poor neighbourhoods people know they'll never be rich... so when the child says 'I want to go to University' the parents tell him 'University isn't for us, you're going out and work'. So you can see that there are some very strong mental barriers. But if you add that to poverty and alcoholism, because strong alcohol is part of our culture in Antioquia, then the man has to return home drunk and his wife is not allowed to complain. So the kids get used to hearing what their parents say 'you can't study, but you can drink' because they'd see them drunk... and besides that there are the temptations [to become a criminal] 'Hey, come with me and I'll show you how to get out of poverty'. But at the same time the parents are saying 'Hey, when are you going to grow up and go to work so

you can help out round here, can't you see this state of poverty we're in?'...

Adam: Why do more young men get involved in violence than young women?

Mauricio: We are in a chauvinist country... the man is the one that "predominates" so people are accustomed to the man belonging to the street... This comes through many past generations – that the man's domain is the street and the woman's is the house. But not even in the house, in the kitchen... I'll tell you from my own experience because I lived it [gang membership] is a virus, this is a cancer that destroys families... (Mauricio, 20/06/2008).

Mauricio shows that women are expected to stay at home and men are expected to be on the streets working. Beyond the asymmetrical power dynamics of chauvinism, there is a clear masculine burden of 'breadwinning' and the gang can also be understood as a gendered livelihood resource, a workspace that women are neither expected nor welcome to participate in.

El Peludo made it clear that he liked the paramilitary lifestyle outlining some of its attractive elements, particularly sexual access to women and material goods.

Adam: So d'you reckon that people join up to get girls?

El Peludo: Oooh [exclaims] the birds, the birds! We're never short of pussy, we're never short of that, we're never short of that. We've got loads of birds!

Adam: Yeah, so that's also attractive right? I mean to join up with the paras?

El Peludo: Oooh the petrol [motorbikes], women and petrol, all that... you get to like that stuff. [Women like] men who shoot, the trigger-happy ones.

Adam: Why's that?

El Peludo: For pleasure, to feel the pleasure of being with us and because we're involved in wars. That's why a load of women fancy you... Because you've got power, motorbikes and cars...

Adam: And are they young?

El Peludo: Oooh [exclaims] yeah a lot of girls, little girls... a lot of young girls. The bosses have got a load of young girls. They get them because they've got cars and money an' all that and because they control drugs...

Adam: But that also becomes a motive for young lads to join these [armed] groups?

El Peludo: They see you and they're like 'Wow! I wanna be just like you and I want this that and the other'. But what can I tell you, this life that we lead is pure gonorrhoea [awful], our life is horrible... they've got to understand that we lead a horrible, horrible life, but they don't listen 'coz they're all 'I wanna be just like you'

Adam: ...and when you got involved when you were twelve were you looking at the bosses thinking 'I wanna be like you'?

El Peludo: Ooof [of course] I wanted to be just like them!

Adam: Were they role models for you?

El Peludo: Yeah of course... I'd see them and think I wanna be like those lads, I wanna be just like that... until one day you get involved and that's that, then you can't get out. Once you're in, there's nothin' you can do...

Adam: For you who are the respected men in the community?

El Peludo: [Without hesitation] The commanders...

Adam: What do you have to do to become a boss?

El Peludo: Well it could be that the lads themselves want you to be the boss... but you have to respect the lads and pay them what they need and have them close... and that's how you begin to become one of the hard men until you end up taking over from another boss.

Adam: Do you have to be a tough fighter as well or not?

El Peludo: Of course! [exclaims as if the question is naïve]. You've got to show initiative, real initiative... and earn the respect of others, of course. Look, if the boss is fucking over his own lads what are they gonna do? They're gonna get hold of him themselves and they're gonna fuck him up [kill him] (El Peludo, 03/06/2008)

Despite the 'gonorrhoea [awful] life' in the gang, new generations of boys still want to join the gang. They look up to the values that the *duro* demonstrates; being a tough fighter, showing respect to his foot-soldiers and having the financial clout to pay for the lifestyle of the other gang members. This also demonstrates the organised, structural or 'institutional' (Hagedorn, 2008) nature of the gang. The *doxa*, the rules of the game have become second nature in the *sub-field* of the gang.

El Loco, El Peludo's older brother, was asked how someone can become respected or a paramilitary leader:

Adam: Do they have to be a good fighter?

El Loco: Yeah, yeah. You've got to have balls [we both laugh] because when you do the rounds it's serious stuff... For us lot it was really tough up in *Santa Cecilia* because we had to skin [kill] twenty-five roughnecks.

Adam: Fuck me

El Loco: We drowned the last one in the reservoir... We dragged a couple up here from down town that had been stealing, mugging a load of people and that sort of shit. You can't get away with that...

Adam: Yeah of course... what does it mean to be a good man for you?

El Loco: A good man? [sounding confused]. That's a tough question! [laughs]

Adam: [I laugh]. Yeah, for me it's tough.

El Loco: Ahhhhh yeah, like I reckon my old man is a good man... hard working, he's respectable, he works like all men should. He's got his faults but I still admire him because he is responsible... I'm thirty-two and he's still by my mum's side even though they argue a lot.

Adam: And for example in this community who are the respected men?

El Loco: The bosses [paramilitary commanders] that are in *San Pablo* [neighbourhood] and down the way, by the park... (El Loco, 03/06/2008)

Like his brother El Peludo, El Loco talks about being tough and 'having balls' to be a member of the gang. The capacity to deploy deadly violence is a key element of gang performance and function. From this narrative however, it is interesting to note his take on masculinity which connects 'traditional' with 'gang' masculinities. He looks up to his father for his traditional performance - a hard working breadwinner who is respectable and responsible, but in the community he respects the commanders who are the 'bosses' of a neighbourhood who will be feared / respected and earn significant money (breadwinners), an exaggerated or hyper- version of traditional masculinities.

Even at the age of thirteen Junior Carrito was acutely aware of gang activities. He grasps the gendered effects of conflict keenly, where 'successful' boys become the gang leaders and that younger girls are likely to chase men with

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellin's periphery money and 'power'. He also notes that *loquitas* or 'chickens' do not get anywhere, and having a gun makes you feel more 'like a man'.

Adam: How does a kid, do you think, end up in the war?

Junior: ...If the gang seems good to him... when he picks up a gun he feels more like a man. That's why they get really involved in that.

Adam: You also mentioned that the money is attractive, what else?

Junior: ...Well they put them on motorbikes to they can drive around.

Adam: Why is it good to have a motorbike?

Junior: First it's better to be bad [a hard man]... because of the guns, the motorbike, because lots like to go round on motorbikes...

Adam: And the kids that have been working since they were very young, how can they become one of the *duros*?

Junior: The most adept, those with the most capacities. There'll be like five and out of those five there'll only be one left over [he sounds animated. The 'best' one left becomes the boss]... The one who's the craftiest out of all of them... the most adept... and who's the most 'bad'.

Miguel: [Laughs] Most bad! What is being 'bad'?

Junior: Who kills the most...

Adam: The most trigger-happy...?

Junior: Yeah... whoever is the most bad is the most agile, the craftiest.

Adam: So you have to be really cleaver, really crafty and really bad to earn respect...

Junior: To earn respect [agrees]... you don't need *loquitas*

Miguel: You know what *loquitas* is? [to Adam] The one which gets frightened, the one who doesn't dare to do anything but who also wants his share of the spoils (Junior Carrito, 19/06/2008).

Junior's narrative clearly expresses the 'values' within the gang - being the 'most bad', cleaver and crafty to earn respect. *Loquitas* expresses the antithesis of masculine performance by getting 'frightened'.

Gang members often have multiple girlfriends and numerous children which are a masculine status symbol, or significant masculine *capital*. Armando is not even sure how many children he has. Like Junior he talks about the 'bad' men

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery getting a reputation. Social worker Miguel Tamayo and community leader Doña Rosalba were at the interview.

Adam: Do you have family? How many children have you got?

Armando: I've got a number of kids. I've got two with the same surname and then maybe three or four... there are a lot of things and women....

Miguel: You don't know how many kids you've got?

Armando: No... That's what the war's done. Blokes who have been in the war have 14, 8, 9 children around...

If a lad wants to grow up being the bad guy and that everyone knows him as the bad guy like... *Henai* a bloke here from the *Candelaria*. He was a really bad, bad, bad, bad man... That bloke was a demon... nothing good was left. I don't agree with that type of person... They turn up and it's like 'because I don't like you, tan tan tan tan tan' [onomatopoeia for gun fire]

Miguel: And that man Mario is doing a stretch for 120 years. Another was Morenacara another was Terry, what murderous sons of bitches...

Armando: Finally they took [*Henai*] up the mountain and chopped him into little pieces...

Miguel: Of course... (Armando, 18/06/2008)

Jarrón said that he liked it when people looked at him with 'respect' because they knew he was with the 'bad man' of the neighbourhood and how his gang – *Los del Hoyo* - became 'famous'. He also indicates that violence 'will never end' because of cycles of revenge.

Jarrón: Well, the hardest gang member is the one who gets the best bird, has the best motorbike... and you just get carried away with it all. I like to get up late and feel that people are looking at me with respect because they know you are hanging out with the bad man in the neighbourhood...

Yeah, round here I suppose we're famous... our lads were more crazy... [we would] leave five or six dead behind and the whole world would run away. That's why *Los del Hoyo* got famous... Ufffff! If you rocked up there it was kicking off big time!...

Adam: And out of all of your mates how many do you reckon have died?

Jarrón: There were forty of us but if there's eight left that's being optimistic... You know, round here the next war is gonna be between the old guard and the new generation... and there are still people who feel the traces of the old wars, who live in the fear that it's all gonna kick off again because of revenge...

Adam: There are a lot of people who say that 'the past does not forgive'...

Jonny: Yeah, there's always gonna be that friction because this will never end, there is still a lot of hatred (Jarrón, 19/06/2008).

Notes says that becoming a gangster was like putting on 'big trousers', a masculinising process. He says that when you start in the gang you have to kill someone if not you're a chicken and the women won't look at you. This rite of passage is commonly known as *probar figura*, 'proving you are capable' of killing.

Notes: Below Santa Cruz a kid from some gang killed someone for the first time, then four or five blokes from his gang were killed in revenge (sic). Yeah bro, you know what happens? The same thing that happens to all of us youngsters; picking up a gun for the first time means putting on the big trousers, so he's gonna want announce this to the whole world by killing someone.

Adam: Explain more about getting the 'big trousers'... what when a kid picks up a gun at 16 years old he thinks he's now a man?

Notes: That's it, that story is as old as the hills... The older bloke is telling you so you go and do it... if not you're a bottler and a pussy...

Adam: So whoever picks up the gun is the man and whoever doesn't is the bottler, a pussy?

Notes: That's it, that's it. So they say 'are you a coward' and he say's 'no, I'm no coward, if he can do it so can I'. So doing this they get the boys to do what the older man says...

If you're a chicken the women won't take a second look at you, no one will take a second look at you. So what do you have to do?

Adam: And you don't get a motorbike nor nothing...

Notes: Yeah... the expensive car... and the pussy on the back [of the motorbike]... Like I say, they call a group of youngsters and they say we're gonna give you guns... and a third of this group of youths want to join up because they choose to. There are others that say no. But if they say to the others that they're a bunch of chickens, scaredy cats, then they say 'well if you lot can do it so can we' [so more join]. That's what happens (Notes, 16/07/2008).

Notes is clear that becoming a man and putting on the big trousers is related to being brave and demonstrating a capacity to use violence and that this then confers the 'spoils of war', the masculine *capitals*; sexual access to women, 'respect' and status and material status symbols such as motorbikes.

Aristizabal says that he liked the 'easy money' of the gangster life and talks about admiring and respecting the gangsters with power and access to women, role models he sought to emulate. Carritas makes similar points.

Adam: So you joined to protect yourself from the other gang or what?

Aristizabal: Yeah, well for a lot of reasons. I was looking for easy money, for luxuries, women, there are a lot of things that influence you... for example you know that women today are only interested in material things, to be with a hard man [gangster] to feel like they're with someone with power. They go for the young girls who are looking for cars, houses, to go to parties...

I've always looked at [the bosses] with respect and admiration in certain ways, but they also have some bad points.

Adam: Where does that respect towards the hard men come from?

Aristizabal: The way I entered the gang was my decision. I respect them because Medellín has always had its history and respect for certain people.

Adam: But it's strange that people respect these figures but they also fear them. Do you think that's true?

Aristizabal: You create that fear yourself when you do things right. I believe that each one of us makes our own destiny (Aristizabal, 15/07/2008)

Carritas:

Carritas: I wanted to be like the others, they were doing well [economically] at that time, working. They had their guns and no one messed with them. And I also wanted to get the respect of the whole world [just like them]...

Since we were kids I've hung out with my friends and... we've grown up with these blokes. What they like is to get theirs and not work for anyone... So us lot also wanted that. We were always at their sides, helping them with whatever they wanted...

I could have left whenever I liked but I didn't leave because that was my opportunity, where I got money and I was with my friends, those that I trusted... They recommended me it wasn't so bad...

[Our commander] always got us a motorbike, others a car... Yeah, we weren't short of women and you know in Antioquia they're the sweetest around!

Adam: But the women why are they like that?...

Carritas: It's coz the women are also participants in all this [war] they're the ones that provoke everything. If you're in love with a sweet girl and you're not in a gang and you don't have a motorbike, you don't have nothing. She's not even gonna look at you... On the other hand, if you pass by in a nice car with the boss the women are looking, you know. So the women also play their part.

Adam: ...How does someone get to be the commander? Is he the toughest, most trigger-happy?

Carritas: No, no. It's not like that. Not the one who's the most bad. No. It's the money. It's the money. The money and managing people well. I know a boss that began as a boss when he didn't have money but he managed to get money and through being a boss he accumulated power.

Adam: Like Don Berna [overall paramilitary commander in Medellín in 2008] had lots of money through drug dealing so he could buy his way into power...

Carritas: Of course! He's the boss... It's him that ran everything, so the high command had to pay attention to what he said because he was the one who controlled the money... So like I'm telling you, the boss is the one with the money. If you've got a boss who can't buy you a drink, who can't hand you a bit of money, phssssh [whistles out air], what sort of boss is that! ...That's no kind of boss (Carritas, 16/07/2008).

Andrés looked up to the gang bosses who came to his house when he was growing up because his father was a gang member. Andrés was also asked whom he admired:

Andrés: ...Those that gave the orders the bosses in that period which were the tough guys, the hard men...

Adam: So when you were young what did you respect about the hard men?

Andrés: How they were... because people were frightened of them. You would see one and think 'oooooh this man has power'. So you would already be thinking 'I've got to run around after him, stay by his side...' You get on board.

Adam: And to have some power and all that?

Andrés: Yeah, of course.

Adam: And the other things like money and the motorbike?

Andrés: Of course, yeah you start to see them progressing, as it were... you see them with a car... so then you also want to do what they are doing. So that was when I began to commit crime, to sell drugs... You also want to get your [material] things... (Andrés, 20/07/2008).

José talked about how younger youths 'respected' him as he was an older gang member and that they wanted nice clothes and motorbikes to have the 'status' of a gangster.

José: After military service I became a bandit.... because I had been trained with guns I was handy with those things and I was a good shot. So I got a reputation... The younger kids would see me doing things well, not going to jail. So the kids would say 'Ohhh this guy [is cool]'. I was like a bad example...

Adam: Tell me how this works between generations? How does it work with the youths? What were the main influences from them to you?

José: The influences? Good clothes, the motorbike, the gun, the "respect" in inverted commas...

Adam: Like "respect-fear"?

José: That's it, that's it! ...kids wanted to get involved because there wasn't any other option... Andrés [also interviewed] was really stubborn 'I want to stay, I want to be like them' asking for drugs... and he stayed until he learned [to be a gangster]... At that time I had an incredible .57 Magnum, so you can imagine a child seeing these guns 'ooohhh!'...

Mauricio: These kids were uncontrollable, neither their parents nor us could control them... All of the kids wanted to become gangsters... A lot of people said don't join up, don't become a criminal, but these kids were so fierce it was impossible... they would look up to the *lieutenants*, the mafiosos, their Toyotas or Mercedes and then the exclusive [nightclubs]...

Adam: And José, why are there more men than women then [in gangs]?

José: Because of the chauvinist culture men won't let them in... You measure [who is more 'capable'] by the way they kill, the stabbings they've done, the cold bloodedness with which they do stuff.... So people think 'oiiii look at this man you've got to respect him because he kills by stabbing'

Adam: So the type of violence is linked to respect?

José: That's it. This is shown inside [the gang]... there is a 'hierarchy of badness'. The 'worse' you are the more recognition you get... if you're very bloodthirsty in the way you shoot people, [they say] 'oiiii that man is doing the rounds! He's good, get his details down for later. Hey that kid's is a good shot! Get his contact details'.

Adam: So they acquire fame?

José: That's it.

Adam: And fame is respect?

José: Respect [agrees]. The more rounds you do the more money you get and then the more recognition you get within the group, inside your social sphere, in society.

Adam: How do you become the head of a gang then?

José: Through dexterity and cunning, and as I was saying by using bloodthirsty behaviour. Also in your power of conviction, leadership, being a strategist... being the old guard... all that to become the head of the gang (José, 20/07/2008)

José's narrative is particularly illustrative outlining the hyper-masculine behaviour in gangs, *capitals* and how they are accumulated. He talks about acquiring the 'status of a gangster' once youths join gangs, the 'hierarchy of badness' within the gang where the *doxa* is clear, the 'badder' you are the more 'respect' to accumulate; respect being one form of masculine *capital*. Such capitals – money, fame, respect, access to women - proved too enticing for youths; they talk clearly about how it was impossible to dissuade ambitious youths from joining the gang, whilst at the same time the gang was a form of men's work, a chauvinist space that would not allow women in.

Havana says he joined *La Terraza* because he 'needed nice things' and that being in an infamous gang made him 'feel good', inflating his ego:

Havana: Like I said we live in a city of a lot of partying so you need nice things, nice earrings, a motorbike... So at that time I was recognised as 'the lad from *La Terraza*' and the trainers I had. In that period you could get trainers for \$15,000 pesos, I wore ones that cost \$300,000 and above. So I robbed to buy my trainers, my clothes, for a good woman.

Adam: For your self-esteem?

Havana: Those things made me feel good... In that period *La Terraza* was famous and that inflates your ego. In the end there's nothing like *La Terraza*... and then we got girls, motorbikes... with the pussy on the back as the saying goes.

Adam: Who did you admire?

Havana: I admired a brother of my girlfriend a lot... Manfre, rest in peace. He was so hard!... One Tuesday morning in '88, '89 or '90... a lad passed by ...this arsehole passes by and says [something bad]... we started throwing stones at him because we didn't have guns. One of them made him crash his bike... So Manfre went over and jumped on his chest and he passed out. There were road workers there with picks and spades and all sorts. And Manfre did the unexpected in the middle of the day in front of everyone... He grabbed a drill and he put it through the heart of the kid and then here [indicates between the eyes] then through his head. Destroyed...

That was one of my worst experiences. I thought what have I got myself into? (Havana, 12/06/2008)

The narratives clearly show that in terms of a 'masculinisation opportunity' the gang was undoubtedly the standout choice in the community. Again, without wishing to overstate the point, *masculinising* is not the only reason youths join gangs, but it is always *part of the reason*. Even those who claimed they 'had no choice but to join the gang' took advantage of gang membership to accumulate *capitals* valued in the local masculine *field*. The gang was a dominant force in the *field*, displaying overt, exaggerated or hyper-masculine performance, exaggerating elements of traditional masculinity such as breadwinning, social status and 'dominating power' and access to women.

Everyone in their communities was acutely aware of armed groups and new exactly who were the *duros*. Such figures were particularly salient to young boys exemplified by Junior, who at the age of thirteen knew intricate details of gang activities and the names of all the *duros*. The 'exaggeratedness' of the gang and the impact of its violence therefore acts as a beacon of masculinity which was claimed in Chapter 2. In particular the violent comportment of gang members can be understood as an exaggerated element of their masculinisation process tied both to the criminal functionality and subculture of the gang.

Furthermore youths did not principally join the gang because they wanted to use violence per se, but recognised that violence 'came with the territory' if they wanted in on gang life and the *capital* accumulation, both symbolic, social and economic, that came with it. Some youths also highlight how they quickly

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery became used to what Mauricio described as the 'honey trap' commonly referred to as 'easy money' - the 'luxuries of the poor', the lifestyle, sexual access to women and social status that accompanied gang membership.

The lack of licit opportunities in contexts of socio-economic exclusion, inequality and poverty also need to be understood through a gendered lens; that is they are emasculating where traditional masculinities call upon men to be 'breadwinners', have social status and maintain dominant positions of power at home and in the community. Hence, the lack of 'options' that youths spoke of above also need to be understood as a reduction of their 'masculinisation opportunities'. The narratives highlight these issues around social status, respect, masculinity and accumulating *capitals* in the gang, and what it meant to these young men. Here it should be restated that Bourdieu's concept of *capital* is a 'thinking tool' not a theory. In other words it is used here inductively to draw out meaning from the texts to demonstrate what masculine *capitals* mean for these young men and how the gang was understood as a 'masculinisation opportunity'.

Conclusions

The young men interviewed recounted numerous stories of the innocent being shot by bullets that passed through the walls of their homes. Junior would run and hide under his bed from shoot-outs outside his front door when he was five years old. A member of *Con-Vivamos* pointed out several bullet dents in her

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery metal doorframe (Durfay, Field Diary 14/05/08). Doña Rosalba, an elderly community leader recalled that in the 1990s it was common to wake on a Sunday after 'the weekend's violence' to see half a dozen bodies thrown into the gully a few yards from her front door (Rosalba, Field Diary, 08/06/07). One interviewee had his hands blown off by a grenade, a severely damaged jaw and was missing an eye. One was in a wheelchair. Another was shot between the eyes but somehow lived, albeit with the lead of the bullet lodged behind a lazy right eye. Others showed battle scars from bullets, grenades and shrapnel. Of those that had reached their late twenties, few of their childhood friends remained alive. José, the only older man interviewed, described himself as a 'veteran' at forty. He looked seventy.

All of these youths are striving to achieve *something* by joining the gang. In some cases it is more apparent than others but the gang acted an instrument for 'masculinisation' – it provided them with the *capitals* which were locally valued signifiers of masculine 'success', such as money, 'respect', designer clothes and sexual access to women. However these youths did not join a gang simply because they were exposed to it, they joined because they were actively in search of a pathway to manhood. This compulsion, or better said 'disposition' worked at a less than conscious level and can be understood as the masculine *habitus*. None of the youths stated explicitly 'I joined the gang as a way to become a man' but this was implicit in the sub-text.

As there were limited positive masculinisation opportunities that the youths perceived as dignified or acceptable, their disposition to masculinise or pursuit of manhood led them to search for other options. As gangs in their neighbourhoods were abundant and performing 'exaggerated' masculinities that

Chapter 6. Life Histories: The pursuit of manhood and becoming violent in Medellín's periphery grasped their attention, there was a 'masculine logic' to the way they sought to 'instrumentalise' the gang as a pathway to manhood. However, not all youths joined the gang because they faced reduced opportunities, some showed significant agency, or ambition, to secure membership to the gang because they saw it as the 'best' way in their community to 'do masculinity', even if they may have been presented with other masculinising options. This gang is an attractive tool for masculinisation and hence efficient at reproducing itself because of its dominant position in their neighbourhoods in terms of masculine capital – status, 'respect', material wealth, etc. This dominance in the masculine *field* means that gangs can assert an ontological grip on boys and men in terms of what it means to be a 'successful' man in the community. It is a powerful localised expression of hegemonic masculinity.

Amongst the youths interviewed opting to join the gang was compounded by family problems in a number of cases. This occurred where there was an absence of positive male role models at home or during their childhood in general. Such youths would be more susceptible to look up to male role models 'on the street' where the gang drew their attention. In the most challenging scenarios, their fathers or brothers were gang members thus acting as role models whom they sought to emulate, whilst simultaneously providing them with exposure to gang life and the opportunity of joining that gang.

The next chapter considers the narratives from youths who chose 'prosocial' pathways to manhood and examines what differentiated them from the 'violent' youths interviewed.

Chapter 7

Life Histories: Becoming Prosocial in Medellín's Periphery

Introduction

Can the concept of *habitus* and masculinisation opportunities explain why youths who come from similar socio-economic backgrounds and contexts of chronic social violence choose markedly different pathways in life? To what extent have they opted for a different masculinisation process or taken different opportunities? Or in fact, to what extent are both sets of youths seeking the same thing – a dignified way to come of age, become men and secure a feeling of belonging, identity and esteem under the circumstances of poverty, social exclusion and violence? Did these youths encounter positive masculinisation opportunities, how did these arise, and why did they pursue them?

This chapter sets out to answer these questions by contrasting the youths with violent histories in the previous chapter with the 'prosocial' youths in this chapter. As outlined earlier in the thesis, the word 'prosocial' is used to describe the youths who were active participants in *Corporación Vida para Todos* (Corporation Life for All), from now on *CoVida*¹, an organisation that works with community and youth development projects, runs a library and playgroup, as well as a small audio-visual business supplying PA services at local events.

¹ *CoVida* is a community organisation in the poor north-west of Medellín, working in development, community cohesion and political participation, particularly through the municipally funded '*Participatory Budget*'. *CoVida* is run almost entirely by youths with an average age of 23. More detail on *CoVida* can be found in the earlier methodology chapter.

Fifteen youths were interviewed from *CoVida* based in the poor neighbourhood called Picacho, high up the mountainside in north-western Medellín. Picacho is the last neighbourhood before the slopes become too steep for any dwelling to be built. The peripheral location of *CoVida*, a long winding ride on the 247 bus from the city centre, is itself an indication of the exclusion of the neighbourhood. At the time of the interviews from April to August 2008, the members of *CoVida* were predominantly made up of youths between 19 and 26 years old - their average age was 23.4 years old. The former Directors of *CoVida*, Pelicorto and Biel were both thirty-one and the only interviewees over 26. There were thirteen young men and two young women interviewed; this encompassed all of the young men working at the organisation and a quarter of the young women.

The interviews sought to cover the youths' 'life histories' insofar as that was possible, and ranged from forty minutes to over two hours per interview. As in the previous chapter, 'thick' blocks of narratives are presented as opposed to fragmenting them significantly in an attempt to leave their stories undisturbed. Sub-headings have been used to group individuals' narratives for analytical purposes.

The first part of the chapter considers their reflections on life at home and growing up, and then how they came to join *CoVida*. The second part of the chapter considers how working at *CoVida* led to the formation and consolidation of 'prosocial' values and how they navigated positive pathways to manhood, rejecting armed groups despite the caveats they faced. The third part of the chapter explores their opinions on violence and masculinity.

Growing up & joining CoVida

Both violent and 'prosocial' youths interviewed lived in what are classified in Colombia as socio-economic strata one or two, the poorest two strata on a scale up to six. Whilst it can be said that the socio-economic living conditions of 'prosocial' and 'violent' youth were similar, each individual household varies and some of the youths interviewed referred to others who had 'more problems at home' (Sammy, 03/06/2008 ; Quien, 20/06/2008 ; Hernando, 21/06/2008 ; Roger, 24/04/2008). This will be expanded upon later.

Very few of the 'violent' youths interviewed spoke negatively about their mothers. Similarly none of the 'prosocial' youths spoke negatively of their mothers. However, the relationships 'prosocial' youths had with older members of their families as a whole, and notably with their fathers, were more positive. Whilst there were problems at home they were not overwhelmingly negative as they often were in the cases of 'violent' youth, where only two from seventeen spoke positively about their fathers. From the fifteen 'prosocial' histories there was only experience of significant domestic violence in one case. In three cases the father was absent due to death or parental separation, and in three more cases the fathers had problems with alcoholism, but none with drugs.

These cases are not straightforward; absent, alcoholic or violent fathers were not necessarily viewed badly by these youths. In the three problematic cases, fathers were not simply 'absent' or 'bad', but demonstrated both positive and negative facets of influence over their children. In the cases of Chiner, Pelicorto and Sammy (Chiner and Felipe, 10/07/2008 ; Pelicorto, 10/06/2008 ; Sammy,

03/06/2008), even though their fathers had significant problems with alcohol they were strong advocates of their sons' education. Pelicorto's father was very violent domestically, especially when he came home drunk on payday, but also tried hard to keep Pelicorto away from the dangers of violence on the streets and was persistent in making sure all of his homework was done. Sammy's father had alcohol problems and separated from his mother when he was seven. Nevertheless his father still drove his three children to and from school every day in an attempt to keep them safe from local gang violence. Chiner stated that despite his father's alcohol problems he supported his childrens' education strongly and was affectionate at home. One youth, Pepe (Pepe, 11/04/2008) stated that he had particularly bad relationships with both parents. They did not see eye-to-eye and argued frequently. Although they were not physically violent to him, his older brother would beat him up frequently when he was growing up. However, Pepe is homosexual and it is likely that a number of his domestic problems were linked to friction with family members over his sexuality in a community where homophobia is the norm.

Whilst all of the youths interviewed suffered from the stresses and strains of growing up in poor and socially excluded households, only Pepe and Pelicorto appeared to view their family upbringing in a predominantly negative light. Notably, this dim view of their domestic relationships occurred when their parents were still together, and not as much when the father was absent. Pelicorto's father left the household and Pepe's father died. This does not come through particularly strongly in their narratives but was identified through informal conversations and visceral interpretations built up by working with, and becoming friends of both Pepe and Pelicorto.

Although it should be borne in mind that parent/sibling relationships are complex, a general overview can be made to help profile the domestic upbringing of the fifteen youths interviewed. Only two youths (13%) Pepe and Pelicorto viewed their upbringings as particularly negative. Two youths (13%) Chiner and Sammy gave a mixed overview of their upbringing, whilst eleven (73%) gave a largely positive overview of their domestic upbringing. Of these, their fathers were present as part of the family unit, bar Roger's father who died when he was seven, but even then he enjoyed the strong support of his grandparents whom he lived with. This is in stark contrast to the violent youths interviewed where only two from seventeen (12%) saw their overall domestic upbringing in a positive light.

Pelicorto's case is particular (Pelicorto, 10/06/2008). He almost carried out a tit-for-tat murder with a group of his friends as a teenager but, by what seemed like a twist of fate, became involved with *CoVida* because he was attracted to a young librarian working there. Out of the 'prosocial' youths, Pelicorto was the one who came closest to involvement with serious armed violence but later became an acclaimed director of the organisation and president of the local citizens' council, the *Junta de Acción Comunal* (JAC). None of the 'prosocial' youths interviewed were 'reformed' violent actors; they had not joined and then left an armed group, they had managed to avoid them altogether. It was not uncommon for their childhood friends to join armed groups, although by that stage their paths had normally already diverged.

Pelicorto: I was at primary school. That was important to my dad... my Dad was a bit strict with education... [he insisted] that we finished primary

school. He paid attention to the marks we got... so in primary school we all did really well... to learn how to read and all those things.

My mum was concerned with us finishing our homework and didn't want us going out onto the street... She gave us housework to do... she even reared chickens to help out economically. So the general idea was all about keeping things at home... When my parents went out they would leave us locked in the house so we wouldn't have contact with other people our age in the street...

My Dad's logic was to send us to school and then keep us up at home... even locking us in... my parents were more worried about school... they tried to put me into a good school...

Adam: So your parents were really focused on you studying at a young age...

Pelicorto: Yes.... My mum did everything possible... For the first couple of years things went well but by the third year I wasn't so interested in studying, I wanted to hang out with my friends more, go to the local bar, hang out in the street...

At 13 or 14 years old... I ended up making friends with some lads linked to an armed group, they were small time thieves, aspiring gangsters... We went out on some spectacular piss-ups!

One of Pelicorto's friends was killed by a gang and he was asked why he did not take revenge for his friend's death:

Pelicorto: I've never had the mettle for that stuff... I mean... I've never been capable of responding violently to anyone...

Adam: But why do you think you were like that?...

Pelicorto: I think it's because of what I've seen in life... my links to my family and close friends ...You experience things that are very difficult but they are not as [his emphasis] difficult as some other lads' experiences... also my attitude was to be subordinate to my family. I was never trying to *get the upper hand* on anyone...

I'm not saying that poverty is the only problem. Obviously it's one problem, but poverty generates a cultural environment that brings you up with lots of rage and frustration... a problem between lads is resolved with blows... I think in my life I've only fought three times... I've never been one for fighting even though I have had a tough upbringing... I think the toughest thing was losing my friend in a hail of bullets. That's the toughest thing that's ever happened to me. I also remember the days when they killed someone on the corner next to my house. I'd come back earlier that night, but my Dad didn't realise. He got up and went to the corner and saw the dead body and thought it was me. When he realised that I was at home he said 'you've got no idea of the fright I've just had thinking that the dead body on the corner was you'. Those were the things that, that...

Adam: They left a mark on you, no?

Pelicorto: Yeah. They've influenced me in life in terms of lots of things... But I've been really influenced by the opportunity that this space [CoVida] has given me.

After his friend was assassinated he turned away from violence which is very different from 'violent' youth where the assassination of a friend often promoted taking up arms for protection or revenge. To 'get the upper hand' – *montarse* in Spanish - could also be translated as 'putting one over' or 'controlling' someone. The youths often referred to armed actors using violence because of their desire to 'control' people and become dominant in the neighbourhood. Dominating others in the neighbourhood can be understood as an element of localised hegemonic masculine performance by armed actors, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Pelicorto later carried out work experience at *CoVida*, principally because of its proximity to his house and because he was attracted to the female librarian there, not because of any pre-established desire to carry out community or social work. The organisation proved to be a haven from the violence on the streets but also became a livelihood opportunity for him and a generator of positive opportunities.

In many ways, Sammy's childhood parallels the violent youths from the last chapter. His brothers were involved with gangs, he was surrounded by violence on the streets and at school, his father had alcohol problems and left his mother (Sammy, 03/06/2008). Nevertheless, the crucial difference was that, despite this, there was still support for him from the family and his father. His brothers later reformed and became positive role models.

Sammy: My oldest brother smoked marijuana and began to do bad stuff... to

get involved with gangs... rob taxis. They caught him and they were going to put him in jail but my mum pleaded with the police and they let him go... [The militias] came to my house a few times looking for my brother to kill him...

So I grew up in an atmosphere of bandits, thieves, deaths, shootouts, drugs... in the early 1990s... We heard bullets, wars... [we thought] why not join them one day? That's how you think when you're a kid... because when you're a kid you don't play with toy cars so much you play shooting games. When you play a gunslinger you would say 'hey, I'm gonna be this-or-that gangster'...

Adam: So you grow up and [gang members] are the heroes?

Sammy: Exactly. As if you were the hero... Or gangster 'Faber'. 'Ohhh, I'm gonna be Faber, I'm gonna be Faber! [the kids would shout]'... We used to play cops and robbers and no one wanted to be the police. So you can analyse all of that... So there is that logic around 'badness'...

Adam: ...So what's the difference between you and your eldest brother because he joined a gang and you didn't?

Sammy: Yeah, I think there is a difference... I didn't take part in that stuff [gangs, crime and violence] because I didn't feel that I identified with them.

Adam: And why not?

Sammy: Because I saw that my mum was exasperated, stressed. Put it this way, I had a different option to them, they offered me a youth group, but not to them. That's it! I found a youth group and they didn't...

That's what I want to explain to you. After seeing the damage that guns do, that the conflict did... and no, 'I don't want to be bad, I don't want to be one of those guys, I want to be someone else'. And I got the possibility to do that...

Adam: Do you think there was someone in particular who said to you 'listen up, don't get involved in the conflict because it's bad', do you think it was your own decision...

Sammy: Look, I reckon there was an influence from my parents and even my own brothers. Even the oldest one who was a role model for me... [he said] 'don't get involved, go home'...

Adam: Your brothers told you that?

Sammy: Yeah, 'go inside, don't stay out all night'. The whole time they were taking care of me so I wouldn't get involved in [gang] dynamics. So I think that also influenced me...

Adam: And your mum too [telling him to stay out of trouble]?

Sammy: Obviously yeah, my mum... my mum and dad are separated, but my mum was always there every day... My dad was the one who had the most influence over us so that we wouldn't get involved in that stuff... Because my dad had a taxi, so he'd pick you up to take you to school. During the break at school he'd come and visit. And at the end of the day,

being so concerned, he'd come and pick us up and take us home. The whole time...

Adam: Taken care of...

Sammy: Exactly. My dad was never foul-mouthed; he never hit us, nothing... So in terms of family violence, uh-uh [no], there was none of that. I think the one that was the strictest was my mum...

Despite the challenges that Sammy faced, he cites various factors that enabled him to avoid engaging in violence. His mother, father and brothers combined to influence his decision to stay away from violence. This was important because, as a child playing 'gunslingers' in the street, he would look up to gang members. This shows the impact of the gang member imaginary on Sammy as a young boy and the importance of 'counter' male role models represented by his family. Such role models were largely absent in the childhood of violent youths.

Furthermore, Sammy states clearly that a key factor to avoiding the gang was his opportunity to join a youth group. This opportunity differentiated him from his brothers, who after all would have received similar parenting. This youth group later put Sammy in touch with *CoVida*.

Sammy: [My brothers] were into rock when most kids liked salsa... I picked that up... and there were *only two* [his emphasis] friends in this neighbourhood that liked rock... so we were the odd ones out in the neighbourhood... one of those friends belonged to a youth group... I began to get involved and ended up staying..."

Sammy was alternative in terms of his music taste, 'hanging out' in a small group of friends who liked rock. He did not hang out on street corners with the majority of the other youths in his neighbourhood. Having 'alternative' interests – based on music taste, church groups, youth clubs, etc - occurred frequently amongst prosocial youths which tended to stop them 'hanging out' on the streets with 'normal kids', where they were more exposed to gangs and often joined them. This will become apparent as their narratives progress.

Chiner and Felipe, both twenty-six, were old friends who were interviewed together at their behest (Chiner and Felipe, 10/07/2008). Chiner and Felipe began by talking about the influence of their parents:

Felipe: More than being my Dad, he has been my friend. He spoke to me, 'do this, but don't do that'... When you are well behaved at home on the streets you try and do the same, right? Or to put it another way, a kid that's good at home, is good in society.

Chiner: And this depends a lot on your relationship with your parents...

Adam: Which men did you respect when you were younger?

Chiner: For me it was my Dad, even though he drank a lot, he was very serious at home, he was responsible and affectionate. He tried to give us the best education, so for me that was the example to follow. We saw *lots* [his emphasis] of things in the neighbourhood...

Felipe: But [the father] is the basic reference point. But when you hit the streets you see these guys [in armed groups]

Adam: Another type of reference point?

Felipe: Exactly... *So when I arrived in society, a society so rotten with violence and power struggles, I didn't want to be mixed up in all that. I didn't want to get involved. Why? Because I saw them with their concept of domination... But when we were kids we used to play gun fighting and someone would always be so-and-so from this gang, and someone from the other... [my italics]*

Chiner: ...*but when I got to the age that I could join a gang I was conscious of things. Because apart from having a reference point at home we also had reference points through our friends... and despite the fact that we were only young, we had a clear understanding... I think because of the education that we received. That's important because we studied hard. On the other hand a lot of friends we had from when we were young only studied until the 6th year of secondary school... [my italics]*

Felipe: ...My Dad has always been very strict with my studies... The only thing that my Dad said to me was this 'Felipe, if you drop a year I'll send you to work at the church'. But I was passionate about school life... I didn't want to be hanging out on the corner on the streets, what a bore... And more than just studying I wanted to have fun because my friends were [at school]...

Adam: What did you think about the armed group leaders when you were between say 12 and 16 years old?... Were you critical of them then, or did you not have that capacity yet?

Felipe: No, no, not then [were not critical of them].

Chiner: To a certain extent I think then there was some admiration for them. The gang that was formed at that time had people in it that we had known for a while and they'd been to our house and stuff... So we knew

each other... and there were always opportunities to join them. But to a certain extent I admired them because they were known in the neighbourhood, they would throw parties for the lads, so you'd think 'Ohhh, those lads are cool'...

'Good values' at home and education made them critical of gangs when they 'arrived in society' and 'got to the age where they could join a gang'. This was the moment in their lives where they 'could join a gang' or not, a significant fork in the pathway of their development. In their cases, they took one route, making the decision not to join the gang. Their narratives suggest that male youths in chronically violent neighbourhoods will inevitably have an 'option' to join the gang. However their values - the emergence of a moral self - and education helped them avoid joining. Notably, like Sammy, they comment that when they were younger they admired gang members. This suggests again that boys will tend to look up to gang members until they develop critical faculties during their adolescence, although of course not all boys develop such faculties. According to these narratives and visceral interpretations in the field, the majority of boys and youths admire gang members, however only a minority actually join up. In adolescence most youths take the decision not to join the gang. The 'prosocial' youths narratives help us understand how this occurs.

Chiner and Felipe were then asked how they became involved with *CoVida*:

Chiner: I reckon it was mainly because of our group of friends but also because of the family. In our neighbourhood we went through a really tough period. The violence was really something... the gangsters... the shootouts... you went running for your house. I was invited to the [youth] group and things seemed interesting. I think probably my family acted as support... For me I joined because of the games [at *CoVida*]. Then later we worked in communication and publicity...

Felipe: When I started at *CoVida*, my sister had previously been in a youth group ...at church and those little groups were taken in by *CoVida*... so I got involved that way.

Although Chiner's family played an important role in keeping him out of violence, he joined the *CoVida* 'mainly' because of his peers' influence. 'Prosocial' youths' domestic influences appear to play a central role in keeping them out of gangs, whilst peer groups were central to joining *CoVida* which then became an important socialisation space for them.

Galan stated (Galan, 19/06/2008):

Galan: I was a really rebellious kid, only listening to rock which isn't very traditional... people didn't like rock. I was really rebellious, rebellious with everything. I've been really critical all my life...

Adam: And where does that come from? Did you get like that on your own?

Galan: Yeah, on my own... But the good thing is that at least my Dad has been a critical person, socially. A hard worker...

I think [my parents] influence was enormous. My Dad was very charismatic... I've always found that useful, you know, if you do social work it's a thankless task. But my Dad understood that, so he's not going to say to me: 'hey, if you don't bring money home you can't live here'. A lot of lads have had that problem... My Dad has been accessible... he hasn't given me everything but he's been accessible. 'Hey Dad, I'm a volunteer, I haven't got any money, blah, blah, blah', he understands because he's done social work....

My Mum has always been... what's it called? An altruist? Helping the whole world... In my family I've got an Aunty as well, who works with displaced people... she's been a good example for me. I've been taking ideals bit by bit from different people... So these people are those I've taken them from... She was also a nun, my Uncle was a priest...

Our family has been really Catholic, with solid moral principles, not very strict, but solid. So this has affected the way I behave a lot.

Adam: ...Do you think your resilience to violence and crime and all that stuff comes from your family?

Galan: I really believe that the main thing was my family... *But you could have the best family in the world, but if your context doesn't help you at all, it's going to make you go off the rails.* I've seen a lot from both sides, the good and the bad. A lot of mates I grew up with are dead, others in jail or they've got a bunch of kids, stuff like that. That's the problem about living in this part of the city, it's not that we're abnormal. From here we make our choices, and *that has a lot to do with our family and our education...*[my italics]

Galan has one of the most supportive families of any of the youths interviewed. His last quotation in italics is significant as it highlights the impact of contextual factors where, even you have 'the best family', you can still 'go off the rails'. This is true, representing the powerful 'lure' of the gang because of its domination of social, economic and symbolic *capitals* spoken about in previous chapters. However these 'prosocial' youths have developed resilience to joining gangs, meaning they are *less* likely to join, which Galan concedes "has a lot to do with our family and education". His next quote sheds some light on the sort of peer pressure and financial temptations (economic *capital*) that might make even the youths with the 'best' families opt to join armed groups.

Galan: When we were young, thirteen or fourteen years old I wasn't allowed out later than 10pm on the street... So at 10 pm I'd have to say to my mates 'I'm going home, it's 10pm'. So they would all say 'Haaaaaaaaaaa! Piss off then so they can put your nappy on!' ...It's easier to stay out than go home because of the pressure. Even now speaking to some of the lads that I grew up with they say to me 'Galan, how long do you have to work to earn three million pesos? [Galan replies] 'Well, it takes me around six months' [They say] 'You know how long it takes me to earn three million? Half and hour.' Things like that. They'll go and rob a bank, go and kill someone...

If you don't have resilience... if you don't have those values, then you get sucked in really easily. It's a lot easier being accepted in these parts being a delinquent than being the goody-two-shoes of the neighbourhood.

Adam: It's interesting, like you're saying, that the goody-goody joins the youth group, the scouts, or CoVida...

Here it is useful to pick up on youths' stories of how their social behaviour leads them to be outcast from certain peer groups – i.e. Galan being a 'goody-goody' leads him to break certain ties with youths who have less strict parenting when he is thirteen or fourteen. Some of these youths then went on to join gangs and Galan did not. 'Hanging out' on street corners and then being gradually 'socialised' into the gang is something these 'alternative' youths have managed

to avoid, leading them to be 'socialised' into other spaces, such as *CoVida*, church groups, et cetera. The age when this happens, from thirteen to fifteen, is prescient because it is the same age that the 'violent' youths interviewed tended to join gangs. Arguably then, measures aimed at preventing youths joining gangs in Medellín need to target youths before they reach thirteen years old.

Hernando was a successful student and high achiever, going on to become the director of *CoVida* at a young age, and then being selected to work at the Mayor's office on youth programs (Hernando, 21/06/2008). Below he reflects on how education and his family led him away from armed groups, and in particular how his family's involvement with politics influenced him.

Adam: Why did you look for status or esteem through something positive as opposed to something violent or criminal [sic]?

Hernando: That's where I insist, enormously, that it has to do with the level of education, the family too, the family environment, the cohesion... education is the most important thing. *Education and the family* [my italics]. They are two primordial institutions that give people in another way of thinking, because when you open your eyes and you read, you see that there are other possibilities for you escape the cycle [of poverty], but a little kid that doesn't manage to finish primary school, doesn't learn how to read well, has a very reduced world which is only made up of those reference points in the neighbourhood, which are *those* ones [as in violent actors]...

In may case [I didn't get involved in violence] because it is to do with my family, and because there are some things, some family history of community participation, politics...

The 'reduced world' of youths living in Medellín's poor neighbourhoods is significant. In such contexts the *field* of masculinity is reduced to 'localised' versions of manhood, which are dominated by gang members. As argued in the previous chapter, gangs have a strong impact upon boys who lack mobility in contexts of exclusion. The narratives here demonstrate that boys playing gunslingers readily absorb a 'logic of badness'; as Sammy noted, when he was a child everyone wanted to be gang leader "Faber" in the game (Sammy,

03/06/2008). Membership of organisations such as *CoVida* open up the *field* of masculinity and present boys and male youths with alternative influences and opportunities that otherwise they would not have envisaged or pursued.

Hernando was attracted to the audio-visual opportunities at *CoVida* and, like the others, he was not motivated to join by any previous ideal to engage with community or social work (Hernando, 21/06/2008). For youths in poor communities the possibility to learn how to use and work with expensive equipment far beyond their reach in their day-to-day lives proves very attractive.

Hernando: When I was going on fifteen I entered [*CoVida*] by chance... I was in school and was part of the radio station. I always liked to be in projects outside of school work and everything... and in a 'Youth Communications Seminar' I got to know the people from *CoVida*...

Adam: But you got involved because you liked the audio-visual stuff?

Hernando: That was the first thing...

Angel, Roger, Gato and Quien all refer to support they received at home.

Angel talks about the disciplining influence of his father (Angel, 15/05/2008).

Angel: Look, in my family, my life was always about education... My Dad wanted me to be *really* educated [his emphasis]... they were really tough on me, they also rewarded me but I had to work hard for it... really strict. Too much Adam!

I became school representative... At school I was a recognised leader, but in my neighbourhood at times I was rejected or made fun of because my mum would constantly be coming out to see what I was doing and would lovingly clean me up. That annoyed me sometimes because my friends would make fun of me about it but it was something that was comforting...

I think that the leadership that I have is because of the influence of my father, someone I respect and admire because of his vast knowledge of life and his intellect... My mum was really sweet to me...

I ask myself why I did not get into drugs and violence if I grew up with them all around me... Sometimes I arrive at the conclusion that it's because of the education I received at home, because I'm someone

who thinks differently because I wanted to finish my studies, to become a professional one day and to help my neighbourhood...

Like a number of the youths here, Roger talks about his supportive home and becoming separated from his old group of friends at the age of thirteen who later joined gangs (Roger, 24/04/2008).

Roger: My decisions have always been supported at home... they always taught me values. They told me what the correct path to take was... 'Don't steal, don't get involved in crime, and if you do we will take you to the police'...

I avoid having friends in gangs, although some childhood friends joined gangs, and because I didn't join them they thought I was pretentious, so our relationships changed.

I was about thirteen when I took that decision. We were a bunch of friends basically from the same block. We went everywhere together, parties, parks, out with girls. The girls got older and began to get older boyfriends who were gangsters with motorbikes. So things changed...

Roger then joined a youth group that was supported by *CoVida* and eventually joined *CoVida* itself.

When he decided not to join the gang his former friends rejected him as 'pretentious'. At the same time, members of *CoVida* reject youths in gangs even though they have been friends as children. The separation of their socialisation spaces and the establishment of the alternative '*CoVida*' and 'gang' peer groups contributes to a process of *othering* between the two spaces. As will be argued in the conclusion this also marked a diversion in their 'masculinisation opportunities' and consequently the way in which they performed masculinity. Gang members developed more macho, *exaggerated* and violent identities, whereas youths at *CoVida* found more positive ways of 'doing masculinity'. The next section of the chapter considers the consolidation of youths' values in *CoVida* which are generally speaking an inverse reflection to the values in gangs. Symbolic and real rivalry in their neighbourhood was established between *CoVida* and the local gangs and paramilitaries. They were at once

competing spaces establishing their own 'status' within the community, whilst at the same time constituting *othering* sub-cultures.

Gato received a lot of support from his parents, he was also very studious and the church played a central role in his upbringing, leading him to criticise gang activities from a young age. These views were reaffirmed by a family tragedy when his cousin was killed in a gang related incident (Gato, 19/06/2008).

Gato: The upbringing that I received from my parents has been really good. Even though there was lot of violence in the neighbourhood that we lived in... Even though my parents were poor they tried to give us everything in terms of education... Since we were kids [with his sister] we've been studying hard.

Adam: And who were the biggest influences in your childhood?

Gato: Mainly my parents... my childhood was school, church, home. Nothing else, that was my life... I was brought up with a conscience... There was always a lot of freedom and trust [at home] because there was a lot of dialogue... if I had to say, I learned right from wrong from my parents...

I shared most with my dad... I talked a lot to him during the time when there was lots of violence in the neighbourhood... There was always that uncertainty and that trauma... All the damage these men were doing. I spoke to my Dad more than anyone about that stuff.

Gato's cousin was a gang member who was killed in a shoot out with the police. This turned him away from violence.

Gato: To go through that is really tough... Yeah you can have money, women, bikes, luxuries [as a gang member]... but it doesn't last, it's fleeting. [After my cousin's death] I said to myself once and for all 'this is not what I want to do with my life'... It made me more religious... I started to get involved more with youth groups at the church...

Gato then joined *CoVida* via the youth groups at the church.

Quien had frank discussions with his mother who was a strong character in disciplining him as he grew up; in part helped by her own prior experiences of growing up amidst violence in Medellín (Quien, 20/06/2008).

Quien: In 2000 there was a lot of conflict here [in the *CoVida* neighbourhood]... so you would go to school and the truth is that at

any time it could kick-off... It was a really fucked up period... if you were out after 9pm on the streets you were running the risk of getting caught in the crossfire...

Adam: And who's been an influence in your life...?

Quien: Ahhh, my mum is the person!... She's really open with me and she tells it like it is, even if it hurts sometimes. So she said to me, 'look sunshine, study hard. I know you see lads around here with guns and all that crap but don't get messed up in that... look in my youth they killed lots of kids because they smoked marijuana and all that'. She was probably really frightened for me because of that experience...

Adam: So she's got that life experience.

Quien: Yeah, she's got that life experience...

**Adam: And male figures in your life who you respected or admired?
[sic]**

Quien: ...The paternal figure in my life has never been present... Normally when mums say 'don't get involved in drugs, don't join gangs' and all that, their sons don't pay any attention... So it depends on having a strong figure in the family. Probably that's the father but with me it was my mum. If I arrived home late she'd say 'Hey dickhead! Where have you been! You son of a bitch, what are you thinking!' She'd speak like a bloke... she'd be tough as if she were a man... My mum's a real personality! I think she was the paternal figure as well.

Quien entered *CoVida* largely by chance to do work experience because *CoVida* was near his house. Again like Roger and Hernando, the use of the audio-visual equipment acted as a hook to get Quien involved with the organisation. He refers to joining *CoVida* as an opportunity to use that equipment, saying: "I took my chance here", suggesting that he had few other opportunities.

Pepe commented that members of *CoVida* actively seek to pass on their work to younger generations and bring them into the organisation (Pepe, 11/04/2008). Pelicorto confirms "of those in *CoVida* today... all of them were brought in by us" (Pelicorto, 10/06/2008). Importantly, Pepe explains that youths first join youth groups "to find a socialisation space with peers" and then values and attitudes begin to develop within the organisation. The next part of the chapter considers the development of attitudes within *CoVida*.

Pepe: I think that they are not conscious that they want to take part [at CoVida]. They don't say 'oh, I want to participate and I want to do that'. I think their first organisation, like the youth group for example, are important factors that influence the development of youth towards social views and interest in doing something for the community... We worked on characterising these youth groups and found that first of all someone gets involved in a youth group because they can meet friends there, because they want to share, to find a socialization space with peers, to hang out and have fun; but also with ideas about supporting the community, to take care of kids, clean the streets, celebrate Easter, things like that. Supporting the community themselves. This begins to develop another type of attitude and other types of public action by these youths which is different to a youth that isn't in a youth group, one that simply hangs out on the corner doing nothing... I think that is important at the moment in which we are looking for the difference [between a 'prosocial' youth and other youths]

73% of the 'prosocial' youths said they were taught good values at home, felt cared for in affectionate relationships, talked about supportive homes, often mentioned their parents' insistence on education and, in many cases, that their parents were strict.

A number of youths spoke of good communication with their parents. Notably Gato, Angel and Hernando had particularly good relationships with their fathers, and Angel, Galan and Quien with their mothers. In all cases, bar Pelicorto and Pepe, the relationships were painted in a positive light by the interviewees.

In the cases of Galan, Angel, Quien, Gato, Pelicorto and Sammy, their parents were notably strict. Galan and Angel even suffered rejection by their peers for being 'goody-two-shoes', or 'mummy's boys'. Pelicorto was locked indoors as a child, Sammy's father would drive him to and from school every day, and Quien spoke colourfully about being verbally disciplined by his mother. Whilst these cases were notable, overall, the parents of prosocial youths could be described as 'actively involved' and supportive as they grew up.

Education was often something parents were keen to push at home. This could be seen in the narratives of Hernando, Angel, Sammy, Pelicorto, Chiner, Gato,

Felipe, Galan and Roger in particular. Of these Hernando, Chiner, Felipe, Galan and Roger were also academically talented. Only Pepe had not finished secondary school from those interviewed. However, whilst few parents expected or pushed their children into higher education, a number have progressed to University – Gato, Pelicorto, Galan, Roger, Angel, and Sammy – and two had graduated – Hernando and Galan. Often the idea to go to university was fomented through values at *CoVida*. In short, whilst 'prosocial' youths still faced the challenges of growing up in conditions of poverty and exclusion their upbringing was a largely positive experience, especially when compared to the experiences of 'violent' youth in the previous chapter.

What is the relationship to their domestic upbringing and joining *CoVida*? The link is not direct, as no youth claimed that they joined *CoVida* specifically because of their parents. They did not have parents or siblings who took them to *CoVida*, bar Pepe, whose sister took him along as a child. Even though Angel and Hernando's fathers had had previous contact with *CoVida*, they did not cite this as the reason for joining. As Pepe noted, *CoVida* actively sought out younger youths who could take over the organisation in the future, who were nurtured once they had joined. 'Prosocial' vocation did not appear to be passed on through the family prior to joining *CoVida* – except for the case of Galan who's father was a social worker. *However, a crucial precursor to joining CoVida was the rejection of armed groups by these youths.* As the above section has laid out, elements of their upbringing such as supportive parents, education and moral guidance made these youths critical of armed groups, crime and violence which opened up the possibility of them joining *CoVida* later.

For example, when Pelicorto's friend was assassinated he did not seek revenge, but sought refuge behind *CoVida's* closed doors at the library; when Gato's cousin was shot in gang related activity, it pushed him closer to the church youth group; Sammy saw his mother suffer when his brothers joined gangs which 'put him off' armed groups. Hernando stated explicitly that education and his family led him to stay away from armed groups. Chiner and Felipe said that their fathers taught them values rejecting violence which was pivotal when they 'got to the age where they could join a gang'. So their adolescence or 'coming of age' was synonymous with a conscious choice *not* to join the gang. When Sammy was asked why he joined *CoVida* whilst his older brothers had joined a gang, he paused and then said it was because he had the 'opportunity' to join a youth group which had 'saved' him from the same fate as them.

These youths were different to the youths hanging out on the street corner 'doing nothing' or 'getting up to no good', demonstrating 'alternative' interests and pursuits. They were often studious (Hernando, Angel, Sammy, Pelicorto, Chiner, Gato, Felipe, Galan, Roger); church going (Gato, Roger); had strict parents (Galan, Angel, Quien, Gato, Pelicorto, Sammy); or liked 'alternative' music such as rock, punk or reggae and hung out in small peripheral peer groups (Sammy, Chiner, Felipe, Galan, Roger).

This process of rejecting violent groups by the 'prosocial' youths was reciprocated by the 'kids on the street corner' who in turn rejected them, the 'well behaved', studious, church going youths, because they weren't cool or were 'swots', 'nerds', 'mummy's boys' or 'pretentious'. It is unsurprising then that *CoVida* was also seen as a 'refuge', not only from the violence on the

streets but also as a socialisation space for these youths who did not want to hang out with 'typical' youths on street corners.

Why did they join *CoVida*? A precondition to entry was the rejection of violent groups. *CoVida*'s outreach to local youth groups normally linked to church or schools accounted for Hernando, Pepe, Gato, and Roger. Chiner, Felipe, Roger and Sammy joined because they had friends there. Friendship, peers and socialisation turned out to be significant motivation reasons for joining and continuing at *CoVida*.

The youths were attracted to *CoVida* after first contact because of the *parche* - the 'fun' socialisation space – because they enjoyed the games and events that were organised, or because they could access sophisticated audio-visual equipment. None of the youths said they were interested in 'prosocial' work – community development and social work – until after they had joined *CoVida*, they learned these values there.

In general, supportive upbringings led these youths to reject crime, violence and gangs and encouraged them to opt for alternative socialisation spaces. This meant that some youths later came across or had the 'opportunity' to join *CoVida*. Although this seemed 'coincidental' to these youths, the rejection of gangs was a precursor to their entry.

'Violent' and 'prosocial' youths opted for different pathways to manhood. The challenge is to understand why. Indications are beginning to emerge; these youths' upbringings have led them to reject gangs and violence whilst family support helped them find alternative pathways to manhood. It will be argued below that membership of *CoVida* consolidated this process, developing their

values, and presenting them with 'positive' male role models and masculinisation opportunities.

Developing positive masculine identities at CoVida

The narratives below cover youths' reflections on their experiences at *CoVida*. As a workspace, socialisation space and even a 'big family' away from home, *CoVida* was significant for these youths in terms of the development of their identities and values. In effect *CoVida* broadened their horizons and provided a type of intellectual mobility through contacts and work with local, national and international organisations ranging from governmental to non-governmental and academic institutions. Indeed, my own participant observation at *CoVida* contributed to this process. This helped these youths develop different perspectives on life beyond those of many other youths in their neighbourhood who suffered from a significant lack of mobility. *CoVida* would also have impacted upon the *field* of masculinities of these youths. That is, expanding what it means 'to be a man' beyond local conceptions where armed actors play a dominant role. Essentially, participation at *CoVida* was an ontologically expansive exercise helping these youths to see 'beyond' their neighbourhood and presenting them with alternative perspectives which challenged local norms. *CoVida* helped provide 'positive' versions of masculinity for these youths, whilst providing opportunities to replicate the role models linked to *CoVida* by carrying on at the organisation and acquiring recognition, belonging and identity there: "I'm not just Sammy, I'm 'Sammy *CoVida*!'" (Sammy,

03/06/2008). This process was not of course uniform or easy; rather these youths still faced significant challenges, not least because *CoVida* was not a reliable source of income and of course not all identity formation can be reduced to masculinisation. Notwithstanding, the following narratives demonstrate that *CoVida* shaped what it meant to be a man for these youths and then provided them with dignified possibilities to masculinise. It has been argued in this thesis that boys, youths and men have a masculine *habitus* that reflects the *field* of masculinities in their given context. The youths at *CoVida* were still *disposed* to masculinise, their narratives show that they still wanted to become men, to have status, to be respected, to earn income, reflecting a number of normative or traditional masculine values. This masculine performance was still tied to developing self-esteem and dignity and, to a certain extent, a reputational project. The masculinisation process they went through was similar to other male youths in their neighbourhood, including the ones that opted for violent pathways to manhood. In fact, the youths at *CoVida* would occasionally demonstrate some *macho* traits, although these were significantly less than the violent youths interviewed. However, around the age of thirteen to fifteen years old, the youths at *CoVida* reached a significant period in their adolescence in terms of 'growing up', developing as adults and for the boys, 'becoming men'. Admittedly, adolescent development does not take place in a two-year time span, but this age did seem to be a watershed in terms of developing independence, belonging and identity away from the domestic sphere. At this age these youths had the opportunity to develop positive or 'prosocial' conceptions of masculinity, forging these identities through *CoVida*. Violent youths passed through the same process, they too were *disposed* to

become men but their masculine influences and opportunities were markedly distinct which led them to join armed groups as outlined in the previous chapter.

Broadening horizons and positive role models

Hernando (Hernando, 21/06/2008):

Adam: Who were your reference points and the men that you respected at that time? Who did you look up to?

Hernando: In that period I looked up to a sociologist called Herra Brovas, also to Pelicorto [former Director of *CoVida*]. He was always someone I looked up to and we became good friends... He was a reference point for me because he had a different discourse to many people. A community discourse, but also involved in social outreach and communications work...

Adam: And they opened up your world beyond four blocks...

Hernando: Yes of course. Ooof! [yes] much more, the city. That is very important...

In 1998 the financing of the organisation stopped... they said to us young people 'look you have to run this now'... so I ended up coordinating a project and I didn't know anything when I started. That's how I began...

Adam: And then there was no going back

Hernando: No way! I was Director of *CoVida* and I got recognition from that. When Pelicorto finished his period as Director, they decided that I would continue in his place.

CoVida expanded Hernando's horizons, provided him with male roles models outside of the home and gave him the opportunity to obtain recognition as he eventually went on to become the Director of *CoVida*. Furthermore there was an ongoing process of politicization and value development at *CoVida*. These processes shaped the pathway to manhood that he chose. Angel also looked up to Pelicorto as "a man you can respect" (Angel, 15/05/2008).

Pepe (Pepe, 11/04/2008) talks about the opportunities for personal development he gained through *CoVida*. Interestingly this has made him not 'feel marginalised', because at *CoVida* he has status and an identity recognised in the community.

Adam: But do you feel 'marginalised'?

Pepe: No. I don't feel marginalised... Of course I've got economic difficulties... But I've also had the chance to get to know a lot of people [via *CoVida*]... had the chance to travel and get to know other spaces, other places in the world... This has helped me to see the world in a different light... That's basically down to my participation in *CoVida*...

Adam: So what are the social and economic opportunities for people... Well, for you when you were young? ...because there's not much work round here. It's hard.

Pepe: It's difficult for the average lad round here, really difficult. Partly because of the level of education... That makes the chances slim of higher education and of getting a good job. With me it's been different because I've been linked to social processes... that has given me job opportunities, training, so I've been able to develop skills that other youths don't have...

Of course my mum, dad and family have had an influence on me, but being here developing my capacity to take decisions, like not going to do military service...

We have status and a place in the community, we're not always out with girls, showing off in an ostentatious way. Our way isn't one of power over the community, it's not a relationship of power...

Adam: And how old were you when you began to think differently to other kids?

Pepe: ...I was about twelve of thirteen years old.

Pelicorto (Pelicorto, 10/06/2008) talks about becoming critical of society, developing political opinions and the scarcity of opportunities growing up. He also talks of the pride he feels having worked at *CoVida*:

Adam: So where do you think you became critical... ?

Pelicorto: I think that happened here in *CoVida* the year that I became Director of the organisation. Even with the youth group we would reflect on life and what was happening, but with a desire to do something. 'Man,

lets do something! Listen up, we're dying in this neighbourhood'. It's because we didn't have anything to do.

I mean, when we finished secondary school most of us didn't have any opportunities. We had pressures to go out and work. I had to work on a building site, but I didn't like it, I couldn't do it. Packing biscuits? I can't do that either. Very few of us aspired to study at University... I was fortunate enough via the library work at *CoVida*... But the rest were just 'there' [doing nothing]!

...

Something that I lost the day my father left home was the idea of my future. Obviously, when my Dad was at home he'd say 'study study! So you don't suffer what I've had to'... But my Dad left home so I had to go out and work... So you get into a 'routinised' world that restricts your perceptions... When I work with youth today I don't see that they've got future plans... Their life is 'today', and I've got a problem with that Adam... When I joined *CoVida* they encouraged me to make plans and think about the future, so when I became Director there were lots of things I wanted to do.

Kids still need libraries, recreation, youth groups, which give them the possibility to think for themselves critically, about what their dream is in this society... for me it worked but I don't know if it will work for everyone. Their world is very authoritarian [sic] their parents impose rules on them, their teachers impose rules on them, so when you ask them 'hey, what do you think you'll be doing in twenty years? What do you think you'll be doing in ten years?'... They can't reply... I think that in my case it was *CoVida* that allowed me to do that...

Today I feel much more grateful to people. Just looking at this building [of *CoVida*] I feel that I have done my bit because the place is open. I've been really influenced by the opportunity that this space has given me... It's shown me the world in a different light, Adam... All because I've been working here...

CoVida became central to how Pelicorto grew up; it gave him belonging, identity and purpose that he felt proud of. *CoVida* facilitated his pathway to manhood.

Gato, Felipe and Chiner talk about how they learnt from their experiences at *CoVida*, particularly the influence of male role models linked to the organisation (Gato, 19/06/2008):

Gato: I began to get to know really valuable and cool people [in *CoVida*]... and they called me for different events so I began to learn from them. This changed way I thought and opened me up to other possibilities and options... I used to believe whatever people said, but then I began to realise that there were other positions, and all that.

Felipe (Chiner and Felipe, 10/07/2008):

Felipe: The way in which we became critical of society, that construction, came from *CoVida*... you first enter because it's part of your group of friends but then you listen in on some meetings, go to forums, to talk about what is happening, but in a nuanced way, how to 'problematise', how to observe, within the atmosphere there. You end up becoming a more critical person... *CoVida* is a school for that stuff... so we grew critically and intellectually [in *CoVida*]...

[My parents] always told me to study at home, although they never told me to go to university, I decided to do that on my own. I think I took that decision consciously because of *CoVida*... they are like another reference point...

Chiner: So in one way or another they become a role model for you...

Felipe: Also, you go back to help the new kids that are entering... so then we become the reference points for the younger ones, 'hey look at this [older] guy, his example, tan tan tan [etc]'...

Chiner: We also become reference points for lots of people...

From these youths narratives it is clear to see the strong influences members of *CoVida* and the culture of the organisation had over them. As Gato states, it is a place for learning and development, but notably Felipe and Chiner repeat how particular role models connected to the organisation were significant for them in terms of broadening their horizons; this influenced their pathway to manhood and provided them with tangible opportunities. These can be understood as masculinisation opportunities that they perceived as dignified and with recognition.

The atmosphere and culture at *CoVida*, facilitated their personal development, broadening their horizons beyond just 'four blocks' as Hernando says. It provided them with access to people with distinct ideas and opinions, not just from older members of *CoVida* but through their contacts from academic and development backgrounds and through engagement with community events and culture. This contributed to these youths growing intellectually and becoming critical of their environments and, particularly, violent groups.

The people they met and worked with through *CoVida* often acted as role models – Hernando looked up to Pelicorto and academics linked to *CoVida*; Chiner and Felipe in turn looked up to Hernando – whilst *CoVida* proffered opportunities to follow in their footsteps. In other words, the behaviour they learned, their critical capacities and cultural shibboleths picked up from role models at *CoVida* then had a chance to come to fruition by working with the organisation. They gained an identity and belonging, something they were proud of, a dignity that Pelicorto could not find 'packing biscuits in a factory'. These youths began to forge dignified identities with recognition and status – this will be highlighted further below. As these boys were coming of age this shaped the type of men they aspired to be, what it *meant* to be a man, and simultaneously provided them with a pathway to a positive form of masculinity.

This was particularly pertinent because they were active members of *CoVida* during their adolescence when they were 'becoming men', or as Felipe put it earlier, the age where they 'could join a gang'. During this formative period they had been subject to a range of alternative influences and male role models. In a sense, their process of value formation that had begun at home, continued at *CoVida*. Their fathers were often strong male role models at home they found positive male role models in their socialisation space at *CoVida*. Their worldview was expanded, whereas violent youths tended to have much more restricted perceptions of manhood dominated by negative experiences at home, by the gang on the street, and their lack of mobility. Bourdieu talks explicitly about the *habitus* being a subjective reflection of an individual's social world, but crucially, where the neophyte is moved from one *field* to the next or into a different context or setting, this will shape and shift their social performance. The same *habitus* performs differently if it is moved into new

settings or *fields*. Where these changes are lasting and significant they can even impact the development of the *habitus* itself. In other words, youths' masculine *habitus* disposes them to achieve some form of normative manhood but the youths at *CoVida* found positive ways of 'being men' because of the examples they were set - both at home and at *CoVida* - and the opportunities proffered to them by association with the organisation.

Consolidating Values

The interviewees developed particular values and beliefs within *CoVida*. This led to strong convictions, demonstrated by the fact that they continued to work there despite significant caveats. They outline these caveats, beliefs and convictions in the below narratives. They had developed resilience to the many difficulties they faced which along with membership of *CoVida*, acted as insulation or a buffer against joining gangs. The pressures they faced were commonly financial but also included threats and intimidation from armed groups and in one case a member of *CoVida* was assassinated by the militias.

After a colleague was assassinated by the militias, Pelicorto said (Pelicorto, 10/06/2008):

Pelicorto: ...We had a feeling of resistance as well. 'We're not gonna give in. We're going to carry on working with our doors open. And whenever there's a shoot out we'll close the doors'. I don't know if this was a good decision, but in any case that's what we did...

I said to Hernando, 'we took the most difficult decision given everything that's happened. For us it would have been easier to buckle under pressure from our family or friends, that we should leave. Or to join one of those [armed] groups.'

Adam: But you resisted...

Pelicorto: I feel that we have to be role models, but we have to be good role models, brother... But I insist that these factors of resilience are very important in these communities, but there is something that makes me worry a lot. How far do factors of resilience go? If Angel, for example, did not have *CoVida*, if I hadn't gone to speak to him or if he'd had to face his situation alone what would have happened [he would have joined the paramilitaries]? [About six months later Angel did join a paramilitary 'community organisation' for the money because his father left and he became economically responsible for his home]

Adam: I suppose resilience is facilitated by opportunities.

Pelicorto: That's it.... The critical and political capacity that you talk about was awakened in us through *CoVida*... Our satisfaction comes from trying to change things, seeing that some things can change...

For Pelicorto, carrying on with his work at *CoVida* has implied sacrifice and dislocation from his family who simply do not understand what he does. Sammy, Chiner, Felipe and Pepe were also pressurised by their families, particularly because the males in the household are expected to become the breadwinners. Hernando stated (Hernando, 21/06/2008):

Hernando: ...in 2001 when the arrival of the paramilitaries blocked our free movement, at times stopped us organising meetings or other times there were shootouts and we had to lock ourselves in. That was really tough, I don't know [how we survived] it's an internal force, like desires and dreams... the idea was to maintain our 'spark' because if that was extinguished it would extinguish the dreams of a lot of people. Maybe it sounds romantic but that's how it was. We were developing projects in the middle of shootouts.

Galan refers to the "moral standpoints" *CoVida* members all shared keeping the organisation together (Galan, 19/06/2008).

Adam: What's the difference between the people at *CoVida* and the paras?...

Galan: Yeah, well you'd think it was about education. But there are these big paramilitary bosses around as role models... It's all about money. I think the difference between us is to do with our principles. What I'm saying is the moral standpoints that each of us has and the collective moral beliefs that we share. Us, the organisation, there's something inside each of us that has developed. But it's not like saying 'this is the path and this isn't'.

The moral view points that he developed that are shared at *CoVida* led him to reject paramilitary 'role models' and helped him opt for a different pathway in life.

Sammy, Pepe, Felipe, Chiner, Gato, and Quien go on to talk about the significant financial challenges they face working at *CoVida* and pressures they often feel from their families. Of these six, only Sammy had paid work on a yearlong contract at the time of the interviews. Pepe's comments are indicative of many other volunteers: "I think my dreams are normal. At some stage I'd like my own place or to have a partner. I dunno, I'd like to be able to travel... I think that the work I do is really difficult, it's not very stable and it doesn't allow me to have any lasting economic tranquillity" (Pepe, 11/04/2008). Sammy shows the financial pressures youths face and why some join gangs:

Sammy: There's lots of adversity... mum and dad saying 'hey.. go to work'... I've put up with all that pressure and now I take money home... but I've had to wait a long fucking time for this job to give me any money! And imagine one of those kids who needs money immediately? Come on! [they take the] 'easy money' [the gangsters say to him]. They don't think twice... but there's no education so they don't take the right decision (Sammy, 03/06/2008)

To summarise, despite the overall positive upbringing of their children many families did not necessarily go on to support their social and community work. This was primarily linked to the fact that *CoVida* rarely paid salaries and preoccupation over home economics was highlighted frequently. As one community leader stated "What's the main problem in this neighbourhood? People are permanently worried about their domestic economy" (Personal interview, Tamayo, 03/04/2008).

However, the youths had developed a strong bond with *CoVida* and commitment to community development work. Galan explained this succinctly when he was asked the difference between the youths at *CoVida* and violent youths:

Galan: I think the difference between us has to do with our principles. What I'm saying is that each of us has moral standpoints and we share collective moral beliefs. Us lot at the organisation, there's something inside each of us that has developed (Galan, 19/06/2008)

These were values that may have germinated at home but the political, critical and moral thinking many youths talked about grew through their association with *CoVida*. In other words they *became* 'prosocial' which was related to the development of positive masculine identities through their affiliation with *CoVida*. Their association with *CoVida* presented them with a number of positive roles models, influences and options which shaped the way they masculinised. Not all the actions of these youths can be reduced to masculine identity and the process of masculinisation, but as they negotiated their pathway to manhood, *CoVida* as a *field* of influence, was significant and the opportunities it proffered prompted them to choose prosocial or positive masculine identities.

The development of their values and identity at *CoVida* gave them a certain 'resilience' to the pressures and challenges they faced – from home, financially, and intimidation from armed groups – and kept many of them working at the organisation. There are of course limitations to such resilience. After the assassination of Doris, one of their members, everyone left the organisation bar Pelicorto and Hernando. Pelicorto has also claimed that such are Pepe's economic woes that if he finds a paid job in a different organisation he would leave without thinking twice; and Angel could not bear the financial pressures at

home any longer after his father left home making him the principal 'breadwinner' and 'defected' to an organisation run by demobilised paramilitaries to fund his university education. So these youths are put under incredible strain just to stay at *CoVida* which is testimony to the dedication and 'resilience' they have acquired at the organisation. As an older member and former director of community organisation once said, "what you should be asking is how people have managed to stay here. Everyone has a different story of survival" (Personal interview, Pérez, 01/05/2008).

The importance of recognition and status

Working with *CoVida* provided these youths with recognition within their community and with a sense of pride and fulfilment. This helped consolidate their membership and commitment to the group, which contributed to the formation of their identity which was shaped by the organisational values and sub-culture which was liberal / left wing, human rights and development focused. These values and their commitment became apparent through the youths narratives.

Here it is important to bear in mind that there are few organisations run by youths that have been as successful as *CoVida*, not just in Medellín but also nationally. *CoVida* has won a number of prizes and been invited to national and even international events because of their work. Their main success was securing funding from the Mayor's office to implement the *Plan de Desarrollo* –

the local development plan – for the poorest neighbourhoods around their office. Through the successful implementation of the development plan they have built close ties with the Mayor's office and also international aid agencies, a significant achievement for any community organisation, let alone one run by youths largely working part time or as volunteers. Despite their successes, paid positions at *CoVida* are few and far between and depend largely on punctual project funding leading to significant job insecurity. This was because *CoVida* had little long-term funding from the Colombian state. Although they did have some short-term specific program funding, these projects would typically run for one year or less and would only employ one or two staff members on a part time basis. *CoVida* did open an internet café and ran it's audio-visual business, but these still provided few jobs and little job security. For example, Pepe might work for one day a week on a funded project looking at domestic violence and work a few hours in the internet café, but this would not provide him a living wage. When a larger project came in he may be working for a month full time, but these projects were sporadic.

Hernando, Galan, Roger, Sammy, Angel, Pelicorto, Pepe, Chiner, Felipe and Biel spoke variously of the recognition, belonging and identity, and having status in the community obtained through *CoVida*. Pepe, Biel and Roger's comments below are indicative of these opinions:

Pepe: I think that us lot who have been in *CoVida* are a very particular type of person, *very particular* [his emphasis]. *CoVida* has created a very strong image in the community which means that the youths here gain a certain status. People have always been keen "hey it's cool being in *CoVida*" and that's because you get recognition from it... I remember I was really good at drawing, painting, writing and it was really cool that in *CoVida* they recognised that. They'd say "Hey Pepe, make us a poster..." they recognised what I did... (Pepe, 11/04/2008)

Biel talks about the work of *CoVida* being “recognised throughout the city. More than just as a community organisation, we were recognised as an up-and-coming youth organisation... We did some really cool stuff... and the community realised that” (Biel, 11/07/2008). Similarly Roger stated, “people give you recognition which is really gratifying... people sit up and notice. They say that at *CoVida* they do things well... that shows that you are doing things right” (Roger, 24/04/2008).

Galan and Hernando make crucial points about securing self-esteem at *CoVida*. In other words, youths can find dignity and ‘become someone’ through the opportunities at *CoVida*. This is an important part of their masculinisation process, they find a identity they can be proud of, satisfying their masculine *habitus*, their dispositions to masculinise.

Adam: For you what are the elements of your life that make you feel good?

Galan: First of all my family. Second... being listened to. In these organisations... they make you feel important, they make you feel like you are part of another family. That’s really important because... when the youths enter into the group they make themselves heard using their own initiative, they mobilise and do loads of things. This is good for self-esteem, which is completely different for the youths who don’t mobilise... they organise themselves with guns, and the gun becomes the object of self-esteem for them...

Adam: And do you feel proud to be in *CoVida*?

Galan: Yes... Of course (Galan, 19/06/2008)

Hernando (Hernando, 21/06/2008):

Hernando: Lots of kids... [just want] money but others want to feel recognised in a context of poverty, to feel recognised to have a certain status... I think that what [*CoVida*] did was give us kids another status, a type of recognition... In other words, another way to link themselves to the life of the city. To feel like someone in the city. [I] felt recognised and that energy fills you up.

Pelicorto's experience is indicative of the limited choices that poor and excluded youths face. In his case he feels fortunate to gain paid work at *CoVida*. The organisation was an outlet for him, a process and site of 'dignification' (Pelicorto, 10/06/2008).

Pelicorto: My Dad abandoned the house so it's my responsibility to provide for the family... I went to work at a factory... but you don't dream of packaging biscuits. That wasn't my aspiration... So I came up to the *CoVida* and in the youth group there's a possibility of working with sound equipment... I became heavily involved in *CoVida*...

You know what satisfies me and fills me with joy? When a child from round here meets me in the street and he calls me the 'teacher' of *CoVida*... I don't give classes... but he calls me 'teacher' [term of respect]... The last time I drank a beer with Hernando I said [proudly]... we haven't had normal lives... doing this type of work.

Angel feels "proud" to be part of *CoVida*, however signs of strain come through in his narrative when he asks 'how can I have a dignified life without money?' (Angel, 15/05/2008):

Adam: And for you what makes you feel like you have self-esteem, dignity?

Angel: ...Dignity for me? Aye Adam! [we laugh]... that's something I've been asking myself recently... How can I have a dignified level of life when I need money to live, when there are obligations at home? At the moment I have to take care of obligations at home... I've had to suspend my studies [at University] because my Dad left home... a year ago for another woman in Urabá.

Adam: So now you're the man of the house?

Angel: I'm the man of the house... It's lots of pressure.

Sammy refers to different ways of obtaining recognition such as being qualified, having a good job or being a good footballer. These are pathways to manhood, ways of accessing masculine *capital* or 'doing masculinity'. Sammy navigated his pathway to manhood with the help of *CoVida* (Sammy, 03/06/2008):

Adam: And how do you get self-esteem, status or respect?...

Sammy: Brother... Because I've assumed a role, and that role is recognised by others. For me that gives me self-esteem... So for example they can give you a particular job, or you're a footballer in some team, or

you have a profession and the whole world recognises you for that. That generates certain sensations... I feel good if people recognise me, I'm ok...

Adam: But you've got status here [at CoVida]?

Sammy: Yes. Working here they also pay me

Adam: Like 'Camila CoVida'. 'Aye, here comes Camila CoVida', and she likes it

Sammy: Yes. Sammy CoVida!

Conclusions: Masculinity and Dignity

Status attainment together with shared convictions and beliefs based on their community work come through in the narratives of the youths as principle cohesive factors at the organisation. This was bound together by the friendship and camaraderie of the socialisation space of *CoVida* itself, an inverse reflection of the 'hostile' outside world. Galan even went so far as to say *CoVida* is like another family. It is not coincidental that this reflects some scholarly interpretations of gangs as 'surrogate' families for disaffected youths who have to negotiate contexts of exclusion (Dowdney, 2007: 82-83). What might be understood as vulnerabilities or risk factors led youths to seek meaning and belonging in socialisation spaces. If these youths were not in *CoVida* there is little else to do. Rates of unemployment and underemployment are very high particularly amongst youths who spend long hours *amurrao* – literally; 'sitting on the wall', figuratively; sad, bored and desperate (Henao Salazar and Castañeda Naranjo, 2001: 90). Where work is available wages are a minimum and professional or formal work is scant. There is little hope of entering into higher education and recreational spaces

and public activities for youths are scarce. Of course, entering the gang in such circumstances can appear to be a panacea for bored, underemployed and under educated male youths expected to come of age, 'behave like men' and contribute to household income. In such conditions how might youths negotiate a pathway to manhood that secures some form of locally valued masculine *capital* or what could be termed masculine dignity? As Jensen suggests, the struggle for dignity is the domain of the impoverished and excluded "it is what powerless people have left when all else fails" (Jensen, 2008: 9). Dignity is subjective, it is also gendered.

The narratives above provide an insight into how youths at *CoVida* came of age and navigated pathways to manhood that dignified them, actions they took pride in. Sammy was clear when he referred to different ways of obtaining recognition such as having a profession or trade, a good job or being a good footballer. These are all masculine assets, or what would be termed by Bourdieu as masculine *capitals*. Sammy and the other youths interviewed navigated their way through adolescence to becoming adults through their association with *CoVida* which had become a symbolic and practical refuge for them from the difficulties they faced in the outside world. The values and recognition they felt through their association with *CoVida* generated "certain sensations... I feel good if people recognise me" (Sammy, 03/06/2008). *CoVida* is a socialisation space and sub-culture of prosocial, progressive, gender equitable and generally 'positive' social values. The youths involved in the organisation reflected that *field* of influence and followed positive pathways to manhood, but they could only do so because the process dignified them.

Conversely, the very same process occurred in gangs – youths felt 'dignified', a sense of male worth, esteem and value in the gang, although this socialisation space fostered destructive and violent social behaviour. Notwithstanding the youths in both spaces were disposed by their *habitus* to masculinise, to find a sense of male worth in their communities that would be recognised, although the outcomes through their social practices were hugely different. Hernando was clear that *CoVida* was an opportunity for him – a potential pathway to manhood – because the organisation gave him 'another status, a type of recognition'. This was summed up by Pelicorto when he said 'you don't dream of packing biscuits in a factory'.

Finally, 'prosocial' youths had markedly different upbringings than violent youth in most of the cases, despite the fact that they all grew up in similar socio-economic conditions. The family life and upbringing of youths in poor communities can actually be markedly different; they do not suffer the effects of poverty, exclusion and social violence homogenously. The 'violent' youths' family spheres were much more impacted by these negative aspects in the social world than 'prosocial' youths' families, which managed to insulate their children from, or act as buffers to, the harsh realities of growing up in Medellín's periphery. This process paved the way for 'prosocial' youths to access positive masculinisation opportunities whilst having the converse effect on 'violent' youths.

The final chapter next, unpacks these findings further by asking 'prosocial' youths a series of questions about why youths joined gangs; why young men join and not young women; and what they thought were the differences between themselves and 'violent' youth. Their answers proved to be particularly

illuminating, and following on from these the conclusions of the thesis are made.

Chapter 8

Conclusion: 'Unfortunate imaginaries' of the good life and young men becoming violent

Introduction

The youths at *CoVida* demonstrated well-developed critical skills and an ability to reflect analytically upon the realities of violence and exclusion in their neighbourhood. This was noted as the field research took place following a number of enlightening informal discussions with them. Hence a series of questions were added on to their life history interviews to explore their opinions and analysis of local youth violence¹. They were asked their opinions on the differences between themselves and 'violent' youths and the role that exclusion and masculinities might play in the regeneration of violence. This was an important part of the empirical research, not least to examine to what extent their responses support or refute the claims made so far in this thesis. Three basic questions were explored to tease out youths' viewpoints. Firstly, why did they think that youths joined gangs? Secondly why did young men tend to join and not young women? Thirdly, what did they think was the difference between themselves and 'violent' youth?

This chapter uses the responses from these interviews to highlight why it is vital to understand masculinities in violent and excluded contexts if we

¹ This was an interesting development in the field research reflected upon earlier in the methodology Chapter (5).

are to interrupt the transmission of violence, highlighting the role of armed actors as local versions of dominant masculinity, and the particular masculinisation challenges that youths face in such contexts.

The chapter then develops the thesis conclusions, reflecting upon *habitus*, masculinisation and the contextualised experience of youths growing up in Medellín's periphery. Finally, the potential implications of these conclusions are discussed in terms of integrating understandings of masculinity into youth work, for practitioners and policy makers, in their efforts to tackle urban violence in Medellín.

'Prosocial' youths' views on becoming violent

Pelicorto talks about common youth conceptions of "living well" and how these are linked to the capacity to "show-off" material possessions (Pelicorto, 10/06/2008). However, licit options to secure desired livelihoods are scarce, leading to many "frustrated dreams" (Pelicorto, 10/06/2008). A number of youths then search for other 'options' through crime and gangs. These illicit options, by contrast, appear ubiquitous and accessible in the youths' immediate social world when presented with the 'imaginary'² or role model of the materially wealthy gang members. Pelicorto suggests that young women have similar conceptions of 'living well' often seeking out men who can provide them with material possessions. He indicates

² The youths interviewed often referred to the *imaginario* of the gang boss. *Imaginario* can be translated from Spanish as 'imaginary', 'image' or 'role model'.

that access to material wealth is more consequential than *how* such wealth is gotten (Pelicorto, 10/06/2008).

Adam: What does youth today in this neighbourhood want to do with their lives? Who do they look up to? What are their plans, projects..?

Pelicorto: There aren't any heroes, just unfortunate imaginaries... of what the 'good life' is. It's not about what makes someone feel good as a human being, it's about owning things... For example, a youth might want to be a policeman but not because of what a policeman should do but... to have power and status in some form but above all to be well paid. With that money they can buy a motorbike and get themselves a little house.

Adam: How do you think then that young men get self-esteem round here?

Pelicorto: These young men need to show something [material] off... Nowadays it's also important for girls to have things. And when they think about material possessions they don't think about... how they should build their lives but instead 'how can I get material things via a man?'...

Life [for them] is about... partying... good clothes, to have a motorbike – for women as much as men... to be a poser in a world of show-offs... Youths have reduced their whole lives to that...

They just finish school and out to work... they want to get a job and then at some time think about leaving the neighbourhood because it's so poor... they want to be independent. But that just becomes a load of frustrated dreams because the obstacles they face in this city mean they can't be fulfilled. When you feel really frustrated you begin to look at the options in front of you and of course you begin to find other options.

Adam: And an option is to join an armed group?

Pelicorto: Exactly, and on top of that, those armed groups look for you... 'Hey don't hang around doing nothing. Join us and we'll give you 'x' amount of money per month... All you have to do is go from house to house and ask people to pay their quota [protection money]. Just say you are coming on behalf of us and then you take your part. Bro, that's all you have to do!'

The other problem is that people who live here have role models who have taken up those offers and today... they live well. The rule of law is non-existent... So at the end of the day they think 'well, I don't actually have to kill anybody. This seems to be an excellent option'...

Adam: What is the stereotype of the respected man in this community?

Pelicorto: The guy that pays out for parties [sic] 'here take \$500,000 pesos and kill a pig' [to eat at the party]. That's the sort of person that people admire... If someone doesn't have money to pay for their utilities they'll say 'here! Have some money so you don't have problems'. Or [if someone says] 'look. I haven't had a job for ages' [they reply] 'ok, come and work on my property until you get a new job'. That sort of thing... These are the types who are admired. That's the image of a respectable man that the community has... [Paramilitaries] are 'legitimate' because of what they do. People aren't interested in *how* they do it, just that they do it. What the state has not done.

Pepe talks about economic motivation to join gangs amidst a dearth of options for youth, role models and social reproduction (Pepe, 11/04/2008):

Adam: What type of lad gets involved with *CoVida* and what type of lad joins them [gangs or paramilitaries]?

Pepe: I reckon it's easier to join them because there's economic motivation. I think that when a lad has difficulties at home – and I'm not saying that I don't have them – you run out of ideas and you think 'what am I going to do?' Any opportunity that comes along seems like a good one in those contexts. *The first way out that comes along is their first option* [my italics]... I think that they are models that reproduce themselves and they reproduce with great ease and efficiency.

Adam: How do you think they are reproduced?

Pepe: Clearly by seeing these role models. I think that the points of reference that each person constructs are crucial. One of the reference points here that is latently constructed is that of the '*cacique*' or 'boss' [the leader of the local gang or armed group]. Well of course, imagine during their whole life at home there's not enough food or basic utilities; there are no loving relationships and high levels of domestic violence; and the whole time they see this bloke who lives locally who enjoys strong economic solvency, who's got... I don't know what to call them, but 'accessories'. He's got a motorbike, designer trainers, girls, expensive clothes, all that sort of stuff. But also he's got *respect, recognition, power* [my italics]. So of course the young lads round here say 'fuck me, this is the ticket!'...

It's also seen as the easy route. For example, they get involved and begin to do a few things and they start to rise and rise. So they are given a gun, and *a gun is already a big deal* [his emphasis]. I think that a gun is a very resounding symbol. So youths then say that this is an opportunity to enjoy the things that they have never had, especially when they look around for other possibilities or alternatives.

It's complicated, very complicated because they don't know other social spaces, other possibilities, other types of spaces that can

guarantee them these material things, and what's more in such an instant fashion. And look, if you join *CoVida* you won't earn any money straight away. They might offer you a paid job, but who knows when?...

Adam: Maybe they don't join [*CoVida*] for that reason, because money is power.

Pepe: Of course, and it's necessary. Having money is necessary, very necessary.

Pepe then discusses masculinities and talks about the traditional male role for older men, and how male youth who join armed groups gain 'status and recognition'.

Pepe: Round here... the older man... is very respected... But the important thing is that people notice that he has money to educate his children, to bring goods home, food for the kitchen, to keep his wife well dressed, going to mass on Sunday together as a family...

Adam: And for young men, what does it mean to be a respected young man?

Pepe: ...Well, there is one stereotype of a man, which is the armed actor, the head of the gang, or the person who has been getting involved with armed groups, and has begun to rise through the ranks. The one that starts as a *Carrito* [a child] who carries guns and then the next thing you know he has become the boss... They also enjoy significant status and recognition.

Roger comments that the most impoverished youths are more likely to join gangs. Furthermore, the more problematic their domestic upbringing the more likely they are to 'admire the man with a gun' (Roger, 24/04/2008).

Adam: And what do you think the difference is between you who joined *CoVida* and the people who join armed groups?

Roger: They mainly do that because of what they learn at home, the responsibilities, the tasks they are given, the atmosphere at home. Poverty has an influence but I think the most important thing depends on the responsibilities and norms and values that are fomented at home when they are kids. Also because they allow themselves to be sucked into the vicious cycle that exists. So from those homes, a lot of kids admire the man with a gun...

Adam: The motorbike, women, booze at the weekends...

Roger: Yeah, and they have money... So they have money and that's one of the things that is most influential in these parts of Medellín... So they stand out much more, especially for the women who take much more notice of them. So because of that the young lads say that they want to be like them and they take it as the example to follow.

They take that path because more than likely they're having a hard time at home, are mistreated by their parents... Also poverty, because they don't have the resources to live a dignified life... I think that because people have very few material resources they dream about having stuff, so because of that they look for the easiest way to get stuff. They end up stealing and getting things by taking risks...

But I've got some values and a life plan. I knew who I was, what I wanted, and that was to choose the right pathway. I've always said that life is short for the people who take the wrong path because it's a life full of risks.

Roger then comments that the boss of the local armed group is commonly seen as the successful man in the community.

Adam: Who is a successful man in the community?

Roger: ...I think for most people in the community the successful man is the one that has the most money, the most power, the most women.

Adam: And who does that character tend to be in the community?

Roger: Well, there have been loads because there has been so much violence here... [gang leaders are killed and replaced frequently]. The bosses are now the paramilitaries. Before that it was whoever was in power, whoever had the most people, the most guns, the ones who were winning the war and were the bosses... it's a dispute that will never end...

Sammy also comments that the respected men in the community tend to be the armed actors that are in power. Sammy, as many of the others do, relates joining the gang to the need for status attainment, economic necessity and the lack of licit options available to many youth. Like Roger he also highlights that conditions for youths are not the same and some are more desperate or have more difficult

upbringings than others despite the fact that may come from the same marginalised neighbourhood (Sammy, 03/06/2008).

Sammy: ...in a conflict context the subject who is respected is the armed actor that's in power, that they call commander, boss, the big criminal, the patron, *cucho*, whatever they want to call him. He is the subject that's respected within a conflict context.

Here you notice particularly the strong difference between men and women. Being a man is to be strong, being a man is to be a brute, being a man means bringing home money, being a man means being a protector, being a man is being skilful, being a man is being a womaniser, being a man is being a chauvinist, being a man is being macho, being a man is being a manly, being a man is to have power, being a man means being respected. Being a woman is the inverse of being a man... being weak, fragile, not having power, not having status, to be subordinated...

It is interesting to see how the common concept of 'being a man' outlined by Sammy fits the profile of the gang member closely, making joining a gang a direct mechanism to achieve manhood for male youth. Sammy then talks about why some youths become violent whilst others do not, highlighting the fact that some are brought up in more difficult conditions even though they are from the same neighbourhood.

Adam: What is the stereotype or the hero, or the one that young boys want to be?...

Sammy: They tend to want to be bad more than they want to be good... to be bad you don't have to study, you don't have to waste so much time in school or college... there's hunger, no money, violence at home... and because mum is crying and because my little brother is crying... so this kid doesn't want to be bad... It's not that someone is born and wants to be bad, no... Who's going to pay for education? Who's going to give them food so they can eat at school? So I spend my time at school who's going to work and feed my mum and dad?... Or my dad abandoned my mum, or my mum died, or my mum left, or whatever...

So there are people who live in poor neighbourhoods but under different circumstances... For example where I lived there weren't so many drugs, different to a load of my mates who grew up in places where they took loads of drugs... My family wasn't so violent...

Why should someone get involved? They live in difficult conditions and then they are offered money to kill someone, or steal a car and

with that they can feed their family... but if I asked a rich person living in good conditions to do the same [it would be different]. What option would you take? Go to a youth workshop or accompany a gangster and get some money... and with that you can feed your family? This also satisfies the needs to have power, to satisfy the necessity to have respect... knowing that a youth workshop won't give you status, nor money, nor clothes, and it won't take your hunger away.

Similarly to Roger and Sammy, Angel comments on the 'respect' for armed actors, but how that is linked to fear; that youths join gangs for economic reasons; and that women do not join because gangs are essentially a 'male space' (Angel, 15/05/2008).

Angel: A man with a gun who's the boss round here is respected but he's only respected because he has a gun, through fear, he intimidates others...

Adam: And what is the stereotype of the *paisa* man here [from this region]?

Angel: Ahhhh, they're womanisers, liars, they drink!...

Adam: Why do you think young men are the ones that join armed groups the most? Why are they men and why are they young?

Angel: Because in these groups there tends to be one older guy who runs things and he's got a load of younger guys who do the work. And why? Because he pays them, and it's the easiest way to get money... youths [in gangs] are accustomed to easy money and not struggling for it... They probably like to take drugs, they don't like studying, the family is in a bad situation... But they like to dress well, have brand trainers... So they see that the paras [paramilitaries] will pay them well and keep them well dressed, they join those groups.

Adam: And why the men and not the women?

Angel: We've created *machismo* in our society in which women are not supposed to use guns. They're for the home.

...Women know that if they join an armed group they're going to be seen as a sexual object and nothing else, so the women feel marginalised and they go to other places to work as prostitutes....

Galan, like Angel, says women stay out of armed groups because the macho sub-culture of the gang actively 'excludes' women. As with motorbikes and brand clothes, attractive women become a commodity within that culture (Galan, 19/06/2008).

Galan: I think that there is still a stigma that men are stronger. In these communities you can feel the *machismo* and it's much more accepted to be a male paramilitary than a female one... Men are almost always related to strength and what they are looking for is status and power. It's not the same saying you've got a gang of twenty men compared to a gang of twenty women. It's not the same... How do women join armed groups? By becoming the girlfriend...

Why do some choose one or another ideal of manhood? I think that depends on what your environment or context sells to you. So in these neighbourhoods the one who is the boss is the one who has the best motorbike, the best women, the one who kills the most, the one who takes charge the most. So these are the imaginaries that have been entering bit by bit. And not just purely in terms of the context in this neighbourhood, but in music, TV, in a load of ways...

Conversely, joining a youth group can be seen as distinctly 'un-masculine', particularly when compared to how Sammy previously described the stereotype of the 'macho' man in the community.

Galan: And why don't youths enter into a religious group, the scouts, or youth organisations? Because of the same stigma. If you join one of those groups then you're a sissy, you're dumb, it's looked down on. If you're from a Christian youth group then 'you're gonna talk shit', 'this kid talks crap', 'this kid's gonna brainwash me'. But on the other hand if you're in a gang you've got status and so you'll get recognition, you'll get to know more women, you'll have [sex with] more women. It's a lot easier to be in a gang than it is to join a youth group.

Echoing others, Hector explains that young men join gangs for 'easy money' and that women do not join gangs because it is a male space, noting that women are involved more indirectly in gang activity (Gato, 19/06/2008).

Adam: Why do you think that the majority of people that join gangs are young men?

Gato: Well, I think the first interest they have is economic. It's very hard to go to Uni and most parents can't pay, and getting a job is

really hard. It's really hard. The jobs that are about are really hard and badly paid. So, I think that when they look at the options that are there, everything going against them, and then they see the opportunity to be in [a gang], to get easy money, to have women, a motorbike...

Adam: But women also suffer the same poverty, the same scarcity of opportunities.

Gato: They don't enter the rank and file like the men, but they get involved with those men. So indirectly they are participating as well. But the principle motivational factor is money. Get involved, get some money, have a certain power and that the locals respect you, that sort of thing.

Adam: What do you mean by 'respect', where does that come from?

Gato: Because they're the ones who control everything in the neighbourhood. Although there are police, they are the bosses... If something happens in the neighbourhood, people don't go to the police to sort it out, they go to them... [the paramilitaries].

Quien comments on youths reduced spatial field where social behaviour is reproduced fluidly or 'genetically transfused' as he puts it (Quien, 20/06/2008).

Quien: The thing is today everything is about money... people are desperate... youths begin to get responsibilities... So [they look for] easy money with a gun...

When people are born and grow up here they think that the whole world is this neighbourhood and that nothing exists outside of the neighbourhood... That the boss is the boss of the neighbourhood, that if you get money you get it from the neighbourhood. So people grow up with an idea - *it's almost a genetic transfusion* [my italics] – that this is the neighbourhood [where everything happens]... so life style is [defined in this neighbourhood]

Adam: ...How do you become a man in this community? What does the community value?

Quien: ...Above all you have to be a dangerous guy and hang out with the tough guys in the neighbourhood... A fast motorbike, and you have to be working with the gang, have a girlfriend, the one that's the youngest and prettiest. The one that is just 'flowering' [going through puberty]...

Hernando suggests that 'protective elements' such as education, good relationships, and health emanate from the family, which can prevent youths from joining armed actors (Hernando, 21/06/2008).

Hernando: [Not] all little kids want to become [gang members]. There are *protective elements* [my italics] which I can't define exactly, but have something to do with the family. For example with good family relationships, with a good level of schooling, that are protective elements against joining [armed groups].

...they're resilient to that. And that, I think, has a lot to do with education, health, the level of family cohesion which makes them less vulnerable to joining an armed group. Those that get involved are searching for easy money, but also for recognition from the rest of the community... Acceptance and recognition beyond the recognition they might get for being a simple labourer or student...

Education and the family; they are two primordial institutions that give people another way of thinking because when you open your eyes and you read you see that there are other possibilities, you escape that cycle. But a little kid that doesn't manage to finish primary school, doesn't learn how to read well, has a very reduced world which is only made up of those reference points in the neighbourhood, which are *those* ones [as in violent actors]...

They don't leave the neighbourhood, they've never been to the theatre, they don't know what the world is. Their world is made up of four blocks and they take care of it, they are territorial and they defend it... and that's generated a lot of wars and continues to generate them, for territory... 'I defend and dominate this area, I control the drugs that pass through, I control the money that comes through, I extort. I establish a small state here in these four blocks'.

Hernando goes on to comment on *machista Paisa* regional culture and how authoritarian men prepared to use violence are held up as the male ideal.

Hernando: ...*Paisa* culture is really *machista* and patriarchal.

Adam: For kids, who is the man that should be respected?

Hernando: He who punishes, who is in authority even when its done through violence and bullets. He who is brave when you have to be, he who gives food, he who hands out money for health... an authority which provides solutions but also punishment. The objective for many youths is to arrive at that position of power.

...Whichever man leaves the rigid cultural norms of what a man and a woman are is a *marica* [softie / poof].

Chiner & Felipe comment on how violence can escalate quickly from something relatively innocent such as throwing stones at children from a different block. They explain that youths join gangs for 'power', access to

material possessions and the related recognition that it brings (Chiner and Felipe, 10/07/2008).

Felipe: ...Kids grow up and up and [the gang] becomes a way of earning 'easy money'... a motorbike, the best clothes, [they] think 'I'd like to hang out with him to have all that stuff too'.

Chiner: Power, power.

Felipe: Exactly, and they have power. Look, if you've got that, then you've got girls, money, everything. That's what 'power', brings. And recognition, you see... Power is to stand out...

Chiner: And to stand out above other people...

Adam: So power then is about dominating the other?...

F: Exactly, like a Mayor. They'll say 'here we're gonna put up three marquees, a sound system and were gonna dance three days... We're gonna buy booze, have drugs and the girls will come where the party is...' That's a lot of power.

Chiner: ...and that person [leader of armed group], people go to him and ask him to sorts out problems, to resolve conflicts.

Felipe: ...If people want to get ahead without becoming involved in the conflict... it's due to the family support they get and the economic situation they are in. Here people take up arms for economic reasons. Or because they are looking for role models that they never had. So then their godfather is the gang boss, that's why they call them patron, boss, like a father...

It should be highlighted that the 'prosocial' youths demonstrated a very strong capacity for analysis and critical reflection, both in this chapter and when reflecting on their life-histories in the previous chapter. This capacity was developed significantly at *CoVida*, which exposed them to new experiences and the influences of NGOs, academics, state institutions and local politics. These were indicative of the skills that have helped them navigate positive pathways to manhood, avoid gangs, and negotiate difficult and dangerous circumstances. Their personal development has opened pathways and possibilities for them, which otherwise they would not have had. For example, a number of them are at, or have finished,

university. Without *CoVida* it is unlikely that university would even have been considered an option. They were, on many counts, a remarkable group of youths.

Localised Versions of Dominant Masculinity

The discussions above have attempted to cast light upon what it means to be a man and the challenges youths face when navigating a pathway to manhood. How was manhood defined in their *field* of masculinities? What was valued as masculine *capital* in their context? In theory, norms in the *field* of masculinities would shape the *habitus* that would code, although not rigidly, masculine performance and hence the social practices of youths seeking to masculinise. Their pursuit of manhood informs their social performance significantly and in ways that operate at a less than conscious level.

What was dominant masculinity in the local context of these youths? Roger, Sammy, Pepe and Hernando talked about local masculine identity tied closely to the identity and role played by the gang boss. These masculine values were dominated – albeit in an exaggerated way - by the symbolism of gang members and particularly gang bosses through their 'power', 'respect', money, access to women and so on. The 'successful *men* in the community' were perceived to be the leaders of the armed groups, even if the 'respect' they garner largely stems from the fear of their violence. The gang became the symbol of localised dominant or 'hegemonic' masculinity and their members were powerful imaginaries and

role models for impressionable boys. They symbolised a mechanism by which to 'do masculinity' and 'show off' locally valued masculine *capital* such as fast motorbikes, expensive trainers or sexual access to desirable women. Pelicorto lamented the absence of real heroes and the ubiquity of what he called 'unfortunate imaginaries'. Pepe commented that such role models were successful at reproducing themselves because the "latent construction of the *cacique* or gang boss who has respect, recognition, power and material 'accessories' in a context where people live in poverty... (sic)" (Pepe, 11/04/2008).

Quien noted that the social mobility of youths was greatly reduced, often to the few blocks of the local neighbourhood. Certainly, the domination of the *field* of masculinity by gangs has a significant impact on boys and youths if they have narrow perspectives of the world due to stymied social mobility. Viscerally this can be detected in these neighbourhoods where, for example, listening to something as common as rock music is considered alternative because it is not traditional *musica popular* from the neighbourhood. Hernando also noted that 'four blocks' would become the gang's 'nation state' from which they would rarely venture. Pelicorto also stated that beyond this physical or spatial reduction, youths did not have a mental image, or a plan of where they wanted to be in the future. Such reduced imaginaries and mobility led youths to focus on a narrow type of male role model of power, status, moneymaking and masculinity represented by the *duros*, the leaders of the local armed groups. This prompts the reproduction of the *duros* version of masculinity and hence violence.

This is not a claim that all dwellers of poor communities do not engage with other elements in the city - shown by Pearlman's classic study in 1976 which demonstrated the mobility of *favelados* in Rio de Janeiro - but this engagement is often based on survival strategies located in the informal economy such as street vending or low paid work, such as house maids, which does little to reduce poverty or exclusion (Pearlman, 2009 ; Koonings and Kruijt, 2009: 17, 25).

Reflecting Pepe's analysis, Galan said masculine values are 'sold' to you by your local context leading to what Quien termed the 'genetic transfusion' of the role of the boss or gang leader. Certainly, as a masculinisation process, youths gain more esteem, status and locally regarded masculine *capital* by joining a gang than by working for a poverty wage as a labourer. As Sammy declared, the gang may satisfy real and practical needs for the desperate, but in reality so would labouring on a work site. The gang has the added incentive of also catering to youths 'need for respect'. Or as Hernando states, youths 'need to arrive at a position of power'.

Masculinisation Challenges

Most of the group here identified a dearth of opportunities and economic difficulties as principle reasons for youths to join armed groups. As Pepe stated, in such conditions 'any opportunity that comes along seems like a good one' and this opportunity was often through the gang. As Roger commented, these youths suffer because they do not have the resources

or opportunities to lead 'dignified' lives and because of 'values at home' (or a lack of them) lead youths to join gangs, contributing to cycles of violence. Furthermore, Pelicorto talked about the materialism of current youth culture. This bolstered the motivation to join gangs for access to 'easy money' and consequent material fulfilment. However, Galan, Angel and Hector outlined clearly that women did not join armed groups because they were male socialisation spaces and women were excluded, apart from their commoditisation as sexual trophies as further 'material possessions' of gang members.

Sammy, Quien, Hernando and Roger highlighted that within poor communities there were micro-level disparities where some youths were 'worse off' or came from more 'problematic homes' than others. This was cited as a factor that led youths to join gangs. Hernando went further stating that some families provided what he called 'protective elements' – such as education, loving relationships and health provision – which kept youths from joining gangs.

Angel and the complex experiences of young men

The social world and the young men that inhabit it in Medellín's periphery are undoubtedly complex. Whilst certain conclusions have been drawn out of the thesis so far, it is important to counter-pose against excessive neatness in the analysis. One case that explains some of these complexities is that of Angel. Angel grew up with a very supportive father, rejected armed groups and was later socialised into the 'prosocial' space of *CoVida* in a similar way to many of the other youths interviewed there.

Although he did not become a fully-fledged paramilitary himself, Angel later joined a 'community organisation' with links to paramilitary groups, and was ostracised by a number of the members of *CoVida*, one of whom said that 'all trust had been lost in him'. Angel joined the 'community organisation' because his father had left home and he could not bear the financial pressures upon him as the oldest male in the house expected to support the family. Hence he 'defected', not only to bring money home but also to fund his university education. He said "I'm the man of the house... It's lots of pressure... how can I have a dignified life without money?" (Angel, 15/05/2008). This shows the complexities of real life circumstance and how it interacts with youths' agency and masculinity to shape their decision making (for a discussion see Greig, 2010 ; also Rodgers, 2006: 286). This occurred despite Angels 'pride' at working in *CoVida* and his political beliefs about working with the community. In other words, even though a youth may experience a similar upbringing and pathway to manhood, we should not expect youths to fall into neat categories and agency, masculinity, contingency and context interact in complex ways. We should flag up such complexities and nuance our analyses, particularly if we seek to recommend methods for intervention with male youths living in contexts of exclusion.

Thesis Conclusions

Habitus, masculinisation and the reproduction of violence

Male youths are disposed to masculinise in a way that reflects local masculine *capital* in the *field* of masculinities in their social world, hence leading to the reproduction of masculine behaviour through the subject. The data was analysed using Bourdieu's 'thinking tools', explaining how individual subjects generate the reproduction of practice. Youths are disposed to navigate a pathway to manhood, acquire male status, identity, 'dignity', et cetera, reflecting masculine values in the *field* of masculinities. To do so they must acquire masculine *capital* rooted in existing or traditional values that confers male status, dignity, and so on.

This process can be applied to youths negotiating a pathway to manhood in any context, but a word of caution is necessary; not all masculinities are the same, nor are they unchanging in different settings. There are multiple masculinities, commented upon in chapters one and two, such as subversive, marginal or homosexual, and the range of meanings of masculinity changes and shifts across racial, ethnic and cultural lines within the same region. Furthermore, we should bear in mind that no man is committed to one overarching version of masculinity all of the time. Violent youths can care lovingly for their mothers and families, invoking Gutmann's multiple 'meanings of *macho*' where it is not uncommon for the poor Mexican *macho* to be involved in childcare (Gutmann, 1996). Masculinities are transposable and mutable and operate in a number of different *fields* or sites. At the same time, men are likely to seek identity, belonging or status and compete for different types of masculine *capital* (see Coles, 2009); and whilst there is no one masculinity, the hegemonic *macho* form in Medellín and much of Latin America reproduces patriarchy

and is undoubtedly widespread. Furthermore, as the case of Angel shows us, even when a youth may have appeared to establish a particular male identity and set of values, masculinity, agency and context interact in complex ways so we cannot rightly speak of fixed rules or definitive contingent factors that necessarily constitute 'prosocial' or 'violent' pathways to manhood. These complexities of the social world do not fit into neat definitions and should be reflected in our analyses.

To negotiate a pathway to manhood, youths will *strategise*. Both 'violent' and 'prosocial' youths were 'strategic' and showed agency. Although their agency is overt, they may not be wholly conscious of the fact that they are disposed to 'act like a man'. The strategy that a youth will follow depends on the influences of the *field* of masculinities in his childhood and as he grows up, and what have been termed 'masculinisation opportunities' that are available to him. These influences and opportunities are subjective, unique and contextualised experiences. The influences in the *field* of masculinities of a youth depend upon the leading masculine imaginaries they encounter as they grow up; namely at home and in their socialisation spaces and local neighbourhood. This shapes their masculine *habitus*, the type of man they are then disposed to become. To become this type of man depends in turn on the opportunities they have to perform as that man, or acquire the masculine *capital* that demonstrates this masculinity. These are 'masculinisation opportunities' unique to their experience of the world which are related to a number of factors which may be socio-economic and structural such as exclusion, poverty or the presence of armed groups; forms of support youths may receive (or not) from home or

in society such as parenting, schooling or through church groups; individual talents, interests and abilities, such as being good at sports, academically or musically, et cetera.

Janice Pearlman says of youths in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro:

“They have nothing to do. Their desire for money, status, belonging and an identity of import makes the lure of the drug traffic almost irresistible” (Pearlman, 2009: 58)

For explanatory purposes it is useful to unpack and develop this sentence using the concepts set out above. Although not explicitly mentioned by Pearlman, the assumption is that these youths are male. Here their “desire” is in part shaped by their masculine *habitus* or their dispositions to ‘act like men’. This infers male “status”, male “belonging” and a male “identity of import”. This requires masculine performance, and to perform like a man these youths will have to strategise to acquire locally valued forms of masculine *capital*. Drug trafficking gangs often dominate local versions of masculine *capital* – access to women money, guns, and the like - this is the ‘lure’. Symbolically they are a leading masculine imaginary in the community as an exaggerated version of traditional, or *macho*, masculinity. They are a local ‘beacon’ of masculinity, shaping the *doxa* - the rules of the game - so to ‘act like men’ younger generations are likely to follow their lead. Of course, there are multiple and competing versions of masculinity, but the majority of youths will seek manhood that reflects normative values, hence reproducing social behaviour and culture. Whilst most of these will not join the gang they will still perform much traditional masculine behaviour as this is part of their *habitus*, just not the exaggerated and violent version with guns.

To stretch Pearlman's sentence one step further, the youths "have nothing to do" and the "lure of drug traffic is almost irresistible". This represents the dual caveat that male youths face in contexts of exclusion and poverty where gang presence is significant. "Nothing to do" means limited licit masculinisation opportunities in the face of the "lure" of the significant masculinisation opportunities represented by drug trafficking.

Both 'violent' and 'prosocial' youths 'diverged' from the masculine norm to a certain extent. Violent youths adopted normative, *macho* or traditional values because of influences at home and particularly in the gang sub-culture, where they exaggerated the more malevolent elements of normative masculinity. They developed exaggerated performances from their masculine *habituses* because of the nature of the influences in the *field* of masculinity in their lives; the *duro* gang leader epitomising this version of exaggerated traditional masculinity.

Unfortunately in Medellín's periphery, armed groups have become 'structures of violence', embedded over time. Given their longevity and continual influence, arguably in Medellín's periphery, masculine values have not become more 'gender-equitable' or 'pro-female' because of this process; but rather the opposite is occurring as the domination of armed groups continues.

'Prosocial' youths also 'diverged' from the masculine norm. Whilst masculinities are complex and on occasion even these youths could be 'a bit macho', the *CoVida* sub-culture was 'prosocial', positive, gender equitable, et cetera, and fostered positive identities for all youths there,

both boys and girls. However *CoVida* also influenced the *field* of masculinity for these youths, for example, through the positive male role models most youths found there. This contributed to them developing positive masculine identities that reflected *CoVida* itself. So whilst the 'violent' youths represented exaggerated *macho* masculinities, the 'prosocial' youths demonstrated positive versions of masculinity which were also divergent from the norm. Male youths at *CoVida* did not develop radically alternative masculinities or masculine *habitus*, they were a divergent and positive version of the norm.

In particular the masculine identity of both violent and prosocial youths reflected the influences on their masculine *habitus* of the sub-culture of the gang or *CoVida* socialisation space. These spaces then proffered the masculinisation opportunities necessary to 'become that man'.

Galan stated 'it's a lot easier to be in a gang than it is to join a youth group' which for male youths is the dominant version of masculinity 'sold to you' (Galan, 19/06/2008). Contexts of poverty and exclusion are emasculating and challenge the dignity of male youths. Joining a gang then becomes a salient *daresay logical* choice for many youths in excluded contexts to secure the masculine *capital* required to secure esteem and 'dignity'. Where masculinisation opportunities are limited youths are more likely to find a pathway to manhood via the gang, especially as the gang dominates locally normative versions of masculinity in the minds of male youths. A number of youths will then be disposed to reproduce that model as they embark on their pathway to manhood or a 'male reputational project' to forge a masculine identity. Becoming a man is inscribed in the

habitus and is of course not bad per se, but in contexts where dominant versions of masculinity are symbolised by violent gangs and youths have precious few other dignified masculine opportunities then they are likely to choose the gang as a pathway to manhood. The influences of the *field* of masculinities and the masculinisation opportunities that have arisen for 'violent' and 'prosocial' youths have been markedly distinct; some youths perceived the gang as an acceptable and dignified pathway to manhood, whilst others did not and managed to secure alternative masculinisation pathways.

Boys will be disposed to go through masculinisation process, and in doing so become men. Those who became 'prosocial' were fortunate enough to have influences, support and opportunities to navigate positive pathways to manhood related to support growing up which led them to reject the possibility of joining armed groups, and the options opened up to them through *CoVida* to become men with a sense of pride and dignity. Similarly violent youths sought to navigate a pathway to manhood, to become men with a sense of pride and dignity, but their pathway to manhood was a different one. This conclusion cannot be a hard and fast rule. No one is bound completely by *habitus*. Unfortunately however, joining the gang is a vehicle for masculinisation, which increases in attraction as emasculation rises and other options fade.

Gangs, crime, drug trafficking and violence do need to be tackled with the legitimate rule of law; however the issues of chronic social violence are multi-causal and therefore need multiple solutions. Boys will strive to be men, and until dignified opportunities are more readily available in

contexts of exclusion and violence, boys and youths will continue to join gangs and cycles of violence will be perpetuated. The findings in this thesis can contribute to our understanding of violence reproduction by young men and can therefore contribute to the interruption cycles of chronic urban violence. With this in mind some initial implications of this thesis are made below.

Understanding Masculinities to Interrupt the Continuum of Urban Violence

As outlined in Chapter 4, despite the boom in youth work since 1990 there has been little focus on masculinities. Critical understandings of masculinities have been applied man-on-woman domestic violence, but not to male-on-male youth violence.

Organisations and institutions working with youth and violence can enhance their work by understanding male-on-male violence through a masculinities lens. Contexts of exclusion, poverty and violence in Medellín pose *particular challenges to male youths* that must be taken into account. Such contexts are emasculating because they actively reduce licit or positive masculinisation opportunities. Whereas the presence of armed groups increases illicit, negative or violence based masculinisation opportunities for young men. Whilst the presence of armed groups must of course be replaced with the legitimate rule of law, those working with youths must understand the masculinisation dynamic that leads boys and young men to join gangs, and replicate violent practices. Arguably, these processes of masculinisation should be understood transversally, that is,

across all organisations and institutions working with youth in contexts of exclusion, and particularly those working in youth violence prevention.

Shaping masculinisation opportunities - First of all, we need to provide boys and male youths with alternative activities and livelihoods that draw them away from violent versions of local masculinity, in an attempt to influence the 'masculinisation opportunities' youths are likely to opt for.

As the 'violent' youths' narratives showed, upon entering gangs, youths were not necessarily striving 'to be violent', they were striving 'to be men' even if this was 'less than conscious' process. Organisations working with male youth need to understand their dispositions to masculinise and cater for them. They will need to conduct specific contextual analysis to be able to do so effectively. So far, organisations have failed to understand this. They can begin to grasp these processes in terms of 'gendered forms of dignity provision' for excluded male youths. For example, if 'being a man' means becoming a breadwinner with status, what type of work or livelihood opportunities are youths likely to pursue that provide them with a sense of pride, and esteem, given their setting? Sweeping the streets may bring in some money, but it does little in the way of masculine pride and the accumulation of masculine *capital*. How might organisations provide avenues for young men and boys to accumulate positive types of masculine *capital*; and how might they identify such *capitals* in localised settings; et cetera?

Male youths' dispositions to masculinise will force their way to the surface as masculine practices. Youths will tend to reproduce 'productive' versions

of manhood – those that accumulate *capitals* in their context - and one of these is as a gang member. In chronically violent contexts embedded armed actors come to dominate and hence accumulate significant masculine *capitals* over time. They become the stand out social articulation of manhood. As such, male youths and boys, often revere the *duro* gang leader as the empirical work in this thesis shows. Practitioners and organisations working to reduce youth violence must understand these dynamics and establish themselves at a position where they can help youths become critical of 'negative' or 'violent' versions of masculinity. Exactly what this might mean in practice depends on each context and should be developed by practitioners who grasp these nuances. Such a grasp, and hence gendered youth work programs, will necessitate the participation of local boys and young men to be successfully developed. Urban violence is gendered, therefore urban violence reduction practices must also be gendered.

Targeting youths from a young age - The empirical work in this thesis suggests that community organisations that provide alternatives for youths, such as *CoVida*, can become positive masculinisation spaces and pathways to manhood. However, it was also clear from studying both 'violent' and 'prosocial' youths that domestic upbringing played a key role in their development. 'Violent' youths were more at risk of joining gangs where their parents were unable or unwilling to support them in schooling or alternative and extra-curricular activities growing up; and particularly where older male members of the family, especially brothers, were linked to armed groups. Predominantly these youths joined armed groups

between the ages of 12-15 years old, so prevention programs need to begin with youths who are under the age of 12, and have to be continued through adolescence. Youths at *CoVida* morally regulated against violent groups – they rejected them as an option – primarily because of the influences of their parents during their childhood. Therefore, such spaces should aim to inculcate similar 'violence rejecting' values into boys, and they should be supported with activities through adolescence which cater for positive forms of masculinisation. This does not mean that every youth should be 'given' a job or livelihood opportunity through such processes. However, an initial rejection of armed groups can act to keep them out of gangs when they reach the 'crossroads' between the ages of 12-15 when they are likely to have the opportunity to join the gang, or opt not to. This is inline with the 'prevention' approach used by organisations in Medellín.

Local organisations should aim to establish projects targeting boys in this age group as a prevention mechanism before they join the gang. Such projects need to be gendered and consider boys' burgeoning dispositions to masculinise, by taking into account the nuances of the local context and also their particular life histories and family background. Certainly such programs should teach and engender positive and nonviolent values about what it means to 'be a man'. As outlined in Chapter 5, the findings of this thesis are being developed into practical implementations in the field with *Con-Vivamos* as a 'real-life' example of this process. Although at the time of writing this process is at its genesis.

Approaches to tackling urban violence need to be understood from a gendered and sociological perspective if we are to prevent boys from

joining armed groups. However, a focus on masculinities alone is not a panacea or 'silver bullet' for urban violence, but it is a vital and little understood component of violence reproduction. Working with boys in contexts of exclusion is one key element for breaking cycles of violence, and practical applications for doing so should be developed with local organisations and be supported through complimentary and not contradictory state securitisation policy.

We can only hope to interrupt the continuum of urban violence by understanding then influencing the lives of new generations of vulnerable young boys in contexts of exclusion and chronic violence.

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Annex 1: Typology of Institutions and Organisations Working with Youth in Medellín, 2008

Organisation	Background & Approach to Youth Work	Target Population	Methods
Government Institutions			
Metrojuventud (Mayor's Office)	Rapid development in conjunction with NGOs and international support since 1993; has opened significant space in Medellín policy making; Farjardo (previous Mayor) declared youth as central to municipal policy; as of year end 2007 running 98 different youth programs across the city consecutively	Outreach to all youth population but majority spending on marginalised youth; support various youth groups, projects, NGOs	Multiple methods and projects, including cultural, sporting, musical, audiovisual events such as large scale music events such as Altavoz Youth Festival, and involving youth directly in political processes via the Municipal Youth Council (CMJ), and Youth Development Plans 2004-present
'Peace & Reconciliation Program' demobilisation process (Mayor's Office)	Demobilising combatants after Presidential process led to 2002 Justice and Peace law with paramilitaries; demobilisation process handed to municipal government; ongoing project in 2008	Demobilising combatants; 4,000+ from Medellín; majority youth; majority male	Primary, secondary and higher education programs; skills training; financial stipends to participate; psychological attention programs
Corporate NGOs:			

Corporación Región	Large liberal / left-wing NGO with international and state funding, long history of youth work since 1980s; Work closely with Metrojuventud on creation and implementation of policy; Conducts research on youth, create & support youth projects – such as Casas Juveniles in 90s, Run education projects such as ‘School of Resilience’, promote socially inclusive education Rights based approach focus; promote youth agency development, participation and psychosocial work.	Carry out work with youth over range of socioeconomic backgrounds throughout city, but more emphasis on lower three strata 1, 2 & 3 (of 6).	Multiple methods
Instituto Popular de Capacitación (IPC)	Large left-wing NGO; research work in many areas; rights based approach with human rights focus; large section of organisation works on youth; previous focus largely on militia issues; currently working to develop critical politicisation of youth or social change; popular education; critical of state abuses; work on human rights with schools; challenge education system; youth participation; critically engage with state youth policy;	Marginalised youth strata 1 & 2; displaced populations	Workshops, action research, popular education, strengthen existing youth organisations
CEDECIS	Large NGO; works on development of education system partly with, partly parallel to state; support youth projects in marginalised rural communities outside of Medellin	Education system; marginalised youth	
Corporación Democracia y Paz	Formed by ex-members of IPC; focus on children and youth armed actors to demobilise and reintegrate; support youth projects in violent neighbourhoods teaching pro-social values	Children and youth living in violent contexts (Comuna 13); strata 1 & 2; demobilising children and youth	Psychological attention for demobilising youth; support youth music groups such as AfroReggae with anti-consumer pro-social values
NGOs: SEMINIS, COMBOS	Eg.		

SEMINIS	Founded in 1980s, part of emerging movements from left not linked to violent project (guerrillas); psychosocial focus on individual transformation; broad rights based (social, economic, cultural); critical / political thinking, Gandian nonviolence; against recruitment into armed actors with project Jovenes Gestores de la Vida; work on improving esteem, show youths that different world to marginalisation exists; gender specific work - project Mujeres Criadoras	Marginalised child and youth population strata 1 & 2 (Comuna 13 where “all kids are traumatised”); at risk youth – from youth prison, street children, children of sex workers; also a focus on women	Creative, artistic, poetry, theatre, cinema, ‘safe space’ or ‘safe haven’ walk in centre for at risk children and youth;
COMBOS	Founded in 1990; aim to respond to most vulnerable youth and children today; provide basic education and canteen for food security; left-wing organisation which promotes nonviolence	Vulnerable youth and children	Food security; primary education; promotion of life plans / opportunities and nonviolence
Networks, solidarity and training: Escuela de Animación Juvenil – ‘Alliance for Youth Mobilisation’	Alliance for the development of youth work between NGOs, Metrojuventud and Universities. Founded in 1998, took place of Paisajoven. Develops ways of working with youth for education and social intervention; criticise education system; educate youths for personal development; develop critical thinking and politicisation for youths; aim for social transformation for marginalised youth	Transversal on youth, education sector, youth policy sector	Train youth leaders, teachers, youth practitioners in: tools to work with youth, conflict mediation, youth world context, implementation of youth policy,
Community Organisations eg. Platohedro, Con-Vivamos			
Platohedro	An organic organisation founded in 2001; started spontaneously by rebellious alternative individuals linked to anarchism; emerged from university youth group; modern manifestation of organic community youth work using audiovisual work	Victims groups and local youth population – strata 3. Also use audiovisual expertise to collaborate with	Principally audiovisual – documentary making, music recording, etc., promote artistic expression, graffiti, cinema, street theatre, run local cultural events

	Run political workshops supporting nonviolence, critical thinking, dissent and activism	different NGOs (IPC, CEDECIS); also run events and cinema for local children	
Con-Vivamos	Founded by local community activists in 1990 in response violence of late 1980s in ultra-violent north eastern part of city Largely left-wing organisation, promote political inclusion, critical thinking, peace-building, human rights, mediation between violent youth groups, the strengthening local organisations, promoting political participation and popular education, support other community and youth organisations including the 'Network of Community Organisations'; support of nearby displaced population	Strata 1 & 2, work with children, youth and local community; local displaced populations;	Promote cultural and sporting events, art, theatre, music, popular education, campaigning against violence, denouncing human rights abuses, drop in centre, promote broader social events in Medellin such as 2008 Medellin Social Forum; support political participation
Youth Organisations and Networks	Corporación Picacho con Futuro, Red Juvenil, Siglo 21, Youth Clubs, Teatro Efimero, Altavista, Corporación Puerta, Articulacion Juvenil, Amiga Joven, etc. Youth organisations vary widely; some are supported by the state and even international aid, others are entirely autonomous, others are articulated and supported by larger NGOs. Many have aim to develop political and critical thinking amongst youths, often supported in thee aims by larger NGOs such as Corporación Región, the IPC or strong community organisations such as CONVIVAMOS. More established youth groups support other youth initiatives such as Picacho con Futuro, or the youth network nonviolence 'anti-military' group Red Juvenil.	Various youth sectors. However, as many receive support or were funded by NGOs or linked to former 'Youth House' state projects with a focus on marginalised sectors, most youth groups are found in the poorer economic strata.	Multiple methods, although youth led youth activity normally implies cultural, musical, sporting, creative methods and events. Eg. Anti-militarisation concert, traditional games night, football competitions, chirimía musical gatherings, stilt walking, etc. Such events often, but not always or explicitly have a social or political message behind them.
Political Party Groups	Jovenes Farjardistas, Juventud Comunista JUCO, Conservative and Liberal party youth groups, etc		Political campaigning to recruit the support of other youth
Family Welfare	Family Compensation Funds are organised and funded	CROJ – child and youth	Educational workshops, life skills

<p>Family Welfare Programs - Cajas de Compensación Familiar</p>	<p>Family Compensation Funds are organised and funded by private business by industrial sector to provide employees and their families social security services, health care and educational support, and recreational activities (eg. COMFAMA, COMFENALCO). They also sponsor social projects, the most pertinent of these is CROJ 'Centro de Referencia y Oportunidades Juveniles' (Youth Centre for Reference and Opportunities), from COMFENALCO which supports the reintegration of former child and youth combatants.</p>	<p>CROJ – child and youth combatants in Medellin</p>	<p>Educational workshops, life skills training,</p>
<p>Church based youth organisations</p>	<p>Such as the Asociación Cristiana Juvenil - ACJ 'Christian Youth Association', CENFOR, Corporación Don Bosco, Movimiento no Matarás (Thou Shall Not Kill Movement) from the 'Diocese Youth Pastoral'.</p> <p>Some organisations are evangelical in nature others are not such as the 'Diocese Youth Pastoral'. Traditional church based groups tend to be top-down and do not embody the postmodern youth appraisal that arose in the 1990s to understand youth realities from youths' point of view (Arias; Marquez; Cruz). Such approaches involve the 'reconditioning' of youths (Arias). Some organisations are refuges for vulnerable children, orphans, etc such as Corporación Don Bosco. Other organisations are not evangelical in nature, principally 'Christian Youth Association' or ACJ which</p>	<p>The ACJ works with at risk youth in areas of high violence (Comuna 13)</p>	<p>The ACJ runs workshops on issues such as sexual health, nonviolence and encourages youth group development using music – namely hip-hop -, journalism for youth, audiovisual projects, sports competitions, etc</p>