SONJA MARZI, RACHEL PAIN, AND JEN TARR

RESEARCHING DISPLACEMENT TOGETHER

Co-producing Knowledge with Women in Colombia

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This book showcases how to co-produce research when we are unable to meet in the same geographical space. It details a remote and hybrid audio-visual participatory methodology through which women share their experiences of displacement, gender, and the city.

Writing as researchers and filmmakers in the UK and Colombia, alongside 24 displaced women in Bogotá and Medellín, this participatory audio-visual project explores displacement from the women's perspectives. This book is innovative in its collaborative writing and its combination of audio-visual and textual material. It presents a methodology for remote and hybrid research, advocating for more inclusive, equitable, and decolonising research interactions. Through three co-written chapters, it contributes to themes of displacement, gender, and the city, as displaced women share testimonies and audio-visual outputs, revealing experiences of violence, conflict, and aspirations for change as they rebuild their lives.

This book stands out for its collaborative authorship and integration of text with audio-visual material, offering rich insights. It will interest researchers and practitioners working inside and outside universities who are interested in developing remote, hybrid, and audio-visual participatory methodologies, as well as those who want to understand more about displacement and the challenges of urban resettlement from women's perspectives.

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Dedicado a todas las mujeres desplazadas y víctimas de la violencia, que hoy continúan luchando por sus sueños y son inspiración para salir adelante.

To all displaced women and victims of violence who keep fighting for their dreams and are an inspiration to move forward.

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Nury Tique Andrade, displaced from Tolima due to the conflict, now resides in Bogotá with her children and partner. A community leader in her neighbourhood, one of her achievements since moving to the city is building her own home, her cherished "palace", which also serves as a community place.

Nancy Callejas, displaced from Cundinamarca, fled to Medellín with her three daughters due to the conflict and continues to live there. Despite many challenges, she sees herself as a fighter who values life's blessings. She loves spending time with her grandson and finds joy in being close to nature.

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Marisol Cely Echeverría, a young dreamer and hard worker, was displaced from Suba, Bogotá at a young age due to the conflict. She had to move within the city, where she began to create new and stronger roots. She actively participates in community processes to learn and to contribute.

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While there are many names that we could list here, most importantly this book would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the women co-researchers and Colombian research team. We started the process and this project during the pandemic, at a time the world and future seemed more insecure than ever. However, meeting every week online and working towards a film that represents displaced women in Colombia on their own terms created a space of continuity and hope. Strong friendships were built since then, especially since we have been able to meet face to face again. Never at this time did we think we would write a book such as this one. We truly believe this is a special book with an innovative format that allows the stories of the women to be heard differently. Our (Sonja, Rachel, and Jen) thanks go to Colombia and everyone there involved in this process. Thanks for working with us, teaching us and sharing your life stories with us. We hope that this book is what you all hoped it would be.

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INTRODUCTION

Sonja Marzi, Rachel Pain, and Jen Tarr

How can we continue to do research together when we are unable to meet in the same geographical space?

This question is the focus of this book. Writing as researchers and filmmakers in the UK and Colombia, including 24 displaced women co-researchers in the two Colombian cities of Bogotá and Medellín, this book is a reflection on our experiences of co-producing research together between 2020 and 2022. We started from a distance online, and later met in person, face-to-face.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which hit the world early in 2020, affected most countries through lockdowns, including restrictions on travel and social contact. The direct and indirect ill health, death rates, and harsh social and economic consequences are, of course, the devastating impacts that many people are familiar with in the months and years that followed (see Appiah 2021; Ensler 2021). Like many researchers, we also faced the challenge of how to continue our work, when meeting with research participants in one geographical place had become impossible due to travel restrictions and health risks. This had a particular impact on those of us who use research methods that rely on face-to-face activity – especially on approaches that involve co-production and participatory research. Approaches under this umbrella, which we say more about below, are especially reliant on longer periods of time spent with research participants in situ; to build trust, design research, and conduct data collection and analysis together.

Many researchers had to either stop their research activities at this time, or change their research design towards secondary sources or to quicker and more extractive methods. For some, there was a shift away from the more deeply engaged collaborative research approaches that had recently become

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more popular, as well as from the positive impacts that these approaches aim to co-create (Marzi 2023a). Paradoxically, this was happening at a time when the collaborative aspects of research were becoming more rather than less valuable. Methodologies involving participation and co-production are often undertaken by and with less advantaged communities around the world, carrying the potential to create valuable knowledge that can contribute to social change and transformation (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007). This is especially the case at times of crisis and beyond. It is often those communities, and particularly women, who are most affected by emergencies, crises, conflict, and social upheaval (including the COVID-19 pandemic), but they are rarely listened to or included in emergency and crisis responses (Bradshaw 2015; Bradshaw and Fordham 2015).

As a consequence of this new landscape of pandemic research, many researchers rapidly developed new ways to start or continue their data collection (Howlett 2021; Horn and Casagrande 2023; Lomax, Smith, and Percy-Smith 2022; Lupton 2020; Marzi 2020). Our team was part of this push, as we searched for solutions that would allow us to continue participatory action research (PAR) transnationally, connecting to and engaging with our co-researchers to co-produce knowledge. Indeed, experiences during the pandemic and other crises seemed especially important to document. We developed a methodology which involved using smartphones to connect remotely, to collect and share audio-visual and written material, and to hold synchronous online workshops (Marzi 2023a, 2023b). As time went on and travel became possible, we also introduced elements of face-to-face research, making it a hybrid research project – that is, methods and practices that are conducted partly remotely, and partly face-to-face.

In this book, we report on our research together and reflect on our experiences. We share some of the knowledge we co-produced with 24 displaced women co-researchers on experiences of displacement, how people rebuild their lives in urban environments and what they aspire to in future from a gendered perspective. We also provide guidance for others on the remote/hybrid participatory audio-visual methodology that we developed during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when we were unable to meet with our co-researchers as we had previously done. We go on to present some of the empirical knowledge that we created together with displaced women, using our innovative remote/hybrid methodology, to demonstrate its benefits and value but also to share what they felt was important to tell. This co-produced research is of a sensitive nature, focusing on women's experiences of displacement, violence, and trauma in Colombia. Research of this nature, we argue, should only be done with strong relationships of trust and, importantly, with the active participation of those who have been affected by violence and trauma: co-producing knowledge instead of extracting it. We discuss this need for a co-production approach below.

The benefits of remote and hybrid research: futureproofing research in the post-pandemic era

Based on our research, we suggest that the increased use of smartphones worldwide provides a positive opportunity for researchers to connect with participants transnationally and remotely – they are an excellent tool for participants to express and document their perspectives and co-produce knowledge. However, and just as importantly, we also believe that the methodology around this tool requires detailed care and attention if the resulting research process and outcomes are to be meaningful, deeply engaged, ethical, and equitable. The remote participatory methodology that we developed, using smartphones and online spaces, therefore offers us ways to work together synchronously and asynchronously and to continue research in a hybrid way. Co-researchers can share data in the form of text, audio, and audio-visual material to continue the co-production of knowledge and provide deep insights during ongoing emergencies.

This can also result in the inclusion of those research participants whose voices traditionally go unheard during these times. But beyond this, too, remote methodologies offer benefits for making research more accessible to all. The traditional model of transnational research, involving international travel and long periods away from researchers' usual workplaces and homes, has been critiqued by many as a continuation of masculinist, class-based colonial practices. It is a model that is often inaccessible to those based in poorer or less well-funded countries, institutions and communities, those with caring responsibilities, and those living with disabilities and/or chronic ill health.

Remote and hybrid research, we argue, offers the promise of research that is more inclusive, equitable, decolonial, and sustainable in terms of reduced planetary environmental impacts. These requirements retain their relevance in the post-pandemic landscape, and having this expertise helps to future-proof our research. However, these benefits are far from automatic. They require a deep commitment to equal participation to be realised, and recognition that the best-laid plans and intentions are often tripped up in real life. They demand commitment to addressing inequities and other problems that arise during the research process.

Our research project: a summary

Funded by a methodological development grant from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (grant number ES/V006029/1), our project developed the innovative remote/hybrid participatory audio-visual methodology detailed in this book. We built this pioneering methodology in collaboration with 24 displaced women in Bogotá and Medellín, who became co-researchers alongside Colombian and UK-based researchers and filmmakers. We explored and tested the methodological, ethical, and technical challenges and possibilities of

the use of smartphones for remote participant recruitment and participatory audio-visual data collection and analysis. The team used these data to co-produce a documentary on women's experiences of displacement, the challenges they faced in the cities they settled in, and their hopes for the future. The final documentary is publicly available here: https://youtu.be/mBLsfgFOzHI

Rigorous participatory research, as we will detail, should be flexible and able to respond to new challenges that emerge on the ground. Our initial topic for the research was women's right to the city during the pandemic. However, our co-researchers quickly told us that they used the word 'pandemic' not just exclusively for COVID-19. Rather, they shifted the research to focus on the many 'pandemics' (their words) they live with. These include the more general neglect of their needs by the state, and the heightened risks of physical, political, and structural violence that they face throughout their daily lives. Consequently, the research focus shifted towards exploring more insights about women's experiences of displacement as a result of the Colombian conflict, the challenges they struggle with in their current urban settings, and looking towards the future with hope and taking action so that a better future is possible (seguir adelante) (see also Marzi and Pain 2024). This book is based on the methodological and substantive findings of this participatory action research and co-creation project.

The aims of this book

We have three key goals in writing this book.

The first is to share with others the methodological knowledge that we have gained from the remote/hybrid participatory audio-visual methodology that we developed with co-researchers in Colombia and the UK. Here we aim to provide the epistemological grounding for the methodology, including the philosophy and principles on which it is based. The book aims to be a practical guide, to support other researchers, practitioners and community activists in adopting and using the methodology in their own work and according to their own needs. It will be especially valuable, we hope, in contexts where one needs to bridge geographical distance between researcher/practitioner and participants.

In particular, we hope that the book enriches and enables more research in the context of climate emergency, disasters, conflict-affected areas, or simply situations where there is not enough funding available for international travel. These are all particular challenges for transnational research, even as – we suggest – collaborative research conducted with marginalised communities has an ever more valuable and urgent role to play in times of crisis. A remote or hybrid participatory visual methodology enables us to continue or initiate participatory work, whilst ensuring that co-production and impact are built in and hold the potential to create social change and transformation (Marzi 2023a). The innovative approach we adopted, using online spaces and technologies,

was underpinned by real relationships, and can offer long-term use and perspectives within and beyond academic research. In this book, we provide a detailed explanation of how we developed and employed the methodology and hope it will provide useful guidance to anyone who seeks to work in a participatory way, whether online or hybrid. In this sense, the book contributes to discussions about how knowledge is co-produced, especially using participatory (action) methodologies in a post-pandemic research landscape.

The second aim is to contribute to understanding of displacement, gender and the city, through centring displaced women's own accounts and their work and aspirations for the future. The book, therefore, also contains substantive content that emerged from the research, showcasing the kinds of in-depth, powerful knowledge that can be co-produced using this methodology. Here our co-researchers, the 24 displaced women in Bogotá and Medellín, speak about their experiences of displacement to and within the city, through the textual and audio-visual material they created and analysed as part of the project. The chapters on displacement, urban challenges and hopes for the future are co-authored with the women co-researchers and provide special insight into experiences of displaced women. The women co-researchers defined the content of those chapters through collaborative writing workshops in Colombia. Therefore, the empirical knowledge presented in this book represents our collective findings that have been disseminated according to what these women feel is important for others to learn from our research.

Researching together, writing together

This leads us to the question 'do you also write with your participants?' We have been asked this question many times when presenting the findings of the research. And it is a fair and important question, often levelled at those who claim to use co-production and participatory research approaches (see below). Hence our third aim, while ambitious, provides an answer to this question. While we believe our co-produced documentary already has great value for our co-researchers, we felt it was important to continue in the spirit of co-production and include women co-researchers as well as the Colombian and UK research teams in disseminating our methodological and empirical findings in this book. We are aware that a book on its own is not necessarily the best option, as there are more accessible participatory dissemination techniques (e.g., see Evans 2017 on disseminating research with young people through creative methods and video). Indeed, we have used other methods that are more accessible and engaging on this project too. Yet a book is still something that both participants and academics tend to favour to disseminate research knowledge; it has recognised status as an output and allows the kinds of detailed reflections and guidance that we offer here.

Writing from research is usually a university-based activity, something that is done solely by academics. Indeed, writing is often a colonial practice by Global North scholars (Mott and Cockayne 2017; Quijano 2000; Smith 2021), a means of taking power and self-representation away from participants and Global South partners, and findings are interpreted and written up without them in the process (see Connell 2014, 2015). We would argue there are many ways to include co-researchers in the analysis and dissemination of research that work well, without writing a book together. However, as this book aims to be accessible and reach broader audiences beyond purely academic ones, we are pushing participatory practice a bit further (see also People's Knowledge Editorial Collective 2016). Nonetheless, we acknowledge that there are still limitations that come with academic structures that prove difficult to challenge; the politics of academic writing have not been fully circumvented in our efforts here. In particular, due to time commitments and resources, the UK-based academic researchers on the project took the role of lead authors of the book. The book's form, however, combines text and audio-visual material so that it includes the contributions of all research partners, including those less comfortable with expressing themselves in writing, and to make the book more accessible for those to whom highly academic outputs are of less interest and use. We also see the combination of text with audio-visual material in this book as pivotal, because the methodology of the project is based on the audio-visual and a documentary that we co-created. The women co-researchers and the Colombian research team, in particular, have strong skills and expertise in creative audio-visual expression, and hence this is a crucial part of how the book is constructed.

Some chapters are therefore led by the UK team, and some by the women co-researchers and the Colombian research team. For example, the empirical chapters were developed in face-to-face workshops between the women co-researchers and research team, to co-produce a detailed outline led by the women to guide our writing of those chapters. Drafts have been reviewed by the women co-researchers and discussed online for feedback. The methodological chapters have been written in collaboration between the UK and Colombian research teams, as the latter are experts in audio-visual methods from an academic perspective. Chapter 2 and the conclusion were led by UK-based academics, though the Colombian researchers provided valuable comments and feedback. The UK-based filmmaking company Spectacle also supported the process of creating and editing the filmed material of the documentary 'Volviendo a Vivir'. While they co-developed the documentary with us, they did not contribute to writing this book; nevertheless, their valuable contributions are highlighted in selected chapters.

In Chapter 5, the first of the three empirical chapters, we describe the process of co-writing in more detail. In Chapter 8, we reflect back critically on co-authorship in participatory action research.

Positioning our research approach

Chapters 3 and 4 provide more detailed information on the methodology that we used on the project. Here, we want to set out our research *approach*, as a set of philosophically and politically founded principles and traditions that drive our research design. This concerns us with matters of ontology and epistemology (see Table 1.1), which lead us to adopt a feminist, decolonial, and participatory research approach. These can be imagined as underpinning and informing our choices of the particular tools, practices, and processes that we used on the ground (i.e., the methodology and methods). Because we adopted a participatory epistemology for co-production, the methods were partly chosen by participant co-researchers.

There are two important aspects of our project that we want to detail in this section. First, our research project is an example of **co-produced participatory action research (PAR)**. This is an increasingly popular methodological approach, both in the academic social sciences and for others outside academia (such as practitioners, activists, etc.) who want to conduct research with the full participation of the communities involved. In other words, those who are usually the 'subjects' of research take on the roles of question generation, research design, data collection and analysis, alongside those more traditionally thought of as

TABLE 1.1 Defining our research approach

'Layers' in research approaches	*Definition*	*What this means in our research…*
Ontology	A theory or set of beliefs about the way the world is	The world is unequal due to the uneven distribution of power – this reality leads us to choose certain epistemologies
Epistemology	A theory or set of beliefs about knowledge	The principle of knowledge justice; everyone should be able to produce, and benefit from, knowledge. Our participatory action research approach is informed by feminist and decolonial theory, all of which rest on this principle
Methodology	The way that research proceeds, through a series of stages of methods and analysis	A co-produced audio-visual remote/hybrid methodology. This is developed over the process of working together over several months, and includes the various stages described in Chapter 4
Method	A technique for collecting data	The research used the methods of group discussion, participatory diagramming, drawing, participatory photographing and filming on smartphones, role play and drama, interviews, guided tours, and storytelling with animations

researchers. The co-produced PAR that we have developed is therefore not just a methodology, but reflects a particular epistemology (our belief is everyone should be able to produce and benefit from knowledge) and an ontology (explicit attention to the fact that world is unequal due to the uneven distribution of power).

Second, our project is a collaboration between countries and institutions in the Global North (UK) and South (Colombia), and this additionally raises the key danger of reproducing colonial relations through research. While we certainly do not promise to have circumvented all of these inherent dangers, the way we designed the research from start to finish aimed to draw on the tenets of **decolonial knowledge production** and the Latin American origins of participatory action research (Freire 1970; Smith 2021; Sultana 2019; see Fals Borda 1987). After all, it would be hypocritical to attempt to address issues of power and inequality between researchers and participants without making the same efforts around the relationships between the researchers and filmmakers who are situated in different national contexts. Throughout this book, we apply a critical lens to these efforts, rather than imagining or assuming that our practices in this regard have always been successful.

What is co-production, and what is participatory action research?

Co-production is now a widely used term in relation to research. It has become popularised in the twenty-first century in the Global North, as a way of engaging research partners outside of academia and thereby increasing the societal impacts of research. At its simplest, it means doing research – producing new knowledge – together, but we should be aware that co-production is an umbrella term that is very wide indeed. It covers a multitude of research activities that look quite different in activities. For example, we have seen researchers claim that simply using more engaging methods (especially creative methods) with participants constitutes co-production; or that accepting funding from business partners means that research is co-produced. For us, co-production means a much deeper level of partnership, and approaching research together beyond the funding or data collection stages. That does not mean that every person involved is contributing to the research process with the same amount of time and resources, yet each contribution is equally valued (Banks et al. 2018: 5). If we look back at Table 1.1, we can position our understanding of co-production as not simply about methods, but as involving an epistemological belief that knowledge production is best when it is a shared endeavour.

PAR is one approach to co-production (although it long pre-dates the use of the term 'co-production'). It is one of the fastest-growing research approaches across the world, not only in academic research but also as a popular approach for local communities to use to generate shared knowledge and pursue change (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2025). PAR describes research that is participatory,

or done together, and prioritises action as the key result – it involves a collaborative process of research, education and action-oriented towards social change and transformation. It rejects top-down and extractive research approaches, and recognises the existence and value of knowledge of those who have often been systematically excluded, oppressed and denied inclusion in knowledge production processes (Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010; Mitlin et al. 2020). PAR should be thought of, then, as itself arising from a specific epistemology (see Table 1.1). Its core epistemological belief is that a more justice-based and equitable approach to the production of knowledge is more likely to result in research that is valid and useful for those communities who are most impacted by the issues under examination. In PAR, research designs therefore centre on knowledge exchange and impact, and research outcomes go beyond academic publications, emphasising action in order to improve the lives of research participants and their struggles (People's Knowledge Editorial Collective 2016; Lenette 2022). Epistemologically, methodologically, and ethically, it is built on direct participation, cyclical awareness building and more equitable power relationships that enable more democratic decision-making processes (Cahill 2007; Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007). Consequently, PAR recognises and embraces the capacity, knowledge and skills of those being 'researched' to participate fully in the research process, from the development of the research question, the research design, data collection and analysis to the communication and dissemination of the results of the research. PAR aims to empower participants, and enhance their skills and capacities to challenge and change existing unjust power structures and relationships (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2025), and this requires holding ourselves to ongoing critical scrutiny. The research process itself is often somewhat messy and unpredictable in its outcomes, requiring the researcher to be flexible, to follow its organic cyclical iterations (Cahill 2007; Pearce 2010), and to build the necessary rapport and trust relationships between researchers and participants.

The origins of PAR are particularly important to recognise for a transnational project like ours that sits across the Global North and South. PAR is a longstanding research approach, first developed in a number of countries during the 1960s and 1970s across Africa, Latin America and the Indian subcontinent (Glassman and Erdem 2014). Many commentators trace PAR back to the practice of Brazilian emancipatory educator Paulo Freire (1970). He developed a critical pedagogy for working with illiterate students, for whom education was crucial in challenging their marginalised status. The result was a community-based research process that supported people's participation in knowledge production and social transformation. Crucially, Freire theorised knowledge not as transferred from one expert group to another disempowered group, but as coming from within all research participants. His ideas, while not without their critics, provided great inspiration to others in the Global South

countries who were engaged in challenging the legacies of colonisation, development interventions and positivist research.

Another key figure in PAR's development was Orlando Fals Borda, a rural sociologist who worked with peasants and fisher people in coastal Colombia from the 1960s. Developing a new approach to research with local people, he was the first to use the term participatory action research. He was explicit about the unjust power relations in conventional research approaches and methods, and argued that only when the 'researched' reposition as 'researchers' can liberating knowledge production that inspires revolutionary change become possible. For him (Fals Borda 1987; Fals Borda et al., 2006), PAR is founded in a set of attitudes and values, a 'philosophy of life' first and foremost. His approach went on to have a much wider influence in Colombia and beyond.

PAR has developed many strands and iterations since this time (Glassman and Erdem 2014; Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2025; Lenette 2022). Troublingly, over the years, these have included many uses that effectively co-opt the approach and its practices, in order to foster 'participation' in name only while leaving uneven and disempowering knowledge production intact (Mohan 1999; Tuck and Yang 2012). However, at the same time, PAR has been adapted to provide methodological approaches to conduct critical research with its roots in strands of critical philosophical thought such as Indigenous, feminist, environmental justice, and critical race theory (see Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2025). In our own project, which sought to enable the self-empowerment of displaced women as co-researchers, the use of PAR was inflected by decolonial and intersectional feminist approaches. Feminist PAR (Brydon-Miller, Maguire, and McIntyre 2004; Fine and Torre 2019; Maguire 1987) and decolonial PAR (Lenette 2022; Tuck and Guishard 2013) are already well-established, and we drew on this work to design the research project that we shared in this book.

This is especially relevant, we suggest, for research on and during emergency situations. The women co-researchers in our project consist of a group of displaced women living in precarious communities in Medellín and Bogotá. Women are among the groups of people most affected by emergencies and disasters (Bradshaw 2015; Bradshaw and Fordham 2015), and this was no different during the COVID-19 outbreak (Kinyanjui 2020), especially for those living in conflict or post-conflict areas and/or those who are migrants (Cintra, Grugel, and Riggirozzi 2020; Wenham, Smith, and Morgan 2020). The prefix of 'intersectional' to our feminist approach accounts for and attends to the multiple differences among women in social, economic, and political power (see Crenshaw 1991), not only among the displaced women who are our co-researchers but also among the rest of the research team too.

Just because a project sets out with the goals of intersectional feminist decolonial practice, however, that is no guarantee it will not fall into the trap of 'faux PAR' (Pratt 2007) that reflects research business as usual and belies its liberatory promise (Pratt 2007; People's Knowledge Editorial Collective 2016;

Ritterbusch 2025). Research demands ongoing detailed care and attention to its ethical and political practices, if the resulting processes and outcomes are to be meaningful, deeply engaged, and equitable. In particular, for our project, the fact that the UK team held the project funding created a series of structural inequities. While we endeavoured to practice just research despite this, it inevitably had an influence on our project.

What do we mean by decolonial knowledge production?

As these histories and geographies of PAR as a research approach (above) help to make clear, there is a particular importance for our research when it comes to issues of coloniality and its influence on research relations. We position our work as decolonial in the sense that it draws on a Latin American decolonial tradition that works to highlight the ongoing role of coloniality in the contemporary world (Hiraide 2021). Quijano (2007) observes the way that coloniality persists in contemporary frameworks of power and knowledge. Universities and the knowledges they produce and value are an intrinsic part of this, with pressures to produce the 'right' kinds of outputs in venues assessed via metrics that reinforce the academic power of English-speaking, Global North institutions. This book, as well as the film that was a primary output of this research project, is an attempt to go some way towards redressing that balance by providing a space where the co-researchers tell their stories on their own terms.

Our commitment to doing decolonial research necessarily includes an examination of our research practices. We have tried to avoid academic extractivism (Connell 2014, 2015; Cruz and Luke 2020) that treats theory as separate to method and sees the Global South as a site of research data but not of theory and practice. Yet we recognise the constraints imposed by the very terms of our research collaboration, determined by a UK Economic and Social Research Council grant with a fixed time period and specific rules around who may be employed as co-investigators and/or members of the research team. The terms of our partnerships with Colombian academic researchers and research institutions, for instance, have been partially pre-determined by the kinds of contracts allowable within institutional rules. We explore these tensions further in later chapters.

As PAR researchers, our methodologies are deeply embedded in our epistemological commitment to challenging unequal power relations. In doing this we have tried to take up Tuck's (2009) proposal to move from a research framework of damage to one of desire. As Tuck notes, social research has often taken as read the assumption that demonstrating a community's disenfranchisement will on its own result in change-making, and that this benefit overwhelms the risks of painting that community as damaged. By shifting the focus to one of desire, we find a framework which does not deny the experiences of trauma and loss but also does not treat these as definitive or final. Rather, by

turning the power of narrative to the women co-researchers in the process of filmmaking, we see how they navigate all the aspects of their lives, reflecting their hopes, dreams, and commitments and turning their past experiences into forms of activism and political transformation.

Who is the audience for the book?

The book aims to provide a polyvocal account of a transnational, participatory action research project that developed a remote/hybrid research methodology in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Alongside offering a guide to this form of research, it also shares the research findings on displaced women's lives in the city, the violence they face and the future they are working to build together. The audience is therefore as broad as the aims of the book. It is a methodological guide for academics, practitioners, filmmakers, NGOs, and anyone else who wants or needs to work with participatory approaches and/or audio-visual methods from a distance. But through the substantive material presented here, it is also aimed at policymakers, city planners, decision-makers, and others who might find interest and value the insights of the women's stories of their displacement, challenges, and aspirations for future change.

Structure of the book

Overview of chapters

In Chapter 2 we provide a brief overview of the Colombian conflict and the country's history of violence. We describe how violence for our women co-researchers, as for many women in situations of conflict and emergency, is gendered and layered; yet the specific Colombian context is also vital for understanding it. We outline how the Colombian conflict developed and how different armed actors emerged over time, to explain women's particular experiences over their lives. Our research argues that the specific gendered effects of this violence require more attention, especially from the perspective of those women who have past and present experiences of it. Therefore, this chapter provides some important historical and conceptual background for the research that we conducted together.

Chapter 3 provides more detailed information on the project's methodology, including guidance for other researchers on how they may adopt it for their own projects. Here we set out our feminist, decolonial, participatory research approach, and outline the most important parts of developing the remote/hybrid participatory methodology. This includes issues of involving participants as co-researchers from a distance, online training and research and the challenges of online facilitation. The chapter reflects on the advantages and

challenges of the remote and online environment with respect to participation and power and its potential for the future.

Chapter 4 focuses on using film as a method and tool for transformation. It draws specifically on Latin American literature and contrasts this with Western theories of using film as a method in academia and community work. It provides an overview of how filming – specifically community cinema and participatory filming – can be used as a tool for transformation and memory building in the Colombian context and when working with victims of the conflict. Led by our Colombian co-researchers and filmmakers, this chapter explains how and why film has been our preferred method and output in working with conflict-affected and displaced women. The focus on transformation is key here, where using film is not simply a method but supports a process of change through deploying the audio-visual. Therefore, this chapter illustrates how using film connects to the project design, and explains why film was an especially appropriate and important methodological choice for the women we worked with.

Chapters 5–7 are led by our women co-researchers and provide empirical findings from our study. During writing workshops, they developed the content (textual and audio-visual) of these chapters that explore women's testimonies of violence and trauma, but also discuss their resistance and activism in continually re-building their lives in Bogotá and Medellín. In Chapter 5, they provide testimony on their displacement. In Chapter 6, they reflect on how displacement and moving to new urban environments led to challenges on arriving in the city. Many of these challenges are ongoing as they live in areas where the majority of the population is struggling economically and where a high proportion of the population are victims of the conflict. However, in Chapter 7, we learn from the women co-researchers how they counteract these challenges through resistance, and about their aspirations towards better urban futures.

The book ends with Chapter 8, which draws together final thoughts and the key points/contributions of the book. It highlights the challenges and advantages of the methodology, drawing on the previous chapters, and suggests how the methodology might be adopted by several researchers and practitioners in the future. We finish the book with a reflection on the process of writing together.

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2

COLOMBIA, VIOLENCE, AND THE VICTIMS OF THE CONFLICT

Sonja Marzi and Rachel Pain

Before going on to describe in detail how we approached the study methodologically, and then sharing the stories and experiences that our women co-researchers collated, it is important to understand the particular political, social, and geographical context of conflict and displacement in Colombia. We first offer a brief history of conflict in the country since it achieved independence in the 19th century and recent hopes for moves towards peace. We then outline the complexity of the violence experienced in the country, informed by our co-researchers, and come to focus on their experiences of gendered violence which are multiple and layered. We identify the role that trauma has in keeping these experiences alive, as well as highlighting the women's resistance and activism for better futures.

Colombia's history of conflict since independence

Colombia is located in South America and is sadly too well known for its violence, history of drug trafficking, and high internal displacement rate. The country's history of violence reaches far back, to times of colonisation, followed by several civil wars after Colombian independence in 1810 caused by confrontations within the two-party political system. Violence continued with the 'Thousand Days' civil war that started in 1899 and ended in 1902, and then during the 1940s. By this time, liberal peasants had grown discontent with elite conservative landowners over land rights: as peasants, they were not able to acquire land titles and property rights, and many confrontations ensued (Sierra 2021; Steele 2017). Meanwhile, the state protected the interests of the powerful landed elite (Sierra 2021; Steele 2017: 63). In 1944, driven by a desire to change this political and economic system, Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer

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Gaitán campaigned for more just economic distribution and political participation (Steele 2017: 63), offering hope for peasants of better land and political rights. However, Gaitán was assassinated on 9 April 1948, triggering a civil war known as 'La Violencia' which lasted until 1958 (Burnyeat 2018; Livingstone 2003; Sierra 2021; Steele 2017).

The effects of 'La Violencia' and the history of displacement in the country are closely related. As the name implies, 'La Violencia' was particularly bloody and gruesome (Livingstone 2003), and some of the women co-researchers in this book recall brutal stories from their parents and grandparents who had been affected by it. It is estimated that more than two million people fled violence during the time of 'La Violencia' (for more details on La Violencia, see Marín 2012; Sierra 2021; Steele 2017). As Steele (2017: 69) highlights, the displacement resulting from 'La Violencia' transformed the country and its cities, marking the start of accelerating urbanisation. Bogotá and Medellín, the two cities where our research was based, are two of the main urban hosts of displaced people in the country. The histories of displacement of our co-researchers (and many other Colombian families), therefore, are not solely those experienced directly by them being forced to leave their homes due to the current Colombian conflict. Some of the women had already experienced indirect displacement through their families' earlier forced movement during the time of 'La Violencia'. This is important in understanding how deeply the trauma of violence and displacement runs in Colombia and within our co-researchers' lives.

In 1958, 'La Violencia' ended with a power-sharing agreement between the political elites which was called 'The National Front' that lasted until 1974. During this time, successive Liberal and Conservative governments took turns every four years (Burnyeat 2018: 6). However, violence continued throughout this time, as land reforms were not followed through with the necessary state presence and services in rural and peripheral areas. Furthermore, the two-party political system did not allow any other party to politically participate in a meaningful way – above all the communist party PCC (Partido Comunista Colombiano) that had been active and was trying to become more politically relevant. This political situation, and continuous state military violence in autonomous regions that were communist-led, increasingly fuelled peasants' resistance and self-defence organisations during and after 'La Violencia', and ultimately to an insurgency against the dominant political system in 1964 (Burnyeat 2018; Sierra 2021; Steele 2017). One notable example of those insurgencies at this time was the insurgent left-wing guerrilla group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC – Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) that was rooted in these peasant self-defence groups (Burnyeat 2018; Steele 2017) (though the ELN, the second largest group, formed at the same time).

The development of the FARC was triggered by a state military attack on Marquetalia in southern Tolima in 1964, which was at that time one of the autonomous areas in the country, led by FARC co-founder, Manuel Marulanda (Karl 2017; Palacios 2006; Sierra 2021; Steele 2017). The FARC officially adopted its name in 1966 (Steele 2017: 76). Soon after its official formation, it became more sophisticated in terms of territory occupation and income generation. By the 1980s, most of its activities were financed through kidnappings, extortion (so-called vacuna – literally translating as a vaccine for providing security), drug-trafficking activities, and 'taxing' the coca trade (Livingstone 2003; Sierra 2021). Between 1964 and 1984, influenced by the Cuban revolution and other communist events worldwide, other left-wing guerrilla groups emerged, following similar aims to transform the state and shift power, especially in terms of land and territory rights (Burnyeat 2018: 7; Sierra 2021; Steele 2017). Among those newly formed guerrilla groups, the second largest, the National Liberation Army (ELN – Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional) was created, which is still active today and currently in peace negotiations with the Colombian government under President Petro at the time of writing this book. Other insurgency groups that emerged at that time include the Popular Liberation Army (EPL – Ejercito Popular de Liberacion, The M-19 (Movimiento de 19 Abril) and the Quintin Lame Indigenous guerrilla, all of whom were demobilised between 1989 and 1991. While other guerrilla groups were also active in urban areas, however, the FARC was mainly active in rural areas in the northwest, southwest, south and east of the country, and by the 1990s it had spread across half of Colombia's territory (Sierra 2021; Steele 2017).

In the 1980s, right-wing paramilitary groups emerged in response to left-wing guerrilla activities and attacks. Throughout the country, landowners and drug traffickers had become increasingly angered by the constant threat of guerrilla and their extreme extortion and taxation tactics. Additionally, guerrilla started to threaten drug traffickers directly, including trying to shift power in the drug business by taking out middlemen, such as in the Medellín cartel led by Pablo Escobar (Sierra 2021). As a consequence, some drug traffickers formed private militia groups to defend themselves against the left-wing insurgencies (Burnyeat 2018; Livingstone 2003; Steele 2017). Hence, while paramilitaries emerged from isolated rural self-defence groups, often funded by landowners and politicians, they became powerful counterinsurgents across the country by the 1990s. They may have been financed predominantly by drug traffickers to defend them and their business from attacks, extortion and/or kidnappings by guerrilla (Burnyeat 2018; Livingstone 2003), but soon paramilitaries across the country perpetrated systematic assassinations, massacres, violently terrorising civilians, and used tactics such as extortion and security taxation for their own means. In the 1980s, they systematically assassinated Unión Patriótica (UP) members (Burnyeat 2018: 7; Livingstone 2003).

The UP was a political party initially created by the FARC and the PCC but soon became independent of them, promoting an alternative left-wing political project. Their systematic assassination contributed to the failure of peace talks between the FARC and the government under President Barco (1986–1990) (Burnyeat 2018; Steele 2017).

These atrocities and criminal activities, however, did not weaken the power of paramilitaries for long. While briefly outlawed under the Barco administration (1986–1990), paramilitary groups took off when the Gaviria administration (1900–1994) legalised auto-defence groups again (also called convivir under the following Samper administration) (Steele 2017: 101). Soon after, towards the end of the 1990s, paramilitary groups from different regions of the country merged into a federation called AUC (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia – United Self-defence Forces of Colombia), which became the most powerful paramilitary group in the country with ties to the Colombian state and its military (Livingstone 2003; Sierra 2021; Steele 2017). As a consequence, land grabbing and related forced displacement in rural areas of the country increased again (Ibáñez Londoño 2008). At the same time, the support for paramilitaries by actors such as the Medellín and Cali drug cartels, and their indirect relationships with the military and landed elite, contributed significantly to the increased ongoing conflict and violence. Until his own death in 1993, Pablo Escobar, for example, fought his own war against the state, killing journalists, judges, witnesses and politicians (Burnyeat 2018: 8) and creating intense periods of violence. While drug trafficking is not the cause of the Colombian conflict, it certainly contributed to the ongoing violence and the continuation of it (Burnyeat 2018; Livingstone 2003).

Paramilitary violence peaked under President Alvaro Uribe (2002–2010) (Burnyeat 2018). By then, several peace attempts between the government and left-wing armed groups failed, the last one under President Pastrana (1998–2002). In contrast, Uribe promised hard-line politics under the notion of 'National Security' and 'to crack down on guerrillas and negotiate only from a position of strengths' to a Colombian population that had been exhausted by violence (Livingstone 2003: 93). And he did with the support of the United States foreign (military) aid, called Plan Colombia, aimed at combating drug cartels (Comisión de la verdad 2022a). The Uribe administration increased police and military forces to push back left-wing guerrilla in the country. Uribe was highly criticised for using paramilitaries as an extension of state forces and as political allies (Burnyeat 2018; Steele 2017). His presidency and administration are accused of several human rights violations such as the 'false positivise' scandal that involved the killing of thousands of civilian young men, mostly by state military, then counting them as dead guerrilla to inflate the body count of guerrilla (Sierra 2021; Steele 2017: 106). Eventually, between 2003 and 2006, and as part of Uribe's aim to defeat and disarm armed groups in Colombia, Uribe's government negotiated a demobilisation of the AUC. This demobilisation was of rather

limited success, and several paramilitary groups are still in existence or have reformed (Burnyeat 2018; Steele 2017). Accusations that Uribe has been intertwined with paramilitaries are still made. Today paramilitary structures are complex, with new groups emerging such as 'las Aguilas Negras' or 'Las Autodefensas Gaitanistas de Colombia (AGC)'. Their connections to the army are not as strong as during Uribe's time, yet paramilitaries have certainly not disappeared; in many areas, they are still powerful groups that are intertwined with local politics. Listening to our women co-researchers, they do not talk about specific groups. *If* they name a group (which they rarely do), they usually talk about paramilitaries, guerrilla or simply armed groups. Most of the time, however, they talk about 'they' and 'them', as the naming of any group is still perceived as dangerous (Marzi and Pain 2024).

Hope for peace?

In 2010, Juan Manuel Santos, the former defence minister under Uribe, won the presidential election. While he was endorsed by Uribe, Santos distanced himself noticeably from Uribe's hard-line politics. In contrast to Uribe, Santos acknowledged the existence of an internal armed conflict and the FARC as a political actor instead of classifying them as 'terrorist threat'. This distinction was important to make peace negotiations with the armed group possible (Burnyeat 2018: 11), which Santos started soon after his election, first in confidence and then publicly from 2012 onwards (Lederach 2023; Steele 2017). In 2011, Santos also passed the Victims and Restitution of Land Law 1448 (Ley de Víctimas y Restitución de Tierras), known as the victims law (ley de víctimas) (Lederach 2023; Steele 2017; Zulver 2022). This law recognised victims of armed conflict and sought to give them reparations (Burnyeat 2018; Weber 2020). As of August 2023, there are over 9.5 million victims of the armed conflict registered (Unidad de Víctimas 2023), which is over 18% of the Colombian population. As Burnyeat (2018: 10) summarises, the National Centre for Historical Memory reported over '220,000 conflict-related deaths between 1958 and 2002, 80% of which were civilians, as well as hundreds of thousands of victims of massacres, assassinations, forced disappearances, forced displacement, kidnappings, forced recruitment, torture, land mines, and sexual violence' (Burnyeat 2018: 10), numbers that have continued to rise since then (see also Comisión de la Verdad, 2022b).

In 2014, Santos was re-elected and peace negotiations continued between the government and the FARC (between 2012 and 2016). On September 26, 2016, President Santos and the FARC signed a historic peace agreement in Cartagena, Colombia. The 2016 Colombian peace agreement is praised as one of the most inclusive, as it includes in its methodology the testimonies and voices of the victims of the conflict. Shortly after the agreement was signed, the international community approved of Santos' peace process by awarding him the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize (Burnyeat 2018: 11). However, less than two weeks

after the agreement was signed in Cartagena, a majority of the Colombian population, most of them from urban areas, rejected the peace agreement in a referendum that was narrowly won by the 'No' vote, and much influenced by a campaign led by former president Uribe and his party. After listening to the 'No' vote promoters' demands, and following re-negotiations with the FARC, the final peace accord was signed on 24 November 2016, to officially bring an end to the armed conflict with the guerrilla that had lasted over 50 years (Burnyeat 2018; Lederach 2023; Steele 2017).

The peace accord, however, has been negotiated with the guerrilla groups, the FARC and M19, but not the ELN and has not been implemented as initially hoped. In 2018, Iván Duque (presidential candidate of the Uribe political party Centro Democratico) was elected president. Supported by Uribe, Duque brought back a right-wing approach to national politics, a denial of the armed conflict, and rejection of spaces of dialogue between armed actors and the government (Sierra 2021). Duque's politics are similar to Uribe's, with a focus on national security and a language of fighting terrorists and defeating criminals instead of working for transformative change (Vélez-Torres et al. 2021). Since Duque was elected, the implementation of the peace agreement has been slow, and social leaders and activists have been increasingly targeted and assassinated, while different armed actors (re)emerged and became more powerful (e.g., the Clan del Golfo among others) (Lederach 2023; Rodriguez Castro 2021a; Sierra 2021).

In 2022, new hopes for an end to the conflict and better living conditions for the poor were raised when left-wing presidential candidate Gustavo Petro was elected into office. The COVID-19 pandemic created increased economic hardship for the country's poor population and after the National Strike (Paro Nacional) protests against Duque's proposed tax and health reforms, hopes for change with Petro and his running mate, Afro-Colombian activist Francia Márquez as vice president, have been high. However, it still remains to be seen how the conflict, violence and implementation of the peace process will unfold under the Petro administration. The first signs after a year in office showed that it continues to be a difficult task to end violence in the country. Over 180 social leaders and human rights defenders were killed in 2022, and over 100 in 2023 (Indepaz 2023). Over 9.5 million people are now officially registered as victims of the Colombian conflict, of whom over 4.7 million are women. Over seven million people are estimated to be forcibly displaced as a result of the internal conflict (López 2019; Unidad de Víctimas 2023), of whom the majority (an estimated 89%) are displaced from rural to urban locations (IDMC 2020), though intra-urban displacement because of violence and armed groups is still increasing (El Tiempo 2022; Jenss 2020). The co-researchers of this study, the majority of whom are displaced women, all now live in Bogotá or Medellín, Colombia's capital and second city, both of which cities are hosts to large displaced populations (Arango-Vargas 2021; Marzi 2023a).

Colombia's conflict, violence, and trauma

This summary of the political and historical events that led to the internal armed conflict in Colombia provides a brief (not exhaustive) background on the politics and motivations of different groups perpetrating violence in Colombia. However, while in the past political motivations were the reasons for conflict between left-wing guerrilla, the landed elite and the state, with guerrilla initially trying to create greater economic, political, and social justice for peasants, those motivations changed and became much more focused on profit and power grabbing rather than political ideals (Sierra 2021). Most importantly, the viewpoints of those displaced and suffering through the violence and conflict, including those of our co-researchers, demonstrate the impossible situation of civilians caught involuntarily in the middle of the conflict and between the different armed groups. Women co-researchers have told us during workshops and interviews that they did not want to have any part in the conflict. They perceived their lives as good when living in rural areas of the country, and were content despite poverty, until armed groups arrived and made them forcibly flee their homes (workshops Bogotá and Medellín 2021 and 2022; life history interviews 2021, 2022). In cases where these women were not displaced because of direct threats by armed groups, other reasons – such as economic hardship and the search for better opportunities – are still related to the conflict, as it changed the economic and political situation in rural areas.

It is striking that in their testimonies they speak of 'them' coming to their village; of 'them' creating confrontations and bringing violence, murdering people for being suspected of aiding the other armed groups. None of our co-researchers identified with any of the motivations of armed groups; often they did not even understand how the conflict evolved nor why it was ongoing in their regions, apart from the profit-creating activities and contesting of territories. Their testimonies and narratives provide a window on how the conflict shifted away from ideals of a different, more just society and better distribution of territory and land. For our women co-researchers, there are no reasons that could justify the violence they witnessed and experienced. No reason would have been sufficient to force them to leave their homes behind and to have to restart and rebuild their lives in their new urban environments.

Today our co-researchers live in Bogotá (ciudad bolivar) and Medellín (comuna 1, 3, 8, 13). Bogotá counts more than 7 million inhabitants officially and more than 2.3 million people currently live in Medellín. Around 20 per cent of the population in Colombia lives around or in Bogotá, the capital of the country. The city sits 2600 metres above sea level, and Ciudad Bolivar and many other poorer neighbourhoods are located in the south of the city. Medellín sits 1400 metres above sea level, in a valley where the most marginalised neighbourhoods are allocated on the high slopes of the city (Davila 2013; Marzi 2023b). Both cities are two of the main hosts for displaced people and victims

of the conflict, with Ciudad Bolivar in Bogotá being one of the main areas where displaced people settle, while in Medellín they do so usually on the higher slopes of the city (Echeverri and Orsini 2010; Observatorio Distrital de Víctimas 2019; Observatorio Distrital de Víctimas 2023). Reliable numbers of how many people are displaced in both cities are hard to come by, both because of different methodologies to count them and because not all people declare that they are officially displaced or victims of the conflict. While it is estimated that there are between 340,000 and 650,000 displaced people living in Bogotá (Observatorio Distrital de Víctimas 2023), for example, this number is in reality much higher and rather downplays the extent of internal displacement in Colombia.

Gendered violence and trauma

Forced displacement in Colombia, rural to urban and urban-urban, is usually assumed to be a direct result of violence in relation to the internal conflict, and because of being threatened by armed groups (López 2019; Meertens 2010; Steele 2017). However, in this book, we argue that displacement may not be directly caused by these threats, but is still a result of the conflict. This is because there are a number of forms of violence that our women co-researchers identify. Violence, as feminist researchers have made clear, is a continuum (Cockburn 2004; Moser and McIlwaine 2004; Moser and Clare 2001; Pearce 2007). Violence is multiple and layered, going beyond the armed conflicts that have received most attention in both academic research and media coverage. Violence may be physical, social, or political. It may also be institutional, structural and economic, resulting from state and local government policies; and while many people have become displaced as victims of the conflict because of threats to their safety, women co-researchers stress many times in their testimonies that economic opportunities were also a reason for many to move to the city. The lack of economic opportunities, however, is still related to the conflict and the absence of the state, limiting forms of economic opportunities for people in rural areas. The different forms of displacement and women co-researchers' experiences of displacement are discussed more in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

Furthermore, violence is cyclical, with many of our women co-researchers experiencing multiple conflicts and crises, of which displacement is one, which then increases their vulnerability to further harmful events and compound their effects. One example is the heightened risk of domestic and sexual abuse which displaced populations (and displaced women in particular) face. Another is the threat of violence from criminals, gangs, and armed groups once resettled in certain neighbourhoods in the two cities. Again, we draw our analytical understanding of violence from feminist scholarship, which has made it clear that gendered violences are connected across scales and sites (Hume 2009; Moser and Clare 2001; Tickner 1992).

While many have written about the violence in Colombia and its consequences including displacement and other impacts on victims, as well as on the recent attempts to create peace (Burnyeat 2018; Díaz Pabón 2018; Garza, Verbel-Montes, and Ramos-Ruiz 2022; Karl 2017; Palacios 2006; Sierra 2021; Steele 2017), only a few have focused on the specific gendered dimensions of the violence and trauma that are experienced but also counteracted and mobilised against by women in Colombia (for some notable exceptions, see Gutiérrez Rivera and Mejía 2022; Marzi and Pain 2024; Meertens 2010; Rodriguez Castro 2021a, 2021b; Zulver 2016; Zulver 2022). Violence that women experience in Colombia is multifaceted, directly and indirectly related to the armed conflict perpetrated by many actors, including guerrilla, paramilitaries and state armed forces (Marzi and Pain 2024; Zulver 2022).

Violence in the lives of our women co-researchers forced the majority of them to leave their original territories and move to the cities of Bogotá and Medellín or, later, move again within those cities (intra-urban displacement). However, being victims of the conflict goes much further than those direct experiences of violence that led to displacement. Women's gendered biographies of trauma, as we call them, include the temporal and spatial trajectories of the impact of violent events in their lives (see Pratt et al., 2017). Elsewhere, we stressed that we

> understand trauma to be "a psychological effect of violence that may have distinct impacts a long way down the line, but [that] may also underpin an ongoing relational dynamic between abuser and abused" (Pain 2019: 388); this twofold conception identifies both the chronic effects of cumulative harms from the past, and the ways that these replay because of specific economic, social and political dynamics of the city.
>
> *(Marzi and Pain 2024: 5)*

Women bring those biographies of violence and trauma to their new environments in Bogotá and Medellín, where they interweave with new encounters of violence and other urban challenges. In Chapters 5 and 6, women co-researchers provide more detailed context on those different violences and urban challenges they find in their urban environments before and after being displaced. They share that displacement and being victims of the conflict is always a story of loss and violence, and that the process of rebuilding their lives in the city comes with tremendous challenges.

They also describe the loss of their Campesina roots and identity. Being Campesina and displaced they further describe as leading to rejection and discrimination in and by the city: what the women co-researchers phrased eloquently with the word *rechazo*, compounded by an absent state not providing necessary support for those affected by the conflict (see Marzi and Pain 2024). This manifested, for example, in the lack of protection from domestic violence

in the countryside where there are few safe and trustworthy services or police; the conflict destroying any economic stability in the countryside and leading to women having to move to the city; or the state failing to keep women and their families safe in their new city homes, making them victims of the conflict again in these urban contexts.

However, women are not passive victims of the conflict. The term 'victims of the conflict' is a legal term linked to the right to reparations from the state through the 2011 Victims Law (Weber 2020), though the term 'victim' is a poor choice, especially when referring to the women in this study. Our women co-researchers, while continuing to live with interweaving forms of violence in their lives and their impacts, are creating long-term recovery through different forms of feminist activism to transform their lives and cities for better urban futures (Marzi and Pain 2024). This resistance is often less visible as it takes place in private and semi-private spaces, often at a small scale although it is sometimes eventually scaled up (McIlwaine et al. 2023; Pain and Staeheli 2014).

In this book, we provide some of the testimonies of violence and trauma of the women co-researchers. They describe their displacement and the challenges they face on arriving in their new urban environments. While these accounts come from a group of 24 women in Bogotá and Medellín, these women suggest they are fairly representative of many displaced women who also had to rebuild their lives in cities in Colombia. However, at the same time, these women teach us about their resistance and activism, undertaken to rebuild and transform towards a future without violence and conflict. The women co-researchers are lead co-authors of Chapters 5–7. This last point is a vital one. As we explained in Chapter 1, the research reported here was co-produced, in a project that followed a participatory action research (PAR) methodological approach. Our approach to the research was designed to support women co-researchers to tell and to present their own stories, in the ways and via the media that they wished. As the next chapter details, we ended up using a range of creative, audio and visual methods in order to facilitate this, working both remotely online and face-to-face. Therefore, this book now goes on to do two things; first, to describe how we designed the research during the COVID-19 pandemic so that the displaced women were co-researchers of their own experiences. And second, to present and amplify their voices and stories of displacement, violence, urban challenges and their hopes for the future. These two goals are closely interconnected.

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3

RESEARCHING REMOTELY

Methodological considerations

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In this chapter, we provide a more detailed overview of the methodology we pioneered and developed on this project. Working in partnership with 24 displaced women in Colombia, we used a co-production participatory filming research approach remotely/hybridly, to create knowledge on women's displacement, urban challenges, and their hopes for the future. This chapter aims to provide useful guidance on how to develop a project using a remote/hybrid participatory audio-visual methodology using smartphones, including outlining some of the challenges and opportunities that are important to reflect on when employing this methodology.

In Chapters 1 and 2, we have already highlighted some key considerations around our approach; the choice of our methodology is closely related to the context of where we do our research, the content of what we research, as well as what the methodology offers beyond academic outcomes. These are questions that relate to what is usually termed the 'impact' of research, although in the UK context, this is frequently defined in ways that we disagree with (see Marzi 2023a; Pain 2014; Pain, Kesby, and Askins 2011). For us, as we discuss, outcomes that offer tangible benefits for participants are the most important.

The bulk of this chapter is intended to offer more insight into how we developed our methodology, and some guidance around employing it for others who might want to do similar research – but this chapter also offers critical reflection on the methodologies' pitfalls and strengths, what went well and what might have been improved on or done differently. We outline how we developed our participatory action research project with the 24 women co-researchers in Bogotá and Medellín, and the ways in which they changed our research questions over time as we worked together on the issues that

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were important to them. The project involved bringing together co-researchers based geographically in several cities in Colombia and the UK, and we describe how we organised and conducted research across these countries; particularly as, at the time we started our project, the world was experiencing the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. We address questions such as how is it possible to organise, conduct, and facilitate online workshops while still aiming to deploy action research principles of participation and sharing power? What are the challenges and limitations of doing such a project online, and what are the advantages and opportunities that came with shifting to a hybrid approach that allowed us to combine online and in-person face-to-face research activities?

We start this chapter with a brief outline of the project, to give some context to what follows. We then introduce the broad methodology of participatory filming/video, as well as critiques of it, before discussing the specific methodological challenges that arise when we work with co-researchers who are using smartphones to record videos in their everyday lives and participating in the project remotely. We then discuss how we went about recruiting participants (who became co-researchers) from a distance. A section on remote co-production follows, in which we explain the practicalities of conducting research online; how we worked to make online interactions as ethical and safe for the women as possible; how they immediately began to direct the research agenda; and how they were compensated for their time. We also reflect here on issues arising later on in the project, when we were able to incorporate face-to-face workshops and interactions with the online activities.

In the following section, we then provide more detailed guidance on how women worked to collect data, analyse it collectively and co-produce the final documentary film. Here we offer guidance on the practical aspects of introducing co-researchers to the method of filming using smartphones remotely. This is followed by a critical discussion of the principles of participation and power in the research process, and some reflections on what we could have done differently in this regard. The reflection part of this chapter is also a reminder of the epistemological and ontological commitments that underpin the decision to choose a participatory action research methodology, as described in Chapter 1.

Finally, we conclude with some thoughts on future directions in which we think this methodology might be taken. We consider who might use it in the future, and how it might be adapted, including outside of academia. While we co-produced a film, we want to highlight the value of the filming process and filmed material as a basis for discussion and reflection on its own terms. Even without creating a documentary or other tangible 'output' at the end, there can be great value in using participatory filming as an approach to co-producing knowledge with communities on sensitive topics.

The 'Volviendo a Vivir/Coming Back to Life' project

Our research project, 'Volviendo a Vivir/Coming Back to Life', was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council through a methodological development grant (grant number ES/V006029/1). The project title was originally 'Co-producing knowledge during emergencies and pandemics: developing remote participatory visual methods using smartphones', and it was developed as a response to the methodological challenges that arose in 2020 because of travel and contact restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project aimed to co-produce knowledge on women's right to the city in Colombia using a participatory research approach remotely. Therefore, while the project was initially predominantly concerned with overcoming methodological challenges, the research questions were further developed by our 24 women co-researchers and came to focus on much wider substantive issues. Here the women co-researchers, who are displaced women in Bogotá and Medellín, decided to shift our research focus from the right to the city to themes that were more important to them, identifying 'many pandemics' of which the COVID-19 pandemic was only one. Issues such as corruption, violence, and poverty were much more central to them and their everyday lives. Consequently, the research project co-produced knowledge on the following questions:

1 Methodological innovation: How can participatory action and co-production researchers continue co-production of knowledge remotely and hybridly for impact, social change and transformation, in this case capturing the realities of displaced women in Colombia?
2 The experience of displacement: What are Colombian women's lived experiences of displacement, and how do they understand and conceptualise displacement based on those?
3 Responses to urban challenges: What are the urban challenges displaced women encounter in the cities of Bogotá and Medellín and how do they respond to those?
4 Hopes for the future: How do displaced women in Bogotá and Medellín look to the future and what are their aspirations and actions for change?

Additionally, even while it was the pandemic that triggered the methodological development in this project, it is important to highlight that the methodology has far greater potential reach and significance: beyond the pandemic, remote/hybrid participatory approaches have great value in research design. Therefore, while the pandemic triggered us to think more thoroughly about the remote aspects of participatory research designs and approaches, there are important reasons why we believe that combining remote and face-to-face research activities makes sense, and we speak to these more in detail at the end of this chapter.

Participatory video and filming

Participatory video (PV) and filming approaches are based on collaboration and participation and led by participants. PV follows action research principles; and so it is a video process without a script or predefined story but rather directed by the participants themselves, developing the content of filmed material in group settings, via iterative cycles of shooting filmed materials and reviewing and discussing them, with the end product being most commonly a film to share more widely (Johansson et al. 1999; Kindon 2003; Lunch and Lunch 2006). Producing a film in this way aims at generating a Freirean process of 'pedagogy of concientisation' (Freire 1970) which allows for collaboration, participation, and knowledge exchange by providing space for those voices systematically excluded in the knowledge production process (Marzi 2023b; Mistry and Berardi 2012; Vélez-Torres 2013). PV opens spaces for dialogue and rejects top-down knowledge extraction but strives for the horizontalisation of power relationships as much as possible. The research process itself is rather unpredictable in its outcomes and therefore requires flexibility from the researcher, practitioner and participants involved to follow a cyclical approach (Cahill 2007b; Marzi 2023b; Pearce 2010). The co-produced film, as a result of this process, can become a form of knowledge dissemination (Lunch and Lunch 2006). However, the *process* of co-producing the film is as important, if not more important, as the final output, the film itself. It is the process that provides the space for creating what we call 'impact-in-process', which is a space for collective learning, democratic dialogue, awareness and capacity building, as well as the potential for action as a result of it (Marzi 2023a; Marzi and Pain 2022; Pain 2014). Sometimes it may even be the case that the film is not screenable to an outside audience but rather remains an instrument for reflection and discussion within the co-researcher group and research alone.

However, while PV provides opportunities to work with participants on issues important to them, and has the potential to shift power relationships in the research process (Kindon 2003), it has also been criticised for utilising and even imposing a Western lens when it comes to how PV is understood, ideas and practical ways of employing it, and how filming 'should' be done (Kindon 2016). This is something we touch upon more in detail in Chapter 4, and it relates to the neoliberal, imperial, and colonial ways of doing PV and participatory filming within Anglophone and Western academia in particular (see also Kindon 2016; Mistry and Berardi 2012; Walsh 2016). We also discuss this with regard to the practical and facilitation aspects of our project later in this chapter. Other critiques of PV have highlighted questions of ownership of the video material that require careful consideration, and problems with reproducing colonial and imperialist views and hierarchies in the research process, where researchers and practitioners potentially lead the process as 'experts' reproducing hegemonic power relationships instead (Marzi 2023a; Shaw 2016).

On the other hand, using participatory filming and video methods offers opportunities for co-researchers to co-produce knowledge non-textually, tackling the exclusion of those who are less comfortable with text and those who are less literate (Beebeejaun et al. 2013; Marzi 2023b; Mistry, Bignante, and Berardi 2016; Rouhani 2019). PV and filming also allow for a diversity of modes of expression, and especially when working on complex and sensitive topics in group settings it may offer more artistic ways for co-researchers to participate.

In our project, we used smartphones for filming activities. Smartphones have become more affordable and available in most parts of the world, and provide a valuable technological substitute for doing participatory filming projects. Video-making equipment is usually owned and provided by researchers and practitioners, but smartphones do not usually have to be given back to researchers so practitioners and co-researchers maintain ownership of their own filmed materials in this way. The increasing use of smartphones also means that co-researchers usually have some existing basic knowledge of using them to record videos. However, while co-researchers may be familiar with their phones, they may lack the technical and theoretical knowledge for creating higher-quality video material. In the past, this knowledge depended heavily on the co-presence of researchers and co-researchers during recruitment, training, and facilitation activities (MacEntee, Burkholder, and Schwab-Cartas 2016; Mitchell, de Lange, and Moletsane 2016). Here, training in basic filming and editing skills, as well as group facilitation, is necessary to ensure equal participation within the research process, and it is important to establish trusting relationships, processes that usually take place face-to-face (Marzi 2023b; Wheeler 2009). However, on our project, face-to-face meetings were not possible for the first eight months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Using smartphones for remote PV therefore became the approach we adopted (Marzi 2023b). We provide more information on how we established and organised the research in the next sections, starting with the recruitment process.

Involving participants from a distance

From the start, we aimed to work with women from Bogotá and Medellín, the capital and second city in Colombia respectively, as these cities, as described in Chapter 2, are two of the main sites hosting displaced people in the country. We were particularly interested in drawing in displaced and conflict-affected women in the neighbourhood of Ciudad Bolivar in Bogotá, and the peripheral neighbourhoods up on the slopes in Medellín. This was to ensure the inclusion of women who are from lower socio-economic backgrounds and who live in neighbourhoods that are characterised by a highly displaced population and that are known for violence and gang activities. Additionally, these neighbourhoods are less connected to the rest of the city by public transport and provide

poorer access to urban services and resources. In the last decade, many of these neighbourhoods have seen some development in infrastructure, such as the rapid bus system Transmilenio going to Ciudad Bolivar in Bogotá, and the cable cars connecting higher-up neighbourhoods with the lower parts of the city in Bogotá and Medellín (see Bocarejo et al. 2014; Davila 2013; Oviedo Hernandez and Dávila 2016).

When we started the research project, as we were not able to meet face-to-face, we had to develop new ways of involving women for the project from a distance. Especially important here were our Colombian independent professional researchers, one based in Medellín (Lina Zuluaga) and one in Bogotá Ciudad Bolivar (Carolina Dorado). Both have many years of experience working with women in the areas of the city that were important for our research and were able to connect to women community leaders in both cities, first through WhatsApp and then also through meetings in person, which took place outdoors in light of COVID-19 safety measures in place at the time. Community leaders in Colombia are well connected in their neighbourhoods to other women who share the wish to enhance their local and city-wide living conditions, including those who are fighting for the rights of women victims of the Colombian conflict.

Once our local research teams in Bogotá and Medellín connected to community leaders, we provided them with the information on the project's aims and objectives, so they could reach out to their networks and, by a process of snowball sampling, ask women if they were interested in our research. We then asked all interested women to join an online meeting to have a more detailed discussion on the project, during which we also invited women to become part of the project as co-researchers. Women joined online meetings using their smartphones, and sometimes in groups where two or more lived close to each other. During that time, contact restrictions were becoming less strict and women were more able to meet locally. This was important as some of the women struggled to join online Zoom meetings, having never done so before.

In total, we involved 24 women, 12 in Medellín, and 12 in Bogotá who worked in separate groups for each city. We created a WhatsApp group to bring all 24 women together outside the Zoom workshops and to create a space where everyone could ask questions and communicate with each other.

The majority of the women co-researchers are displaced from the countryside to their respective cities, many as heads of household with children to care for. All of them are victims of the Colombian conflict and have experienced violence in different forms. The majority of women were also engaged in informal work which had been challenging especially during the pandemic. We offered compensation payments for the time they contributed to the project, as this was a substantial amount of their time each week over a period of ten months. However, we did not tell women about these compensation payments during early conversations about involvement, to avoid money being their

primary incentive for joining the project (see also Marzi 2023b). Ethically, we consider these payments essential, especially on action research projects that require a lot of time from participants who have precarious living conditions.

Remote/hybrid co-production of knowledge

At the start of our project, we needed to replicate and adapt standard participatory filming activities into online space. Following action research principles, the research design included weekly online meetings during which we would discuss the research, train participants for filming activities and finally edit the resulting film. The early online meetings focused on the vital steps of discussing the aims and objectives of the research, and exploring what women co-researchers felt was important to them to research and communicate further.

Doing research with displaced women who have faced violence and trauma in the past, and often continue to do so, necessitates the creation of especially safe (or at least, safer) spaces, in which they feel comfortable and confident sharing their experiences of violence and conflict before, during and since moving to the city. While we worked with two male filmmakers who were based in the UK and supported the filming training, film workshops and editing of the film, we decided to start with women-only workshops that allowed women a space to get to know each other and the research team (the Colombian professional researchers and UK project lead), and to share their ideas of what the film should be about. This decision was made as many women had experienced sexual abuse and violence, as well as violence related to armed groups and gangs.

During these workshops, the women began to take control of what they wanted their research to focus on, and it became clear that displacement was the main theme they felt needed to be highlighted in the film. They shifted our initial topic from the right to the city to issues that are related to their displacement experiences, the challenges they face having moved to their respective cities, and their hopes for better futures (these issues are detailed in Chapters 5–7). This became especially apparent as women shared their opinions about how displaced people were treated in Colombia and highlighted the challenges displaced people face on an everyday basis in Colombian cities. Additionally, the focus on urban challenges was triggered by recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the difficult situations women lived in during the pandemic in areas where health care was insufficient and isolation to keep people safe was difficult to achieve because of poor living conditions. But also, at the time we started the research project, Colombia was at the peak of the Paro Nacional (e.g., Lozano Lerma 2022). The Paro Nacional were country-wide demonstrations, especially in urban centres, to protest health and tax reforms suggested by the then Duque government. As a result, in the women-only workshops, they shared their dissatisfaction and anger with the government

and further information on their personal histories of displacement, including the places they had been displaced from.

After a couple of weeks, the women had created a preliminary topic list for things they wanted to film that related to the displacement issues and challenges they had experienced and discussed in relation to their respective cities. We then started film training workshops with our partnering filmmaking company 'Spectacle', in collaboration with María Fernanda Carrillo Sánchez who is a filmmaker and co-researcher on the project as well as co-author of this book. During these training workshops, women learnt the basic techniques of making videos with their smartphones of good quality and usable for the final documentary. The workshops focused, for example, on how to hold smartphones when filming, how to deal with sound issues, light and focus, and training that was followed by women doing filming exercises. We then reviewed their material in further group online workshops and discussed it together.

We also discussed ethical issues during the first online workshops and in particular issues that arise when using audio-visual material. These include not filming minors, needing permission and consent from any people that are visible in the videos if not filmed in public spaces, and making sure that women do not put themselves in danger when filming (e.g., using their smartphones visibly in areas where they might be robbed).

As well as the compensation payments for the women's time, the project covered their internet costs so that they could participate in online workshops, as well as share their filmed material through an app to the project leader for storage on a secure project cloud.

After 4–6 weeks, once the co-researchers had basic skills to film with their smartphones, we shifted online workshops increasingly to the discussion of video material in typical action-reflection cycles. These are key knowledge co-production activities, during which we collected audio-visual material around prior defined themes, reviewed the video material, and based on a reflection on the material, we decided what needs filming next to be able to show the issues important to the co-researchers in the final film. In this sense, we talk about creation-research, considering that the creating process allows co-researchers (who are in this case also directors of the participatory film) to express feelings, to improvise, to speculate, and beyond, in the middle of an artistic praxis (see also Truman 2021). This is the most time-consuming but also most important stage of co-producing knowledge and co-creating the final film together. It is within the review and discussion of the video material that collective knowledge is shared, discussed and 'data' collectively analysed between professional researchers and women co-researchers.

After six months of filming and related workshops, we started the editing phase which was the final remote working phase. During this time, we focused on bringing video material together to co-produce the final documentary. While we still continued with action-reflection cycles that allowed for adding

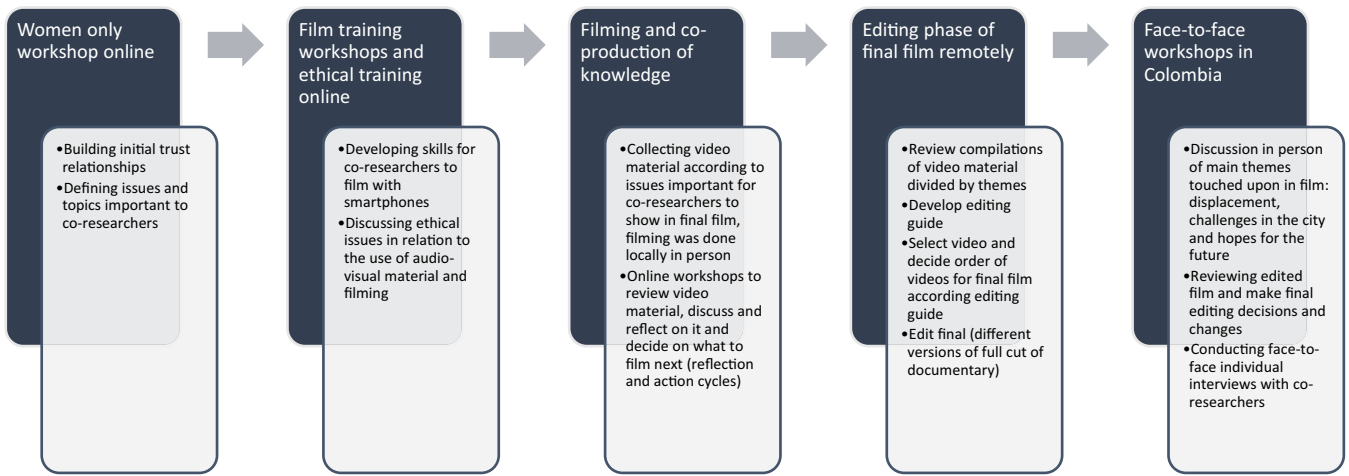

FIGURE 3.1 Co-production of knowledge and editing of film process.

more video material where necessary, in this phase, we largely decided on the order of video material, and on how the story women co-researchers wanted to tell should be shown. By the time we started editing the final film, we had reviewed the co-produced video material with the co-researchers/ directors online several times. To decide the order and story of the film, we categorised the video material into overall themes, and the co-researchers/directors developed guidance for the filmmakers to edit the video material according to the story they wanted to tell. It was only at this stage that we named the three parts very clearly as displacement, urban challenges, and hopes for the future – the three main themes covered in the film. Once the storyline was set and decided on, the UK and Colombian filmmakers edited the final film in stages, regularly asking for feedback from the women co-researchers/directors, until the first cut of the final documentary was finished.

Yet while it was possible to edit a first cut of the film remotely according to co-researchers' guidance, we also realised the limitations of being constrained to an online space, which, at the end, cannot fully compensate for face-to-face participatory action research activities and workshops. Women especially struggled with following the film on their smartphone screens to a sufficient extent to make informed editing decisions, as well as with making collective decisions based on discussions around sensitive topics the documentary touched upon. We therefore decided to organise face-to-face workshops in January and February 2022, which was when we were allowed to travel internationally from the UK to Colombia again due to pandemic restrictions having been lifted.

From remote to hybrid

The remote research workshops took place until the end of 2021. By this time, as described above, we had a first cut of the final documentary. However, watching a film of 20 minutes lengths on a small smartphone screen is much more challenging than on a computer or projector screen. Especially as filmmaking and cinema is a shared experience, and in the way we developed it always built collectively, we needed to make editing decisions together on topics that were quite sensitive in nature and which related to the violence women experienced through their displacement and in their cities.

Discussing sensitive topics online such as displacement, violence, and trauma had also proven difficult. The main reasons for those challenges in the online space were that first, those topics are very personal for the co-researchers/directors. Each one has her own experiences and knowledge to bring in for the research and final film. Yet the online space did not allow for an even discussion space in which each woman felt she could participate and share to the same extent. Some women continued to struggle with the technology and thus weren't able to contribute to the discussion to the same extent as others. Yet, following

action research principles, it was crucial to provide each co-researcher a space to speak and contribute. Additionally, even for those who were confident using the technology of the online room, only one person can speak at the same time and it is less easy for co-researchers to bounce off each other's comments to create a fluid discussion. Rather than co-producing invaluable knowledge with each one of the co-researchers/directors, topics then became dominated by those who could unmute themselves first and were most confident speaking in the online space in the first place. It was quite difficult to facilitate in the online space as well for these same reasons. So what we needed was a space where women could build on each other's contributions; and where giving feedback was also possible through body language, something extremely important for the facilitation of the discussion.

Another issue we struggled with in a purely online space was that of trust. Even though we had been together online for several months, certain topics were not touched upon online. Experiences of violence perpetrated by armed groups that then resulted in displacement are difficult to talk about for some women in general, but also some of them still feel there is a danger in being too open about what they have lived through. Armed groups continue to exist in their urban environments as well and as one of the co-researchers said in a face-to-face workshop later on: 'One doesn't know who is who. And one needs to be aware that the city is full of paramilitaries and guerrilla' (co-researcher in Bogotá, cited in Marzi and Pain 2024: 9). She was hinting that those armed groups that threatened women in their place of origin are still present in their current urban neighbourhoods as well. So there was a trust barrier in what can be said in an online space to each other, but also especially to us as the UK and Colombian professional researchers and filmmakers. In the end, the UK project lead, Sonja Marzi, is a white European researcher sitting at the other end of the screen far away. And even trust between the women co-researchers and the professional independent Colombian research team needed to be built further face-to-face, as just because someone originates from the same country does not automatically mean there is an insider relationship of trust. Intersectional differences are of importance here which provide for different positions of power within the Colombian context as well.

We would have preferred to bring all 24 women from the two cities together into one geographical space, but funds available would not cover the costs. Therefore, we conducted face-to-face workshops with the women co-researchers in Bogotá and Medellín separately, but with Sonja and the whole Colombian research team present in both cities during the workshops.

We began these workshops with some time to talk to each other, as it was the first meeting time face-to-face, allowing time to build some trust beyond the online environment. We then used participatory activities to explore what women co-researchers felt they had left behind when leaving their place of origin, and what they encountered when they arrived in the city (que dejaron y

que encontraron). We continued working on themes of getting ahead in life (seguir adelante) once in the city and the challenges of doing so. We went on to discuss forms of resistance and activism of displaced women. These exercises included group work activities, discussions, drawings, little presentations as well as audio-visual activities such as creating and filming short dramas. While time intensive and intense on an emotional level, these exercises were important to explore the topic of displacement in more detail and so that women as well could share their own stories in a more intimate space and in an environment of trust. Finally, in the second part of the face-to-face workshops, we concentrated on the final film, rewatched the version we had at that time on a projector screen together and made final editing decisions, informed by both the remote and face-to-face work we did. Additionally, being in one space geographically with the co-researchers, the project lead Sonja Marzi also conducted face-to-face life history interviews with them in the days around the workshops. These interviews not only augmented the co-created material we had already with individual accounts of displacement and settling in the city, but also supported developing more trust by having a closer one-to-one dialogue space.

At the end of the face-to-face workshop days, the women mentioned how important it was to have personal exchange and to get to know each other this way rather than only behind a screen. They described the benefits of building long-lasting trust relationships and being able to look each other in the eyes when sharing and co-producing knowledge on their displacement experiences. They said they had been unsure how to feel about the project lead, Sonja Marzi, before meeting her face to face. One of the women co-researchers even mentioned: 'Al principio pensé que usted es tal un poco arrogante como tal los profesores de allá a veces están pero no para nada, muy amable y me cae muy bien ahora'. – 'At first I thought that you are a bit arrogant, like the professors over there are sometimes, but not at all, very kind and I really like you now'.

This confirms that online research spaces have significant limitations, especially when research touches upon topics that demand strong trust between all co-researchers, including the professional research team.

Participation and power in remote/hybrid research processes

While we are advocates of participatory approaches to research in general, and indeed have written this book in a way that supports others wishing to undertake similar research, we do not want to present our experiences as somehow beyond the serious critiques and problematics that have been highlighted by others (Kindon 2011; Lenette 2022; People's Knowledge Editorial Collective 2016; Tuck and Yang 2012). PAR is enmeshed in power relations, and not only open to misuse but widely deployed in ways that belie its community-based origins (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2025), both within academia and outside it. We

sense that this is especially true in the Global North, and there is certainly a tendency for written accounts to gloss over the tensions, conflicts and contradictions that many projects encounter and entail (Pain and Francis 2003). Since participatory approaches took off in Global North research practice, there have been enduring critiques of the ways they can mirror development logics (Mohan 1999). These critiques run parallel to challenges to the earlier deployment of participatory development by NGOs and global institutions such as the World Bank (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Once participation became taken up by powerful constituencies, it is argued, so it lost its original commitment and drive as a liberatory tool for the most marginalised communities; it is routinely co-opted and ends up reinforcing the status quo (Hickey and Mohan 2004; Kapoor 2004).

These postcolonial accounts, along with feminist PAR, re-emphasised the original principles of the approach (see Chapter 1) and argued for more equitable versions of the approach that pay full attention to the abuse, circulation and potential of power (Kesby 2007; Kindon 2011; Maguire 1987). More recently, the resurgence of Indigenous, Black, and postcolonial work re-emphasises the roots of participatory research, where communities of experience originate and control action research projects (Akom 2016; Chan 2023; Lenette 2022; Tuck and Guishard 2013). As we discussed in Chapter 1, these origins of PAR are particularly important to recognise for a transnational project like ours that sits across Global North and South. Indeed, PAR was developed and probably first named in Colombia with the work of Orlando Fals Borda (Chapter 1). Such research projects, then, especially where funding is held by UK partners, are open to reasonable suspicion about lead researchers 'mining' the PAR approach and then re-exporting it in a new neoliberalised form – a paradoxically colonial logic. Chapter 1 also delved into the promise of a decolonial framework for PAR work, working from Quijano's (2007) critique of the colonial logics in power/knowledge relations, and outlined the pitfalls of 'whitewashed PAR' (Lenette 2022; Tuck and Yang 2012).

In our project, it would be naïve to think that these politics of knowledge production have been completely circumvented or neutralised by the methodology and research practices we adopted. In this research project, we adopted a feminist, decolonial, participatory action research approach, as mentioned in Chapter 1. The choice of a co-produced PAR research process is not just a methodological one, but reflects a particular epistemology and an ontology that is based on feminist and decolonial principles of collaboration, participation, and power sharing. Throughout the project, we attempted to apply a critical, reflexive lens to these efforts, rather than imagining or assuming that our practices in this regard would always be successful. Second, our project is a collaboration between countries and institutions in the Global North (UK) and South (Colombia), and this additionally raises the key danger of reproducing colonial relations through research. While we certainly do not promise to have circumvented all of these inherent dangers, the way we designed the

research from start to finish aimed to draw on the tenets of decolonial knowledge production and the Latin American origins of participatory action research (Smith 2021; Sultana 2019; Freire 1970; see Fals Borda 1987).

The project involves a large number of co-researchers spanning two continents and different professional, social, and economic positions, including academics in the UK (where the research funding was held) and Colombia, an independent filmmaking company, Colombian filmmakers, community activists, and displaced women most of whom live in relative poverty and undertake informal paid work. That most of us identified as women (except for the two men in the filmmaking company) barely impinges on the differences in geography, nationality, race, class, income, language, and sexual orientation that divide us. The fact that the majority of the research was undertaken remotely – and of those involved, our Principal Investigator Sonja was the only one who actually travelled between the two continents so that she could engage in research in person as well as online – underscores and amplifies the power geometries framing the project. And, of course, these geometries are not unique but commonplace where academics in the Global North gain funding that enables engagement with other researchers and participants in Global South locations (see Cornish et al. 2023).

Such a statement is an acknowledgement not only of the individual differences between us, that create potential challenges around language, culture, finance, understandings of what we are doing and why, and so on – but of the structural inequalities that commonly frame what we might call the global neoliberal research order. Others, including the geographer Lawrence Berg (2012), have talked about Anglo-American hegemony in knowledge production, but we believe that the web of hierarchical relations is wider than this implies. This global order typically positions research partners unequally from the start, giving greater resources, status and intellectual and financial control to Global North academic partners. Of course, no one would wish to identify their professional practice or ethics as open to the possibility of co-option, coercion, and abuse – but our point here is that practice on the ground can too easily fall into these patterns, whatever high ethical standards and egalitarian practices are promised in research proposals. And we should be clear that this coercion is not only a problem when older, white men with permanent contracts in elite Global North academic institutions lead projects. These patterns may also be replicated by more diverse and junior scholars, as well as those outside the Global North who engage communities in research. But they are also entangled, given all of our intersectional positions in real life. Sonja herself may have been Principal Investigator, responsible for leading the project and ensuring the outputs that have come from it. But she occupied a complex position as regards power; as a junior lecturer on a temporary contract for most of the project, she experienced the precarity and sometimes the underestimation that increasingly accompanies such roles in academia. On the other hand, her fluency in Spanish, willingness to listen, and knowing the Colombian context

well by having done research in the country already many years before this project removed a key barrier with the Colombian team and co-researchers, and helped to cement mutual trust and respect.

It is vital that all researchers, and especially those occupying positions of privilege in this global hierarchy, critically reflect not only on their practice but on the ways that research projects like ours are set up and run. We have found feminist and decolonial research ethics and practice helpful here in informing our project design and the choices we made within the institutional constraints that we are part of. For example, in choosing methods that help centre the voices of women participants who tend to be marginalised (Moss, Falconer Al-Hindi, and Kawabata 2002), in adopting feminist modes of collaboration in all our working practices and interactions (Gilbert and Masucci 2008), and in the overarching shared understanding that our women co-researchers already live the politics and ethics that we aspire to have underpinning our knowledge production (Nagar 2019), and so their expertise directed our research inquiry, in ways outlined elsewhere in this chapter.

Specifically for feminist PAR, a recent paper by the diverse team led by Flora Cornish et al. (2023) suggests a number of productive means to counter power/knowledge challenges on PAR projects. Their suggestions are to build PAR-friendly networks of people and infrastructures; cultivate a critical community to hold them to account; use critical reflexivity; redistribute powers; and learn to trust the process. They also advocate working with social movements 'that demand the redressing of inequities and the recognition of situated expertise'. These points are a good reflection of how we tried to work together on our project.

Another important aspect of a feminist research approach when violence is central to participant experiences (as Chapter 5 explains, violence characterised many of our women co-researcher's accounts) is working in ways that are trauma-informed. When working remotely, as we did in our early workshops, where co-researchers do not yet know each other or the wider team, the danger of unsafety and triggering PTSD seems even greater than in face-to-face qualitative research. We therefore designed sessions as women-only, carefully facilitated the slow building of trust before such stories were shared, with clear ground rules to support each other through the accounts that were shared. As Lenette (2022) also remarks, there is considerable potential for trauma-informed approaches to be used in PAR, with its emphasis on relationship-building and relational ethics that safeguard researchers and participants (Cahill 2007a). Inevitably in such projects, and especially (in our experience) in working in women-only research spaces, women began quickly to support each other, in and outside of workshops and formal online research interactions (see Pain 2022 for an example of trauma-informed PAR).

We had felt previously that participation for some women was limited when we worked with them online only; it can take more courage to speak up online

than if we all sit around a table, where they speak to each other and give each other confidence. In addition, where the UK 'research team' and filmmakers host and facilitate the zoom call, this can mirror colonial relations – there is a technological divide, as well as a geographical and even gender divide (given that the UK filmmakers were men).

When it came to our hybrid approach – when Sonja travelled to Colombia to do follow up work with the women co-researchers, both further workshops and in-depth interviews – ethical challenges remained, but generally, due to the strong relationships of trust that had been built, things felt easier. The women co-researchers had taken ownership of the co-creation research and were motivated to work together to forge the outputs (documentary film, animations, etc). With Sonja, they felt a strong bond of friendship, but at the same time referred to her as the professor in charge. Despite our attempts to challenge or equalise power in these encounters, then, ultimately this had its limits.

Nevertheless, we believe that it is one of the strengths of our hybrid approach to challenge these power imbalances at least to a certain extent. A hybrid approach has the potential to become a long-term solution to co-produce knowledge with co-researchers, especially for research that has a transnational character including the Global South and Global North (Marzi and Tarr 2023). In the end, it was the combination of having worked together over ten months remotely before starting face-to-face research activities in January and February 2022 that developed very strong trust relationships between women co-researchers, the Colombian professional researchers, and the UK PI Sonja. Even more trust was developed when we as researchers from universities in the Global North did not 'disappear' after having 'collected' 'data' but continued to co-produce knowledge, ask for feedback and stay connected remotely. While writing this book and beyond, Sonja continues to meet with the women co-researchers online every couple of months. First, because we are writing this book collaboratively and feedback from the co-researchers is crucial for this process but also to check in and ask if everyone is okay, to celebrate the end of the year and to see if they are able to meet in the future again.

Future directions of hybrid participatory research approaches

Finally, we want to reflect on the potential that a hybrid participatory research approach combining remote and face-to-face research activities offers as a long-term solution to co-produce knowledge with co-researchers and participants, and on potential future directions for this methodology. Hybrid research allows for long-term transnational research relationships that are responsive to demands to reduce the likelihood of exploitative and extractive research, and reduce travel for environmental reasons. Elsewhere we (Marzi and Tarr 2023) argued why a greater focus on taking advantage of combining remote and face-to-face activities is necessary, and why these methodologies could

become more established. We therefore understand a hybrid research approach as combining online/remote with face-to-face research activities and, as Horn and Casagrande (2023) also demonstrate in their hybrid participatory video approach, as complementary.

As we argued in Chapter 1, there is a pressing need for implementing such innovative hybrid research designs, particularly for more sustainable and adaptable transnational research, especially in present and future circumstances of disruption and crisis. The global COVID-19 pandemic forced us to rapidly develop new ways of approaching online qualitative research (e.g., Howlett 2021; Keen, Lomeli-Rodriguez, and Joffe 2022; Kim et al. 2021). For participatory researchers, however, while we have been able to bridge geographical distance through online engagement with participants, we reported in this chapter that we found online spaces cannot fully compensate for face-to-face participatory research activities, either in terms of 'data' quality or building trust relationships, especially with sensitive topics such as violence. We are also clear that the methodological innovations created during the pandemic should not be dismissed, not only given the short-term benefits they have had but also their potential long-term advantages including the ability to mitigate researchers' carbon footprint and widen inclusion (e.g., of researchers and participants with caring responsibilities). Hybrid participatory research designs involving online and 'present in person' research might bridge the advantages of both approaches (Horn and Casagrande 2023; Marzi and Tarr 2023).

The benefits to researchers include both ethical and practical priorities. First, hybrid methodologies future-proof research projects in light of the normalisation of disruption to travel and face-to-face social contact affected by emergencies and the climate crisis, especially (although not exclusively) for transnational Global North-South research collaborations such as ours. Second, they are also of great value in contexts of violence and insecurity where researchers may struggle to enter the field ethically safely, or logistically. Third, increasing arguments for decolonising research practices through valuing local knowledge (Rodriguez Castro 2021; Smith 2012; Tuck and Yang 2012) are one of the drivers of our development of a hybrid participatory methodology, which allows for greater transnational collaboration and thus aims to shift power within the research process in more sustainable ways, as well as allowing for more ethical and long-term research commitments (see Knott 2019; Mason 2021). Fourth, funding restrictions that limit travel and fieldwork opportunities, combined with rising inflation and energy costs, make it increasingly challenging to conduct transnational participatory research, especially for early career researchers for long periods of time.

Fifth, this ability to remain 'in the field' through a hybrid, partially digital approach potentially allows for more ethical and also rigorous qualitative data collection, and thus co-created knowledge, but also keeps the trust of participants that researchers do not 'disappear' once face-to-face research activities

are finished. We are still connecting with our co-researchers several times per year remotely. Sixth, hybrid research offers more inclusive research processes: giving participants more choices over when and how to take part, especially important for our participants who are time poor and juggle work, caring, and community responsibilities (see also Horn and Casagrande 2023). Seventh, it allows for bridging geographical places, reducing travel time for participants and connecting groups that could not meet face-to-face. In our project, our co-researchers were located in two cities in Colombia and researchers even across countries in Colombia and the UK. Finally, hybridity facilitates continued inclusion of participants in data analysis and dissemination after face-to-face research is concluded, and potentially leads to more impactful research practices benefiting participants during and beyond the research process. It provides the ability to respond better to participants' aspirations and needs, while at the same time co-producing more thorough findings.

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4

THE AUDIO-VISUAL AS A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMATION

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This chapter provides an overview of how audio-visual methods and audio-visual techniques can serve as a tool for social and political transformation. While in the previous chapter, we discussed audio-visual and participatory methodologies primarily from Western viewpoints, epistemologies and ontologies, in this chapter, we shift the focus to the influence of Latin American audio-visual and filming methodologies and how they were included in our project. These particularly include methodologies of community filmmaking, henceforth cinema comunitario, which played a crucial role in the participatory audio-visual methodology developed and applied in this project.

We begin this chapter by examining how cinema may serve as a tool for protest, fostering collaborative processes that raise political and community awareness in contexts marked by violence and injustice. Next, we consider how community filmmaking has emerged as a means of media appropriation, self-management, and self-representation. We then continue, from the perspective of feminist community filmmakers, to explore how film can be used to reconstruct memory, especially regarding women's embodied experiences and their connection to territory. Lastly, we analyse how the film produced within this project, *Volviendo a vivir (Coming Back to Life)*, acts as a reconstruction of the memory of forced displacement in Colombia and serves as a transformative tool for the women participants and co-directors as they build relationships with each other and come to see their struggles as communal and not merely personal.

Film as a political and community tool

In Latin America, filmmaking has become an essential tool for asserting the right to information, protesting violence and inequality, and bringing collective

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aspirations and self-representation to life. Filmmaking serves as a continual practice of amplifying the 'illegitimate' voices of those most excluded in society. The roots of community filmmaking are community radio movements. Community radio in Latin America began in the 1930s and its popularity spread to several countries in the region. Community radio became the preferred medium over other media because it was low-cost and easy to operate. Radio was able to reach a large number of people and participation in its production was easily possible (Beltran 1996: 8) across regions and different populations with varied access to economic resources. In the late 1960s, radio became a particularly important tool for the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's (1970, 1983, 2001) Popular Education movement – inspired and sponsored by trade unions, student and farmers' movements – aiming to create paths of emancipation for the working classes.

Radio then became a medium for bringing literacy programmes to communities far removed from the urban centres. For example, *Escuelas Radiofónicas Populares* [Community Radio Schools], supported by the Catholic Church, transmitted educational content to the most impoverished areas of Colombia. The pioneering project of this initiative was Radio Sutatenza, a radio station opened in 1947 in Valle de Tenza, which is a rural village in Boyacá. This radio station delivered distance education to nearly eight million farmers and was the beginning of a cultural and educational revolution in the Colombian countryside. This radio education model also served as a precedent for many other broadcasters in Latin America (Radio Nacional de Colombia 2017). Radio continued to be a means of promoting social justice and became an instrument of resistance communication in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s, during the military dictatorships and weak, elite-controlled democracies (Tornay Márquez 2021: 54).

At the same time, in the 1950s, television and visual media became increasingly popular as tools for communication, with the growing use of film cameras making visual storytelling more accessible. As technology advanced, film cameras became more portable and capable of capturing sound, transforming the medium. Against this backdrop, the New Latin American Cinema movement emerged in the 1960s, setting itself apart from the neocolonial industrial cinema by taking a critical stance on pressing political issues (Mestman and Oubiña 2016). Argentine filmmakers Solanas and Getino articulated this vision in their 1969 manifesto, *Hacia un tercer cine* [Towards a Third Cinema], describing Third Cinema as a form of revolutionary action intended to transform reality and spread ideas of liberation. They envisioned it as serving 'a broader goal: to subjugate abstractions and fictions to the need to illuminate a specific historical or political situation through testimony (documentary)' (Paranagúa 2003: 462).

In this respect, this form of political cinema stood in direct opposition to the mainstream cinema produced by state and industrial systems. It employed

dialectical storytelling and introduced production and distribution methods outside the capitalist-industrial model. This approach fostered a collective 'we', which parallels the focus on the collective over the individual in Latin American feminism (Segato and McGlazer 2018), and defines political and militant cinema as a form of resistance within the violent landscapes of Latin America. Consequently, by challenging established historical narratives, militant and political cinema started processes of transformation. Previously under-represented contexts, people, and issues emerged in film, as cinema became both a political tool and a means for research and expression (Del Castillo Camargo 2019: 62).

Using participatory action research (*Investigación Acción Participante (IAP)*) methodologies, Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva created innovative social documentaries that were rare at that point in Latin America. Their work is relevant for diverse urban processes with indigenous and campesina communities because they proposed 'research to transform' and 'praxis as political action', according to Fals Borda and Rodríguez (1987)'s theories of PAR and arising from the work and commitment of putting the heart and mind into the process. That is, *thinking and feeling* reality with communities in contexts of violence in order to materialise potential transformations through research and, in this case, filmmaking.

Thus, Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva created political and ethnographic films about Colombia's urban and rural inequality from a Marxist and anthropological perspective. As a strategy for reconstructing memory, their films featured testimonies and *mise-en-scène* by the protagonists of the experiences portrayed. By showing the films to the communities represented therein, this practice also served as a tool for raising awareness of the exploitation, inequality or domination present in the communities. Particularly noteworthy among these films were *Chircales* (1966–1971), which led the protagonist family in the Bogota neighbourhood of Tunjuelito to resign after realising they were being exploited; and *Planas: testimonio de un etnocidio. Las contradicciones del capitalismo* (1971) [Planas: Testimony of an Ethnocide. The Contradictions of Capitalism], which explores the Planas massacre in Vichada, an area in Colombia's eastern plains. The latter would later serve as legal evidence. For example, in productions like *Campesinos* (1973–1975) [Farmers] and *Nuestra voz de tierra y memoria* (1974–1982) [Our Voice of Earth And Memory], which expose historical problems with the Indigenous and farmers populations, the protagonists use *mise-en-scène* and poetics to narrate and politicise their memory (see https://martarodriguez.com.co/index.php/films/ for more information of those films).

Other examples are films such as *Asalto* (1968) [Assault], *Colombia 70* (1970) and *¿Qué es la democracia?* (1971) [What is Democracy?] by Colombian filmmaker Carlos Álvarez. Heavily censored in the 1970s, a period when the political elite had negotiated a deal to alternate power between the main two parties

(see Chapter 2), his work exemplifies the political role of film in constructing versions of memory that challenge the hegemonic memory constructed from places of power. Using 16mm cameras and small-scale, independent labs to develop his films, Álvarez's approach was political not only in content but also in his technical method, because his technical process was a political move to appropriate the means of production.

This socially and politically engaged form of cinema, which aimed to co-produce films with communities, laid the groundwork for what is now known as contemporary participatory community filmmaking, as explored in the next section. From the 1970s to the 1990s, various militant Latin American Third Cinema filmmakers – critical of conventional control over film production – organised initiatives within Indigenous and farming communities across different countries to reclaim the narration of their own stories. Notable examples include Marta Rodríguez and Jorge Silva's educational and collaborative work in Cauca, Colombia (Cruz 2003), Jorge Sanjinés' and Ukamau group in Bolivia (1979), Luis Lupone's media transfer projects in Mexico (García and Roca 2021), and Vincent Carrelli's Video das Aldeias, an Indigenous production in Brazil (Carelli, Echeverría, and Zirión 2016). These projects, marked by self-representation, community-driven production, and self-visualisation practices, sought to raise political consciousness around the experiences and contexts of Indigenous and farming communities. Thus, in Latin America, community radio and militant political cinema were the forerunners of community filmmaking, which appropriates the means of film production and serves a community's objectives.

Community filmmaking: appropriation, self-management, and self-representation

Community filmmaking seeks to appropriate the means of film production in pursuit of *audio-visual sovereignty*. At its core, this approach represents a political commitment to democratising film and media across the region. It encourages innovative practices in education, production, exhibition, and access to film and filmmaking, empowering community members as the central protagonists in these processes (Benavente 2022). By fostering the right to communication – meaning access to knowledge, information sharing, freedom of expression, and education (MinTic 2021) – community filmmaking aligns closely with political activism, advocating for rights related to information, health, the environment, and education (Molfetta 2017: 22).

Therefore, there is no single definition of community filmmaking. Rather, it is an organic, localised practice that each organisation or community adapts to suit its environment and the particular needs of its processes. This adaptation breaks away from conventional models and challenges filmmakers to create production methods that foster unique aesthetics, yet are grounded in

horizontal structures of control, collective decision-making, community management, and the development of alternative narratives and perspectives. Through self-management and self-representation, community filmmaking brings about substantial transformations in collaborative work, production methods, cinematic language, and the fundamental purposes and motivations behind filmmaking. As Indigenous Zapotec filmmaker Luna Marán puts it, 'community filmmaking strives to be an art of everyday life, a necessary act, like looking in the mirror, like asking ourselves who we are and what we desire' (Marán 2018: 36).

In this spirit, community and educational filmmaking initiatives have emerged across Latin America. In Mexico, *Ojo de Agua Comunicación* and the Chiapas Media Project *Promedios* were established in Oaxaca and Chiapas, respectively, in 1998. In Argentina, the organisation *Cine en Movimiento* [Cinema in Motion] began producing in 2002 as a response to the economic crisis. In Peru, *Grupo Chaski* has led the *Red de Microcines* [Microcinemas Network] since 2003. The first decade of this century saw the development of more firmly established community projects, such as *Ojo al Sancocho* in Ciudad Bolívar, Colombia; *Rio 40* in Brazil; *El Churo* in Ecuador; and *Campamento Audiovisual Itinerante* [Travelling Audiovisual Camp] in Mexico, alongside others that continue to grow at the local level (Gumucio Dagron 2014). What they all have in common is that they follow the community cinema principles described above.

In Colombia, community filmmaking is shaped by the country's history of violence and armed conflict (see Chapter 2 for further context on the conflict). In this context, community cinema serves as a tool for advancing popular struggles, asserting rights such as the right to life, subsistence, human dignity, non-discrimination, and the preservation of one's language, among others. Communities, organisations, children, young people, and adults have begun to reclaim the squares and streets of their neighbourhoods and towns to showcase their work, with parks transformed into open-air theatres for screening these films (Dorado Lozano 2024; Gumucio Dagron 2014). These were the beginnings of several Colombian collectives and organisations, including *La Corporación Colectivo de Comunicaciones Montes de María Línea 21* (El Carmen de Bolívar), *La Escuela Belén de los Andaquíes* (Caquetá), and *El Colectivo Mejoda in Cali's Agua Blanca District* (Valle del Cauca), among others.

Although these initiatives take place amidst fear and violence, they also reflect a strong commitment to reclaim public spaces through cinema, offering a means of resisting violence and making a clear demand for state attention. As a result, community filmmaking has contributed to successfully deterring the forced recruitment of young people by armed groups and has become a form of public protest against the violence and structural challenges facing these regions. In our own work, we have witnessed transformative experiences for communities and community film organisations. For instance, the process

of creating the short film *Lucas y el camino de la resistencia* [*Lucas and the Road of Resistance*] (2019) emerged from an initiative to engage children and young people at the *Escuela Popular de Cine* (Community Film School) in Ciudad Bolívar, Bogotá. Founded in 2005, the school offers a space for teaching and learning based on the principles of Popular Education (Freire 1970) across several neighbourhoods in Ciudad Bolívar, an area marked by ongoing conflict. The school provides a safe space and a platform for children and young people to tell their own stories, come together, spend their free time, and understand and imagine their surroundings as a shared space.

This filmmaking process began with a neighbourhood mapping exercise in which children and young people identified places that stirred different emotions in them: feeling safe, unsafe, happy, sad, and so forth. Using the insights from this exercise, we selected various locations to explore further with the young people within the neighbourhood. The children and young people embraced the exercise, sharing personal stories tied to each place, interviewing local residents, and discussing why certain areas felt intimidating to some but not to others. This activity enabled them to recognise and reflect on their neighbourhood, its challenges, and the various community and resistance efforts underway. A particularly significant spot was *el palo del ahorcado* (Hangman's Branch), a well-known neighbourhood tree that held deep meaning for them but had, unfortunately, become a dangerous place. As the project evolved, this exercise transformed into a short film script featuring a dog, which ignited a community initiative to reclaim *el palo del ahorcado* for the residents. In a symbolic gesture, the tree was renamed el palo de la resistencia (Resistance Branch).

Community cinema has developed its own meanings, aesthetics, and methods of production and distribution, striving to promote wellbeing and bring perspectives of intersectional inequalities into the public eye. As Stefan Kaspar, a pioneering figure in Peru, once remarked, 'Cinema does not change reality, but it has the potential to include the excluded, to bring the invisible to light, to remember the forgotten […] That is the main change' (Kaspar cited in Benavente 2022: 19). By producing films created by and for the community, community cinema helps to establish subaltern counter-publics – 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses' (Fraser 1999: 21).

Today, community cinema methodologies have evolved into a rich set of audio-visual and participatory techniques for collective work. Many of these techniques, originally rooted in academic settings, have been adapted into *educación popular* (popular community education) processes. Central to this approach is the concept of the 'laboratory' – a space where each organisation and initiative collaboratively discovers the meaning, relevance, and application of community cinema tools. As facilitators, our role is to accompany and support, serving as a bridge for resolving questions and, more importantly, raising new ones that encourage knowledge sharing and foster in-depth, reflective

discussions among all participants. In this way, community cinema collectives become transformative spaces that generate social multipliers, strengthening community communication networks and establishing community filmmaking as a tool that furthers the community's political aims.

In Bogotá, one of the cities in the current project, community cinema is rising in popularity. There it has enabled young people to study at the previously mentioned *Escuela Popular de Cine* in Ciudad Bolívar. The experience of studying there often transforms their outlook on life, demonstrating that film can be a viable pursuit, even within the constraints of the educational system. Today, many of these young people serve as role models for others in the neighbourhood, with some even forming their own collectives and collaborating with peers to lead workshops across the country (see also Larrate 2024). Ciudad Bolivar is also the place where many of our co-researchers in this project currently live.

Many other seed initiatives have taken root and are flourishing in various regions. In Peru, Grupo Chaski's *Red de Microcines* brings film education and screenings to communities throughout the country. Likewise, a bi-national initiative between Peru and Colombia, *Hacer una escuela de cine comunitario* [Making a Community Film School] (HUECC), shares a 'recipe' for establishing community film schools. Through initiatives like these, community filmmaking spreads like a rhizome, with the steadfast aim of transcending borders and establishing community communication as a fundamental right.

Feminist community filmmaking: narrating identities to reconstruct memory

In recent decades, the recognition of patriarchy as a system of gender oppression has permeated community needs and demands. This transformation has involved challenging privilege and addressing the reproduction of violence within various organisational processes. Feminist community cinema has emerged to reflect on and critique filmmaking practices through a lens that considers power dynamics, the intersection of filmmaking technique and gender, and the relationship between the body and the territory. Feminist community cinema also contests mainstream versions of memory and produces alternatives. In Colombia's context of chronic violence, it achieves this through the self-representation of women and their identities beyond heteronormativity.

Studies have shown that women's bodies are particularly vulnerable in conflict and war settings, where violence against women is often employed as a deliberate tactic under a patriarchal structure of violence (Actoras de Cambio 2021; Cockburn 2004; Segato 2016). The women co-researchers involved in the project of this book have experienced forced displacement and subsequent revictimisation by finding themselves in violent contexts again in their respective cities, Bogotá and Medellín. Those situations of experiencing violence have

become more intense for them simply because they are women and have to struggle with intersecting multilayered forms of violence before, during and after their displacement from their original homes (see Marzi and Pain 2024). In this context, using artistic forms of expression, such as participatory filming and community cinema, becomes a form of symbolic resistance, offering pathways for self-representation and the narration of their life experiences marked by violence. As a group of female international facilitators and researchers working with women of all ages from various communities and regions in Colombia, we realised that much of what they wish to capture in the produced audio-visual content throughout the project centres on their need to tell their own personal stories.

Consequently, we used methodological exercises to connect the body to the territory as an element of memory and knowledge making. These included asking women to localise places they feel safe, at home, etc. and allocate them to a part of their body and explain why (see also for more context on cuerpo territory Rodriguez Castro 2021; Sweet and Ortiz Escalante 2017; Zaragocin and Caretta 2021). *La Partida*, a feminist community cinema collective in Bogotá, explains: 'We encourage our [female] participants to explore the exercise of remembering and forgetting as a political means of reconnecting with themselves, their territory, and their culture. They do this both for themselves and for potential interactions with collective memories' (2021, private archive). These exercises thus serve as an opportunity to politicise daily life, where recognising shared experiences unites women in creating collective narratives, affirming that 'the personal is political'.

Feminist community cinema crafts new narratives in order to amplify and create spaces for women's struggles, so that their stories – and thus their memories – are acknowledged, told, and heard. These films are sometimes presented from the perspectives of those who have suffered violence, as seen in our project with women co-researchers in Bogotá and Medellín, who aim to 'remember and name so that it does not happen again' with this audio-visual work (Isela, Medellín workshop).

Hence, as an exercise in memory making, the use of audio-visual art enables us to narrate the unspeakable. Using diverse filming strategies – animation, *mise-en-scène*, and first-person testimony – audio-visuals allow the telling of stories of often very painful and traumatic events in women's lives. Consequently, cinema emerges as a tool for justice, of truth telling and providing testimony and to remember (Jelin and da Silva 2002) and avoid repetition, as Isela mentions above. It offers those who lived violence and trauma an opportunity for reparations and at least a bit of healing by naming their truth from their experience and by having that truth publicly acknowledged. In other words, community cinema processes can play an important role in constructing and transforming collective memory; they are vehicles for the creation of remembrances that sustain the collective memory.

Thus, the transformative process that feminist community cinema fosters goes far beyond simply producing a film. 'It is not about giving a camera to another woman' (La Partida Feminista 2022); rather, it is about creating a space where women can come together to share their personal experiences, explore the diverse realities of different bodies and territories, challenge inequalities, and devise strategies for overcoming their struggles and generating resistance. Such a space was realised in our project, *Volviendo a vivir* [*Coming Back to Life*] (2022), where we gathered to co-create a film. Here, women utilised technological tools and multiple voices in a filmmaking process that offered an opportunity to listen, recognise, and amplify their own voices. Through self-narration, the women shared their unique perspectives, building a collective memory of forced displacement in Colombia and to push for transformation of their own urban lives while at the same time representing many women who lived through similar experiences.

Volviendo a vivir [Coming Back to Life], filmmaking as a memory of displacement

The women co-researchers, and also directors, of *Volviendo a vivir* (2022) decided it was crucial to understand the film as an opportunity to acknowledge their experiences and traumas. By expressing them, they hoped to contribute to future generations avoiding a repetition of the violence they lived through. As noted in Chapter 2, Colombia has been in the midst of internal conflict for more than 60 years. Consequently, generations of Colombians have never known a conflict-free country. The women participating in this research-creation exercise are direct victims of this conflict who have suffered first-hand from the war (see also Chapter 5 for more testimonies of displacement).

This project includes displaced women and those who are affected by the Colombian conflict. Many women co-researchers shared experiences of violence related to their arrival in the cities of Bogotá and Medellín and how they struggle even now with limited job opportunities, resulting in many economic hardships and difficulty establishing a safe and dignified home. Few co-researchers were familiar with community cinema or participatory techniques of filming, and most struggled at the beginning with the technological tools such as using their smartphones to make videos. Yet, they found that the audio-visual offered a way to be heard, tell their stories and share their aspirations.

When we started the research process, two challenges became immediately visible. First, we started in an online environment and women had to manage their phones and learn new technological skills to join Zoom meetings (as we detail in Chapter 3). Second, apart from the technological challenges, creatively we needed to agree on common themes and ultimately on a theme for the film. The research project itself was a broad umbrella, and according to action research principles it was critical that the women co-researchers decide

themselves on what was important for them to communicate through the audio-visual medium. This was especially true as they would be committing to work collectively on these topics over a prolonged timeframe in an online context. We began by focusing on individual presentations and memory, inviting each participant to film herself while sharing who she was and where she came from. Participants were also encouraged to use the camera to capture their homes and neighbourhoods. These activities included technical exercises to familiarise the women with using mobile phones and expressing themselves through audio-visual language. Gradually, they began to connect across distances, discovering pieces of themselves in one another's stories, via personal anecdotes shared in their own voices. The results were presented at our collective online meetings, sparking questions, reflections, and dialogues among the women.

Watch here the video 4.1 – 'Soy de' – lugar de origin ('I am from' – place of origin) (https://youtu.be/5QWgU8MoK58)

VIDEO 4.1 Playlist – researching displacement together.

We continued sessions talking about the issues that became at the end the main themes for the film, their displacement testimonies (Chapter 5), the challenges they had and still experienced in their respective cities (Chapter 6), and the hopes and aspirations they have for their urban futures (Chapter 7). The film began taking shape accordingly, starting with the women co-researchers' departures from their previous homes and taking viewers through their arrivals in the city as they confront new realities. The women talk about their pasts, with a heavy emphasis on their struggles and the ways they have survived as women in the city.

These topics were captured in a poem that one of the women co-researchers started and that the group finalised together during online meetings and in their own time. The ideas within the poem then gradually morphed into a storyline for the film (Table 4.1).

The audio-visual, then, is not just a form for recording their memories but opens up a space for developing narratives and testimonies collectively.

TABLE 4.1 Poem developed by co-researchers for film 'Volviendo a Vivir'

Volviendo a vivir	*Coming back to life*
Las familias se marcharon	The families left
Pues las desplazaron.	Well, they were forced to move.
Las amenazas llegaron	the threats came
sus derechos han violado.	their rights have been violated.
De sus tierras la sacaron	They took their land from them
la tristeza ha llegado.	sadness has come.
Los disparos escucharon	They heard shots
y sin nada han quedado.	and they were left with nothing.
Con sus hijos caminaron,	With their children they walked,
Hambre, frío van pasando.	Passing stages of being hungry, cold.
Con los corazones destrozados	with broken hearts
a la ciudad están llegado.	to the city they are arrived.
Tocando de puerta en puerta,	knocking from door to door,
tratando de buscar calma,	trying to find calm,
por aquellas masacres y	from those massacres and
desapariciones forzadas.	forced disappearances.
Evidencias de lesa humanidad	evidence of crimes against humanity
los llevaron a escapar.	they were led to escape.
El desplazamiento intraurbano	intra-urban displacement
en la ciudad los pone a luchar.	in the city they were put to fight.
Recorriendo diversos sitios	Go round various sites
todos aquellos han sufrido.	all those have suffered.
Blancos, negros, afros, indígenas,	Whites, blacks, Afros, indigenous,
En la ciudad han sido acogidos.	In the city they have been welcomed.
Esperando de un gobierno	Waiting for a government
Injusto y olvidado,	unjust and forgotten,
que sin ayudas del estado	that without state aid
como víctimas han quedado	as victims they have remained.
Aquellas manos laboriosas,	Those busy hands
se la pasan reciclando.	They spend it recycling.
Angustiadas, sudorosas	distressed, sweaty
buscando el sustento diario.	looking for daily sustenance.
Sus trabajos artesanales,	their handicrafts,
creativos, sensacionales.	creative, sensational
Nuestras mujeres la pasan,	Our women spend it,
Sembrando plantas medicinales.	Sowing medicinal plants.
La lucha siempre sigue	The fight always goes on
buscando una esperanza.	looking for a hope.
Sin revivir el pasado,	without reliving the past,
por este conflicto armado.	for this armed conflict.
Hemos sido protagonistas de una Guerra	We have been protagonists of a war
Ahora somos protagonistas de una transformacion	Now we are protagonists of a transformation

It became their tool for remembering and reconstructing memories of violence, but also of resistance, allowing them to dream up different ways to heal their wounds and make each other more resilient by being together. Hence, working with community cinema in an action research project allowed for what Sonja Marzi (2023) calls impact-in-process, where the transformation is part of the research process through different forms of awareness building, network building and processes that support healing.

The audio-visual production of the film itself – finding these synergies in their collective experience – became a process of politicising their experiences as victims of forced displacement and violence in Colombia. By creating and later showing the film to different communities, they not only share their experiences and aspirations but also highlight the issues that need greater support from the government and policymakers to enhance their urban futures. By reconstructing their trajectories with the audio-visual materials they acknowledged themselves as more than victims of forced displacement, amplified their voices as defenders of life, creators of urban solidarity and, in some cases, as being or becoming female leaders. These roles the women had within their new lives in the city are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

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5

DISPLACEMENT

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Introduction: telling displacement in Colombia

In this chapter, the women co-researchers describe how they conceptualise displacement, share their displacement experiences and speak about the reasons for their arrival in their respective city, Bogotá or Medellín. They set their own experiences of forced displacement against the wider Colombian context, understanding displacement not only as an individual experience but also as a shared experience of a displaced Colombian population resulting from violence and conflict (see Chapter 2 for more details on the conflict and violence in Colombia). Especially important is that the women co-researchers understand displacement as a collective as well as individual experience, and this chapter aims to contribute to work against the 'disembodied representations of violence' (Oslender 2016: 11) and representation of displacement through numbers, statistics and categorisations such as 'IDP' [Internal Displaced Persons] (Oslender 2016: 17). Instead, women shared their experiences and individual histories to show their realities behind the numbers.

As the Colombian conflict is complex, so is the internal displacement that results. Urban communities and cities are the main recipients of internally displaced people, including Medellín and Bogotá, where our co-researchers

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currently live. Being two of the main hosts for internally displaced people in the country, displacement is a key challenge both cities struggle with, and they experience unplanned growth on a large scale because of it, above all in the urban peripheries.

In 2023, Colombia had over 8 million forcibly displaced people (Unidad de Víctimas 2023), making it one of the countries with the highest IDP (Internal Displaced Persons) rate in the world. The IDMC reported in 2023 that internal displacement triggered by conflict and violence worldwide was three times higher in 2022 than the annual average of the past ten years (IDMC 2023). Sadly, Colombia is among those countries and its internally displaced numbers in 2022 caused by armed conflict were the highest for over a decade (IDMC 2023). These high numbers over such a long period have the effect of taking away people's individual identities within the category of the 'displaced' population (desplazadxs), making displacement a normalised phenomenon in Colombian society, something much criticised (Oslender 2016: 13). This chapter aims to counter this by telling the stories of our co-researchers affected by displacement and conflict. Furthermore, displacement in Colombia is an ongoing phenomenon; although the term displaced is, as Lombard et al. (2023: 1325) highlight, temporarily and spatially limited, implying something that has happened in the past, rather than describing a process that continues in the present (see also Celestina 2016, 2018; Meertens 2012; Vélez-Torres and Agergaard 2014).

We understand displacement in terms of being or having been forced to move from one place to another. Celestina (2016: 368) notes that the Colombian state defines displacement as 'the act of leaving one's place of residence' but highlights that this definition misses the relational and emotional importance of place and place-making (see also Celestina 2018). Places are rarely experienced or understood in isolation, but instead, there are strong ties between people's sense of self, identity and place (Fullilove 2016; Marzi and Pain 2024: 7). Indeed, place is formed and becomes meaningful through relations of power between people, as well as through living, acting and engaging within places (see also Celestina 2016, 2018; Massey 2005, 2009). Consequently, and importantly for our co-researchers' experiences, displacement can involve loss of place, relations and sense of self and one's identity through the act of being forced to leave their homes involuntarily. Displacement as a form of uprooting (Celestina 2018; Marzi and Pain 2024) is something our co-researchers touch upon more in detail later in this and the following chapters, drawing on their own experiences of displacement.

Displacement may happen in different ways and take many different forms. Most displacement in Colombia is rural displacement, where people are forced to leave their rural homes and campesino identity and move to places that may be rural but are most often urban (see for example Celestina 2018; Steele 2017). Yet increasingly, people experience intra-urban displacement within city areas,

having to move from one urban neighbourhood to another. In the majority of cases, this occurs because of violence and armed conflict and being afraid for their own lives, yet other reasons may co-exist. Among these are neoliberal processes including urban development and land extraction projects that displace people from their territory, often violently. Additionally, our co-researchers identify forms of displacement that are not directly linked to the armed conflict but rather to intra-family violence and the lack of economic opportunities to get ahead in life (seguir adelante). We argue that the latter is still related to the armed conflict, and especially affects poorer people through state neglect, or as Celestina (2018: 5) puts it 'where state protection is not a priority'.

This chapter thus shares some of the knowledge that was produced through the innovative methodology described in preceding chapters. Importantly, this chapter shifts focus to the voices of those directly affected by displacement in Colombia, the women who were co-researchers on our research project. Here, they provide their own definitions of what they understand displacement to be and to entail, based on their lived experiences; they describe how it occurred in their pasts and presents, and talk about its impacts. Additionally, they understand and present their stories as being representative of those of many other displaced people who have histories of loss and uprooting in the country.

Collaborative writing

The chapter's main authors are the Colombian co-researchers, the women who co-produced the knowledge on this research project together with us. All of them have been extremely generous in sharing their experiences, and they conceptualise displacement in a way that makes most sense to them as displaced women in Colombia. Writing this and the following chapters was not an easy task, especially for a book partly intended for academic audiences, and therefore having to follow and negotiate customs and rules regarding writing style, structure, language, and form. Many of the women co-researchers do not have the training or skills to write large chunks of text to academic standards. Others are simply not interested in writing in this way. So we devised a co-writing process that works with where we are each coming from and our capacities, while making sure the final text reflects shared ideas and conversations as far as is possible. At the same time, the women co-researchers and the rest of us were very excited by the idea of writing and authoring a book together, something many of the participants never saw as a possibility for themselves. The University-based researchers in the UK and Colombia felt the book would be of value for academics, but also perhaps to audiences beyond academia if we could write jointly and offer an additional platform on which the women co-researchers shared their knowledge in more detail. To address both the challenges of writing text for non-academic writers and audiences, and the limits of traditional academic books, we decided to combine audio-visual and textual material.

As a result, and in order to realise the three chapters co-authored by our co-researchers, we ran writing workshops together in Colombia. We spent a total of four writing workshop days in each city, Bogotá and Medellín, during which we developed the content of these chapters. Writing workshops were led by the UK lead researcher, Sonja Marzi and the two Colombian independent researchers Lina María Zuluaga García and Carolina Dorado Lozano. All audio-visual and visual material presented in those three chapters and the rest of the book have been created with the creative mind, skills and support of artist Ana María Díaz Restrepo, and support of María Fernanda Carrillo Sánchez in terms of the sound for the animations.

During these workshops, we explored our co-researchers' ideas for their empirically based chapters and what it is they want to share with readers. The women co-researchers decided to follow the themes of displacement, urban challenges (rebuilding their lives in the city), and hopes for the future, which are the three chapters co-authored by them in this book. This builds on the knowledge we already co-produced for the documentary 'Volviendo a Vivir'. To create the text, we discussed the content during writing workshops and collaboratively agreed on the key messages.

We also decided that the chapters needed to be a combination of text and audio-visual material, for several reasons. First, text is not the primary way that many of these women communicate or inform themselves. This also means that many audiences we want to reach with this book, beyond academia, may prefer content and material that is not in the form of text. Second, having worked for over three years creating audio-visual material with our co-researchers, we believe including it here is crucial. Finally, the reason why we chose audio-visual methods and used filming in the research is because, first, we believe the audio-visual and in particular film can work as a tool for transformation (see Chapter 4) and, second, it allows women co-researchers to express themselves in ways that complement text and go beyond it, providing a more comprehensive picture of the knowledge they shared so generously. As a result, we used different techniques to create the content of these chapters, such as discussion groups, participatory exercises, and visual art in the form of drawings and collages. We recorded the content of the chapters through audio recordings and written notes as well as the material outputs that came out of the participatory and creative exercises.

For all recordings (audio and audio-visual) during workshops consent was given by all participants, and of course, institutional ethical clearance had been given for the project. However, doing research following co-production and PAR principles, especially when touching upon such sensitive topics as displacement and experiences of violence and trauma, means that asking for consent continuously is vital. We did this by meeting with the women regularly, presenting them with the co-produced written and audio-visual

outcomes, and asking again for permission as well as feedback on any changes they would like to see. Additionally, we communicated through our WhatsApp group asking for continued consent before adding content, quotes or any 'data'/material that is especially sensitive, to mitigate any risk or harm for our co-researchers as well as emphasise shared ownership of both the material and the process.

Conceptualising displacement in Colombia: women's perspectives

The majority of our co-researchers had had to leave their homes and territory involuntarily. Many of them identify as victims of the conflict between guerrilla, paramilitaries, and the Colombian state that has been ongoing for over 50 years (see Chapter 2). Others do not identify directly as victims of the conflict but had to leave their 'tierras' (land) because there were no opportunities for them to progress in life (seguir adelante) or because they had to flee domestic and intrafamily violence. Still, the conflict amplified these other violences, and sometimes indirectly caused them; the absence of the state in many rural regions at the time women were displaced left them unprotected (see also Celestina 2018; Marzi and Pain 2024).

Women co-researchers left for the cities of Bogotá and Medellín where they currently live. In this chapter, they talk about their own displacement experiences. At the same time, they consider themselves to be representative of the wider population of displaced women in the country, who share similar experiences. As a result, sometimes in this chapter, women present their own individual experiences, but often the stories we present in the book are created as a collective account by all of the women, representing their shared experiences of being forced to move away from their homes. They took the decision for the chapters to work in this way. We want to highlight that individual stories are still important, but also that many displaced women have lived through similar traumatic experiences of violence, neglect and fear, and experienced similar challenges when trying to rebuild new lives in the city. Collective testimony is also of value to show the massive impact of displacement and the high levels of violence that women and their families face.

The women co-researchers view internal displacement in Colombia as having many different causes and forms. They see reasons for displacement not as mutually exclusive but as often interconnected, relating to the conflict even if not directly, including forms of intra-urban displacement which, to our knowledge, receive less specific focus in the academic literatures on displacement in Colombia at the time of writing this book. In the following sections of this chapter, women co-researchers provide more detailed information on understanding displacement, how they experienced displacement, and how they differentiate its various forms.

Different forms of displacement

> El desplazamiento tiene muchas raíces – the displacement has many roots.
> (Isela workshop, Medellín)

We started the writing workshops in both cities by discussing what we understand as displacement in Colombia. In Bogotá, women explain that displacement is being forced to move from one place, which one usually calls home, to another new place that they then must make their new home, often suddenly, involuntarily and without the ability to plan. Though not all displacement situations are necessarily unplanned, we focus here on forced displacement which means women had no choice to stay. During workshops in Bogotá and Medellín, women identify displacement as an event that creates economic and family ruptures, violates their rights and generates fear and anxiety. We will provide more information on the impacts of displacement in the next chapter.

We began writing workshops in both cities by re-watching videos that the co-researchers made in relation to displacement, including those that were not selected for the final film 'Volviendo a Vivir'. Women then started to define displacement and its different forms, first by thinking about what they all share with all people who are displaced. For example, in Bogotá one of the women said:

> Because there are many things in common, right? Everyone here comes from another place, everyone had to leave their lands, their roots and came to face new things, so there are many things in common between us.
> *(Mariela, Bogotá)*

> Porque muchas cosas hay en común no? Todas aquí vienen de un lado, tuvieron que dejar las tierras, las raíces y vinieron a enfrentar cosas nuevas, así hay muchas cosas en común entre nosotras.
> *(Mariela, Bogotá)*

In Medellín, the women then decided to draw a picture to illustrate their shared displacement experience and co-wrote some text that tells the story of displaced women who come to Medellín. The animation 'relato colectivo' (collective story) is based on this drawing, and we recorded the story; together they represent a collective account of displacement. While this is produced by the women in Medellín and focuses on their immediate context, the women also intend it as representative of many other displaced women in the country.

Watch here the video 5.1 Relato Colectivo del Desplazamiento Medellín (Collective story of displacement Medellín) (https://youtu.be/bOm8f2tVBdU)

VIDEO 5.1 Playlist – researching displacement together.

> Collective account of urban and rural displacement. I was trapped, I had spent hours looking for a way out, an answer to why I was stripped of my territory where I had everything. Arriving in a city unknown to me, so many lights close to my eyes, cars, a lot of noise, the mountains so far away, so much construction and upon arriving at the centre of the city standing at the foot of the Coltejer building. I sigh, I sit on the ground covering my daughters who are full of fear and feeling a cold that runs through my body, uncertainty, hopelessness, feeling the contempt of the people who were passing by and the discrimination just for being displaced. I feel heartbroken when I see the Medellín River and the bodies and murdered people often seen in it passing by. I look up and in the distance, I see the neighbourhood where I had to leave everything behind because others decided for me – I had to leave to protect my life and those of my family. I feel my voice being tied for not being able to say what does not make me feel free, in my city, who I love and who I do not want to leave because here are my missing and buried beloved ones and I do not lose hope of knowing why and who did it and where there are.
>
> *(relato colectivo, Medellín)*

The women co-researchers identified four main forms of displacement. These are:

1 displacement from rural places to cities in Colombia (del campo a la ciudad),
2 displacement within cities and urban areas (intra-urbano),
3 fleeing domestic violence and forms of abuse, often within the family, and
4 being displaced because of extreme poverty, and having to move to find better opportunities (economically mainly but also socially) (seguir adelante).

These forms of displacement are not mutually exclusive and can happen at the same time. Displacement may also be experienced repeatedly rather than being a singular occurrence – once you have already been displaced, you become more vulnerable to it happening again. We can also see from the list

that women drew up of forms of displacement, above, that there are economic and social as well as political causes. The women do not draw hard lines between political violence taking place at the scale of the national state, region or neighbourhood; the actions (or perceived lack of action) of the state in protecting conflict victims and addressing poverty; and interpersonal violence which may often be, for women, experienced within the home and intimate relationships. Moreover, these various situations interplay and aggravate one another.

The majority of the women co-researchers in Bogotá shared their stories of violent displacement because of armed groups, while in Medellín displacement experiences have been more varied in their causes. In both cities, a few co-researchers also experienced intra-urban displacement. Other aggravating economic and political factors include development projects, the building of roads and infrastructure (Celestina 2018) as well as land extraction projects. While people may have to leave their homes for different reasons, often these reasons are still related at least indirectly to the conflict. For example, some co-researchers mentioned that extreme poverty has been one of the reasons to move, and it was the combination of being afraid of armed groups and the conditions they lived in that made them leave their homes. In many cases, extreme poverty is also the result of the armed conflict where the presence of armed groups and the neglect of the state failing to protect its citizens creates increasing displacement and migration, leaving places without people and with spiralling economic decline. Other studies have also highlighted that the closure of schools and businesses meant people felt they had to leave as 'there was nothing else to do' (Celestina 2016: 383).

Additionally, one of the co-researchers in Medellín mentioned that the recruitment of young men and boys (and sometimes girls) by armed groups was a reason for families to move away from their rural homes.

> Many families took their children out of the rural areas due to recruitment, the guerrilla recruitment of those children from the age of eight, nine, to start training and all that… and that is also part of that displacement.
>
> *(co-researcher, workshop Medellín)*

> Muchas familias sacaron sus hijos de la zona rural por el reclutamiento, el reclutamiento de la guerrilla de esos niños desde los ocho, nueve años para empezar a entrenar y todo eso… y eso también hace parte de ese desplazamiento.
>
> *(co-researcher, workshop Medellín)*

These different causes show that, even where families have not been threatened directly by armed groups, their decision to move is involuntary, as they were

either too afraid of possible future violence and threats, or because the conflict took away economic and social opportunities in their home locations.

In our research, the majority of cases of displacement that women shared were triggered by being threatened by armed groups, both in rural and urban areas, and women were forcibly displaced to save their lives from the violence that came to their homes. The women mention in their testimonies that sometimes they were caught in the middle of the conflict between several armed groups such as guerrilla, paramilitaries as well as state armed groups at the same time. The majority fled their rural homes and came to the city, being well aware that one of the dominant reasons for their and other people's displacement is the fight over territory, frequently linked as well to the drug trade (see also Chapter 2) and interests that profit through the exploitation and development of land. Some women experienced intra-urban displacement, which means they had to find a new neighbourhood to live in a different part of the same city. In Medellín, women's stories of displacement are more varied and cover all of the forms of displacement identified: rural–urban, urban–urban, and intrafamily violence and economic reasons that led them to leave their homes involuntarily. However, in both cities, women co-researchers tell stories of overlapping violences such as being displaced by armed groups but also having survived intra-family violence. On arriving in the city, they then became increasingly aware that the armed conflict they fled from is also present there; not in the same form, but still threatening, sometimes to an extent that they are displaced again within the city, again without much support from the state.

> False support from the state, this also deepens the displacement. Hope turns into despair, displacement from the countryside to the city and then intra-urban.
>
> *(Co-researcher, workshop, Medellín)*

> Falso apoyo del estado, esto también profundiza el desplazamiento. La esperanza se convierte en desesperanza, desplazamiento del campo a la ciudad y luego intraurbano.
>
> *(Co-researcher, workshop, Medellín)*

As the Colombian conflict is so longstanding, the women had experienced displacement at different stages of their lives. Some of them were displaced as children, some had to leave as teenagers and young adults, some had to leave their homes as mothers with their families, and some only have been displaced recently for the first time. They came from many different places of the country to the two cities and as noted above, some talked about several occasions on which they had to move, showing that displacement is not a singular event.

Del campo a la ciudad – rural to urban displacement

Rural-to-urban displacement is the most common form of displacement in Colombia, triggered by armed groups (see also Chapter 2). In both cities, Bogotá and Medellín, many of the women shared this experience. Their testimonies are full of multiple forms of violence, and also their tenacity and resistance. In all those testimonies presented here, women had to leave their rural homes to save their and their families' lives. Often they only had a few hours to move, or sometimes because the violence they had been witnessing on a daily basis became too much and the fear of becoming the next to be targeted too great.

Watch here the video 5.2 Testimonio del Desplazamiento (Testimony Displacement) Bogota 1.mp4 (https://youtu.be/2tAFCvgWuAE)

VIDEO 5.2 Playlist – researching displacement together.

> 21 years ago I lived in La Palmera, La Palmera village, Capitanejo Santander del Sur, where illegal groups such as guerrillas and paramilitaries arrived and attacked the town; They began to threaten the campesinos (farmers), to ask for a vacuna (extortion money) and well then we were forced to leave with my family. I left with my husband and my 3 baby daughters, and well, leaving everything behind, arriving with absolutely nothing, with one hand in front and the other behind.

Such stories of rural displacement testify how people got caught up between armed groups that competed and fought for territory. Here one woman talks about guerrilla and paramilitaries coming at the same time to her home town, asking campesinos (farmers) for extortion money (so called vacuna – vaccine in English). Often families were unable to pay the money, or it would mean living in greater poverty as well as in fear of being targeted by one of the armed groups. For many, including her and her family the only choice left then was to leave.

Watch here the video 5.3 Testimonio del Desplazamiento Bogota 2 (https://youtu.be/G-4dFUnAyYo)

VIDEO 5.3 Playlist – researching displacement together.

> I have been displaced since 2000 from Coyaima, Tolima where we were living on the banks of the river. We had fish, chicken, yucca; 5 in the family, that is, 3 children and two adults, who is me and my partner. Then some bad people arrived and knocked down everything, they burned the ranch, everything, they stole everything, they took all the animals that we had there and we had to come here (to the city) with one hand in front and one hand behind without clothes or anything like that, and getting to the city was hard because without clothes, for God's sake.

Armed groups that came to women's rural villages and towns were often very violent and sometimes women would witness the torture and murder of family members, the burning down of houses and fields, threats against families and theft and sometimes slaughter of their animals. The woman in the second animation (Testimonio Desplazamiento Bogota_2) describes exactly this. She recounts how they had everything in their rural home, fish, chicken, yucca and therefore food, something that changed in the city where they struggle to have enough food for their families on a regular basis. Women describe their past rural life as being one they preferred to the city. When the woman, as the second animation (Testimonio Desplazamiento Bogota_2) retells, left with her family and her children they tried to take what they could carry to the city. But in her case as well as many others, they arrived in the city with nothing, which is what the sentence 'with one hand in front and one hand behind' (con una mano Adelante y una mano atrás) means – literally with nothing, like being naked and holding one hand in front and one hand behind to cover one's body, as there was just not enough time to save both their lives and their belongings.

Watch here the video 5.4 Testimonio del Desplazamiento Bogota 3 – (https://youtu.be/vokE7e_hFpo)

VIDEO 5.4 Playlist – researching displacement together.

> One afternoon I was playing with my brothers, my parents were planting seeds. When the night came, some men arrived, threatened us with weapons and said that we had to leave or else they would kill us. My parents looked immediately for a truck, they put us in there and we arrived here in Bogotá and here in Bogotá it was difficult because we had to live on the street.

Yet the hardship for many of the women, as for many displaced people in the country, did not end with the violence they had escaped. For example, the traumatic experiences (retold in Testimonio Desplazamiento Bogota_3) of being threatened by armed groups suddenly contoured with arriving in the city as poor campesinos and having to live in the streets of Bogotá. Many of the other women shared stories like this where they had to live with what they could carry, find places under bridges for shelter and find ways to rebuild new lives (see also Testimonio Desplazamiento Medellin_1). Often they started with nothing, collecting rubbish, feeling disoriented, and getting no support with the psychological impacts of the violence they had witnessed and experienced. Therefore, the trauma of displacement is compounded by the challenges that women faced arriving in the city and rebuilding their lives there, something we explore more in detail in the next Chapter 6

Watch here the video 5.5 Testimonio del Desplazamiento Medellin 1 (https://youtu.be/FFSjE7T-DcU)

VIDEO 5.5 Playlist – researching displacement together.

My displacement had a very strong impact. When they told me 'You have to leave from here' because the sergeant came out (to me?) and saying we kill you, because the army (at that time came and) was taking possession of the farm in the middle of the conflict. I had a 3-month-old baby and 4- and 3-year-old girls. I didn't even know what I felt at that moment, it was up to the sergeant to take us out of this place and leave our lives we built there, the future of my life and the stability to start over again. When I arrived in Medellín to the large building with many mirrors, I felt helpless and only when I saw that I had my daughters and 2 black bags with our clothes, I only thought about what I had experienced and from that moment on I clung to my daughters and to God. I stayed sitting at the building for 8 hours without knowing what to do and without food to give them. I remember a woman approached me, she saw me crying and asked what I was doing there with the girls. I went into a restaurant, people looked at me like a weirdo, from there I went to the cityhall in the Alpujarra; there I spent the night. The next day they listened to me and they took me to a shelter where I could sleep. While there I had to sell garbage bags, until I found a space.

Intra-urban displacement – Desplazamiento intra-urbano

Watch here the video 5.6 Testimonio del Desplazamiento Medellin 2 – (https://youtu.be/LjegU7gzMMc)

VIDEO 5.6 Playlist – researching displacement together.

On the 24th of October, 1991, at midnight, heavy rain fell, the little stream flooded, the house filled with swamp, and in the midst of this distress we did not realize what was happening in the neighbourhood. They knocked on our door around 1 in the morning, saying 'open the door'. When we opened there were armed men, they were throwing everything around, searching, my children ran to the kitchen scared to death, when some of the men tried to force themselves on me I ran to the kitchen and one of the men said 'not now', asking if there is something hot to drink. I made signs to my children to escape through the window, and I brought hot panela water to the men

> and when I returned to the kitchen, I went out through the window, I ran and ran without looking back. The rain made noise and I felt that my steps were not heard. I arrived at the place where my children were waiting for me and we continued running together. We stayed in a sheltered place, it was supposed to be safe. At 5 in the morning a dumping lorry appears and the driver let us get onto it. Once we arrived at the neighbourhood where we were going to stay, I got news that my brother had been murdered. It was at this moment that my life fell apart.

Displacement in Colombia is widely associated with the rural areas where in many places guerrilla and paramilitaries perpetrate violence in the fight over territory. But as women's stories show, less visible forms of displacement also occur within urban areas, where people are forced to flee from one urban neighbourhood of the city to another. In particular, intra-urban displacement related to violence perpetrated by armed groups has become an increasing problem in Colombian cities.

The animation and displacement story (Testimonio Desplazamiento Medellin_2) provides an account of the brutal realities women face who are displaced within Colombian cities. Displacement within cities occurs because armed groups also control territories within urban borders. Those are criminal groups also sometimes referred to as BACRIM (Bandas Criminales) and many are related to drug trafficking, illegal mining, and other illicit activities, as well as often emerging from demobilised paramilitaries groups (Bagent and Charles 2017; McDermott 2017).

Intra-urban conflict takes place mostly in the peripheries of cities though not exclusively. In Bogotá and Medellín, intra-urban conflict may have different dynamics (see also Dávila 2018; Moncada 2016; Montoya Ruiz 2013) but for the women who got caught up in these conflicts the consequences were the same – intra-urban displacement to flee violence and keep them and their families safe. In the animation Testimonio Desplazamiento Medellin_2, the woman describes the terror the night of her displacement in Medellín brought to her and her family when she was afraid for the safety of her children and threatened with rape by the men who violently entered her home. Only by fleeing through the kitchen window and hiding until she was able to catch a ride to a safer neighbourhood did she escape the violence. And again her story is not an isolated case, as many women in the cities of Medellín and Bogotá share similar experiences, and many of them are doubly displaced because of it.

The reasons why women had been targeted by these armed groups vary widely. Some had become neighbourhood activists, and armed groups didn't appreciate the attention this brought to their areas or felt threatened by it; some had family members who were involved in business with armed groups

or angered them; some were unable to pay the extortion money (vacuna) asked of them by armed groups; some just disagreed, complained about or denounced any illegal activities; and some were re-targeted by armed groups which they had previously encountered in the rural areas they came from. Either way, these forms of violence and conflict made life in a neighbourhood too dangerous to stay. Some had even been targeted for no particular reason or even by mistake, which still meant they had to move away to keep their families safe.

Watch here the video 5.7 Testimonio del Desplazamiento Bogota 4 – (https://youtu.be/iZSGHB7QT3s)

VIDEO 5.7 Playlist – researching displacement together.

> My family was displaced from Suba, Bogotá because my father received threats from an armed group, so we had to leave there to safeguard our lives and we lived in many parts of the city until we reached Ciudad Bolívar. I had to leave from one place to another, start over, look for a new place because it is a bit complicated; it gives me the satisfaction knowing that my family fought for our lives and to get ahead (in life) and get a home for our family.

This intra-urban displacement can be as harmful and traumatic as the rural-urban displacement that initially brought most women to the city. Several describe how this further displacement replays and reanimates the trauma of their earlier experiences. When the woman in the animation (Testimonio Desplazamiento Bogota_4) had to leave her home in Bogotá as armed groups threatened her family, her whole family had to leave and they have lived in several places since then before finding a permanent home in their current neighbourhood. However, she emphasises that even though her displacement was a horrible experience, how much she appreciates that her family never stopped fighting to keep her and her sibling safe in the face of this violence, and fought to get ahead in life. This is something which we will come back to in Chapters 6 and 7 where our co-researchers share how they rebuild their lives and continue to hope for better futures.

Displacement because of intimate violence – Desplazamiento por razones de violencia intrafamiliar

> La violencia en la familia es también un motivo del desplazamiento forzado – The violence in the family is also a motive for forced displacement.
>
> (Medellín workshop)

Watch here the video 5.8 Testimonio del Desplazamiento Medellin 3 – (https://youtu.be/gSGCurbPnI0)

VIDEO 5.8 Playlist – researching displacement together.

On July 17th, 1988, in a very small village in Antioquia, in a very humble house, 4 girls aged 10, 11, 12 and 14 fled due to the abuse of their father. The 4 little girls arrived to a totally unknown town, where they wanted to look for relatives, but they were rejected (rechazadas). An unknown woman gave them shelter and food, but they had to look for a place to sleep elsewhere. A great aunt gave us lodging in that town.

A woman who saw them wandering in the streets of the town asked them: 'Girls, where are you from? Who are you looking for?' After listening to their answers, she helped them by taking them to a woman. The woman's daughters took the girls in and took the two oldest (girls) to Medellín. They had to work there for themselves doing household chores and they were paid $5,000 pesos a month. With this salary we helped the little ones (their sisters) who stayed in the little town. Only the oldest ones went to the city to work there. When the older sisters who already worked in the city realized that the little ones came to wander into the city, they wanted to look for them. The reference point so that we do not to get lost was Parque Berrío or Edificio Coltejer. Those women who welcomed the little ones and offered them employment wanted to restrict them going out of the house. The eldest one managed to flee and the youngest one they moved her (to another place) so that they would not find her and told them (sisters) that they were in Girardot, but the older sister managed to rescue her, because she was still in the city, and they had moved her (only) to another neighbourhood to continue enslaving her as domestic worker.

> Nowadays there is a lot of pride and little sisterhood in this family, the abuse (we experienced) never allowed us to be a united family.

Some of the women identify as displaced, but they may not be recognised by the government as displaced or as a victim of the conflict according to the law. The woman in the animation (Testimonio Desplazamiento Medellin_3) shares her experience of fleeing a violent home with her siblings as young teenagers and moving to the city. She left her home with her siblings because of the constant domestic violence they survived. They lived in a rural area and decided to move to Medellín to find a way to support themselves economically. As with many others who had been abused previously, they faced repeated abuse in the city, and again, as in their rural homes, had to find ways to survive and get ahead in life by themselves.

Leaving rural homes because of domestic violence and abuse is quite frequently mentioned as a reason for our co-researchers fleeing to the city. It is important to understand that while this may not be formally recognised as forced displacement (i.e., not related to the armed conflict), our co-researchers are very clear that they conceptualise this as forced displacement and some mention the lack of protection by the state. This experience in many ways parallels that of displacement due to armed conflict – they often left quickly, because they felt their lives were at risk and they had no choice, even though many miss the rural culture and lifestyle. One of the women calls the city 'freedom', freedom from being exploited and abused in her home, but she still misses the countryside greatly. And, in common with victims of the armed conflict, they again face violence in the new place where they lived and worked. Clearly, too, as much research around the world has shown, war and armed conflict are intimately connected to domestic and child abuse, which always increase when communities are living under the threat of political forms of violence. This is not to say that abuse in the family is caused by political violence – rather it is usually linked to patriarchal oppression that is almost universal – but that women, children and men become more vulnerable to domestic abuse and its impacts under conditions of wider conflict.

Displacement aggravated by poverty and economic change – Desplazamiento agravado por la pobreza y el cambio económico

Economic displacement, too, is often connected to the armed conflict. Women describe how rural places suffered from the conflict and their communities became even poorer because of the violence of armed groups and the forcible taking of territory for illicit activities. In both cities, women said 'allá no tenía nada que hacer, si querría estudiar yo o mis hijas tenía que traerlas a las ciudad – There was nothing left to do, if I wanted to study myself or my daughters I had to bring them to the city', showing that the economic situation in rural places often involved extreme poverty and made it increasingly difficult for

them to get ahead in life. As a consequence, the only option was moving to the city even though 'la ciudad no es lo que queríamos, pero sí nos brinda mas oportunidades – the city is not what we wanted but it offers us more opportunties.' (workshop, Medellín)

This resonates with what Celestina (2018) also describes – in areas of conflict, businesses and schools close, no social life takes place anymore and towns and villages become ghost towns. Leaving, then, was the last option to provide for them and their families and to offer their children a better future. Nevertheless, displacement in all its forms leaves traumatic impacts, something all of the women who took part in the research wanted to highlight. And it is not just leaving their roots and culture behind that creates those traumatic experiences, but also the violence and urban challenges they face in their urban homes where they settled. These impacts of displacement, and the urban challenges that come with moving to the city or within the city because of the armed conflict in its different forms, are the subject of the next chapter.

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6

URBAN CHALLENGES AND REBUILDING LIFE IN THE CITY

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Introduction

In this chapter, women co-researchers continue to share their experiences of (re)building their lives after forced displacement to the cities of Bogotá and Medellín. In Chapter 5, they provided in-depth accounts of their experiences of displacement. Here, they focus on the challenges they experienced when arriving in the city, and how they set about rebuilding their lives in their new urban environments. Based on their individual and collective experiences, they discuss the various challenges that impede their recovery from the traumatic experiences of displacement and conflict. New urban challenges also relate to multiple, ongoing, and intersecting forms of violence perpetrated by intimates, armed groups, other people in the city, and the state. Moreover, many urban challenges women describe here are connected to the violence experienced because of displacement and relate to the conflict. Therefore, rather than standing alone, Chapters 5 and 6 are intersecting halves of the women's whole stories. The Colombian conflict does not end simply when they leave their lives *en el campo* behind; rather they feel uprooted, abandoned by the state and face new challenges. These challenges are also the catalysts of individual and

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collective growth; the women have come to care deeply for their cities, especially the urban neighbourhoods and communities they live in. Rather than being passive 'víctimas del conflicto' they actively rebuild their lives, practising forms of activism at different scales. Their aspirations and hopes for their urban futures are presented in more detail in Chapter 7.

The impact of displacement: urban challenges when rebuilding lives

Latin America is the most urbanised region of the world in the Global South. In Colombia an estimated 75.5 per cent of the population live in urban areas, an increase of 38.3 per cent since the 1950s (OECD 2022). The phenomenal speed of urbanisation is largely the result of rural-to-urban migration (OECD 2022). Additionally, Latin American cities, including those in Colombia, are increasingly feminised (Chant and McIlwaine 2016). In Colombia, women may move to cities because of better educational and work opportunities, more access to services, and changes in patriarchal norms and dynamics in comparison to rural areas (Chant and McIlwaine 2016; Hume and Wilding 2020; Marzi and Pain 2024; McIlwaine et al. 2020); and of course, as described in Chapter 5, because of the conflict that for over 50 years has caused mass displacement from rural homes. In recent years, an additional 2.6 million Venezuelan refugees have settled in Colombia (OECD 2022). Five cities host 40 per cent of the urban population in Colombia, of which Bogotá and Medellín are the largest: Bogotá's population is 7.4 million, Medellín 2.4 million, Cali 2.2 million, Barranquilla 1.2 million, and Cartagena 1 million (OECD 2022). Due to the conflict and related forced displacement, the peripheries of both Bogotá and Medellín grew substantially. Here, informal neighbourhoods and so-called 'invasions' (invasiones) became the new homes for many displaced people, including many of the women co-researchers in our research (OECD 2022).

Today women co-researchers live in both areas, formal/official (barrios) and informal neighbourhoods. Informal neighbourhoods in Colombia are defined as those that are unplanned and grew through *'invasiones'* of the land. These are not officially registered as part of the city and often lack infrastructure and sufficient access to public services. The neighbourhoods that our co-researchers live in are also often referred to as 'barrios populares', a term that describes registered 'official' neighbourhoods, though the term is casually used for any sort of neighbourhood of lower economic stratification. Importantly, the 'popular' is a reference to 'el pueblo' and describes broadly a reference to lower/working-class communities, although the term is also racialised and not exclusive to the Colombian context.

However, many of the women co-researchers had started off living in invasiones/informal neighbourhoods when they first came to the city. At a later stage, those areas were increasingly recognised as official parts of the city. Some

of the women still live in neighbourhoods classified as informal or invasiones, which means they are in danger of losing their homes again if the state decides to erase their 'illegal' settlement; sometimes these settlements are literally bulldozed. In both, Medellín and Bogotá, the co-researchers' neighbourhoods are characterised as low-income, developed unplanned and are challenging contexts in terms of access to (public) resources, transportation, insecurity, and violence that includes ongoing urban armed conflict and gang violence (Abello-Colak and Pearce 2015; Davila 2013; Marzi and Pain 2024; Oviedo Hernandez and Titheridge 2015).

In this chapter, the women co-researchers speak about settling in their new urban environment. Most were displaced from rural areas in the country (see Chapter 5 for more details), and being displaced to urban areas within Bogotá and Medellín brings a set of particular challenges which we discussed during face-to-face writing workshops in 2023. The negative impacts of displacement are therefore related to the challenges women experienced and still experience when rebuilding their lives in their urban neighbourhoods. Those challenges may differ on an individual level, but during workshop discussions, the women realised that they share many of the same struggles in their respective cities. Many of these challenges and the impacts of displacement are very similar between Bogotá and Medellín. Therefore, in this chapter, we draw on both individual and collective experiences that the co-researchers shared. As was the case in Chapter 5, women analyse their accounts of these challenges as representative of many displaced women who have had to rebuild their lives in urban Colombia. As one of the co-researchers says, 'I say not all of us can tell their story, and it means others tell it for those who aren't here anymore!' (Isela, workshop Medellín).

In Chapter 5, women shared their testimonies of displacement and related their displacement to violence and the Colombian conflict. However, violence related to the conflict doesn't stop at the urban border: conflict and violence are ongoing in the city, and women's accumulated experiences of violence may become more complex, layered and intersectional, encompassing slow and fast forms of violence (Christian and Dowler 2019). The city continues to be a site of violence perpetrated by armed groups, and additionally, gang and organised crime heightens the insecurity women co-researchers have to live with. Furthermore, co-researchers talked about violence perpetuated by intimates, communities and the state, which can be physical or emotional, political, economic, or structural. And still, they define themselves as more than 'víctimas del conflicto', continuing to rebuild and recover, resist and act, aspire and hope to build better urban futures for themselves, their children, families and new communities (see also Marzi and Pain 2024).

Figures 6.1 and 6.2 show women's classifications of the different challenges they faced and still face in the cities of Bogotá and Medellín. In the rest of this chapter, they detail the challenges they faced when arriving in the cities, and those that still exist today.

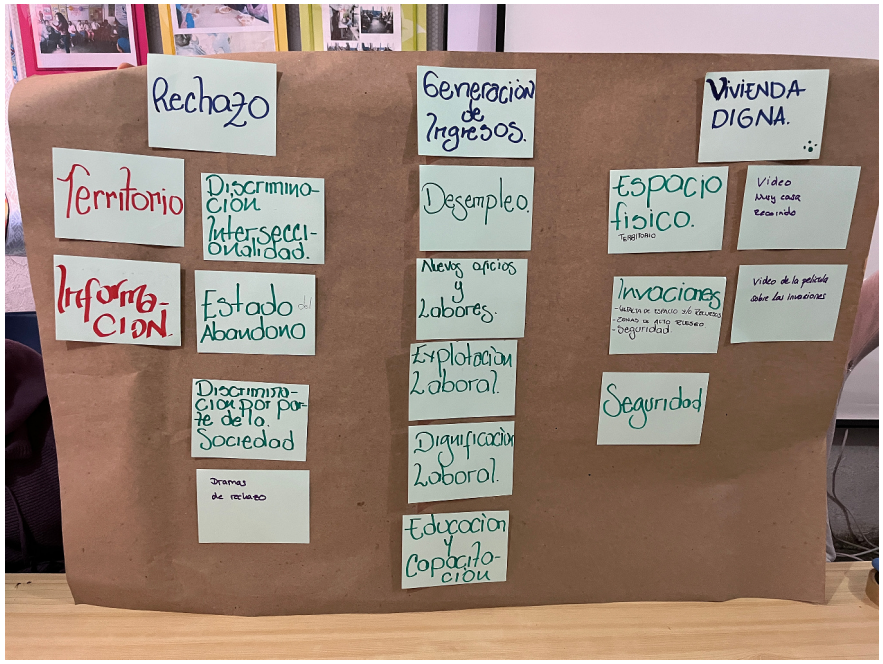

FIGURE 6.1 Urban challenges – workshop Bogotá.

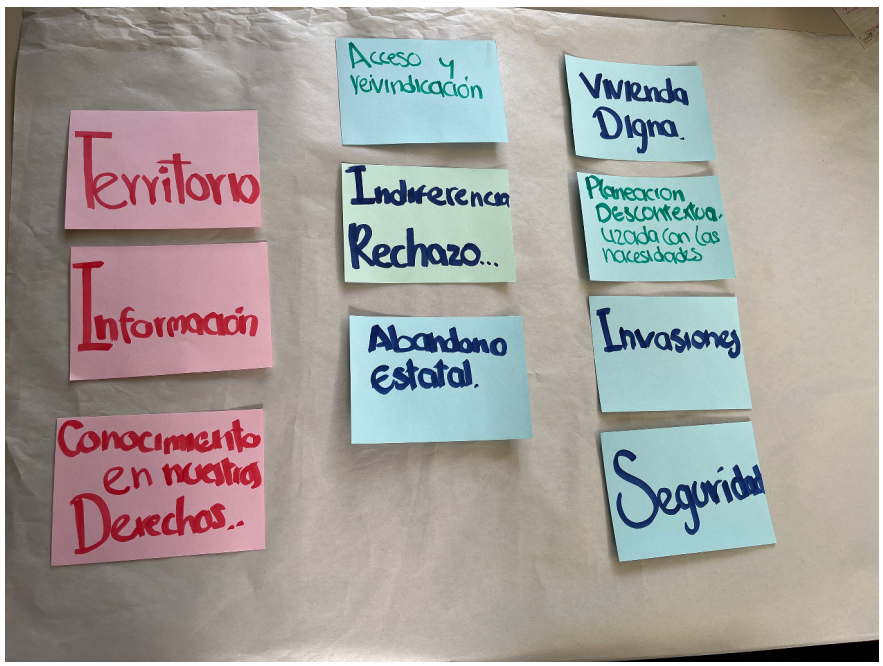

FIGURE 6.2 Urban challenges – workshop Medellín.

The unknown city – La ciudad desconocida

> One of the challenges and what is bringing us together is recognizing the dynamics of the city, how it moves, those contrasts that we have to face day after day. Rebuilding ourselves and our hopes are what allows us to continue and reinvent ourselves.
>
> This involves 3 words, acknowledge, respect and replicate.
>
> *(workshop Medellín)*

> Uno de los desafíos frente a lo que nos está juntando es reconocer las dinámicas de la ciudad, cómo se mueve, esos contrastes con los que tenemos que enfrentarnos día tras día. Reconstruirnos nosotros y las esperanzas son lo que nos permite seguir reinventándonos. Involucrar 3 palabras, reconocer, respeto y réplica.
>
> *(workshop Medellín)*

Quite apart from the experience of conflict and violence, arriving in a new city means first and foremost dealing with the unknown. The city's unknown character and dynamics made the process of survival even more challenging at first, and many of the women still struggle with some of these aspects. So when discussing urban challenges, the co-researchers summarise their understanding of the collective experience of the challenges:

> I think the first challenge is to get to that city. It's a challenge, imagine, instead of mountains there is cement. Well that is the first challenge. The second is how we rethink our life project because just by going to build a house with four sticks, a piece of plastic and a tile so I don't get wet, I am rebuilding my life again. When I then understand that, damn (hijo de pucha), I have children, I have minors, I cannot let them die of hunger, it means starting to rebuild that new life project because we had to leave our territory.
>
> *(Isela, workshop Medellín)*

> Yo creo que el primer desafío es llegar a esa ciudad. Es un desafío imagínense, en vez de las montañas hay cemento. Pues eso es el primer desafío. El segundo, es como replanteamos nuestro proyecto de vida porque solamente el yo ir a construir una casa de cuatro palos, un plástico y unas tejas para no mojarme, estoy nuevamente reconstruyendo mi vida. Cuando ya entonces entiendo que hijo de pucha tengo unos hijos, tengo menores de edad no les puedo dejar morir de hambre, es empezar a reconstruir ese nuevo proyecto de vida porque nos tocó salir nuestro territorio. ¡Y eso es también algo que digo no todos podemos contar la historia porque otros la cuentan por los que no están!
>
> *(Isela, workshop Medellín)*

> We suffered a lot and sometimes we didn't have a bed or anything. Just a little box with each person's clothes. We were hungry but the children weren't because you don't eat and give it to the children, they go first.
>
> *(Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

> Nosotros sufrimos mucho y a veces no teníamos cama ni nada. Solamente una cajita con la ropita de cada uno. Teníamos hambre pero los niños no porque uno no come y dale al niño, primero ellos adelante.
>
> *(Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

Del campo a la ciudad: uprooting, loss of place and identity

> This change from el campo into the city, being with the children in the house with this urban routine – Este cambio del campo a la ciudad, de estar con los hijos en la casa a esa rutina urbana.
>
> *(workshop, Bogotá)*

In discussions about more specific aspects of what is perceived as challenging when moving to the city, one of the first things mentioned by both groups of co-researchers in Bogotá and Medellín was the different way of life in the city compared to the *campo*. Their descriptions of different cultures and routines also reflect that displacement and being a victim of the conflict lend stories full of loss and violence. The women have faced traumatic experiences in their place of origin, during displacement, and when settling and rebuilding their lives in the city. During workshops, several women used metaphors around plant life to liken displacement to the city as a form of uprooting:

> I see it like thinking of a tree or a plant. The roots stay there in the ground and the rest is carried away. So when we talk about roots, it's all that we had there from the beginning in those places, we had our house, our family, and everything, we had to leave many things there and bring the rest here.
>
> *(Marisol, workshop Bogotá)*

> Yo lo veo así pensando en un árbol o una planta. Las raíces se quedan allí en el suelo y el resto se lleva. Así cuando hablamos de las raíces, es todo lo que desde el principio teníamos allá en esos lugares, teníamos nuestra casa, nuestra familia, y todo lo que teníamos, nos toca deja muchas cosas allá y traer el resto para acá.
>
> *(Marisol, workshop Bogotá)*

Moving to the city involves many losses: of culture, friends, family, traditions, animals, and food. The women lost their routines that structured their days and struggled to find their place with the life skills they already had, being

forced to learn new ones that were more fitting for the city. And while they varied in how many possessions they were able to bring with them, they still long for things of the past they just cannot find in the city.

For example, one of the women in Bogotá explains how difficult she found it to get used to the food when moving to the city.

> For me an impact that was also very difficult, was the change of food. There (en el campo) we were accustomed to always eating fish, plaintain, well, good things. And I got here (to the city) and I didn't know anything about grains (all the women laughing in agreement). For me it was very shocking what vegetables, grains, people eat (here in the city) … well… potatoes are normal, but for me it was this, we also ate very little potatoes (in el campo), there is only plaintain there. So it is about the food and sometimes that (this means) tradition is lost a lot.
>
> *(Ana Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

> Para mí un impacto que también fue muy fuerte fue como las comidas. Digamos nosotros allá fuimos acostumbrados a comer siempre pescado, el plátano, pues cosas buenas. Y llegar acá y yo no conocía nada de los granos (todas las mujeres riendo de acuerdo). Para mí fue muy impactante que las verduras, los granos, la gente come, bueno las papas es que como normal, pero es que para mí fue esto también comimos muy poco la papa, es que allá solo hay plátano. Y por eso, eso de las comidas y a veces se pierde mucho esa tradición.
>
> *(Ana Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

> The taste of the food is also very different, the chicken that you catch on the street and kill is not the same and here in Bogotá everything is frozen and there everything was fresh. There we caught the fish (ourselves), and planted the cilantro.
>
> *(Angélica and Ana Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

> El sabor de la comida también es muy diferente, no es el mismo el pollo que se coge en la calle y matarle y aquí en Bogotá todo se consigue congelado y allá todo era fresco. Allá se cogió el pescado, y sembró su cilantro.
>
> *(Angélica and Ana Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

Food is very significant to our co-researchers, and those in Bogotá all agreed that they struggled with getting used to different kinds of food. Not only did they lack skills for cooking urban food, cooking in el campo is part of campesino cultural traditions that they feel are lost with moving to the city. In this sense, food becomes as well part of the experience of uprooting due to displacement to the city (Pascua 2015).

This uprooting also brings us back to what we discussed in Chapter 5; displacement means traumatic experiences of loss of place but also loss of relations and sense of self and one's identity that is bound to place (Fullilove 2016). These women have had to leave their homes behind, and by leaving their homes, they leave their *campesinas* identity, culture, and traditions (Celestina 2018).

Women standing to fight – Mujeres en pie de lucha

This phrase 'mujeres en pie de lucha', translated literally 'standing to fight', conveys women's sense of being a warrior (luchadora), full of determination in withstanding the struggles that the move to the city entails. As women's stories of displacement in Chapter 5 show, moving to the city was involuntary because of economic needs, domestic violence and for the majority because of direct threats by armed groups. They moved to save their lives and those of their children. However, for some, their new environments did not provide them with safety because of urban armed groups. Nury describes how she was haunted by fear of being followed by armed groups when she first came to the city. Struggling with trauma and fear, and worried about her children, at the same time she had to learn to survive in the city.

> When I was displaced I came with that fear that they were coming after us, chasing us and most of all, the children were small. And we suffered. And here I learned how to recycle because I didn't know how to recycle or anything like that. And a neighbour has taught me to recycle, that is, to be independent, to get ahead for my children and to fight for housing. But I was afraid that they would come after us or the children. It was very hard for me and I haven't forgotten anything. And the boy who is now 24 years old still remembers everything that happened there on the farm.
>
> *(Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

> Cuando yo estaba desplazada yo vine con ese temor que venían detrás de uno persiguiéndonos y más que todo los niños eran pequeños. Y sufrimos. Y aquí aprendí como reciclar porque yo no sabía como reciclar y nada de eso. Y una vecina me ha enseñando a reciclar o sea de ser independiente, salir adelante por los hijos y luchar por la vivienda. Pero tenía temor que nos vienen perseguir o a los niños, para mí fue muy duro y a mí no se ha olvidado nada. Y el niño que tiene ahora 24 años todavía se acuerda todo lo que sucedió allí en la finca.
>
> *(Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

Nury's reflection shows the tremendous challenges she faced when fleeing to the city. Having lived her whole life in the countryside, she did not know how

to earn money in the city. Only with the support of a neighbour did she learn how to collect recyclable material to sell it and make some money to feed her children. She is still afraid of armed groups, but most of all she is worried about the mental health of her children, a topic that has only recently received attention in Colombia (Alarcón Garavito et al. 2023; Vera San Juan et al. 2024). Angélica has similar worries about children and the scars on their lives wrought by the displacement and the struggle to rebuild their lives.

> Yes because the psychological is very, very present, that is, everything that one lives. […] because the children still remember. For them everything is very very present.
>
> *(Angélica, workshop Bogotá)*

> Si porque el psicológico es como muy, muy presente, o sea todo lo que vive. […] pues los niños recuerdan todavía. Para ellos todo esta muy muy presente.
>
> *(Angélica, workshop Bogotá)*

Insecurity in the city – Inseguridad en la ciudad

Violence and the threat of armed groups did not stop at the city border, and while some women (like Nury, above) described their fear of being followed, others explained that armed groups were already present in the city. Those could be guerrilla and paramilitaries but also different forms of gangs and organised crime groups involved in violence in urban Colombia, including in the neighbourhoods in Bogotá and Medellín where our co-researchers live. It is not always evident which group is present or who in the neighbourhoods is linked to armed groups.

This hidden armed group membership works differently in the two cities, according to the women co-researchers. While Medellín is well known for its truly 'organised' crime structures which include rules and hierarchies (see for example Abello-Colak and Pearce 2015; Moncada 2016; Sotomayor 2017), Bogotá gives the impression it is more difficult to navigate in terms of organised crime groups and their power over territories. As a consequence, for the women in Bogotá, it is not just the fear of being (re)targeted by armed groups in general, but also there is higher mistrust of people that accompanies them in their daily lives. For example, Elvira says 'One doesn't know who is who. And one needs to be aware that the city is full of paramilitaries and guerrilla' (Elvira, Workshop Bogotá).

These structures of gangs and armed groups in both cities are intensified by the inequality in those poorer neighbourhoods; for young men in particular, criminal activities are an attractive and fast way to make money, as well as an opportunity to perform masculinities (Baird 2012).

Therefore, for displaced women in Bogotá, there was and often still is mistrust in the people around them, especially when they are new to urban neighbourhoods and don't yet know who may be part of an armed group. Mariela for example said that when they moved to a new urban environment in Bogotá because her husband was mistakenly targeted by armed groups in their old neighbourhood, they had to invent stories about the reasons why they moved out of fear being identified and retargeted.

As well as the fear of being retargeted, there is a wider change in the nature of insecurity in the city in comparison to el campo. The dynamics of violence are different and more complex in the city. There are more varied dangers when walking in the streets in the cities of Bogotá or Medellín, and so being displaced to the city was also described by women as losing freedom.

Ana Nury: 'Another impact is also that one loses their freedom. When we travel to the pueblitos (villages) one feels more free. Here in the city one is more closed in, one lives with more distrust'.
Angélica: 'Three locks on the door here'.
Ana Nury: 'Ha yes, then you lose that confidence of, let's say, we go out at any time. On the other hand, there on the farm, no, one would go outside and I was not thinking that they were going to rob me'. (workshop Bogotá)
Ana Nury: 'Otro impacto también es que se pierde la libertad. Cuando nosotros viajamos a los pueblitos uno se siente con más libertad. Acá en la ciudad uno es más encerrada, vive con mas desconfianza'.
Angélica: 'Tres chapas aquí en la puerta'.
Ana Nury: 'A si, entonces se pierde esa confianza de como digamos que salimos a cualquier momento. En cambio, allá en la finca no, uno salía y uno no estaban pensando me van a robar'. (workshop, Bogotá)

In the countryside, before armed groups arrived on their doorstep, daily routines generally felt safe and calmer. When asked if there weren't problems with guerrilla and paramilitaries already, Ana Nury answered:

> Yes, you know that there are guerrillas and all that, if you understand me, but even though (they are there) you feel sure that they won't mess with you, then you start to feel fear and they start to threaten you like they want your farm (Lina: "your farm or you") but you always know that the guerrilla is there or something, but in my case we were calm, we didn't have this fear (the fear in and of the city) when we got here.
>
> *(Ana Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

> Sí, uno sabe que allá hay guerrilla y de todo, si me entiendes, pero encima uno se siente seguro de que no se metan contigo, ya te comienzas con el temores y te comienzan a amenazar como ellos quieren tu finca (Lina: "tu

> finca o a ti") pero si tu sabes siempre que allá esta la guerrilla o algo pero pues en mi caso nosotros estábamos tranquilos no teníamos ese miedo cuando ya llegamos acá.
>
> *(Ana Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

This difference meant that Ana Nury had felt more at ease to move around at her home in el campo than in the city. Not because it was safe, but more because the unknownness of the city provides a different kind of unsafety.

In Medellín, women also talk about their fear of the city after being displaced. One woman from Medellín shares how she struggled with being constantly afraid that something would happen to her daughters when arriving in the city.

> And this fear when someone arrives here in the city, for example when I arrived, I couldn't let myself sleep because of the fear that they would grab my girls and rape them, that was my fear.
>
> *(Nancy, workshop Medellín)*

> Y el miedo cuando alguien llegué aquí en la ciudad, por ejemplo, cuando yo llegué no me pude dejar dormir por el miedo que cogen las niñas y las violan, eso estuvo el temor de uno.
>
> *(Nancy, workshop Medellín)*

Nancy, who had to leave her home in el campo as described in Chapter 5, took over 10 years to rebuild her life, living in extreme poverty with her three daughters for a long time. During this time, she suffered a lot of abuse in the city by people exploiting her need to feed her children and pay rent. Nancy mentioned many times how, for years, she was afraid of the city. For her, building a life and a new home was a long process, and she still mentions how much she misses her Finca in the countryside and that their life was good there.

Rechazo – neglect and discrimination in the city

When speaking about what they found on arriving in the city, the women in both Medellín and Bogotá identified *rechazo* as their main difficulty; translated into English as rejection, it encompasses intersectional discrimination and stigmatisation and abandonment by the state.

> A *rechazo* [rejection] by a city with an institution [government] that is not thinking about dealing with this type of violence, a city that even from a planning perspective does not care for the victims [of the conflict] when they arrive … but who also become part of it [city]. So here when we talk about rejection, it is in that.
>
> *(Isela, Medellín workshop)*

> Un rechazo de una ciudad con una institución que no está pensada para atender este tipo de violencia, una ciudad que incluso desde la planeación no tiene cómo atender a las víctimas cuando llegan…pero que hacen parte también de ella. Entonces acá cuando hablamos del rechazo digamos que es eso.
>
> *(Isela, Medellín workshop)*

Rechazo as discrimination

The women analyse two main forms of *rechazo*. First, displaced families from the countryside encountered discrimination. Here women say that they couldn't rent a house or get jobs because in the city people would reject them. For example, the women in Bogotá said they could not rent a house because they have many children and landlords would not want big families in their houses. But the women in both cities report experiences of open discrimination and indifference towards their hardship.

> Overcome indifference. In a completely unknown city, they look at one strangely, as if you were a thief, with indifference, a city where everything is cement and walls and you need to know how to knock on doors (beg), especially mothers who do not seek protection for themselves but for their children. It's both things, rechazo in the way that they don't accept you and won't help you, and indifference (where they are like) "I look at it and I'm not interested".
>
> *(Ana Patricia, workshop Medellín)*

> Superar la indiferencia. En una ciudad completamente desconocida, lo miran raro, como si fuera ladrón, con indiferencia, una ciudad donde todo es cemento y muros y llegar a saber a tocar puertas, sobre todo las mamás que no buscan protección para ellas sino para los hijos.
> Son las dos cosas, rechazo que no te aceptan y ayudan, indiferencia "la miro y no me interesa".
>
> *(Ana Patricia, workshop Medellín)*

For some, this prejudicial treatment intersects with racism, especially for those who are Afro-Colombian. Here *rechazo* is also highly racialised, adding to the multiple experiences of violence that led to displacement and followed it.

> Yes, the one that has marked me the most was one time, there was a position at a school and I was going to my interview and there was clearly no photo (when applying for the job) and I arrived and the secretary told me "Are you Mille?" "Yes, I am Mille" and she told me: "But on the phone you didn't sound like a black woman's voice".
>
> *(Mille, workshop Bogotá)*

> Sí a mi como de toda la que más me ha marcado fue una vez que, había un puesto en un colegio y yo me iba a la cita y (la solicitud del empleo) había claramente sin foto y llegué la secretará, me dijo, "ay usted es Mille?" Yo "si soy Mille" y ella me dijo "pero es que por teléfono no se escuchaba como voz de negra".
>
> *(Mille, workshop Bogotá)*

This was not an isolated experience and Mille continues to tell of more examples where she had to encounter direct racism.

> I called to ask for a place for my daughter and when I arrived the rector asked me:
> "are you Mille",
> "yes sir",
> "no, you can't (get your daughter enroled here) because here people don't like black people".
>
> *(Mille, workshop Bogotá)*

> No podían tener accesos a trabajo por ser negra o a un cupo en un colegio, llamé para pedir un cupo para mi hija y cuando llegué el rector me pregunto:
> "usted es Mille?"
> "sí señor",
> "A, no, no se puede porque aquí a la gente no le gustan los negros".
>
> *(Mille, workshop Bogotá)*

State abandonment – Rechazo del gobierno

While women talk of their experiences of discrimination and racism they also identified a second form of rechazo, one that is neglect by the state and lack of care for the victims of the conflict who were displaced. Even though women had rights, including to reparations according to the 2011 victim law (Weber 2020), many of them did not have the necessary information on how to claim their rights and/or were afraid of registering officially as the violence they encountered was sometimes even perpetrated by armed groups of the state.

> In Medellín it was difficult for the displaced, now we have support groups and the Victims Unit also emerged, but first we had no help here, the state did not want to help us. When I arrived in the Paris neighbourhood in Bello, we had to live and sleep with our daughters on cardboard.
>
> *(María Eugenia, workshop Medellín)*

> En Medellín era duro para los desplazados, ahí surgieron también grupos de apoyo y la Unidad de Víctimas, pero primero no teníamos ayudas acá, el estado no nos quiso ayudar. Cuando llegué al barrio París en Bello, nos tocó llegar a vivir y dormir con las hijas sobre cartones.
>
> *(María Eugenia, workshop Medellín)*

> El gobierno abandona (the government abandons).
>
> *(Angélica, workshop Bogotá)*

In Medellín, the co-researchers made this video, in which they demonstrate how abandoned they feel by the state when being forced to leave their homes for the city.

Watch here the Video 6.1 – Teatro Desplazamiento Medellín (theatre displacement Medellín) (https://youtu.be/379vkjU0gS0)

VIDEO 6.1 Playlist – researching displacement together.

Generating income – Generación del ingreso

The majority of women in both cities do not have formal work contracts and many struggle financially on a regular basis. Consequently, the topic of generating income arose, especially in Bogotá where the living conditions and poverty levels of our co-researchers are more challenging than in Medellín. There are varied reasons for this. Bogotá is much larger than Medellín, has received more diverse groups of displaced people, and provides a more challenging environment especially in terms of transport, because of the size of the city, and in some areas in terms of levels of insecurity. That means there may be greater constraints on women's ability to take advantage of opportunities for economic enhancement in Bogotá than Medellín. Of course, we cannot infer that this is always the case, and we know there are also variations between neighbourhoods in each city. But for example, many women clean houses to generate income, often in more affluent areas which are often at the other end of the city in the North. Travel time from the south of Bogotá, where Ciudad Bolivar is located, to the North can take between one hour and several hours depending on traffic.

In Bogotá, women say that they struggle to find work and educational opportunities, and that even when they find work they are often exploited. Employers take advantage of their status as displaced people, lacking education and being poor. Elvira, for example, explains that exploitation in the labour market occurs both in terms of hours that women must work as well as not paying a decent salary. 'I went to interviews in family homes and they asked me to work and they didn't pay me – Yo me iba a las entrevistas en las casas de familia y me ponían a trabajar y no me pagaban' (Ana Nury, Workshop Bogotá). Ana Nury describes how she goes to interviews to clean family homes and they would ask her to clean, to test if she is a good cleaning lady, but then not pay her. Ana Nury is Afro-Colombian, and her experiences show the intersectional character of violence and rechazo in Bogotá in sharp relief. Similarly, Mille, also an Afro-Colombian woman living in Bogotá, tells us that even when they are paid for their work, it is still not enough: the majority of the women share their feeling that their labour is exploited. Mille: 'I mean we do want to work, but they also need to pay us a good salary – es que uno quiere trabajar pero también que lo pagan un salario bueno'. All women co-researchers who identify as black or Afro-Colombian, in both cities, Bogotá and Medellín, shared experiences of racism and misogyny in their daily lives, and especially when trying to find work.

The women further reflect on their abilities when it comes to new forms of work in the city, especially those who come from el campo. Elvira: 'What we are missing is having opportunities – Eso es que nos falta, tener oportunidades'. Elvira highlights that women need opportunities to learn new skills and a different education to the one they had in their rural places of origin, if they are to be able to take advantage of work opportunities. Yet the women also feel state abandonment, again, as there are not enough opportunities to learn the new skills that would enable them to do work with dignity and without exploitation.

> In the countryside we women cooked and that, but here, for example, it is about how the computer works or about how we operate the computer.
>
> *(Angélica, workshop Bogotá)*

> En el campo las mujeres cocinábamos y eso pero aquí por ejemplo es como funciona el computador o como manejamos el computador.
>
> *(Angélica, workshop Bogotá)*

Because of the skills gap they identify, often opportunities are limited to work such as cleaning family homes. Even more often, they collect rubbish material to sell for recycling, or many even told us that they had to 'make rounds' (haciendo vueltas), which means beg for food and money to survive. As a result, unemployment is a key issue for the women. In particular, formal work

opportunities are rare – in Colombia, the share of the informal economy in its 23 largest cities is almost 50 per cent (according to Colombia's Office for National Statistics 2022 cited in García et al. 2024). This is an issue that is both structural in nature and intersects with the different forms of discrimination that the women identified as rechazo (above).

Vivienda Digna – a decent place to live

One of the most important themes raised by the women co-researchers in both cities was a 'Vivienda Digna', literally translated as dignified/decent housing. This phrase encompasses more than just the house; it also includes the area and neighbourhood where one lives, even though the majority of discussion is about the house itself. Having their own space for themselves and their children is vital.

> We were looking for a home and all that. And someone told me there is a house over there and I took that house, without a bathroom, without anything, nothing, not even glass windows. My sister went to buy me some glass windows and my mother-in-law bought me a bathroom. We had to put plastic so that water doesn't get in.
>
> *(Mariela, workshop Bogotá)*

> Estuvimos buscando una vivienda y todo eso. Y alguien me dijo por allá hay una casa y me metí a esa casa, sin baño, sin nada nada nada, ni vidrios. Mi hermana fue a comprarme unos vidrios y mi suegra me ha dado para un baño. Nos tocó colocar plástico para que no entre el agua.
>
> *(Mariela, workshop Bogotá)*

Indeed, the search for dignified housing is one reason that drove women to the cities after displacement:

> When we arrived in the city they told us: "Go there to the city as you are displaced, and the government can help you by giving you housing while you find work".
>
> *(Ana Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

> Para nosotros pensábamos cuando llegamos a la ciudad nos dijeron: "váyanse allá a la ciudad como ustedes son desplazados ya el gobierno les puede colaborar dándoles una vivienda mientras consiguen trabajo".
>
> *(Ana Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

However, their experience of seeking housing once they were in the city often did not live up to initial expectations.

The idea of a decent home means different things for different women. While for many a house of bricks, with a brick floor and linked to official infrastructure such as water and gas are most important, for other women a decent house can be self-built out of recycled material but with enough rooms for each of their children. Nury shows us their house in the video, below – it is a big house completely built out of recycled material, and to her, as she calls it, it is her 'palace'. For her, the priority is that her children each have their own big room, that there is space where the community can come together and eat, and that there is space for her garden for growing plants from her rural home (she has been displaced from) where she can teach her children about the medicinal and food traditions associated with these.

Watch here the Video 6.2 Tour (Recorrido) Nury's house (casa) – (https://youtu.be/jhiJmAANXz0)

VIDEO 6.2 Playlist – researching displacement together.

While the government offers houses to displaced people as part of the *ley de víctimas* as reparation, these houses often do not provide for what our co-researchers perceive as a dignified home. Often these houses are two-room apartments that are too small for a family with three or more children, and their residents are penalised for extending or developing the property. Those who come from rural areas in the country have already lost so much of their culture they do not want to live without, for example, some form of garden so that they can recover at least some of their tradition and culture in the city.

> They took us from a place that, because we were at risk, because the house was going to fall, to put us in something that looks like a palomar (a bird house), they put us in 4 walls full of dust, humidity, the toilet and the keys they were damaged, water dropped to the floors, poor quality of construction. And if we make the repairs to the apartments, now it turns out that the State has raised our price. We fix them to have a better quality of life, but they raise our stratification level (which defines how much they pay for public services), the services go up, we have to pay administration, we are abandoned by the State.
>
> *(Yovana, workshop Medellín)*

> Nos sacaron de un lugar que, porque estábamos en riesgo que, porque se iba a caer la casa, para meternos a una cosa que parece un palomar, nos metieron en 4 paredes llenas de polvo, de humedades, a muchos el sanitario y las llaves se les dañó, cae humedad a los otros pisos, mala calidad de la construcción. Y si hacemos los arreglos a los apartamentos, ahora resulta que el Estado nos subió el estrato. Los arreglamos para tener una calidad de vida mejor, pero nos suben el estrato, los servicios suben, hay que pagar administración, estamos abandonados del Estado.
>
> *(Yovana, workshop Medellín)*

As Yovana explains above, the environment of housing provided by the state often fails to provide a safe and decent dwelling place. Those who get offered only a flat in an apartment building have to pay service charges over which they have no control but also struggle to pay without being able to generate enough income. Additionally, some houses and especially apartments do not provide the facilities they need. Often they are too small for displaced families and are not able to accommodate people with special needs or older people who struggle with stairs, for example.

> They did not take into account that there are people with disabilities, older adults. They built 7 floors, 5 up and 2 or 3 down to save costs, it has no safe evacuation routes.
>
> *(Yovana, workshop Medellín)*

> No tuvieron en cuenta que hay personas en situación de discapacidad, adultos mayores. Construyeron 7 pisos 5 hacia arriba y 2 o 3 hacia abajo para ahorrar costos, no tiene rutas seguras de evacuación.
>
> *(Yovana, workshop Medellín)*

Such housing is also often located in neighbourhoods where there are few facilities and poor access to services, in other parts of the city, which relates to other issues women co-researchers mentioned above and are also important for a decent living and home:

> We feel tied, they give us a home, but they are not giving us anything because they took us out of a home where we had everything, they are relocating us wherever they want. Where is my home? And now worse, one studies a technical degree and they take away one's health insurance or aid because according to them one cannot continue or learn anything, it is not convenient for our government officials that we are great professionals or that we know our rights.
>
> *(Ana Patricia, workshop Medellín)*

> Nos sentimos atados, nos dan una vivienda, pero no nos están dando nada porque nos sacaron de una vivienda donde teníamos todo, nos están reubicando donde les da la gana ¿Dónde está mi vivienda? Y ahora peor, uno estudia una técnica y le quitan la salud o las ayudas porque según ellos uno no puede seguir ni aprender nada, a nuestros gobernantes no les conviene que seamos grandes profesionales o que conozcamos nuestros derechos.
>
> *(Ana Patricia, workshop Medellín)*

> In the periphery we do not have the right to many things in the city. The aid and guarantees to which one is entitled by law are not provided. They have not recognized the human losses, by giving us housing that is not worthy/dignified and we have not recovered even a quarter of what we have lost: tranquillity, stability, an easier life with the culture of the countryside, here we have to adapt to theft, insecurity, drug addiction, abandonment.
>
> *(María Eugenia, workshop Medellín)*

> En la periferia a muchas cosas de la ciudad no tenemos derecho. No se entregan las ayudas y garantías que se tiene derecho por ley. Las pérdidas humanas no las han reconocido, con darnos una vivienda que no es digna ya nos repararon y no hemos recuperado ni la cuarta parte de la que hemos perdido: la tranquilidad, estabilidad, una vida más fácil con la cultura del campo, aquí nos toca adaptarnos al robo, la inseguridad, la drogadicción, el abandono.
>
> *(María Eugenia, workshop Medellín)*

For many of the women, arriving in the city meant leaving their community behind, and so many wanted to settle in neighbourhoods where there were family members or others from their home communities, or at least from the same regions. Because the state does not provide housing immediately but only after years of waiting, the women had settled in their new urban environments not just physically but also socially, being close to extended family, building new friendships and new communities where people join forces to get their informal settlements recognised as registered barrios. Rather than accepting housing that they feel is inadequate and in a different area of the city where they would have to rebuild again, they prefer to fight for better and decent living conditions in the areas they are living now.

All these reasons mean that the women's preference is sometimes for living in the informal settlements known as 'invasiones', without formal permission, thereby remaining at risk of state intervention such as destroying their houses or taking children into care, unless the settlement eventually becomes formalised.

> We all have the right to a decent home, our house is made of pure recycling, but everyone has their room, for us that is dignified. For us, that is worthy.

> We are fighting so that they give us the land to build as we please. Sometimes the government thinks that because one is poor and because we are building informal houses they can take away one's children and take them to the Family Welfare Agency, but we said that they have to kill us first before taking away our children or throwing us out of the house.
>
> *(Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

> Todos tenemos derecho a una casa digna, nuestra casa es de puro reciclaje, pero cada uno tiene su habitación, para nosotros eso es digno. Estamos luchando para que nos den el terreno para construir al antojo de uno. A veces el gobierno cree que, porque uno esta pobre y en una invasión le van a quitar los hijos y llevar a Bienestar Familiar, pero dijimos que primero nos tienen que matar antes que quitarnos los hijos o sacarnos de la casa.
>
> *(Nury, workshop Bogotá)*

In other cases, the government classifies the places that women have settled in as high-risk areas. This is often for environmental reasons, typically because of landslides, especially in Medellín where informal neighbourhoods are built on the higher steep slopes of the city that are in danger when there is heavy rain. Displaced women are presented with a seemingly unresolvable problem, then, as they cannot choose where to live – as the government decides where they can have a new home. And the informal alternatives, the 'invasions' they create, are often in areas classified as 'alto riesgo' and unsafe.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented our co-researchers' descriptions of some of the challenges they face, as women displaced by the Colombian conflict who arrive in the country's two largest cities. They struggle with accessing housing, work, and finding food for their families, like many migrants, but this is exacerbated by discrimination and state neglect, or what they conceptualise as 'rechazo' in the city. These challenges are made much harder by the loss of their lives and the culture of the countryside, the fear and trauma caused by the experiences they had there, as well as significant risks of ongoing and new forms of violence in the city.

Few accounts of urban struggle or the impacts of displacement are written from the vantage point of women, and our co-researchers not only call for their voices to be heard, but in many cases become involved in politics themselves at the community, city or national level in an effort to force action on the issues discussed here. In the next chapter, we turn to focus on this action and activism, and the hopes that women have as they build better futures for themselves, their families and wider communities.

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7

HOPES FOR A BETTER FUTURE

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Introduction

> The voice of women is missing in the city, the challenge is to defend the city from our perspective and be part of the city's transformations, if we transform ourselves we can defend this city that is also ours.
>
> *(Isela, workshop Medellín)*

> Falta la voz de las mujeres en la ciudad, el reto es defender la ciudad desde nuestra perspectiva y hacer parte de las transformaciones de la ciudad, si nos transformamos nosotras podemos defender esta ciudad que también es nuestra.
>
> *(Isela, workshop Medellín)*

In the last two chapters, women co-researchers provided in-depth accounts about their displacement trajectories and the urban challenges they faced and still face in the form of discrimination and neglect by the state (rechazo). The women provided detailed accounts of the different multilayered and intersectional forms of violence they have experienced, including being threatened by armed groups, intimate partners and from other forms of gender-based

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violence, meaning that crisis and related trauma have often been constants in their lives for many years. These violences affect them in their everyday lives, while at the same time, they are trying to rebuild their lives in the cities of Bogotá and Medellín and (as they put it) 'coming back to life'.

While the women co-researchers refer to themselves as 'victims of the conflict', this term 'victim' is not understood as them being passive victims but rather, as described in Chapter 2, it relates to the legal rights they have as victims of the conflict according to the 'victims law' since 2011 (Lemaitre 2016; Weber 2020). Indeed, rather than being passive, they are actively resisting different forms of violence they face(d) in the past into the present. This resistance shows itself in their aspirations and related actions and activism.

When we developed the documentary 'Volviendo a Vivir', the women co-researchers emphasised the importance of showing to others their histories of displacement and the issues they face in the city when rebuilding their lives. Yet, after more in-depth discussion, they also insisted that our shared project does not focus only on the 'bad' (lo malo). This discussion included a critique of how Colombia and Colombians are often represented in relation to the conflict and violence in the country, including in previous research. Thus, while the challenges and difficulties women must deal with in their everyday and wider lives are important to highlight, according to our co-researchers, they were also clear that research rarely spearheaded them as luchadoras (fighters) who are active in creating positive change in their lives (online workshop discussion, 2021), even though they perceive themselves exactly in this way. In response, this chapter provides some of their testimonies on exactly that – their resistance to violence and other urban challenges, their aspirations for better futures, and their active involvement in producing social change as part and parcel of rebuilding their lives.

All of the women co-researchers have these aspirations for the future, and each one is actively and continually working towards these for better lives for themselves and their children. These efforts exceed simply responding to the urban challenges they describe in Chapter 6; their planning and action to work towards change and to achieve their aspirations distinguish these from mere dreams or wishes (see Marzi 2018). This action is both intentional and deeply political, based on a shared understanding of their collective position as marginalised women in the particular context they find themselves. Hope is not simply 'wishful thinking', but:

> For me, hope is to wait calmly and move forward without giving up. It is a construction of our future, in a safe way in this country that so many times in many ways wanted to silence us. That is why we will always persist, resist and insist.
>
> *(Yesenia, workshop Medellín)*

> Para mi la esperanza es esperar con calma y avanzar sin desistir. Es una construcción de nuestro futuro, de una manera segura en el país que tantas veces en muchas formas nos han querido callar. Por eso siempre vamos persistir, resistir e insistir.
>
> *(Yesenia, workshop Medellín)*

> We as women are facing a country, full of women who have experienced the same situation that we have experienced. So we are representing those other women as well.
>
> *(Yovana, workshop Medellín)*

> Nosotras como mujeres estamos enfrentando un país completo de mujeres que han vivido la misma situación que hemos vivido nosotras. Entonces estamos representando esas otras mujeres también.
>
> *(Yovana, workshop Medellín)*

During face-to-face workshops, women further discussed these hopes, aspirations, and actions. In their answers, there is a collective understanding of a better life in the future. While women express individual aspirations that may differ, most of them also mention collective aspirations and hopes such as more safety, better opportunities for work and education, and more respect for them as Indigenous, black, Afro-Colombian, and Campesina women. This is in line with Latin American feminist theories, including those that draw on Indigenous knowledge, that understand feminist activism as a collective endeavour and reject any binary between the individual and collective, the private and public sphere and the informal and formal (see Las Tesis 2023; Lugones 2010, 2019; Segato and McGlazer 2018). Rather, these theories and our women co-researchers understand themselves as 'we', and hope is conceived as united fighting for their shared rights and to overcome their shared struggles. Yovana, for example, mentions that she understands the group of co-researchers to also represent other women who are not part of this project but share their experiences of displacement and urban challenges. At the same time, they do not erase their individual contributions or hopes, which are also visible in the manifestos presented later in this chapter.

Resisting violence with private and public activism

> I see hope in the unity that we women have … with a single objective: That our rights are fulfilled and this fight goes on for some time now (started) by women who are no longer with us. And we follow (the fight) so that others have a better life every day. So for me, the social movement and going out to mobilize runs through my veins and I tell you that I do feel that I am contributing a grain of sand to make this life better.
>
> *(María Leticia, workshop Medellín)*

> Yo veo la esperanza en la juntanza que tenemos las mujeres … con un solo objetivo: que se nos cumplan nuestros derechos y que esta lucha viene de hace tiempos por otras mujeres que ya no están. Y que nosotras la seguimos para que otras cada día tienen una mejor vida. Entonces para mi el movimiento social y salir a movilizarme me corre por las venas y le digo que sí siento que estoy aportando un granito de arena para que sea mejor esta vida.
>
> *(María Leticia, workshop Medellín)*

Hopes, then, are collective, based on shared experience and knowledge, and implicit in hope is that women are already working towards making them material, through action. They accept that this may take a long time, and requires perseverance and creativity. But what kinds of activism do women enact? And why do we use the term 'activism' for these resistances?

When we talk of 'resisting' violence and discrimination, this can sound like a very constrained act, one that is undertaken only in opposition to the many forces in people's lives that are not only powerful but also disempowering. Violence often takes freedom and choice away, and often directly reduces people's material circumstances too, in the ways that the women co-researchers, who had been displaced, outlined in previous chapters. These circumstances include reduced financial and social capital, which might otherwise ease recovery and rebuilding. Often, then, discussions about resistance only understand people's actions in relation to the contexts that constrain them. Reframing these actions as activism lends a much more powerful sense of women's capacity to change their circumstances, however difficult those may be; a sense that fits much better with how women themselves narrate their power and action.

However, this also demands a reframing of activism, in ways that feminists (and particularly Latin American feminists) have thought about for many years. Mainstream understandings of activism cast it through a masculine lens, the activist pursuing political action through formal public arenas. But rather than understanding activism as loud, forceful public protest, women refer here as well to the quiet intimate spaces and small acts that nonetheless produce social change (see in Western literatures Askins 2015; Staeheli 1996). The women co-researchers' descriptions of their actions during workshop discussions resonate with theories of Latin American feminism (Arango-Vargas 2021; Conway 2021; Lugones 2010; Safa 1990; Segato and McGlazer 2018). Such small-scale action can be individual accomplishments, at least initially, but is also phrased in the 'we'; thus aspirations and acts for social change are understood and experienced within and for the collective as well as by and for the individual. Importantly, those acts or forms of activism are seen as a key part of recovery: efforts to rebuild their

lives for better futures for themselves and their children, while not forgetting the past.

> Letting go of burdens, it is about healing those wounds, which come from homes where they abused us but we have healed because we want to transform our children, we want these stories not to be repeated with our children, grandchildren, friends, … we have been transforming all of this, and that helps us to heal our wounds.
>
> *(Yesenia, workshop Medellín)*

> Soltar de las cargas, es sanar esas heridas, que venimos de hogares que nos maltrataban pero hemos sanado porque queremos transformar nuestros hijos, queremos que esas historias no se repitan con nuestros hijos, nietos, amigos, … eso lo hemos ido transformando, y eso nos ayuda a sanar las heridas.
>
> *(Yesenia, workshop Medellín)*

> To have an own livelihood, be entrepreneurs and fighters. Human beings we do not stay still, we will always move to make ourselves visible and claim the rights we have.
>
> *(Ana Patricia, workshop Medellín)*

> Tener el propio sustento, ser emprendedoras y luchadoras. El ser humano no nos quedamos quietas nos vamos a mover siempre para hacernos visibles y reclamar los derechos que tenemos.
>
> *(Ana Patricia, workshop Medellín)*

Activism may therefore include individual acts of healing, care, and planning so that the next generation does not experience the same problems or carry trauma from the past; but women do not separate out activism that is shared and public. As we have noted, Latin American feminists view the idea of a public/private divide (a cornerstone of conventional Western feminism) as an artificial binary, seeing these spaces in women's lives as contiguous, and activism as crossing boundaries and changing form and tactics according to the context in which it takes place. Our women co-researchers talk as much about activism in their families as on the streets, or formal political spaces.

> The marches (during Paro Nacional), when I see those I like that people start revolutionizing, so that they (the government) see that we have hope, we have to fight for the rights we have.
>
> *(Yesenia, workshop Medellín)*

> Las marchas, al verlas me gusta que la gente se meta a revolucionar para que vean que tenemos esperanza, hay que luchar por los derechos que tenemos.
> *(Yesenia, workshop Medellín)*

> The demands (for our rights) are made in different ways, some take to the streets and others we get together to build resistance, to support and also accompany those who are on the streets.
> *(Isela, workshop Medellín)*

> Los reclamos se hacen de diferentes formas, unos salen a las calles y otras nos juntamos para construir para hacer resistencia, para respaldar y acompañar también a quienes están en la calle.
> *(Isela, workshop Medellín)*

Talking and working together on problems that turn out to be shared is transformative emotionally and psychologically, and this helps to build understanding and confidence, and enables activism – again, often with the goal of improving life for their children as they grow:

> What we have here is that we are united in many things and supportive. These things have helped me a lot, my situation is difficult, but with my compañeras I see that there are problems similar or bigger than mine. That has helped me to get stronger. I see that I am not the only one with a problem, that there are many people (with problems) and that is giving me courage, because in my head I alone understood my problem and I was isolated, I have learned many things.
> *(María Eugenia, workshop Medellín)*

> Lo que hay aquí es que somos unidas en muchas cosas y solidarias. Estas cosas me han ayudado mucho, mi situación es grande, pero con mis compañeras veo que hay problemas similares o más grandes que los míos. Eso me ha servido para fortalecerme, miro que no soy sola la de un problema, que hay mucha gente y eso me está llenando de valor, porque en mi cabeza yo sola entendía mi problema y era encerrada, he aprendido muchas cosas.
> *(María Eugenia, workshop Medellín)*

> I see hope as the fight we have to give our children something so that they do not go through the situations we went through. And that they can get ahead and get a professional career without having to knock on doors (and beg) but rather they themselves fight (for a better future) because we have taught them (how to do so).
> *(María Eugenia, workshop Medellín)*

> Yo veo la esperanza como la lucha que tenemos para brindar a nuestros hijos algo y que ellos no pasen por las situaciones nosotras pasamos. Y que ellos pueden salir adelante y ser unas personas profesionales sin necesidad de tocar una puerta sino ellos mismo luchan porque hemos enseñado a ellos.
>
> *(María Eugenia, workshop Medellín)*

As we mentioned in Chapters 5 and 6, the women co-researchers in Medellín and Bogotá describe a process of '*Volviendo a Vivir'* (coming back to life). This is how they describe rebuilding their lives in the city, by building on their roots and developing informal collective organising and solidarity networks. Women explain how their activism becomes increasingly collective and organised, as they come together in their communities with shared needs for change. While they often begin informally, the activism becomes more publicly political as women community leaders connect to others in the city and work with NGOs, researchers or local councils to bring their demands forward to a platform that is wider still.

Hopes and aspirations for the future – manifestos for the future

> La lucha siempre sigue, buscando una Esperanza sin revivir el pasado por este conflicto armado – (The fight always goes on looking for hope without reliving the past, in this armed conflict).
>
> *(Sentence of poem of documentary 'Volviendo a Vivir')*

To understand the women's hopes, aspirations, and related activism better, we asked them to elaborate during the workshops in Bogotá and Medellín. In Bogotá, women answered in the first instance with their individual aspirations. Many of the hopes they mentioned are direct responses to the urban challenges they identified in Chapter 6, such as having better access to education and work opportunities, owning their own house, and feeling safer in their neighbourhoods and city:

> Art, I would like there to be spaces where people can do art more easily, there are spaces, but there are not that many. Also sports, and that they promote more different sports. Free education, so that people who want to access it can do so. Also stable work to be able to do more things in life like traveling. My family really likes art and sports and when we have the opportunity we go to see free plays and the girls like them. I see art and culture as a tool for transformation and overcoming difficulties.
>
> *(Marisol, workshop Bogotá)*

> El arte, me gustaría que haya espacios donde la gente pueda participar más fácilmente, hay espacios, pero no son tantos, además el deporte que se

> promuevan distintos deportes. La educación gratuita que las personas que quieran acceder lo puedan hacer. También el trabajo estable para poder hacer más cosas en la vida como viajar. A mi familia les gusta mucho el arte y el deporte y cuando tenemos la oportunidad vamos a ver obras de teatro gratis y las a niñas le gustan. Yo veo arte y cultura como herramienta de transformación y superación de dificultades.
>
> *(Marisol, workshop Bogotá)*

Some of their hopes and aspirations also go beyond these previously identified challenges. One interesting example, above, is the hope for more creative spaces for children and themselves, that offer different forms and spaces of art, as art gives hope and is a tool for transformation. The co-researchers in Bogotá, in particular, use art in their own time and in community work, understanding it as a tool for transformation as well as a way to connect back to their cultural roots. In this sense, art provides a link back to the places they have been displaced from and to a culture they feel they are losing. As Mille argues, music and singing keeps her Pacific Afro-Colombian culture alive in the city.

> Art is a fundamental part of transformation and gives us hope. And for me as an Afro woman, art is essential, it is important to connect with my roots, we (Afro-Colombians from the Pacific) are singers, like arrullo (lullaby), it (art) connects with people and art is also made to connect with the lands and roots, this music serves for fertility, the food.
>
> *(Mille, workshop Bogotá)*

> El arte que es parte fundamental para la transformación y nos da esperanza. Y para mi como mujer afro es indispensable el arte, es importante para conectar con las raíces, somos de cantoras y arrullos, se conecta con la gente y el arte también se hace para conectar con las tierras y raíces, esta música sirve para la fertilidad, la comida.
>
> *(Mille, workshop Bogotá)*

Adding to this desire to use art, along similar lines, other women added their aspirations for more garden space or different housing. These would also allow them to connect to their roots, through growing plants that come from the areas they are displaced from, or being able to keep some animals.

The aspiration to use art as a means of expression and a tool for change was realised through the research as time went on. During further workshop discussions in Medellín and Bogotá, the women took a collective decision to write 'manifestos' (manifiestos) of their hopes and aspirations. Those manifestos are only a few sentences long but represent the outcome of long

discussions over several hours of what it is that they aspire to or hope for in their futures, and, importantly, in relation to their trajectories up to the places they are now.

It was Carolina, one of the Colombian researchers in our team, who came up with the idea of using *manifiestos*. She explains the technique to the women with Lina, also a Colombian researcher, as follows:

Carolina: 'It has a lot to do with […] the idea of putting forward a position. So the manifesto is like that. For example, the declaration of human rights was a manifesto that was filled out in a public square'.

Lina: 'So like ideas or a way of claiming a hope or a desire. A demonstration is different … but the manifesto is a document where one says, for example, what we women demonstrate or want or hope'.

Manifestos are simultaneously an expression of desires, a forward plan, and a call for others to take action. In common parlance (variously in Spanish and English), manifestos are understood to be a form of protest; declarations of political intent; and forward projections of strategies for enabling social change. This is how we understand the women's use of the method here. Their ideas, hopes, and plans, born from deep discussion, are summarised with succinct text and illustrations by artist Ana María Díaz Restrepo who worked with the women to produce them. The manifestos become a powerful tool through which to represent collective aspirations.

Below, we first take a look at the manifestos created by the co-researchers from Bogotá, followed by the one from the women in Medellín. In Bogotá women wrote their individual manifestos, while in Medellín women co-researchers decided to produce one final collective version.

In Bogotá, many of the manifestos start with women's individual aspirations and hopes for the future. But, as we have noted, as the discussions went on, women co-researchers would increasingly emphasise that their hopes and aspirations are actually to be understood as from and for the whole collective of displaced women. As a result, each manifesto needs to be read as well in the 'we', even where it says 'I'. For example, the sentence may start with I (yo) '*I am, as an indigenous woman…' (manifesto A),* or *'As a black woman, I dream that…'* (manifesto D), but are intended to represent not just themselves but all other displaced Indigenous and Black women in Colombia who share their experiences, struggles, and hopes.

'Secondly, the women co-researchers in Bogotá mention two terms in particular when talking about their aspirations and achieving them. One is 'luchadora', which translates as 'fighter', and the second is 'seguir adelante' which can be translated as 'getting ahead in life'. Both terms are used when women refer to the activism they practise to rebuild their lives and create better urban futures.

FIGURE 7.1 Manifesto A.

Artwork: Ana María Díaz Restrepo.

I am, as an indigenous woman, a fighting Pijao (Pijao Indigenous people), an entrepreneur and aspiring to rebuild a dignified life and future for my children and my grandchildren.

I, as a woman and mother, entrepreneur, dream of achieving my goals and raising my son and enjoying a life full of hope.

FIGURE 7.2 Manifesto B.

Artwork: Ana María Díaz Restrepo.

We dream of having job opportunities, education, food and also so that our children have a better horizon for the future. We hope to rebuild and plant a new life project with our rights and freedom.

It is a country that has wanted to silence us in so many ways, it is necessary to actively participate in important decision-making spaces as co-responsible and empowered women.

FIGURE 7.3 Manifesto C.

Artwork: Ana María Díaz Restrepo.

As a young woman with dreams and being mother, I dream of helping my family to get more stability, being able to travel and learn. As a woman with dreams I want to fight for my happiness. I want to fight for a better world as a woman.

I long for a better world where children play without fear, young people have a future, and the elderly are not isolated.

FIGURE 7.4 Manifesto D.

Artwork: Ana María Díaz Restrepo.

As a black woman, I dream that my people are respected, that my struggle is respected, that my work and my community work are dignified.

As an Afro woman, my biggest dream is to be with my family, that we have quality time together, that our quality of union and happiness is not separated by a job or distance.

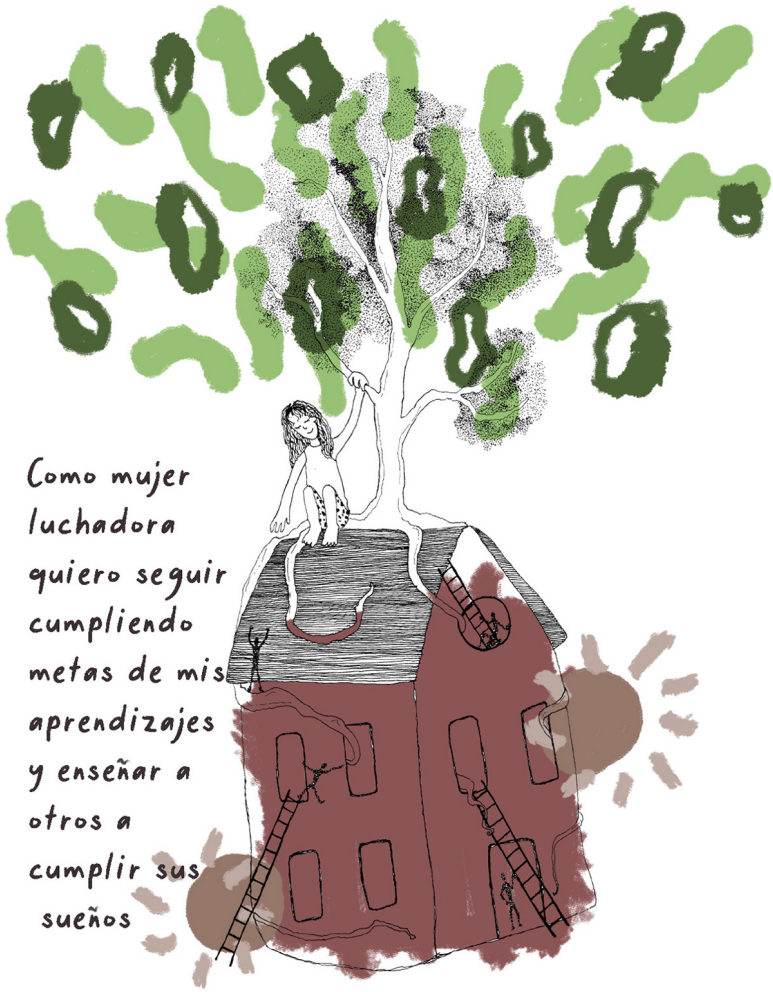

FIGURE 7.5 Manifesto E.

Artwork: Ana María Díaz Restrepo.

As a fighting woman, I want to continue to achieve my learning goals and teach others to fulfill their dreams.

FIGURE 7.6 Manifesto F.

Artwork: Ana María Díaz Restrepo.

As a peasant woman, social leader and human rights defender, I wish to support and build for the change of our country. I dream of continuing to be independent, humble, and continuing to work for the people.

In Medellín, the women co-researchers did not create individual written manifestos. Instead, from the start of their group work, they had the goal of developing one collective manifesto. This was done by breaking into three groups for discussion over three hours, and then deciding how to collate the content they produced together. They argue, in similar ways to the women in Bogotá, that their collective position needs to be visible in the manifesto (and in this book): the goal is to enable other women to identify with the stories told.

> Here we make a collective manifesto…. Slowly we began to open this (the book) to adding other voices, it wasn't just our voice, I think in that perspective that is the important thing, of the collective, so it will be in that book so that other women can also feel identified.
>
> *(Isela, workshop Medellín)*

> Aquí hacemos un manifiesto colectivo…. Lentamente nos fuimos abriendo a poner otras voces, no fue solamente la voces de nosotros, creo que en esa mirada eso es el importante, del colectivo, así en ese libro va estar para que otras mujeres se sienten también identificadas.
>
> *(Isela, workshop Medellín)*

> I think, how we are working collectively, and we all have such similar life stories.
>
> *(Ana Patricia, workshop Medellín)*

> Yo pienso como estamos trabajando colectivamente y todas tenemos historias de vida tan similares.
>
> *(Ana Patricia, workshop Medellín)*

Ana, the artist, then drew portraits of each of the women, and using their words (reproduced below), we created a short animation that can be watched here.

Watch here the video 7.1 Collective Manifesto Medellin_English – (https://youtu.be/ZS7s823v3Ps)

VIDEO 7.1 Playlist – researching displacement together.

We, as women, have hope and trust in the future with safety, we dream of building a free country for women, girls, young people and adolescents, without violence, without fear when going out into the streets, with respect with regard to our differences and without discrimination.

We dream of having job opportunities, education, food and also that our children have a better horizon for the future. We hope to rebuild and plan a new life project that includes our rights and freedom. In a country that has wanted to silence us in so many ways, it is pertinent to actively participate in the important decision-making spaces of our country as co-responsible and empowered women.

Nosotras como mujeres tenemos la esperanza y confiamos en el futuro de manera segura, soñamos con construir un país libre para las mujeres niñas, jóvenes y adolescentes, sin violencias, que se acabe el miedo al salir a las calles, que se respeten nuestras diferencias sin ninguna discriminación.

Soñamos lograr tener oportunidades laborales, de educación, alimentación y también para que nuestros hijos tengan un mejor horizonte para el futuro. Esperamos reconstruir y plantear un nuevo proyecto de vida con nuestros derechos y libertad. En un país que de tantas formas nos ha querido silenciar, es una exigencia participar activamente en los espacios de decisiones importantes de nuestro país como mujeres corresponsables y empoderadas.

FIGURE 7.7 Illustration Women Bogotá.

FIGURE 7.8 Illustration Women Medellín.

These hopes and aspirations had a more collective character than in Bogotá. This is not surprising, given that women in Medellín in general work more closely together. Much of the reason for this is because the city is much smaller, and it is easier to connect to each other than in Bogotá, but also the history of the city has created different dynamics between and within communities.

Conclusions

Aspirations and hopes are only dreams, unless there is an attempt to achieve them (see also Marzi 2018, 2022). The women co-researchers in both cities aspire to better futures, and they work every day towards achieving them. These actions – understood in this chapter as activism – can have different forms and scales, but always aim at social change. Activism may begin in the private sphere, through individual acts of care, planning, and working towards better futures for women and their children, but in many cases becomes collective struggles that are more organised, as women come together and realise that much of their past experiences and future hopes are shared. Their activism occurs quietly every day, continuing for years, rather than being fast or highly visible. The pathways to change are multiple and simultaneous, always changing across time and space (Marzi and Pain 2024; Murrey 2016).

In our project, the manifestos became a key way of representing hopes and action. They were not a method that was planned, but a technique suggested in a workshop by Carolina that might help the women articulate and represent their aspirations and demands. The women co-researchers took the method on enthusiastically and developed it. They produced the summary text in the workshops and, drawing also on their wider testimony, Ana visualised their hopes and demands through her artwork.

The resulting manifestos have become a key output of the project, providing striking, direct, and moving representations of our findings. The women asked that postcards be made from the manifestos, which they can hand out at the launch of this book. As with the other methods utilised on the project, the process by which the manifestos were produced is as important as the outcome – the lead was taken by the women, who took decisions about the content and design. Beyond simply being an innovative method and an effective output, we would argue that when manifestos are developed in a participatory framework, they are more likely to produce original and important content. As tools, they aided women in their articulation of the substantive issues and concerns which they chose to highlight through the vehicle of the project, providing another means for them to direct the narrative.

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8

CONCLUSION

What's in a book?

Rachel Pain, Sonja Marzi, and Jen Tarr

How can we continue to do research together when we are unable to meet in the same geographical space?

In Chapter 1, we started this book with this question that had underpinned our research project, which sought to connect researchers, filmmakers, and displaced women in Colombia and the UK and co-produce knowledge during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, in our minds, this question was very much a practical one, as we struggled with the techniques and technical issues of doing research remotely at such a distance. While many of these practices now feel commonplace as we write about them just three years later, at the time they were new to all of us. But on this project, we were trying to do something more than simply engage with participants in conventional research. In Chapter 1, we reflected on our concern about one impact of the pandemic on research being a shift away from the deeply engaged participatory and collaborative research approaches that involve co-production of knowledge for mutual benefit and social transformation. Our belief is that these approaches become more, rather than less, valuable at times of emergency, crisis, conflict, and social upheaval, where those communities with fewer advantages are most affected – and especially women, as is shown by the findings of this book. And so our team wanted to create and adapt a participatory action research (PAR) approach during the pandemic, involving remote co-production between academics, community researchers and filmmakers, with the added challenge of doing this transnationally.

We rapidly learnt new ways of communicating, as well as dealing with the technology, and tackled all of the logistical issues that arise when creating, analysing and disseminating knowledge together without meeting face to face. These challenges were detailed in Chapter 3. It was immediately clear, too, that

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ethical and interpersonal matters had to be identified, discussed, and resolved, as we progressed the work. Some of these were issues that were familiar in PAR, and others were newer, arising from the radically altered format of the research. As the research morphed to encompass hybrid elements, as we have discussed, further hurdles also became apparent. Overall, across the project's life, we observed the various benefits and limitations of remote, hybrid, and in-person participatory research (Chapter 3).

While we started this book by asking this predominantly methodological question, and reflection on using our pioneering hybrid participatory audio-visual methodology remains one of its main aims, during the collaborative writing process we have realised that the book has become much more than a 'how to' guide. It provides a platform for the knowledge we co-created, where our co-researchers who are displaced women have collated their testimonies in an innovative form that we developed while starting to write together. It was their decision that the book should morph in this way, combining content, approach, and methods (which, after all, are not ultimately separable). Rather than the academic researchers in the team interpreting the co-researchers' words, we decided to think differently about how to do academic writing and publishing. This book provides a platform for our co-researchers' voices through writing but also, importantly, through audio-visual media. As we explained in Chapter 1, they co-author the three chapters that report on the substantive themes of the project: displacement, urban challenges and hopes and actions for the future. We hope that this has contributed something new to understanding of displacement, gender, and the city, as well as women's activism and involvement in social change in the different spaces and scales of their lives.

This book, therefore, shows the powerful knowledge that can be co-produced using this methodology.

This shift in the book's goals reflects the fact that, as time went on, the implications for the type and content of knowledge that is created by PAR became especially clear. And, as we worked together on this book as the culmination of the project from our various locations and lives, we also reflected on the difference that co-writing, as well as co-researching, makes to the outcomes of research. We believe that the co-authorship model – while, as we discuss in this chapter, it is certainly partial, incomplete, and imperfect – changed both the content and the form of the book and the insights it contains. This is why our title for this chapter is 'what's in a book?', as we reflect on the medium and traditions of academic books, and pay tribute to our various contributors who helped to shape it.

The remainder of this chapter contains some reflections on key elements of the book. We do this in the hope of offering useful messages for anyone who wants to develop similar work, whether it is research you are undertaking hybridly, transnationally, or research located in times and places of crisis.

Towards a hybrid participatory audio-visual methodology

Recognising the potential

As we have outlined, the participatory audio-visual methodology started as a remote methodology during the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to bridge geographical distance when we were unable to meet in person. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, this forced situation of being unable to meet in one place at the same time with our co-researchers inspired us to think about how we can do participatory research, especially participatory video, from a distance in situations of crisis, conflict, or simply lack of financial means (see Marzi 2023; Marzi and Tarr 2023). We learnt that using smartphones offers many possibilities for remote participatory research, and we are convinced that the methods developed were not only of value in the pandemic. They have utility in other contexts, too, in fostering the inclusion of those who are often not heard and are excluded from participating in research, and there is much potential for continuing to push methodological boundaries to develop their use further.

In particular, doing participatory research remotely allows for research that goes beyond a limited period of time for 'data collection' towards more continuous involvement of participants' voices in the research process, even when the researcher is not present 'in the field' all the time (or even any of the time). It can also be expanded to encompass the inclusion of participants in the analysis and dissemination stages of research, and before 'fieldwork' begins by involving participants during the planning process. Despite the seeming ubiquity of PAR, this is something that still rarely happens, as the research puzzle and questions are often at least broadly defined by the lead researchers before other participants enter the research process. There are sometimes structural and institutional reasons why this is the case; but if we are honest, it also reflects academic reluctance to let go of our monopoly of certified expertise, and our control over which topics are most valuable and in need of research. In contrast, our research design was flexible throughout, and participants informed and continued to shift the questions and the project focus in positive ways, as we have described in this book. This kind of engagement from different geographical places raises new questions about what 'the field' comprises, and what it encompasses in terms of generating knowledge: this is potentially far wider than its common understanding as being synonymous with 'collecting and interpreting data'. In this book, we frame 'the field' as more than a geographical place where the researcher physically collects data; rather, it is a research process that is co-produced with participants throughout, without anyone needing to be present at the same time and place at any point.

Audio-visual methods also allow for greater inclusion from afar, by allowing the development of ideas and findings beyond text and conversational methods, as we described in Chapters 3 and 4. On this project, we drew on our

team members' expertise in the Latin American tradition of feminist community cinema (see Chapter 4), where the creation of space for women to share experiences is as important as the act of simply capturing audio-visual material. The limits of textual and verbal-based methods are thrown into sharp relief when they are done online, as quite a reductive approach where we have to compromise not only on the visual and embodied clues present in face-to-face research, but the social benefits of being together in one place. Moreover, as many critiques have highlighted, participants may not feel comfortable with text-based methods (see Beebeejaun et al. 2013) and may wish to express their knowledge in more creative ways. In our research, this was certainly the case, including the process of co-writing this book.

Acknowledging the challenges

However, while remote participatory research has enormous future potential, we also encountered several significant challenges when doing our research purely online. As we described in Chapter 3, these limitations led us to move to a hybrid research design when circumstances allowed. First, there are technological challenges, especially when working with people who have only limited means to acquire hardware such as computers and good internet connections. We mitigated this to some extent by paying for the data they used, but connections were still unreliable at times. In our project our co-researchers showed impressive skills, working with us over ten months simply using their smartphones, sometimes several women appearing together on one smartphone screen. But the medium also sometimes reduced their ability to concentrate and participate over longer periods of time. Reduced to a small screen, often limited sound from smartphones and outside noise, it was not always easy for the women to follow over several hours all the discussions we had in the online meetings.

Second, technology leads to issues around who is controlling discussions. Online discussions are inevitably not as fluid as face-to-face discussions, and this is even more the case with people who do not know each other well. The fact that only one person can talk at once makes bouncing off and developing each other's points more difficult in a Zoom environment than face-to-face. Discussions are more difficult online and require good facilitation skills, which in turn can raise issues of academic power and control that we wanted to challenge through our use of participatory methods. As experienced facilitators, we may have done our best to encourage everyone to speak in the online workshops, and keep louder voices from talking too much, but this meant taking a more dominant position as the facilitator with the right to limit the contributions of other co-researchers.

Third, ethical issues around researching traumatic topics can be heightened when research is online. In our case, the acutely personal material gathered through audio-visual means and the co-production ethos of the project

meant that anonymity was neither possible nor ultimately desirable. Our co-researchers were therefore in the position of knowing they might share similar experiences without necessarily knowing the shape and specificities of those experiences, especially at first. Clearly, the topic of displacement is a sensitive one, where our co-researchers were sometimes reliving the trauma of past and present violences. Of course, we took as many precautions as possible, and frequently discussed these ethical issues of consent and care with the co-researchers. And in principle, there are ways in which collective discussions can take place about specific issues without veering into personal experience – although this requires very careful facilitation and arguably enforces an artificial divide between the personal and general. Nonetheless, we still believe that sharing personal accounts of difficult experiences and circumstances is better discussed in face-to-face workshops and spaces. This is not just because there is a more fluid discussion where women can make eye contact from a conversational point of view, and have the reassurance of each other's physical presence, but more importantly, those spaces enable relationships of trust to an extent that is difficult to build online. As described in Chapter 3, when Sonja visited the co-researchers face to face for follow-up work, it was partly for this reason; to have a more relaxed group and one-to-one discussions about traumatic personal stories, where individual women were comfortable doing so (and having built up the personal relationships that enable this). These discussions have also informed the wider research and this book. We find that those trusting relationships can only be built if co-researchers feel comfortable and safe enough to share their story, and that can be difficult to create in online spaces. This would be even more so if there hadn't been ongoing contact over a period of time between co-researchers in different physical locations.

Fourth, there are power differentials connected to our professional and global positioning that complicate any simplistic claims that these methods are 'more decolonial' in nature. As we also reflected on in Chapter 3, especially because she is from a white European background, our co-researchers created much closer relationships with Sonja once she met with all women in person in Medellín and Bogotá. At the same time, the fact that we had been working for so long online before meeting in person definitely built some trust, forging a stronger foundation for these relationships to become close where very personal experiences could be shared. Thus, it is the hybrid nature of the overall project – the combination of online and face-to-face methods and interactions – that really contributed to the co-creation of in-depth knowledge on women's displacement stories. It allowed for a longer time together during which relationships could gradually be built, as well as an understanding that the research didn't stop with Sonja leaving Colombia but would continue online, with the co-researchers continuing to have a central role in the whole process even once the lead researcher had exited 'the field'.

Still, while greater trust was created, it would be disingenuous to pretend that power relationships were completely levelled on the project. As mentioned earlier in Chapters 1 and 3, using co-production and especially with PAR principles, power should be shared as much as possible between different team members. At the same time, given how academic research and funding are positioned within a neoliberal academic system, any claims about horizontalisation of power relations would be disingenuous. The funding that is given to academic partners and participants is always conditional on knowledge production that is translated into some form of academic output at the end. Growing knowledge, popularity, and acceptability of participatory approaches, and arts-based outputs among researchers and funders has certainly been hugely valuable in making co-production more meaningful in practice. Yet, we suggest that being honest about power and how it is distributed within each project is the best way forward and should always be discussed explicitly with participants: giving clear information about constraints, as well as opportunities for the expression of ideas and wishes concerning what activities are most interesting and will create most benefits.

Overall, while remote and hybrid participatory research has significant benefits which mean it can be more inclusive and sustainable in some contexts, these benefits are far from automatic. A critical approach is vital to ensure it is as equitable as possible. These approaches require a deep commitment to equal participation if that is to be realised to any degree, and recognition that the best-laid plans and intentions are often tripped up in real life. Most of all, they demand continuous reflection and commitment to addressing inequities and other problems that arise during the research process. We therefore hope that hybrid participatory research is something that others will take up and that this book is useful in creating similar research designs and developing this methodology further.

Maximising participation

In Chapter 1, we outlined our intent to develop and use a feminist, decolonial, participatory research approach as a framework for the co-production of knowledge through the remote and hybrid research we have described above. Drawing on the principles of feminist and decolonial research approaches seemed especially important given the topic of the research, the location of the funding grant (the UK) and the 'field' (Colombia), and its focus on displaced women, many of whom have experienced multiple forms of violence. These research approaches inform many aspects of the research design. They also lend themselves to PAR (Lenette 2022), as we detailed in Chapters 1 and 3, which seeks to privilege the voices and experiences of participants as researchers rather than research subjects, and generate knowledge collectively towards the goal of social change.

The uneven positions of various team members – viewed in terms of our access to global, economic, social or academic privilege – may on the one hand signal the imperative for a PAR approach which can challenge the ongoing coloniality of power and knowledge. Yet, these asymmetries also inevitably complicate the use of PAR. As Kindon, Pain, and Kesby (2025: 2) note:

> PAR approaches have often in past decades come to resemble technocratic 'fixes' to address short-term problems that can be marketed at the end of a project funding cycle…too much of what now purports to be PAR – participatory research, co-produced or co-designed research, within academic settings – lacks criticality.

The authors of this recent volume go on to suggest that a 'critical' approach to PAR means practice that is informed by liberatory theories such as feminism, anti-racism, anti-imperialism, Indigenous and queer theories, research that acknowledges privilege, and is continually critically reflexive and attentive to how power plays out within participatory processes rather than ignoring it. We discussed some of these imperatives in Chapters 1, 3, and 4. Even so, we are all too aware of the dangers of disingenuous Western practices that claim to decolonise research processes while using the language and techniques of inclusion to reinscribe business – and the ownership of research – as usual. As Tuck and Yang (2012) famously contend, decolonisation is not a metaphor and 'participatory' projects cannot assert that they are liberatory when still couched in the apparatus and practices of Western academic institutions.

We have taken some steps towards challenging the coloniality of research on this project, ensuring that questions, choice of methods, outputs, and benefits are shared by the whole team as far as practicably possible. The displaced women who are our co-researchers are far from simply sources of research data; their ideas and innovations alter our collective practice and theorising. The women also highlight their role as agents of social change, focusing on their accounts as in their shaping of the direction of research, on how they survive and resist structural and interpersonal violence, and their hopes and goals for the future rather than merely the traumas of the past. This echoes Tuck's (2009) call for a move towards frameworks of desire-based rather than damage-based research. The methodology was also substantially informed by Colombian traditions of community cinema (see Chapter 4). Here, film is not just a method, but is also used as a tool for transformation and memory building in the Colombian context, in the case of our study when working with victims of the conflict. Audio-visual methods, again, come into their own, used as is so often in Latin America as part of a process of change.

In practical terms, our co-researchers did not want to be involved in every part of the research. It is a common misapprehension that participatory research involves an ideal wherein every participant is involved in every stage

and activity. Instead, skills are pooled and decisions are taken about who does what. On our project, given the constraints on women's time and the sensitive nature of the topics they were exploring, it was especially important that they made these decisions, and the rest of the team tried as best as possible to fit around them. One key example is the documentary that was co-produced – while the women took the footage, discussed and analysed it, and identified how they wanted the story told, they felt that the quality of the finished film would be better if the professional filmmakers took the technical decisions and used their expertise, taking guidance from the co-researchers and editing accordingly. This made more sense than an argument for full participation at the cost of the quality of the film (though other participatory video approaches exist where collective editing is preferred). On a more prosaic scale of decision-making, the women had different levels of involvement and input in the discussion sessions we held online and face-to-face. As we described in Chapter 3, some did not always feel like sharing their experiences but learnt through listening and had input in other ways; minimal participation is a choice as valid as any other, and there is no question, of course, of forcing anyone's participation.

What's in a book?

These questions of participation lead us to reflect back on the process of writing this book. We discussed in Chapter 1 that it is often assumed that the inevitable corollary of sharing a research process with participants is involvement in writing outputs. And yet this is quite rarely undertaken. We set out our intentions in co-authorship in that chapter, and in Chapters 1 and 5, we explained the mechanics of the co-writing process, particularly for the three empirical chapters (Chapters 5–7). Here, it was the co-researchers who decided on the content, themes, and messaging, and co-created the audio-visual material that is as important an output of the research as our written work.

When it came to the writing process, we designed a number of writing workshops to discuss and plan the content of the three empirical chapters (see Chapter 5). Many of the women co-researchers are not literate enough to write large chunks of text to academic standards. Others are simply not interested in writing in this way. As academics ourselves, we have to admit to sometimes struggling with academic writing, and so asking this of those who are not academically trained was not an option. Moreover, following the principles of PAR, we are well aware that there is a fine line between understanding writing as an empowering exercise that is inclusive and aims to share power in the process and writing as an intimidating exercise that ends up excluding participants by asking too much of them. Writing collaboratively can sometimes be seen as an innately good thing in participatory research, yet depending on whom we write with, it can become disempowering, and we feel it is important to acknowledge this. For those of our co-researchers who are less confident in working with text,

this process may become frustrating and put some into the position of having to disclose that they find it difficult and are embarrassed by this. On the face of it, then, collaborative writing adds yet another layer of academic activity that can clash with the ideas of including and horizontalising power relationships within PAR. Of course, in practice, as with all aspects of PAR, a more ethical and democratic approach respects the different skills that people bring, does not assume that everyone must contribute in the same way, and ensures that everyone participates to the level they desire in ways that are comfortable for them.

While writing the book, the question of what's in a book and for whom we write became increasingly interesting and important for us. While we knew we wanted the book to provide guidance for others about the methodology we had developed together, we asked the women co-researchers what else they thought should feature in the book. Perhaps not surprisingly, the knowledge that we created together and the themes raised in the film were also the main topics that the women thought it was important to write about. As a result, we decided together that while the book provides methodological information and guidance, it should also provide knowledge on displacement, urban challenges and women's aspirations for the future.

This brings us back to the third aim of this book, which arose from the question 'do you also write with your participants?' that we touched upon in Chapter 1. There, we explained some of the principles of writing together, as well as the somewhat complex realities. Here, we reflect on the value of writing together with our co-researchers. Is writing together the best way to disseminate knowledge together? For whom do we write, when we write together?

We start with the last of those questions, which focuses on audience. While the question 'do you also write with your participants?' was asked of Sonja in an academic space when she was giving a presentation on the research project and the film we co-developed, the publication of such a writing project through an academic outlet has not been that straightforward. The first publisher we worked with on the book proposal had little understanding of the theory and practice of collaborative research and authorship, and insisted on 'more academic' language and content throughout. So there is a mismatch between communicating, as well as producing, research together; and the ways that academic writing is circulated and rewarded. At the end of most projects, academic texts still dominate, and publishing takes place mainly to advance theories in books and journal articles that often provide little space for our co-researchers to participate – so for whom do we write?

Like other writing collectives, we want to challenge this static (some would say, stale) form of writing and push for more innovative ways to co-write. Yet, rather than seeing these as yet another innovative output from an action research project, classified as impact but not enough to be considered equal to other academic writing, we suggest thinking differently about and recognising publishing from co-produced knowledge. This also opens it up to new audiences.

The fact that we combined audio-visual material with text to allow women to co-author without needing the same writing skills for which we as academics have been trained created some issues. These were not only around how to include these types of material as part of the book, but also whether this material was accepted as part of academic knowledge in itself without interpreting it in words and theories. Yet, if we want to co-produce knowledge that has also value for the co-researchers we work with and other interested parties, we needed to find a way that they can recognise their own voices in the collaborative book. Thankfully, our current publisher was better informed and had more understanding of these goals.

These issues give rise to further questions about the nature of the knowledge that is enabled, and the value for our co-researchers. The process of writing the book together, and the many days of workshops creating the empirical content, itself clarified what should be in the book and how women's stories should be told. Within academic writing spaces, we admit regularly that in the process of writing our arguments emerge, but that 'thinking' space through the writing process is rarely extended to our co-researchers.

Finally, our question of 'what's in a book' challenges the idea of one academic gold standard that may bring us closer to promotion but distance us from our research subjects and co-researchers. If the impact is what we aim for, then books too should reach beyond traditional ways of writing and publishing, beyond sitting in libraries and within lists of publications on academic webpages. The way we wrote this book takes considerably more time – coordinating co-authoring with many people, using different formats, in different countries, with different educational backgrounds and different languages, has been intensive and sometimes exhausting, far more so than better recognised academic publication routes. At times the process was frustrating and contradictory as we had to negotiate and juggle the conventional norms and standards of research while doing action research, working towards feminist and decolonial practices, and thinking seriously about power within the research process.

Future outlook

As we write this concluding chapter, reflecting back to our project's origins in 2020, the future of research on issues of justice and inequality feels uncertain. The impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, genocide and conflict, mass migration, growing gaps between rich and poor, and the realistic threat of future pandemics are all issues that urgently require ongoing research, but they also present growing challenges to conducting research as we have known it conventionally. At the same time, in the Universities of many Western countries, we are seeing contraction, financial cuts, and redundancies, as decades of market-driven neoliberalisation and lack of public investment lead to a collapsing sector.

It seems to us that in these global and local contexts, the approaches and methodologies we have used in the project reported in this book are likely to become even more valuable in future. As we suggested in Chapter 1, remote and hybrid methods might be one way to help future-proof research in the post-pandemic era. This is the case in many circumstances where the traditional model of research involving field visits and even international travel is no longer viable and we want to avoid its environmental impacts. And this model has never been accessible to those based in poorer or less well-funded countries, institutions and communities, those with caring responsibilities, and those living with disabilities and chronic ill health. Remote and hybrid methods can have similar benefits for research participants, levelling to some extent who is and who is not able to participate in research. Might we even consider it a liberatory alternative to masculinist, class-based colonial practices? Realistically, if we pay attention to the reality of ongoing knowledge relations and their wider political contexts, and to indigenous and decolonial critiques, the dangers of claiming liberation and decolonisation through research are clear.

Moreover, our project has not simply utilised and developed these new ways of using methods but has attempted to approach the whole research process differently. Using PAR, which has foundations in and synergies with feminist and decolonial practice, our participants repositioned as co-researchers and contributed to driving every stage of the research process. This, we argue, made not just for a better process where the benefits of research are more likely to be shared, but also for richer knowledge that more accurately portrays the realities of women's lives, challenges, and dreams. We have also been careful in our analysis not to overplay the potential of PAR, identifying the risks of co-option and unethical co-production.

Finally, the issues raised in the book reflect the priorities and lived experiences of our co-researchers who are displaced women living in Bogotá and Medellín. They shaped the research questions and process, and the content of this book. In Chapters 5–7, they shared their testimonies on experiences of displacement, multiple forms of violence and the effects of trauma as they resettle in the city and start to rebuild their lives. They described many challenges of being victims of the Colombian conflict, and the economic, social, and material issues faced when making a new life in the city. Many of these challenges, and indeed the threat of violence, are ongoing as they live in areas where the majority of the population is struggling economically and a high proportion of the population are victims of the conflict. Nonetheless, all of the women also shared their goals for the future for themselves and their children, and described how they organise together to realise these. They all take action at different scales – from the household to the community, the neighbourhood and the city – working and connecting with others to overcome multiple traumas and challenges. The knowledge they produced has been expressed via artistic means, which connect to their cultures and the culture of

Colombia and the wider region. Taking part in this research project, and in particular, the women's development of the audio-visual outputs which we include in the book, became an integral part of their everyday action, rather than a separate 'stage' or 'impact' as is commonly positioned in academic projects. There is much fertile ground here for further research, as well as pointers to changes that need to be made to policy and practice, if these women and the many thousands like them are to be supported in their efforts to create new urban futures.

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