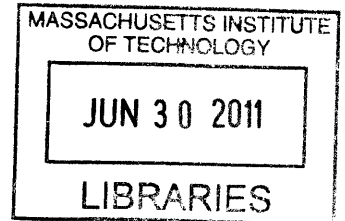


Survival Cities:
Adaptive Approaches to Violence and Insecurity on the Periphery of Bogotá

By

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
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ABSTRACT

In Latin America, the most violent and urbanized region of the developing world, violence and insecurity are among the most powerful issues facing cities. In Bogotá, Colombia, decades of armed conflict and structural dynamics of urbanization and exclusion act as the stage for pervasive violence in the urban periphery. The insecurity that residents of marginal areas face limits their physical, social, economic, and political mobility in diverse ways that reflect individuals' unique positions in the urban ecosystem. In this context, short- and medium-term responses that allow citizens to mitigate the instability and move forward with their lives are urgently needed.

This thesis examines the various manifestations of violence and the spatial, sociopolitical, and economic security strategies that residents adopt to respond to these threats in the Municipality of Soacha, an urban extension of the capital city of Bogotá. By critically evaluating the ways in which citizens adapt to their insecure conditions and the implications these have for the city as a whole, the thesis makes a case for considering citizen adaptations on the periphery as the basis for sustainable urban change, calling into question the dominant security and planning paradigms. By looking to resident experiences with violence for cues, planners and policymakers can design more grounded and effective responses to insecurity and exclusion that allow communities to move toward a more integrated and productive urban reality.

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The women of Soacha, Colombia have experienced unimaginable violence. Yet, through forced displacement, domestic abuse, and death threats, they are not only surviving, but also finding innovative ways to transform their communities. I thank them for their trust and friendship, and dedicate this thesis to all those who dare to express alternative visions for the city in the context of overwhelming violence and exclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

In Latin America, the most urbanized and most violent region of the developing world, insecurity saturates the urban landscape (Moser and McIlwaine 2004). Violence has become so pervasive that the causes, manifestations, and potential solutions to the current dynamics of conflict are now central areas of discussion in planning and policymaking circles. In some cases, the question of how to resolve and recover from violent conflict now supersedes questions of how to address poverty and marginality in the debate around urban wellbeing (Koonings and Kruijt 2007). Even in Colombia, a country known for political armed conflicts that have plagued mostly rural areas over the course of six decades, politicians and policymakers have steadily shifted their focus to include patterns of violence in urban neighborhoods in national security discussions. As officials search for ways to curb the violence, urban populations live in perpetual fear and struggle to adapt to the pervasive insecurity that directly threatens their livelihoods (Davis 2008, Koonings and Kruijt 2007, Rotker 2002).

In this context, scholars and practitioners have worked to understand the roots and various forms that urban violence takes in order to arrive at sustainable responses. Economics has been key to this discussion, as deep inequality all over Latin America has created severely fragmented cities in which the popular classes are both economically and socially marginalized in mainstream society (Davis 2010, Koonings and Kruijt 2007). High urbanization rates have compounded historical trends toward social and economic fragmentation, and have contributed to the creation of massive informal settlements on the urban periphery (Davis 2006). The social stigma attached to living in these neighborhoods in addition to their minimal education opportunities makes formal employment largely unfeasible for residents, and informality reigns not only in the economic, but on every level of urban life. In these areas, agents of violence thrive, as State presence is generally minimal, and new, unemployed recruits are plentiful (Collier 2003).

Even within these marginal areas, however, it is clear that violence and insecurity are

not evenly distributed. In the Municipality of Soacha, in many ways considered the seat of the problems of violence and marginalization of greater Bogotá, Colombia, these dynamics affect different communities and individuals in distinct ways across space as well as social, political, and economic divisions. Whereas traditional studies of violence in Colombia are oriented toward understanding the actors involved in the national armed conflict, such as the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and government security forces, Soacha provides a pertinent example of the complexities of the conflict as it maps onto the conditions of the urban periphery. In this case, the armed actors that operate on the national scale have morphed to adjust to the urban reality, extending their control over neighborhoods in a variety of old and new ways, in accordance with the makeup of the communities and the groups' aims. In this environment, residents' spatial, social, economic, and political options are limited by their violent surroundings in ways that serve to solidify divisions and encourage further fragmentation.

In response to rampant violence and insecurity, citizens adapt to their insecure surroundings in diverse ways, which are related to both the types of threats they face as well as their unique positions in the urban ecosystem. Some adjust their lifestyle and transport patterns to avoid risk, while others make use of expanded networks in an effort to express their needs and interests or guarantee their economic stability. Of the various security strategies that citizens adopt to survive and progress, some serve to expand their mobility in a comprehensive sense, increasing the social, political, and economic spaces to which residents and other members of their community have access. In contrast, other strategies further limit mobility, in that they add to social fragmentation and restrict the ability of residents to interact across social, economic, cultural, spatial, and political lines. By inverting the traditional security logic and using input from residents themselves on the diverse forms of violence and insecurity that they face and the strategies they employ to avoid these threats, planners and policymakers can design more effective responses to violence that allow communities to move toward a more integrated and productive urban reality.

In this thesis, I will examine the ways in which residents of Soacha respond to violence and insecurity in their communities, focusing on a set of key questions that will guide my analysis. First, what kinds of violence do residents experience in their daily lives, and how is this affected by spatial and gender dynamics? Furthermore, what kinds of strategies do individuals, families, and communities employ to protect themselves in the context of these various forms of insecurity? Based on this analysis, how might planners and policymakers leverage local adaptations to violence as a basis for a more grounded security policy? Looking beyond the major actors and institutions normally implicated in security discussions, I will argue, may allow us to identify innovative responses to violence and propose a new course of action to those interested in generating comprehensive development in violent communities.

CHAPTER 1

Urban Violence and Insecurity: Definitions, Manifestations and Determinants

Violence in Latin America has reached unprecedented proportions (Rotker 2002, Concha-Eastman 2002, Davis 2007), making the continent the most violent in the world (McIlwaine and Moser 2001). Approximately 140,000 people die violently each year in Latin America, and one in three people have been the victims of violence, either directly or indirectly (Rotker 2002). The proliferation of violence has been centered in urban areas as opposed to rural ones (Vanderschueren 1996) and has created an extensive sense of fear among the population, which has severe impacts on opportunities for individual and community growth as well as social cohesion within violent neighborhoods and cities (Davis 2008, Koonings and Kruijt 2007, Rotker 2002). As Moser and McIlwaine (2004, 4) write, residents in marginalized, violent areas “face a series of restrictions in how they use time, space and social relations,” which further exacerbate their social and spatial isolation. In this seemingly lawless environment, impunity is widespread, and the failure of security and justice institutions to protect citizens has caused some to question whether the situation is leading toward institutional collapse (Pizarro Leongómez 2002). In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which scholars have attempted to analyze the dynamics of violence in urban areas, how urban violence has developed in the Colombian context, and how planners and policymakers might approach the topic in order to generate medium-term strategies for violence mitigation.

Violence has many definitions, but generally refers to the infliction of harm by one person against another in order to achieve a given aim (McIlwaine and Moser 2001). Writing from the public health perspective, Concha-Eastman defines violence as “an intentional use of force or power with a predetermined end by which one or more persons produce physical, mental (psychological), or sexual injury, injure the freedom of movement, or

cause the death of another person or persons (including him or herself)” (Concha-Eastman 2002, 44). In places where violence is prevalent such as many of the cities of Latin America, the impacts of violence go far beyond the direct injuries that are captured in crime statistics and media accounts. The experience of violence on a regular basis, whether directly or indirectly experienced, creates a widespread feeling of insecurity in the areas and among the populations in which violence occurs. In this sense, insecurity is intimately related to the occurrence of violence but is more directly linked to perceptions; it can be understood as the sense of uncertainty that violence generates (Moser and McIlwaine 2004). Insecurity implies instability, vulnerability and fear, all of which, though hard to measure, have severe impacts on personal and collective wellbeing.

While the precise causes of violence are not easily determined, many studies have linked the prevalence of urban violence and insecurity to a number of structural issues that affect all cities worldwide. Hypotheses on the sources of these trends include the pressures generated by rapid population growth in urban areas through urbanization and migration as well as the poverty and vulnerability in disadvantaged areas that act as critical conditions for rampant crime (Ratinoff 1994). Furthermore, the lack of government response to violence in newly urbanized, low-income areas, whether intentional or due to a lack of state capacity, is also identified as a key component of the growth in urban crime rates throughout the region (Koonings and Kruijt 2007). These factors are all intimately related, and take different forms according to the specific historical, social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics of the various countries of Latin America and the world. However, some general trends exist that can assist in understanding the widespread character of violence in the region.

Poverty, Inequality and Exclusion

The structural conditions of poverty, inequality and exclusion are key elements involved in urban violence. Rampant income disparities, unequal service distribution, and selective security provision as well as a number of other manifestations of substantive

inequality are said to lead to violent responses within the population (Winton 2004). As Ailsa Winton (2004, 167) suggests, “poverty itself is *not* a cause of urban violence. Rather, the exclusionary processes active in the unequal distribution of resources in urban contexts throughout the South have a strong impact on violence levels.” These issues, which are especially severe in Latin American cities, act as the context of urban insecurity in that they “lower barriers and inhibitions and tend to make non-violent practices less attractive and legitimate” (Koonings and Kruijt 2007, 2). These analyses also suggest that not only are the determinants of violence related to inequality, but the distribution of risk is decidedly uneven as well; certain populations and areas experience insecurity more than others (Winton 2004). In this sense, the urban poor are disproportionately affected by violence, both as victims and perpetrators of crime (Concha-Eastman 2002).

Urbanization Patterns

The socioeconomic divisions in the cities of Latin America have been exacerbated by urbanization patterns. The region consisting of Latin America and the Caribbean has the highest urbanization rates of any region in the world, resulting in the establishment of massive informal settlements. In the city, “[t]he poor, unable to afford land or shelter in the limited areas of the city that are fully serviced, have access only to the least desirable and most densely developed spaces,” which are frequently located on the outskirts of major cities (UN-HABITAT 2008, 82). In these marginal neighborhoods, service provision, particularly in the form of physical and security infrastructure, is generally limited, which is largely related to the illegal nature of these neighborhoods. Residents may face long commuting times to arrive in the city center, facing both physical and social distance from urban resources and amenities. This physical division between the urban rich and poor creates what UN-HABITAT calls the ‘spatial poverty trap’ (UN-HABITAT 2009). As poor migrants continue to move from rural areas into peripheral urban neighborhoods for job opportunities that are frequently elusive, the population of impoverished, disillusioned, and underserved individuals grows, creating apt conditions for the spread of violence (Collier 2003, Concha-Eastman 2002).

Failure or Absence of the State

State approaches to governance in peripheral areas has varied, but most governments in Latin America have chosen to extend services to some neighborhoods and leave others to their own devices (Ward 2003). In this environment, where illegal land tenure and questionable economic activities thrive, so does crime, and city governments are hard-pressed to revert these trends (Davis 2008). Against this backdrop, armed actors have increasingly free reign over certain areas of the city, sometimes with the complicity of state security forces. Many citizens have lost faith in the ability and even will of the State to protect them from the violence and police are frequently distrusted and even seen as a threat to the livelihoods of residents (Koonings and Kruijt 2007). In this context, the integrity of social, economic, and political institutions is compromised, which is not only detrimental to informal settlements, but to society as a whole. As Pécaut (1997, 892) writes, “nothing is exempt from the impact of the phenomenon of violence... It is not only of concern to zones that are outside the authority of institutions, but also the central regions and the institutions themselves as it alters or paralyzes their functions” (author’s translation).

These patterns all reinforce one another, making it harder for neighborhoods and cities to get out of the “conflict trap” that Paul Collier (2003) describes in the context of civil war. Histories of unequal development and social exclusion create apt conditions for violence, and socioeconomic divisions are solidified by the physical patterns of urban expansion. State capacity to respond to these trends in the form of social services or security provision is limited and impunity is widespread, which contributes to the sense of helplessness in marginalized areas, and violence in turn expands. In this context, particular neighborhoods or even cities become associated with the violence and poverty that pervades them, and these areas are treated as “no-go areas,” while their residents are “stigmatized as ‘undesirables,’” criminals, and beggars (Koonings and Kruijt 2007, 4). With limited options, resorting to illegal and violent forms of income generation can become an outright necessity (McIlwaine and Moser 2001).

Urban violence and insecurity in the Colombian context

Urban violence in Colombia shares many of the same structural determinants as its Latin American counterparts. As I will explain in the next chapter, the institutions set up by Spanish colonizers left a lasting impact on society through the formalization of class-based divisions. A series of economic growth strategies that indirectly promoted urbanization, and the consequent massive influx of migrants to cities, were seen both in Colombia and in the rest of Latin America. The inability of the Colombian government to respond to these trends on the scale at which they emerged paralleled the approach taken in a number of other countries. These patterns, which have had enormous impacts on how urban growth has taken place across the continent, were just as, if not more, pointed in Colombia, resulting in vast socioeconomic inequality and the informal settlement of the urban periphery.

In addition to urbanization trends that have been seen in much of South America, Colombia's history of armed conflict over the last century has played a formative role in national and urban development.¹ In the 1960s, as post-war development was increasing in many parts of the world, leftist guerrilla groups with origins in the self-defense groups of *La Violencia*, or an era of violent confrontations between the dominant Liberal and Conservative political parties that cost the lives of 200,000 people between 1948 and 1958 (Moser and McIlwaine 2004, Theidon 2009). This history of violence and class conflict act as key ingredients of social discourse and collective memory, and in many ways these elements fueled the fire set by leftist insurgents. The largest guerrilla groups, namely the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) used their Marxist discourse to recruit members among poor populations of *campesinos* in rural areas. In some cases, guerrillas

¹ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to give anything more than a brief overview of the Colombian armed conflict. See Pécaut (1997) for a much more detailed account of both the history of the conflict and the ways in which this violence pervades all levels of Colombian life.

used the devastation of *La Violencia*,² as a way to recruit young people whose families had been victims of this conflict (Pécaut 1997). Their main target was the rural elite, whose land holdings made them the object of guerrilla attacks. Landowners responded by hiring mercenaries, or paramilitaries, to protect themselves and their assets. Since their emergence, paramilitaries have had a close, yet complex relationship with governing elites. They have been known to act in alliance with or as proxies for the Colombian military in the elimination of “political alternatives portrayed as leftists,” particularly in marginal rural areas (Ramírez 2010, 86).

In the 1970s and 80s, the conflict took on a new dynamic with the expansion of the drug trade (Pécaut 1997, Theidon 2009). By controlling various aspects involved in the processing and export of cocaine as well as a number of other drugs, insurgent and self-defense groups grew in numbers and resources, and increasingly turned to violence against civilians in an effort to maintain their territorial control (Pécaut 2007). The violence associated with the conflict, while not exclusive to rural areas, was certainly centered outside of urban agglomerations, as control over large territories and their corresponding resources was a central goal of the armed groups. This resulted in considerable forced displacement within the country; in the last 25 years, roughly five million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes throughout Colombia (CODHES 2009).³ Most of the internally displaced have traveled to regional population centers, that is, small, mid-size, and large urban areas, to seek out employment opportunities and government services (UN-HABITAT 2009). This has resulted in the massive migration of families who have been the victims of a variety of forms of physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence to Colombian cities.

2 For more information on the era of *La Violencia*, see Pécaut (1997).

3 Government estimates are considerably lower, though there is a consensus that the number of displaced is at least three million people since the beginning of the conflict. Part of the disconnect between these numbers may be the result of government reluctance to acknowledge the paramilitary forces as illegal non-state armed actors until very recently, under the leadership of President Juan Manuel Santos.

Urban violence became a significant problem in the 1980s, particularly at the end of the decade, with the proliferation of armed youth gangs in marginal neighborhoods (Pécaut 1997). While the national discourse and the bulk of security funding continued to be focused on financing the struggle with non-state armed actors in territorial battles across the country, urban crime increased. Another guerrilla group, M19, installed “urban camps,” thereby making cities a key site for the development of the national conflict. Medellín, the second largest city in the country, became known as the most dangerous city in the world with its astounding murder rates and the establishment of formal hierarchies of *sicarios*, or hit men, by the Medellín cartel. Around the same time, members of the FARC and ELN formed urban militias in cities across the country (Pécaut 1997). At this point, however, the national discussion around urban criminality remained focused on the main actors in the conflict: drug cartels, guerrilla groups, and other forms of organized crime. The structural issues of poverty and exclusion that paved the way for high levels of violence went largely unaddressed, even as these made possible the merging of politically-motivated violent actors with those whose operations involved primarily economic crime (Pécaut 1997, Winton 2004).

In the early 2000s, the coalition of paramilitary groups called the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) that formed in 1997 (Gutiérrez Sanín 2008) adopted a new strategy for their operations that was designed to increase their presence in urban areas. Citing rare guerrilla attacks on cities as their rationale, AUC groups moved into the urban peripheries, establishing their territory in marginalized neighborhoods where their activities would go largely unchallenged by local officials. Targeting members of existing urban gangs, the paramilitaries began to use isolated areas for recruitment and training, as well as occasional confrontations with the FARC (Ambrus 2002). After a long negotiation process between 2003 and 2006 between the national government and 37 different groups, the paramilitaries officially demobilized, leaving roughly 31,000 young men trained in the use of force and without a source of income throughout the country (CIA 2010, Human Rights Watch 2010).

Following the demobilization process, there emerged a new set of criminal organizations made up of a variety of actors, including former paramilitaries; ex-police officers and military personnel; and members of youth gangs. According to the Police, former paramilitaries lead almost all of these new criminal groups on the local level, some of which continue to have connections with State security forces (El Tiempo 2011). While their tactics are similar to those used by the AUC, there are also differences; it appears that they operate independently without coordination by a national coalition and they are less organized around the fight against guerilla insurgents than the paramilitaries were. However, they continue to target human rights advocates, union leaders, journalists, and victims of crimes carried out by paramilitaries that seek justice through formal State institutions (Human Rights Watch 2010). The emergence of these *bandas criminales* or criminal gangs, called *bacrim* for short, has drawn significant media attention to the widespread insecurity in marginal urban areas and has been highlighted not only by city officials aiming to curb the violence under their purview but also by national security experts (El Tiempo 2011).

Responses to urban violence and insecurity in Colombia

Despite the severe insecurity faced by residents in urban areas, the intensity of the conflict in rural areas has generally won the attention of academics, development professionals and policy makers interested in reducing the extraordinary levels of violence in Colombia. Until recently, the focus had remained mostly on counteracting or limiting the operations of non-state armed actors on the national scale, with few programs being directed at urban populations with the express purpose of violence prevention. Instead, largely heavy-handed policies have been developed, with the national government pursuing direct military actions against the various leftist armed groups, particularly the FARC, in rural battles across the country and sometimes in coordination with the paramilitaries (Ramírez 2010). This emphasis on how non-state armed actors operate, recruit members, and secure financing has outweighed the analysis of the many larger forces, such as poverty,

exclusion, and the lack of state presence, that contribute support to the activities of illegal groups. In this sense, the role that urban areas play in the persistence of violence has been overlooked in the analysis of the conflict.

While more recent initiatives include an emphasis on cities, particularly in light of the waning influence of the FARC throughout the country, these efforts still appear to be largely based on a traditional view of conflict that continues to obscure the structural determinants of violence and promote confrontation as a way of punishing those responsible for urban crime. For example, in 2010, the national police went through a process of redistribution to add capacity to police forces in cities in an effort to bolster their presence in insecure urban areas (Semana 2010). Indeed, improving state security infrastructure in unstable areas likely represents an important step toward the institutionalization of security provision in those neighborhoods. However, it also contributes to a disturbing trend toward the increased militarization of public spaces in Colombian cities. Through the establishment of military and police bases near schools, health services, social organizations, and other civic institutions, every aspect of life becomes saturated by the use of force as a way to create social order, and violent actions gain legitimacy among the population (CID 2010).⁴

In view of these trends, those who study insecurity in Colombia are searching for new responses to the vast institutional and societal failures that have produced the conditions for the proliferation of violence in cities. Short of a complete overhaul of dominant economic and social systems, however, opportunities to address structural inequalities are scarce. In this context, short- and medium-term responses that allow citizens to mitigate the instability and move forward with their daily lives are urgently needed. Diane Davis (2007) suggests that scholars and practitioners look to the transformations that citizens and institutions

4 As Theidon (2009, 23) notes, militarized expressions of the dominant masculinity such as carrying a weapon and “strutting around like a “big man,”” become key behaviors for young and adult men to establish themselves as ‘real men’ and traits that women actively seek out in their partners, which reinforces the militarization of society.

undergo in the face of urban violence in order to identify opportunities for sustainable change. The various ways in which residents adapt to insecurity in their neighborhoods can serve to challenge the proliferation of violence as a means of establishing social and territorial control. By identifying the ‘practices of security,’ to adapt a term from Susana Rotker (2002, 13), “that redefine relationships with power, fellow citizens, and space” in a constructive way, we may be able to make recommendations on the types of existing behaviors and activities that policies and programs could support in order to expand possibilities for improved security and equitable development in the urban periphery.

Summary of Following Chapters

In the rest of this thesis, I will examine the dynamics of violence and insecurity in greater Bogotá, capital city of Colombia, focusing on the southwestern municipality of Soacha. Chapter 2 is dedicated to teasing out the economic policies, urbanization trends, and other historic forces that have shaped the urban landscape of Bogotá, making its outskirts an apt site for the proliferation of violence. In Chapter 3, I will present the findings of a study conducted to understand Soacha residents’ experiences with violence and insecurity and the implications of these for social, spatial, and economic mobility. In Chapter 4, I will analyze the ways in which residents have adapted to their insecure surroundings in an effort to protect themselves and improve their livelihood options, and how these adaptations support or restrict civic engagement, economic growth, and the use of public space in the municipality. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings and makes recommendations for policymakers and planners interested in curbing the violence in Soacha and other insecure cities in Colombia and across Latin America.

CHAPTER 2

Bogotá and Soacha in Regional and Historical Perspective

“ Living here is like being so close yet so far. You’re limited in all possibilities, totally excluded. Being from here is the worst; you have no options. ”

- Carolina, Resident of Comuna 1, June 17, 2010

As mentioned in the first chapter, the scale and patterns of urban violence and insecurity in a given city are deeply rooted in the economic, social, cultural, and political trends that shape the urban landscape. As such, this chapter focuses on the development of the greater Bogotá area from a historical and spatial perspective, emphasizing how the conditions in Colombian cities are similar to and differ from other Latin American population centers.



Figure 1. Regional Map of Colombia.

Specific economic and social trends are incorporated as they relate to the creation of structural conditions that favor the spread of violence in and around the city. As the reader will see, historical trends toward massive urbanization and policies that promote inequality and exclusion have resulted in the concentration of popular classes on the outskirts of the capital area. These patterns have resulted in a widespread sense of fragmentation within the metropolitan area and severe spatial segregation, both of which

have paved the way for the proliferation of violence in peripheral areas.

Bogotá is one of the most unequal cities in the world (UN-HABITAT 2008).⁵ United Nations studies show that urban inequality in Colombia continues to increase, and nowhere is this more evident than in the Municipality of Soacha, which abuts the southwestern border of Bogotá. Mistakenly considered a neighborhood of Bogotá by many inhabitants of the capital proper, Soacha is a separate city that forms part of the department of Cundinamarca.⁶ Due to its strategic location at the entrance to the capital and a series of policies and programs on the national level, Soacha has experienced astounding growth levels in recent decades. In fact, municipal documents suggest that the population of Soacha is currently growing faster than any in other municipality in all of Latin America (Municipality 2010). This is partially due to its role as a receptor of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); it receives the highest number of displaced families in the greater Bogotá area and is one of the most important settlements of IDPs in the country (CENTRAP 2010, CID 2010, DANE 2009). About half of the population is said to live in poverty (CENTRAP 2010).⁷ Similarly, roughly 50% of the settlements in the city are considered to be illegal, that is, without formal property title and with minimal service coverage (CID 2010). Another 30% of the housing, much of which is self-constructed, is at high environmental risk, due to construction practices and the geographic and topographic conditions in outlying areas (CID 2010, Guerrero 2006).

Due to its location at the entry of Bogotá from the South, Soacha is a strategic location for economic development and industrial activities (CENTRAP 2008). However,

5 Recent research from the World Bank suggests that Colombia is the most unequal country in the world, as “incomes of the top fifth [of the population] are nearly 25 times those of the bottom fifth” (Economist 2011).

6 Although Soacha is the name of a province and municipality within the department of Cundinamarca, in this thesis, I will refer only to the “casco urbano,” or urban area of the municipality of Soacha, which is widely called the *city* of Soacha. Refer to Appendix 2 for a map of the entire municipality.

7 Other sources list much higher poverty rates; there is a variety of ways to measure this statistic, which may explain the variation.

its location also means that Soacha is an ideal location for the operation of armed groups. The hilly neighborhoods of the city act as an important corridor for drug trafficking into Bogotá (UN OCHA 2010). The Soachan *altos*, or hilltop slums, that abut some of the poorest Bogotá neighborhoods have been the stage for confrontations between violent non-state actors such as former paramilitary groups, youth gangs, and guerrilla militias, as well as the forced disappearance of civilians by the Colombian military.⁸ This has resulted in extraordinary violence in the city. The homicide rate in Soacha reached 47.08 in 2003 and has remained high throughout the decade, representing the highest rate in the Department of Cundinamarca by far (FEDES 2008).⁹ The occurrence of sexual violence in Soacha is also the highest in Cundinamarca (CID 2010). In addition to these problematic statistics, sensationalist media accounts of the rampant violence have served to reinforce the serious stigma attached to living in these areas.¹⁰

Despite its current disorder, Soacha is a city with a rich cultural history. It is located on the flatter part of the high plain of Bogotá, where a large lake existed until virtually drying out 30,000 years ago. Archaeologists have identified artifacts of human settlements in Soacha dating back 12,500 years to a group of nomadic hunters (Municipality 2008). Its name, originally Suacha, is derived from *chibcha*, the extinct language of the *muisca* people who inhabited the area around and including Soacha for 2500 years before the arrival of Spanish colonizers. The *muisca*s, an agricultural tribe, were known for their culture rich in legends and myths, many of which appeared on ceramics and rocks and were captured in the names they gave to places. 'Sua' refers to the sun, and 'cha' means

8 At the end of 2008, a political controversy emerged when young men who had disappeared from their homes in Soacha were found murdered in rural areas of the country. It was later found that due to perverse incentives created within the military to promote the defeat of the FARC, soldiers had abducted and killed these youth, dressed them in guerrilla-like clothing, and presented the bodies to commanding officers in exchange for a reward. Further investigation showed that the practice was, in fact, widespread; as many as 1400 people, from a variety of provinces, had been killed in this way (El País 2009, OHCHR-Colombia 2011).

9 The homicide rate in Soacha is 65% higher than the municipality with the second most murders in Cundinamarca (FEDES 2008).

10 See: Especiales Pirry: Altos de Cazucá, 2009. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h53yOoEtXhg>

man; Suacha, then, was the City of the Sun Man (Municipality 2008, Municipality 2010). The city acquired its current name in 1558, when the *Real Audiencia* of Bogotá, or the entity representing the Spanish monarchy that oversaw most of modern Colombia, granted the areas of Soacha, Bosa, and Tena to Pedro de Colmenares, one of the first Regents of Bogotá (Municipality 2008). A current resident of Soacha who studies the *muisca* tradition suggested that ‘soa,’ which replaced ‘sua’ in the city’s name after it was colonized, means violence, which makes Soacha the ‘City of Violent Man’ in *chibcha*.

Urban growth in greater Bogotá in historical context

In order to better understand the specific manifestations of violence and insecurity in Soacha, it is helpful to review the historic economic, social, political, and spatial policies that have influenced urban development in and around Bogotá. In the 16th century, the Spanish utilized a decidedly urban strategy of colonization in Colombia and the rest of Latin America. Authority was centered in cities, which were founded in locations with dense local populations such as the *muisca*s around Bogotá that acted as cheap labor for the export-oriented colonial economies. Cities in the Andes Mountains served colonial purposes well, as they were easily defensible from a military point of view (Hay 1977, Portes 1977). The spatial distribution of urban populations within cities paralleled the colonial administrative structure. Development focused on a central square, where Spanish authorities worked and lived, and grew outward, with distance from the central square being inversely related to social, political, and economic status. Colonial leaders controlled nearby hinterlands by granting tracts of land outside the city to Spanish colonizers who then solidified colonial influence by exercising control over the populations living there (Portes 1977). This urban-focused strategy based on the centralization of authority and resources had the effect of radically restructuring rural (as well as urban) social relations, and this paved the path for high levels of urbanization in the region (Roberts 1989).

This pattern of settlement remained largely unchallenged through the 19th and 20th centuries. Other European powers increased their investments in the newly independent and

resource-rich nations of Latin America in the early 19th century. Investors channeled export production and profits through urban centers, which further cemented the concentration of resources within cities (Gilbert 1990). In this context, rural migrants began to move to the cities to seek out employment opportunities in urban centers, particularly in the absence of any meaningful land reform processes in rural areas (Gilbert 1990, Hay 1977). This trend continued, and between the 1930s and 1970s, city-focused industrialization policies on the national scale reinforced further urbanization. Import-substituting industries were located around major cities, which again attracted rural migrants in search of employment. As groups migrated to cities to participate in this industrial growth, employment opportunities proved to be largely insufficient when compared to demand. Residents who did not find



Figure 2. Map of Soacha, 1627.

Source: Secretariat of Planning and Land Use, Municipality of Soacha.

work in the modern industrial sector turned to informal industrial and service work, creating a large, unprotected informal working class (Portes and Roberts 2005).

Within Bogotá, the social and spatial composition of the city shifted along with these economic shifts on the national level. The waves of migration into the city caused local elites to move to advantageous locations to the north of the city beginning in the first decades of the 20th century. In these less developed areas, they could escape the crowding of the urban center and enjoy more space and larger houses, but still have access to the economic and cultural activities of the central business district (Portes 1977). With limited housing stock and a continual upward pressure on housing prices due to the rapidly increasing demand from migrants, living in the center of the city became prohibitively expensive for the poor. As a result, members of the popular class settled largely in areas located to the south of the city center (Portes 1977, Portes and Roberts 2005). As Portes writes, “[f]rom a simple cephalic pattern of successive concentric circles, Bogotá was transformed into a sharp physical dichotomy: the rich and powerful in the north, the poor and powerless in the south, and a feeble middle class of employees and small merchants occupying the center” (Portes 1977, 69).

Social status, as derived from physical location, was transformed in response to this new spatial configuration, and the distribution of infrastructure and services followed suit. Utility companies granted preferential access to the wealthy and politically connected inhabitants of northern suburbs (Gilbert 1990). Inhabitants of southern neighborhoods and growing cities to the south of Bogotá like Soacha struggled to access public goods. While access to the south was certainly not impossible, as the first railroad was installed to connect the city center to neighborhoods and cities in the south in 1898, and a highway was constructed in 1924 (Department 2010), this would be drastically insufficient to respond to the rapid growth that was beginning to occur in the area. Similarly, in the post-war period, Alan Gilbert (1990) shows that in Bogotá, new city agencies emerged to respond to demands from the urban populace to provide services such as water, electricity,

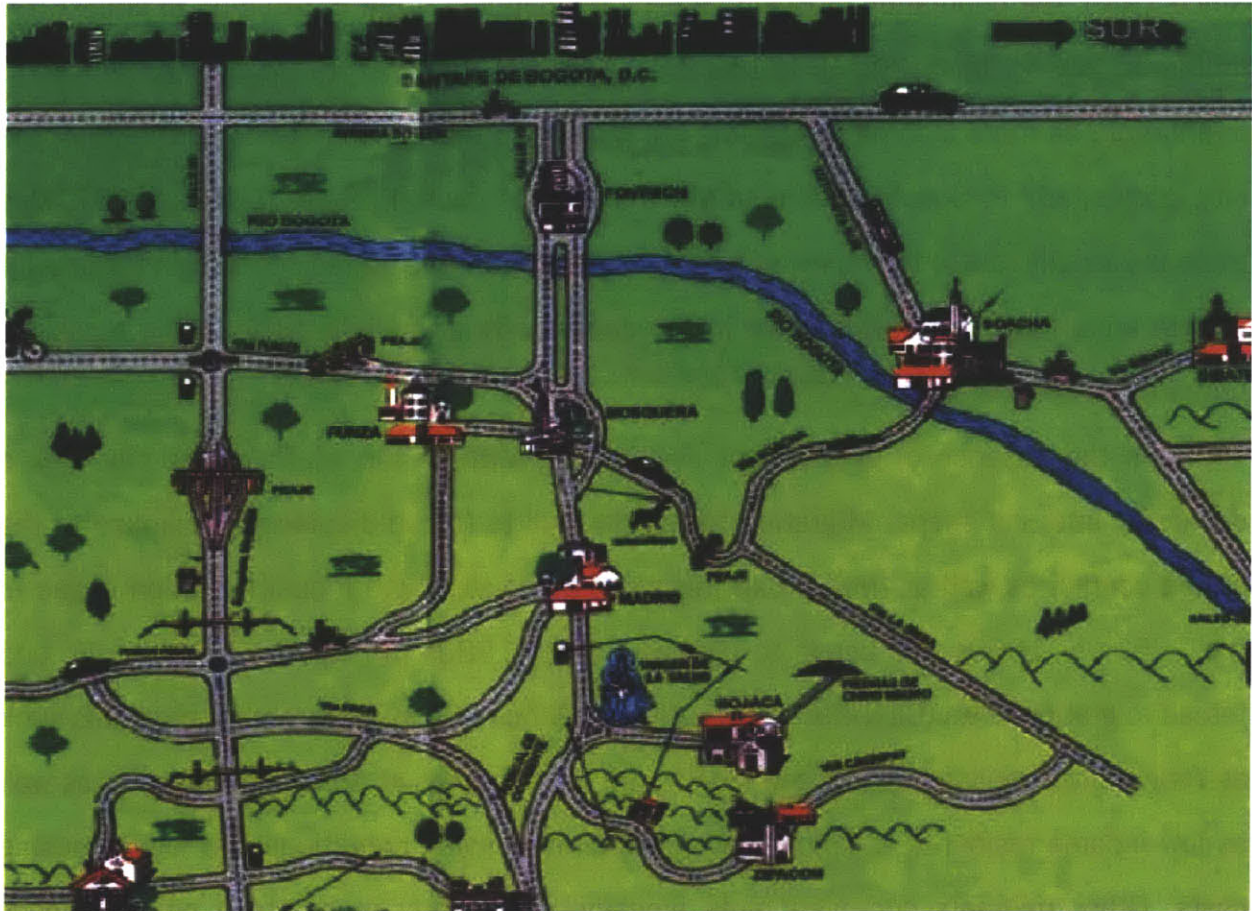


Figure 3. Map of Soacha, 20th century.

In this map, the transport infrastructure to the southwest of the city of Bogotá (located at the top of the map) is clear, as is the limited level of industrial development in the area before massive migration to the metropolitan area. Source: Secretariat of Planning and Land Use, Municipality of Soacha.

and telephones. However, he writes that these agencies did not emerge in “functional areas less critical to capital accumulation” (Gilbert 1990, 99) and that “poor residential areas benefited only partially from the new services” (Gilbert 1990, 91). The topography of peripheral neighborhoods also presented serious technical and financial challenges to the extension of services to hilltop areas. As rapid growth began to fill in the gap between poor areas and the neighboring municipalities to the south and southwest of the city, their exclusion from formal services and infrastructure effectively institutionalized the pattern of segregation that was established in colonial times.

Population growth further exacerbated both fragmentation within the city as well as the pressure on city officials to provide services and infrastructure to peripheral areas.

Since 1985, the population of Bogotá has nearly doubled, from 4.2 million to almost 8.4 million in 2005 (DANE 2007). In this time, however, migration to Bogotá has shifted in orientation, as more incoming migrants are moving to the municipalities surrounding the city, particularly to Soacha in the south, than to the capital proper (DANE 2009). This trend is partially due to the inflow of forced migrants from the armed conflict; in the greater Bogotá area, many IDPs who arrive in the capital city ultimately settle in the outskirts, primarily in Soacha (DANE 2009).

In the absence of government oversight, growth in the south of the city took a decidedly informal shape. Migration to Soacha due to forced displacement linked to the armed conflict as well as rural-urban migration associated with industrialization began in the 1950s or 1960s and began to increase in the 1980s in response to economic and forced migration flows (CENTRAP 2008, Pinzón Ochoa 2007). Government programs such as *Provienda* provided subsidized land in the central areas of Soacha to migrants as well as low-income residents of Bogotá seeking improved living conditions and lower housing costs. Other migrants occupied plots illegally, particularly in the hilly neighborhoods where public services were largely nonexistent and there was a lower chance of being evicted. Still, police showdowns were common, as officers were known to burn down the shacks constructed by residents in order to prevent further invasion (Pinzón Ochoa 2007). Although much of the insecurity surrounding land tenure has been resolved and public services have been extended to most areas, negotiations between the city government and illegal neighborhoods around issues of regularization and service provision continue to this day (FEDES 2008).

With the onset of neoliberal economic policies in the 1980s, unemployment, poverty, and income disparities grew across Latin America at the same time that urban growth skyrocketed in greater Bogotá. The percentage of people living in poverty in the region increased from 35% in 1980 to 41% in 1990, before decreasing again to 36% in 1997, which is still above its 1980 level (Molyneux 2002). In Colombia, this trend was even more acute, with

poverty steadily increasing over the past decades. In 1980, 42.3% of the national population (39.7% of urban residents and 47.7% of rural citizens), lived in poverty and by 1994, these numbers increased to 52.5% of the national population, 45.4% of urban residents, and 62.4% of rural residents (ECLAC 2010). By the end of the 20th century, cities all over Latin America cemented their transition to a service-oriented economy, pursuing heavy deregulation and liberalization policies that facilitate foreign trade, reductions in public spending, and restructured social programs that destabilized existing assistance to the poor (Portes and Roberts 2005). Whereas a number of governments in the region have followed national and regional currents by moving policy toward more pro-poor outcomes in the 21st century, the Colombian government has continued to focus on attracting foreign direct investment and boosting trade (CIA 2010), thereby fortifying existing social, economic, and spatial divisions.

What has resulted, then, is the concentration of poor, disenfranchised residents, many of who have been involved in or affected by the various cycles of violence that the country has faced, in informal settlements in the peripheral, hilly areas to the south and southwest of the city.¹¹ As residents deal with their daily struggles to make a living and protect themselves and their families from rampant violence, the population of Soacha continues to spiral out of control. While the national statistics office, DANE, puts the number of inhabitants at under 400,000, the municipal government of Soacha claims that the population exceeds 700,000, and NGOs suggest that both estimates are conservative (CID 2010). In addition to migration trends, natural population growth has increased in Soacha as a proportion of the department-wide statistics. In 1998, the number of births there represented 5.5% of the births in Cundinamarca; by 2008, this figure had risen to 11.6% (DANE 2011). As a result, it is clear that not only is the urban population growing in greater Bogotá, but the growth appears to be concentrated in marginal

11 See Appendix 2 for a map of the location of these settlements in Bogotá.

By no means does poverty only affect the population to the south of the city. In describing the spatial history of Bogotá in broad strokes, I have focused on the most significant concentration of residents living in poverty within the greater metropolitan area; this is not a comprehensive analysis of low-income settlements in Bogotá. Furthermore, labeling these areas as low-income is a response to average income rates, and is done so to simplify the story, not disregard the diversity of experiences within each area of the city.

neighborhoods to the south of the city and in municipalities like Soacha, where unequal patterns of development are particularly evident. As pressures on municipal capacity will persist in the context of rapid population growth, there is no end in sight to the humanitarian crisis that citizens currently face. In this context, the dynamics of poverty, violence, and exclusion make the ways in which residents experience violence, and the structural issues associated with it, critical areas of ongoing study for urban planners and policymakers.



Figure 4. Satellite image of the border between Bogotá and Soacha, 2011.
Source: Google Earth.

CHAPTER 3

Resident Experiences with Violence and Insecurity in Soacha

“For me, various actors enter into the security question: armed actors, common crime, and also husbands, the violence that one sees inside houses. We can say that here in the municipality there are those three. The violence is not because of the [national] armed conflict, but because of the presence of armed groups, in Altos de Cazucá, in the different *comunas*. The whole thing about security on the streets, one can be attacked, raped, sexually abused, and then also there is domestic abuse... Living in a circle of so much violence does not allow us to empower ourselves, it does not allow us to make decisions, and it does not allow us to advance.”

– Carolina, Resident of Comuna 1, June 17, 2010

As this quote from resident Carolina illustrates, violence and insecurity permeate the various spaces of individual and community life in Soacha, with severe consequences for the urban landscape and quality of life of its residents. In an effort to understand the ways in which this context of violence affects the various groups who live in the city and how people cope with the diverse threats they face, I implemented a study with Soachan residents in the summer of 2010 and early 2011. The study involved a combination of participant observation, individual interviews, focus groups, and cognitive mapping with local women leaders and members of community organizations throughout the city. The study was designed to answer a set of questions about the dynamics of violence and adaptation from the perspective of those who live with it on a daily basis. Specifically, what are the various types of threats that residents experience? How do they adapt to insecurity in their daily lives? How do the threats faced and adaptation strategies chosen differ across gender and age groups, as well as across the six *comunas*, the major administrative division of the city? Finally, how do insecurity and strategies to counter it shape the spaces critical to individual and community life in Soacha and affect opportunities for growth and progress? What follows is an account of the results of this study; for more information on the methodology used, see Appendix 1.

Current Security Panorama

In a meeting with women leaders in June of 2010, a member of the Consortium of Women's Organizations of Soacha and legal representative of another community-based organization, Paula, broke down the situation in Soacha in extremely clear language. "What happens," she explained, "is that this is a city of survival. One has to fight it out, whatever it takes, to put food on the table." In her statement, Paula highlighted multiple things that deserve emphasis. First, she makes clear that there is a strong sense of societal conflict and contestation that pervades daily life in Soacha. Second, she suggests that this unstable and insecure dynamic is related to the harsh economic realities that residents face. Furthermore, this struggle for 'livelihood security,' or "the ability to access resources to ensure survival" (McIlwaine and Moser 2001), is primarily individual in character, or in other words, geared toward providing for one's own family. In this description of Soacha, Paula paints a picture of a city dominated by individuals struggling to secure their livelihoods using whatever means necessary, at times at the cost of community or individual wellbeing.

Despite being linked to the capital city of Bogotá through commercial and cultural exchange, migration flows, and social ties, Soacha is in many ways a *forgotten* 'survival city.' Whereas Bogotá represents the center of power, resources, and influence of the country, Soacha is a city on the periphery both geographically and in terms of resources and power. Although Altos de Cazucá, an especially dangerous area of Comuna 4, abuts the Bogotá slum of Ciudad Bolívar and shares many of the same challenges in terms of the presence of violent actors, displaced families impoverished by the conflict, and informal settlements at high risk of environmental catastrophe, there is a fundamental division between the two. The divide is not just administrative, though that is a critical component of current challenges to development in Soacha that will be addressed later in this thesis. There is a latent disregard for the population in Soacha, in popular and State discourse, which can be illustrated by a number of indicators, including the lack of research on and

statistical data for the city and the low level of awareness among residents of Bogotá of the realities of the poverty and violence next door.

This indifference manifests itself in the spatial reality of the city, as well. A major highway that connects Bogotá to western and southwestern cities like Cali runs through the center of the city, dividing the city literally in half: Comunas 4, 5, and 6, which include the hilltop slums, are separated from the center of town and Comunas 1, 2, and 3. In this sense, the spatial integrity of the city is defied by the movement of major industrial materials and products between the economic centers of the country on the one hand, and members of the Bogotá middle and high classes traveling to country houses on the other. The explosive population growth and concentration of poverty-ridden families in Soacha has generated some attention from national and departmental authorities, but generally

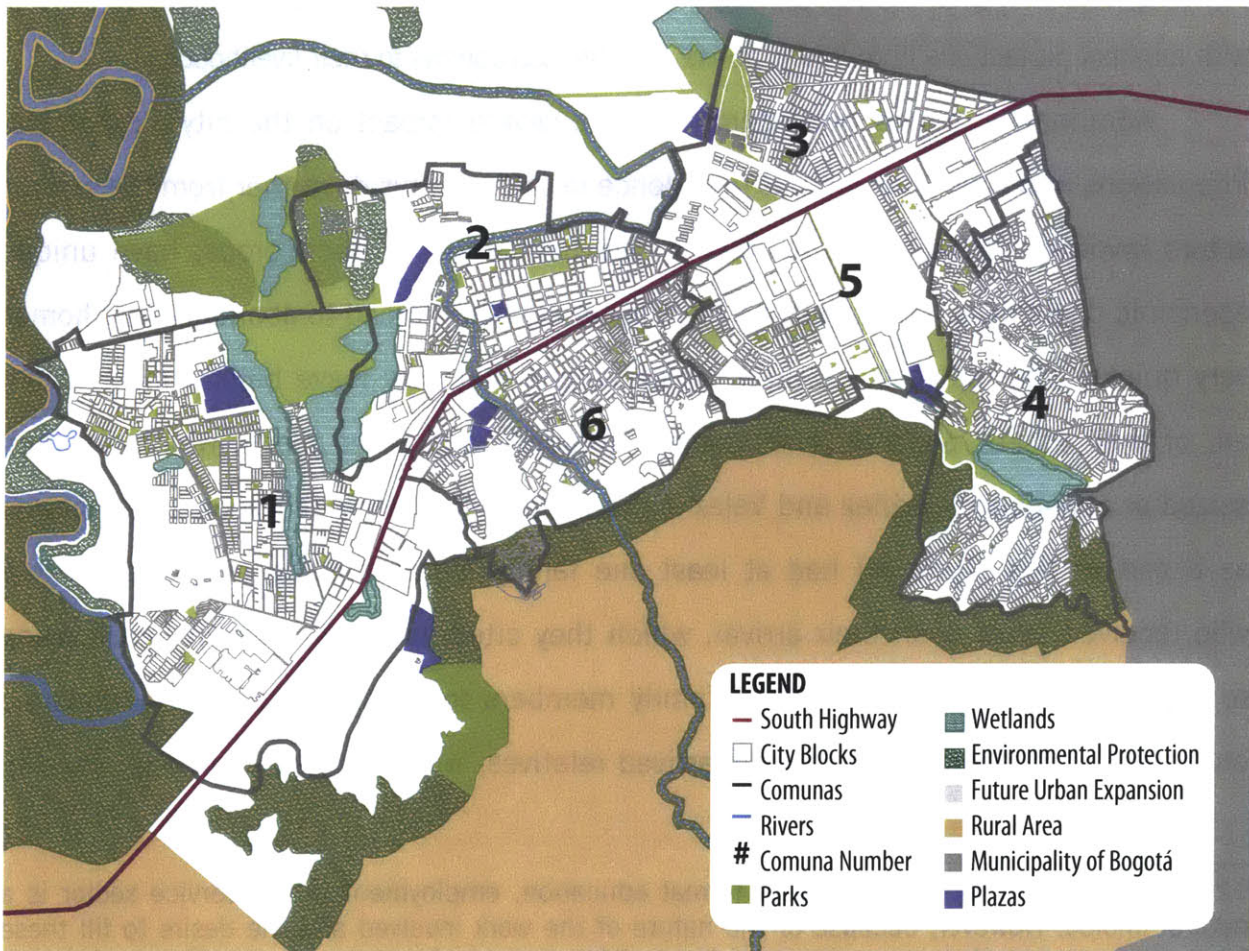


Figure 5. Map of Public Space in Soacha.
Adapted from: Secretariat of Planning and Land Use, Municipality of Soacha.

speaking, the resource-poor municipal administration, local organizations and NGOs have been the primary drivers of support to the population.

In this context, economic insecurity is one of the most notable and oft cited issues that residents face. Government statistics suggest that the majority of citizens in Soacha do not have formal jobs due to a variety of issues related to access, discrimination, and the availability of employment (FEDES 2008).¹² Informal types of income generation, then, have become a prominent way of making a living, despite the lack of protections that this involves. The trend toward informality is evidenced by pension statistics. According to a government census, only 14% of Soachan residents are affiliated with a pension fund. For women, who make up the majority of workers in the city, only 11% have a pension, whereas 18% of men do (FEDES 2008). The informal nature of employment in Soacha, which might provide some workers with more flexibility in their employment, frequently leaves residents without a steady source of income and with minimal protections from injury, abuse, or other disruptions to their livelihoods.

Additionally, forced displacement has a severe impact on the city's dynamics. Populations who have been victims of violence in the countryside, either from the various actors involved in the armed conflict or the fumigation of illicit crops, have unique economic challenges. The displaced have generally been forced to abandon their homes very quickly after being threatened, which means that they leave behind most, if not all, of their assets, such as land, homes, livestock, and other goods, which are then seized or abandoned (Ibáñez and Vélez 2008). Of the five displaced people interviewed as a part of this study, all had at least one family member living in greater Bogotá who received them upon their arrival, which they cited as a main reason for choosing to move to Soacha. However, these family members frequently face severe economic challenges in supporting their newly arrived relatives, who rarely stay for long, seeking

12 For residents with low levels of formal education, employment in the service sector is a natural choice. However, because of the nature of the work involved and the desire to fill these jobs with young people, men and women find it difficult to be hired once they reach a certain age. According to respondents in this study, this age is around 30 for women and 40 for men.

out other opportunities to earn a living. In terms of their economic livelihood, then, those who arrive in Soacha must reconstruct social and economic ties with a new group of friends and neighbors. As displaced people, however, they are sometimes perceived as criminals or somehow inherently violent, as a result of their past experiences, and are stigmatized. This presents obvious challenges to their efforts to establish ties in their new surroundings, and complicates their ability to make ends meet. Government statistics suggest that women head the majority of families that arrive in Soacha after being forcibly displaced,¹³ which makes more difficult the economic necessity of providing for children with only one parental income (FEDES 2008).

These conditions contribute to the overwhelming poverty, informality and fragmentation in Soacha that make it an apt environment for crime and violence. In the following pages, I delineate the manifestations of violence and insecurity that residents of Soacha expressed during the course of the study. Previous attempts by scholars to classify violent acts include those that focus on the nature of the attack, such as psychological or physical; the person or group affected by it; or the apparent rationale or motivation behind it, such as political violence (Guerrero and Concha-Eastman 2000). Utilizing this last scheme, classifying violence by its apparent motives, is particularly helpful in analyzing the aims of violent groups and individual aggressors on a broader societal level. In order to better understand the ways in which violence is experienced in Soacha, I have combined and adapted the classification systems presented in Moser (2004) and Concha-Eastman (2002) in order to arrive at a set of categories that makes sense for the specific context in the city, adding a spatial perspective to these schemes in order to bring attention to the implications that the various types of violence have for the city itself. The chart below summarizes these groupings.

13 The percentage of female-headed households in Soacha as a whole is also high compared to the national rate (FEDES 2008).

Classification of Violence in Soacha, Colombia by Motive, Type, Aggressor, and Urban Space			
MOTIVATION	TYPES OF VIOLENCE	AGGRESSORS	SPACES WHERE VIOLENCE OCCURS
Social or Interpersonal	Physical, sexual, verbal, psychological abuse or conflict	Intimate partners, relatives, friends, acquaintances, strangers	Public and private spaces: Within homes, schools, streets, parks, buses
Economic	Robbery, theft, mugging, assault, intimidation, murder	Youth gangs, delinquents, drug users, neighbors	Mostly public spaces: Street corners, parks, high schools, parking lots, buses, homes
Economic and Political	Murder, assault, death threats, kidnappings, forced displacement	Organized crime groups made up of paramilitaries, guerrillas, youth, soldiers, police	Public and private spaces, particularly in peripheral neighborhoods: Streets, homes
Institutional	Extra-judicial killings, official or unofficial sanctioning of violence, neglect in the extension of security infrastructure	Vigilante gangs, local and national government entities, military, police, judicial institutions	Public and private spaces and centers of political decision-making: specific neighborhoods, homes, streets, government agencies

Classifying violence in this way is done so in order to better understand the diversity of experiences with violence that individuals and communities face in Soacha, yet, it is clear that there is significant overlap between the categories. Any combination of motivations may cause individuals and groups to engage in violent acts; economic motives, for example, appear twice in the classification, as they are at the heart of both common and organized crime, which are sometimes difficult to disaggregate.¹⁴ By looking at how these various forms interact in a specific space, such as the neighborhood street, the complex relations between the types of violence emerge. Social violence, sometimes called ‘interpersonal,’ might at first appear to be limited to the domestic sphere, but may also extend onto the street in the form of violent conflict between individuals that could, in fact, have any

14 In this case, organized crime groups operating in Soacha do have political motives tied to the exercise of territorial control and efforts to maintain their power, but they also aim to secure economic gains by engaging in violent acts. Young criminals may also engage in economic crime to make money, but may less be interested in claiming territory.

number of economic and political motives and implications. Manifestations of violence associated with common economic crime, such as robbery, may also occur on the street, as might the violence of organized crime in the form of threats to passers by at nighttime. On the other hand, institutional violence crosses many of the spatial boundaries within the city; it is felt in homes by way of threats made to individuals and their families by vigilante groups, in specific neighborhoods through the extra-judicial killing of poor young men, and throughout the city in the form of systematic governmental neglect. Furthermore, institutional violence is at once social, economic, and political, as it restricts resident life in all of these areas. In sum, these categories are more fluid than a table can show, though they serve to illustrate the specific dynamics of the diverse forms of violence in Soacha.

Social or Interpersonal Violence

Residents and local NGOs also cite various forms of social or interpersonal violence as central to the daily experience of insecurity in Soacha. Interpersonal violence occurs between intimate partners, family members, acquaintances and strangers (Waters et al. 2004) and can include any type of verbal, physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, fights, or extreme arguments (Moser 2004). Most social violence is gender-based, or “linked to gendered power relations and constructions of masculinities” (Moser 2004, 4). The multiple forms of Violence Against Women (VAW) represent what are perhaps the clearest examples of this type of violence in Soacha. Violent acts occur both in public and private spaces, and take many forms, including psychological, physical, sexual, and verbal violence. During the course of the study, participants mentioned the occurrence of various forms of violence against women in public places. In the focus groups, women discussed being targeted on buses, catcalls, and cited other evidence of what they considered to be disrespectful and inappropriate behavior on behalf of unknown men. In their cognitive maps, two women indicated that on their average day, they encounter unsolicited sexual advances along their route, and are sometimes followed by men as they walk. Although none of the participants in the study mentioned being victims of serious crime in the

public sphere, they told numerous stories of female friends and neighbors who had been assaulted or raped. This trend is echoed in NGO and governmental reports; Soacha is said to have the highest rate of sexual violence in all of the Department of Cundinamarca (FEDES 2008, CID 2010). According to one such research report, the incidence of sexual violence is highest in Comuna 6, and the areas that represent the highest risk are dark streets with few to no people around and locations in close proximity to bars, high schools, parks, or corners where drugs are sold (González et al. 2008).

Interpersonal violence in the domestic sphere has also reached alarming rates. In a recent diagnostic study carried out by a Colombian NGO, the Center for Popular Support (CENTRAP), 62% of women in Soacha reported having experienced some kind of interpersonal abuse, their intimate partners perpetrated 55% of those cases, and 27% of these women continue to be victims of abuse on a daily basis. Like the other types of violence, interpersonal violence against women is unevenly distributed: 90% of women in Comuna 4 identified themselves as victims of domestic violence, whereas that number dropped to 35% in Comuna 5 (CENTRAP 2008). Women, however, are not the only victims. The elderly and children are also targeted, and crimes against them represented roughly 39% of cases of domestic violence in Soacha in 2009. Overall, the rate of domestic violence that same year was about 500 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, and this statistic most likely vastly underestimates the actual occurrence of this type of crime, which frequently goes unreported (Carreño Samaniego 2009). While the violence that occurs within homes is not always included in analyses of urban insecurity, its high incidence rate in Soacha has undeniable repercussions in society. It serves to cement the sense of constant fear in which citizens live and legitimizes the use of force to exercise power and resolve conflict, not to mention the severe physical and psychological harm that is done to victims and witnesses. The pervasive nature of social violence in Soacha, then, makes it one of the most common and destructive forms of violence in the city.

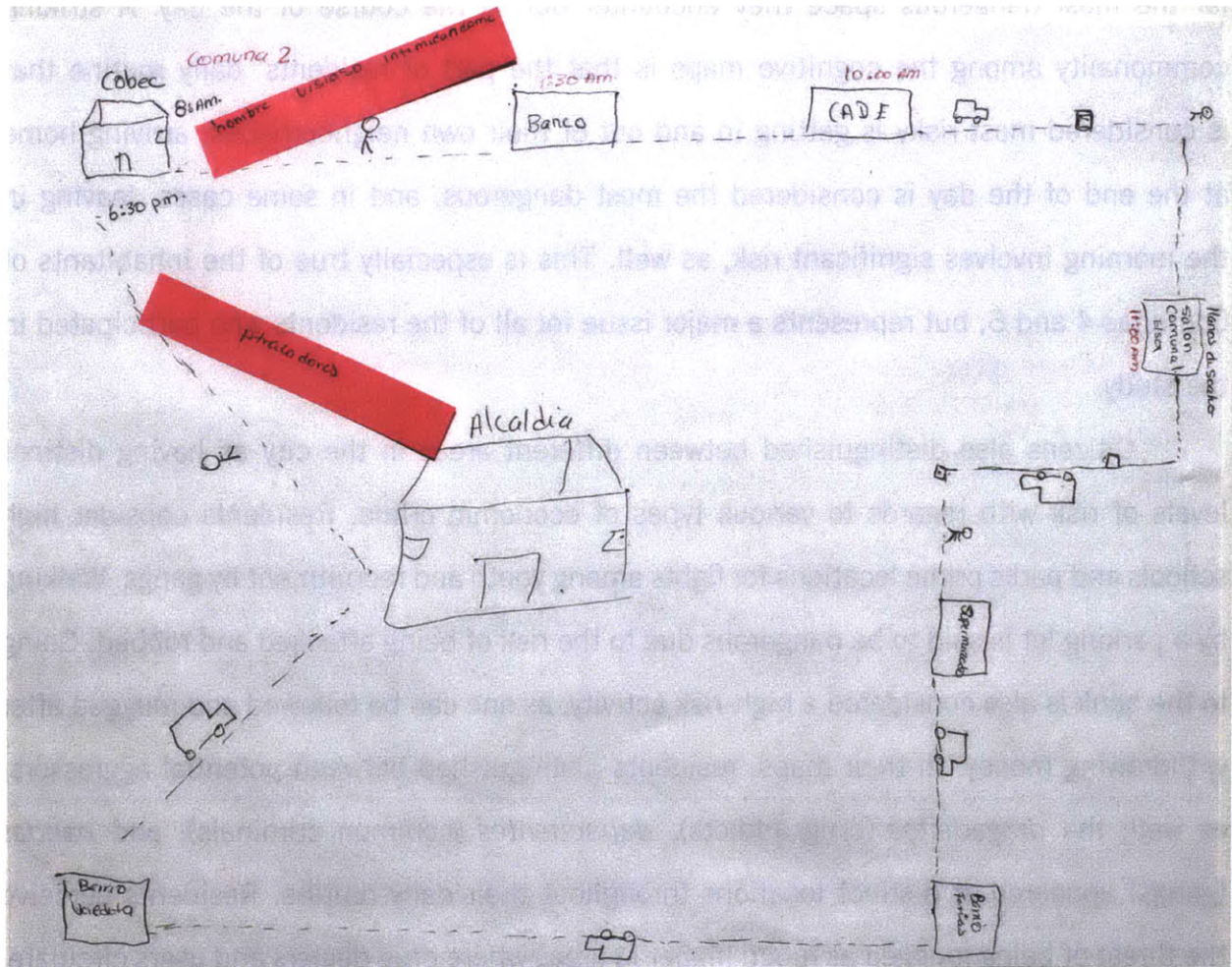


Figure 6. Cognitive Map produced by Comuna 2 Resident, Paula.

Her route includes threats from a “depraved man intimidating [her],” and muggers, both of which are located in her own neighborhood as she leaves the house on foot in the morning and walks home at night.

Economic Violence

Residents cite the risk of economic street crime as the most common in their daily routines. In all of the 21 cognitive maps that residents produced as part of this study, *atraco* and *robo* (mugging and robbery) appeared once, and in most cases, multiple times during the span of participants’ average day. NGO reports support this finding, as these types of economic crime are reported to be central to residents’ perceptions of risks in their neighborhoods and throughout the city (CENTRAP 2007). Every one of the people who participated in this study indicated that they encountered this type of risk most while moving around the city. While a few people mentioned being robbed in their homes, and others told stories of ongoing interpersonal violence within their homes, the street is by

far the most dangerous space they encounter during the course of the day. A striking commonality among the cognitive maps is that the part of residents' daily routine that is considered most risky is getting in and out of their own neighborhoods; arriving home at the end of the day is considered the most dangerous, and in some cases, leaving in the morning involves significant risk, as well. This is especially true of the inhabitants of Comunas 4 and 6, but represents a major issue for all of the residents who participated in the study.

Citizens also distinguished between different areas in the city as having distinct levels of risk with regards to various types of economic crime. Residents consider high schools and parks prime locations for fights among youth and recruitment by gangs. Walking by a parking lot is said to be dangerous due to the risk of being attacked and robbed. Going to the bank is also considered a high-risk activity, as one can be followed and mugged after withdrawing money. In their maps, residents distinguished between potential aggressors, as well; the *drogadictos* (drug addicts), *delincuentes* (common criminals), and *bandas* (gangs) appeared at distinct locations throughout their daily routine. Residents perceive the threat of being mugged as much higher in areas where drug dealers and users circulate, which is frequently around parks and in more isolated neighborhoods. In these cases, it does not appear that women or men are disproportionately targeted as victims of economic violence, but residents characterize the perpetrators almost exclusively as *jóvenes* (young men), who may or may not be affiliated with an illegal group.

While making money through robbery is the main aim of many gangs, they are also implicated in murders that are likely related to maintaining control of their territory in an effort to protect their source of income (FEDES 2008). While they express fear with regards to the presence of youth gangs, residents attribute their existence to the severe economic situation that the city faces. With few economic and educational opportunities, citizens argue, young men have little to no option but to participate in illegal activities. Particularly in the *altos*, many of them are displaced, which further limits their capacity to

find alternative sources of income. According to respondents in this study, recruitment to armed groups is a common threat for young men, especially in and around high schools. One participant in my study suggested that gang members force young men and even boys, to take drugs as a form of initiation, using the threat of killing their family members to force compliance. NGO reports suggest that those who resist or challenge the gang system in some way, whether it be through participation in social or cultural activities or a straightforward rejection of their proposals, may pay with their lives. FEDES (2008) suggests that in 2006, more than 100 young men between the ages of 14 and 22 were murdered in the *Altos de Cazucá* neighborhood alone, which reveals just how grim the panorama of options for young men is, particularly in more isolated neighborhoods. As Carolina, a former resident of Comuna 4, reports, “there is a young man, the son of my best friend who lives [in *Altos de Cazucá*]. He used to say, ‘I don’t want to grow up. Here, why grow up, if they are just going to kill you? Why be young at all? The opportunities are minimal.’”

Economic and Political Violence

In addition to the economic and social forms of violence that are most directly related to residents’ daily experiences with insecurity, the dynamics of the national conflict are felt in Soacha in the form of organized crime. While some guerrilla groups operate in the city, the series of new, paramilitary-led criminal organizations (*bacrim*) that emerged are responsible for most of the direct confrontations that occur between citizens and organized crime groups. These groups use tactics that are very similar to those of the AUC, that is, they “exercise territorial control through threats and extortion, they participate in narco trafficking and other illegal activities, and commit generalized abuses against civilians” (Human Rights Watch 2010, 5). The violence associated with the operations of organized armed groups appears to primarily affect young and adult men who are involved somehow in illegal activities, as well as families or individuals in peripheral neighborhoods who refuse to comply with practices of extortion. As a result, these groups are frequently

not seen by most residents in any direct sense, but instead are detected in the form of regular murders of young men, graffiti indicating their presence, and quiet discussions among neighbors. In their cognitive maps, residents rarely included armed actors beyond youth gangs and common criminals, presumably because interaction with these groups is not a daily occurrence. However, organized crime groups, especially the *bacrim* and other descendants of paramilitary organizations, were mentioned repeatedly in individual interviews and focus groups.

Efforts made by armed groups to protect their territories against outside threats often have broad ramifications for all kinds of residents. Those holding views that may potentially question the dominant system of power and territorial control are threatened, and sometimes killed, as is the case across the country. At least three of the fourteen women leaders who I interviewed have received a series of threats due to their involvement in social issues, even though the scale of their work is, in most cases, quite small, and its reach quite local. These women received written threats on their doorsteps, at their places of work, and even in their email inboxes, as well as verbal ones near their homes at night, in what they consider to be an effort to silence them and prevent them from continuing to work within their communities. Those threatened include leaders within the displaced population, advocates of women's rights as victims of violence, and allies of the Afro-Colombian community, among others, though the justification for the threat is frequently said to be an alleged cooperation with the FARC guerrillas. While these threats are normally aimed at individuals, it is clear that their family members are also at risk, as well as their coworkers if they are working within the context of a community organization. In some cases, people connected to the original targets are the first to see the threatening pamphlet as it arrives at their house or headquarters, which serves to further disseminate the terror used by armed groups to establish their control.

In one such case of continued threats against activists, Luz Marina, a member of the Mesa who works with female victims of violence, was threatened by members of an

organized crime group while coming home one night. She was arriving home from her job at a bakery at about 11:00 PM when a group of men wearing black hoods and carrying guns pulled her onto the bed of a pickup truck. After asking her what she knew about groups selling drugs in the neighborhood, they revealed an additional motive for picking her up. "They said that we were going to influence them, to spread ideas to women about things they shouldn't do," she recounts. The group then stated that if she continued to do social work with women, they would kill her. Luz Marina's story and the many like it indicate that despite the fact that they do not regularly interfere with residents' daily activities, the presence of organized, non-state armed actors is a critical element in the widespread sense of insecurity in Soacha. Most people are hesitant or even unwilling to discuss their presence, despite frequently being fully aware of the identity of the individuals who have threatened them. This "law of silence" that governs popular behavior prevents many people from speaking out against the atrocities that they witness, and instills a widespread sense of fear in residents. Without what could be conceived as an effective challenge to the control of non-state armed actors in the form of government security forces, armed groups maintain their control through the spread of fear. According to Daniel Pécaut (1997, 915), "[e]very collective expression is prohibited... The processes of violence do not accept the presence of "third parties." Those who have wanted to assume this role have been the first victims."

Allegiance or loyalty to a given group, whether actual or perceived, can act as a negative asset in this environment. Citizens who are associated with economic, social, or political activities that challenge or provide alternatives to the interests or discourse of organized crime groups are identified and suppressed, or in the worst case, eliminated. The power of this form of governance lies in the ability of these actors to actively discourage individuals and communities from taking on alliances or activities that may result in them being labeled a sympathizer of a rival group. For example, having a son in a gang, being related to a drug dealer, or collaborating with social organizations whose activities could

be seen as a threat to the dominant order become risks that citizens may be increasingly reluctant to take on. In this way, illegal armed groups guarantee their territorial control by eliminating potential threats to their authority within a given space. Their physical presence or the extension of death threats is not always necessary to enforce their will, which explains why they are able to maintain a high level of control without necessarily being a daily presence in residents' lives.

Institutional Violence

Residents cite the existence of social cleansing groups in a number of Soachan neighborhoods, which represents a vigilante approach to justice that is apparently supported by some sectors of society. These groups, reportedly made up of former paramilitaries and gang members, use social control tactics that resemble those of the AUC and *bacrim*, and are said to operate all over the country in marginal urban areas where historically poor populations reside along with Colombia's internally displaced (El País 2009, Ortigosa 2009). Going by names such as *Mano Negra* (Black Hand), these groups "clean" urban neighborhoods of their "criminals" in exchange for money. According to citizens' stories and news outlets, they distribute pamphlets that warn neighborhood residents of their impending arrival, recommending that inhabitants remain in their homes after a certain nighttime hour, the *toque de queda* or curfew, in order to avoid being the victims of violence. The groups then arrive as advertised, dressed in black from head to toe, and kill or critically injure those who are outside on the street at that hour, regardless of their reason for being there (Caracol 2005). These death squads claim to target individuals and groups who they consider to be delinquents, drug dealers or addicts, homeless persons, sex workers, or involved in some other type of illegal activity. Whereas in other major cities of Latin America, 'social cleansing' is generally associated with extrajudicial killings by police forces, it is important to note that in Colombia, a formal link to government entities has not been established.

The extent to which the State or other societal institutions directly or indirectly

sponsor any of these forms of violence, mainly those of organized crime, is debatable. Despite some clear examples of direct governmental abuses against civilians such as the *Falsos Positivos* scandal, whether and to what extent the State is responsible for violence in Soacha is hard to prove or deny. However, experts suggest that there is a link between formal and informal power systems; specifically, between paramilitary groups and the State on the national level, and between paramilitaries and death squads and the police locally (UN OCHA 2010).

The impression of State involvement in violence is reinforced within the community by anecdotal accounts, as one woman I interviewed recalled that in her neighborhood, policemen warned youth on her block that a social cleansing group would soon arrive, suggesting some extent of communication between State and non-State users of force. There is also the question of the financing of these groups; the same respondent commented that local governments paid social cleansing groups to come to her neighborhood to “clean up” the illegal actors that police could not be seen doing. News and NGO reports allege that some of the men involved in illegal armed groups in these neighborhoods might be former members of the police and military, which could explain why links exist between local security forces and illegal armed groups (CID 2010, El Tiempo 2011). The relationship between the paramilitaries and politicians, public officials, the police and the military on the national level has been the source of significant investigation and controversy in Colombia (Ramírez 2010). In Soacha, this link is highly problematic in terms of the potential to reduce existing levels of violence, and certainly calls into question traditional, heavy-handed responses to insecurity that involve an increase in military and police presence in an effort to reduce crime.

In addition to the alleged complicity of the State in the crimes committed by illegal armed actors, the neglect that the Colombian government has shown the residents of Soacha represents another form of violence. Generally speaking, respondents in this study cite an inability to rely on authorities to respond to their security-related demands. In one

focus group, the participants suggested that the police were very slow to respond to calls from citizens reporting crimes, if they showed up at all. One resident said that the response time of the police could be predicted by the location from which one was calling; in the center of the city, the police might arrive in five or ten minutes after receiving a call, but it would take hours for them to appear in other, unsafe neighborhoods. If a call originated from places like *La Loma*, a neighborhood located high in *Altos de Cazucá*, the residents were simply “on their own.”

Another struggle cited by the respondents is that government services are very hard to understand and access, and municipal employees are generally unresponsive to citizens seeking justice as victims of violence. Focusing on the high incidence of domestic violence, a study carried out by González et al. (2008, 4) showed similar results: “the authorities ignore the issue, for example, one might go to press charges [against the aggressor] and the response is to attempt to reconcile [the couple], while the victim is afraid for her life.” While a few respondents state that they have received protection from authorities against repeated acts of violence, most say that their attempts to get help have been ineffectual. Considering the low level at which crime is currently reported in Soacha due to the risk that it involves for the victim, the fact that citizens cannot be sure that the entities charged with protecting their rights will be responsive to their needs serves to further the widespread impunity that agents of violence enjoy.¹⁵

Geographic Variations

In broad strokes, Soacha is a ‘survival city’ in the sense that residents of all of the areas of the city struggle with insecurity on a daily basis. However, the history of formation

¹⁵ González et al (2008) report that only 32% of the women they interviewed reported the violence they had suffered to the authorities, and in the majority of those cases, they felt as though it did not help at all; in fact, they exposed themselves to the risk of further violence by angering their aggressors. Another NGO study (CENTRAP 2008) suggests that only 19% of women report cases of violence to the relevant entities. Of those women who do not report these violent acts, 56% cite family pressure or fear as their reasoning, 16% say that the process of reporting to authorities is too difficult, involved, or long of a process, 15% report not having enough information to know where to go, and 9% are too embarrassed to press charges.

of the various neighborhoods of Soacha has resulted in the consolidation of some of the older neighborhoods, creating a stronger institutional presence and neighborhood identity in some areas than others. Crime and violence, in a general sense, are more commonly associated with the newer *altos* than the traditional city center, and government and civil society statistics by and large support this claim. This is evident in the presence (or lack) of security infrastructure in different parts of the city. The center is seen as relatively safe, at least during the day, but the *altos* will always be entered only with caution, as certain areas are said to be the site of murders and rapes during all hours of the day (CENTRAP 2007).

In the *altos*, or the slum-like neighborhoods located in the hills of Comunas 4 and 6, the relative isolation produced by the natural topography and the history of informal settlement creates a particularly insecure environment for residents. The neglect shown to these areas by government officials in the form of a lack of public service provision and security infrastructure makes them an especially appropriate stage for armed groups. The non-state actors are now increasingly difficult to distinguish, as their links with national armed actors have weakened and their agendas and membership composition are increasingly determined on the local level (Human Rights Watch 2010). A critical part of the economy in these areas is the drug trade, as well as the sale of arms, as Soacha acts as a trafficking corridor due to its border with Bogotá (UN OCHA 2010). In these neighborhoods, drug dealers operate *ollas* out of storefronts or homes, selling a variety of drugs to neighborhood residents. They effectively function as centers for drug use and crime, which inhabitants see as intimately related phenomena. As the population in these areas is composed by the extremely poor and the displaced, residents are largely disenfranchised and have a high level of vulnerability in terms of livelihood security and social mobility.

Additionally, it is important to note that in the *altos*, a small number of residents mentioned environmental risks as detrimental to their sense of security in their

neighborhoods. These areas, settled mostly by invasion and composed almost entirely of self-constructed housing, are at a high risk of flooding and landslides, which are in fact quite common in these areas (Guerrero 2006). The same neighborhoods are also those with the least coverage in terms of public services, which makes their existence even more precarious. This instability in the physical conditions of their housing is reflected in the prospect of being evicted at any time. While some neighborhoods have been regularized through negotiations with municipal officials, others are still disputed, and the departmental authorities will not extend services to neighborhoods that may soon not exist. The relationship between the legality of land tenure and the overall sense of instability in these areas continues to lend credence to informal actors, who capitalize on the lack of government presence in the form of security forces or infrastructure to impose their will on the local population.

Implications for Soacha

Social Cohesion

Illegal armed groups that use the threat of violence to effectively keep people in line with the dominant, militarized agenda has resulted in a pervasive sense of fear in peripheral neighborhoods, especially among those whose work involves activism on behalf of these marginalized communities. The forceful implementation of the law of silence, as is the case in areas of both Colombia and peripheral urban areas all over the continent, is extremely destructive to the social fabric of the community. Residents are never certain as to others' allegiance and refrain from speaking about the severe insecurity that they face in an effort to protect themselves. Outsiders are hard pressed to acquire information about the conditions in the city, especially of marginal neighborhoods, and a general mistrust of anyone asking questions is common.

This dynamic is complicated by the role of governmental and non-governmental agencies in Soacha. As a result of the large number of internally displaced people who

make Soacha their home, aid money and programs have flooded the municipality, targeting forced migrants for special legal, psychosocial, and economic support. In this context, new series of divisions are formed and old stereotypes and prejudices are reinforced. Within the *Mesa de Organizaciones de Mujeres de Soacha*, a consortium of women's organizations in the city, discussions of whether to participate in the design of municipal policies aimed at providing support for displaced people were highly controversial, and resulted in internal divisions even within the small 10-person committee. According to some *raizales*, Soacha natives, preferential treatment toward forced migrants is unfair, as the conditions of poverty and violence in fact affect the entire population, who also face significant challenges in ensuring their livelihood.

This marked orientation toward the displaced on behalf of both Colombian and international aid agencies can be seen in the spatial distribution of aid throughout the municipality. As one respondent, Claudia, observed, “[i]n Comunas 4 and 6, sure, there is violence, but we have all of that in the other *comunas*, too. You should see what goes on right here, a couple of blocks from the center of town.” Regardless of whether the humanitarian situation in any given *comuna* is more severe than another, the perception that certain groups and neighborhoods receive more support than others has very negative impacts on the city as a unit. It has led to additional discrimination against those who reside in targeted areas, especially the displaced. Those who live with constant insecurity in *comunas* that do not receive much attention from government or civil society programs may feel even more helpless because authorities do not acknowledge their plight. In both cases, the perceived inequality in the distribution of services and programming contributes to the general sense of contestation and fragmentation within the city.

Urban Landscape

As residents' capacity to speak out about the violence they face is restricted both by threats from their aggressors and their lack of access to state institutions, impunity is the *de facto* rule. While in many cases the crimes that citizens suffer are not reported

to authorities, they are, nonetheless, “recognized by the community” (González et al. 2008, 2) and recorded in the collective and individual memory of residents. In this sense, violence becomes normalized not only by its frequent occurrence, but also by the fact that it goes unpunished. González et al. (2008, 4) write that “Soacha is organized in such a way that violence is part of the environment, its culture reinforces violence as something “natural.”” Daniel Pécaut (1997, 892) writes that in Colombia, “[v]iolence has become a mode of functioning in society, giving birth to diverse networks of influence over the population and unofficial regulations.” In this sense, the exercise of power is tied inextricably to the use of force, which impedes the development of alternative visions of social relations, leadership, and order.

The prevalence of violence changes not only the ways in which people interact with one another, but also how they relate to urban space (Rotker 2002). As streets, parks, high schools, and other places that serve as centers for public life are perceived to have the highest level of risk for residents, the democratic potential of these spaces is undermined by the ever-present risk of violence. When analyzed along with the sense of fear and fragmentation that influences social interaction, the effect of this dynamic is to make citizens turn inward, avoid risk, and focus on self-protection rather than engagement. This has spatial repercussions, as it limits the spaces in which people circulate and interact, and transforms the urban landscape. As César Fuentes Flores (2010, 42) writes on the situation in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, “violence impacts the city in three of its essential conditions: it reduces the duration of activities in the city (cities and urban sectors), it reduces the space (places where people cannot go) and it reduces the possibilities of citizenship (distrust, loss of a sense of collectivity). What that creates is a population that is afraid of the city and especially its public space” (author’s translation).

Mobility

In Soacha, violence has become the primary mechanism for maintaining social order, which has severely restrictive effects on individuals as well as communities. The

activities involved in simply going about their day put residents at risk, especially with regard to moving around within the city and traveling to and from Bogotá. This limited physical mobility parallels the restrictions that pervasive violence implies for citizens in the social, economic, and political realms. Their livelihood options are limited due to the high risk implied by economic interaction and the intense social stigma attached to being from Soacha. The social fabric of the city has been repeatedly strained by competition for limited resources and the continual fear and mistrust of one's neighbors. The types of demands that citizens might otherwise make on the State in the areas of security and public service provision have been noticeably dulled by the influence of armed actors who target those who speak out. In this context, the urban landscape is saturated with insecurity that limits the possibilities for citizens to move forward toward a more equitable future.

CHAPTER 4

Adaptations to Violence and Insecurity

“Here you have to have lots of strategies in order to survive.”

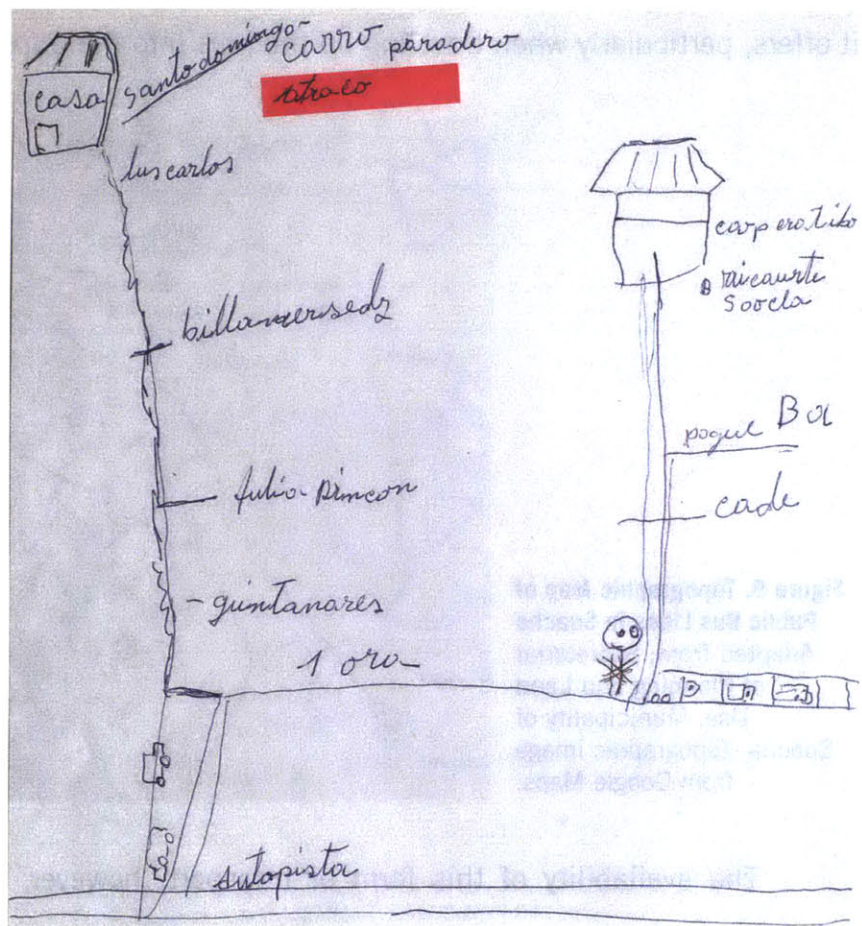
- Paula, Resident of Comuna 2, June 11, 2010

In response to rampant violence and insecurity, citizens adapt to their surroundings in diverse ways. These strategies or practices of security are related to both the types of threats they face as well as their unique positions in the urban ecosystem. Of the various actions that citizens take to survive and progress, some actively improve their mobility in a comprehensive sense, expanding the spaces to which residents and other members of their community have access. However, other strategies are detrimental to mobility in that they add to social fragmentation and further limit the ability of residents to interact across social, economic, cultural, spatial, and political lines. Understanding the diverse forms of violence and insecurity that people face and the strategies they employ to avoid these threats makes possible the analysis of how violence and insecurity shape the city, its neighborhoods, and residents.

In the same way that distinguishing between the various motivations that cause groups and individuals to participate in violent acts is a complex endeavor, determining the dominant motive for undertaking adaptive behavior is a challenging task. As many scholars have shown, the phenomena of poverty and inequality on the one hand, and violence on the other, are complex and interrelated. While a relationship between the two has been established in a number of studies across geographic lines, it remains unclear whether any causality can be determined, and more importantly for the purposes of this thesis, which of these issues is the more powerful determinant of citizen behavior in conditions of violence and insecurity. In some cases, it is difficult to establish with any certainty or

precision whether residents are more motivated to take on specific strategies in order to bolster their precarious economic situation or to avoid the threat of violence.¹⁶ However, it is clear that these two issues are intimately related and both contribute to the sense of fear and insecurity that pervade the city. As a result, the analysis of resident adaptations that follows will emphasize the ways in which economically-driven strategies take on different forms in this violent climate and how these actions interact with the prospects for economic growth, social integration, civic engagement, and security for individuals and communities in Soacha.

Figure 7. Cognitive map by resident of Comuna 4, Diana.
 This resident depicts her daily commute and the challenges it involves in arriving to other parts of Comuna 4. She lists the various neighborhoods that she has to traverse by bus, traveling all the way down to near the autopista (highway) that passes through the middle of the city and then back up the hill along another route in order to travel between her home and place of work, a trek that reportedly takes her a full hour. She notes various threats associated with vehicular traffic along these routes as well as muggings in her neighborhood, Santo Domingo, near a paradero (parking lot).



Self-protection: mobility-based adaptations

Alteration and limitation of transport patterns

As they move about the city, residents utilize alterations in their transportation

¹⁶ For more discussion of this topic, see “Limitations of the Study” in Appendix 1: Methodology.

patterns as a first line of defense in avoiding threats to their security. Almost all residents rely on public and private buses to travel to locations throughout the city, as it allows them to cover more ground as well as to avoid criminal groups operating on the streets. Despite a few accounts of violence in the form of robbery, intimidation, and verbal assault taking place there, buses are widely considered by respondents the safest mode of transport to which they have access. Buses take on additional importance within the daily routines of residents at nighttime, when the threat of being the victim of violence is more pronounced. Residents may take a bus to cover even a short distance because of the additional security it offers, particularly when traveling up the hills into the *altos* of Comunas 4 and 6.

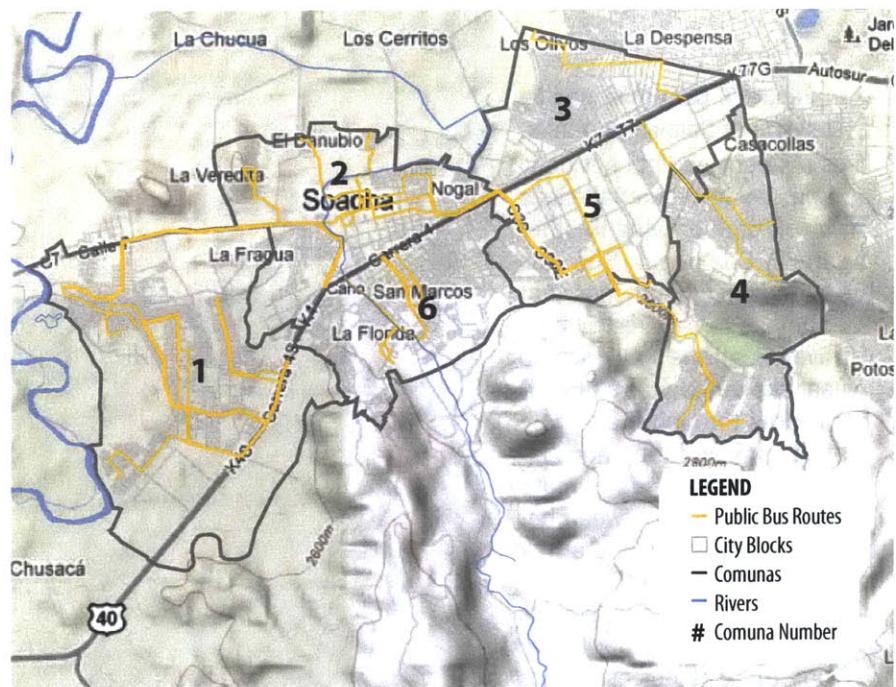


Figure 8. Topographic Map of Public Bus Lines in Soacha
Adapted from: Secretariat of Planning and Land Use, Municipality of Soacha. Topographic image from Google Maps.

The availability of this form of transport, however, is affected by a number of restraints. Public transportation routes do not extend into all of the hilly areas, and citizens are reliant upon smaller, privately operated vehicles to travel from their neighborhoods of residence to the center of the city and back again. Private bus operators use routes and pricing that are generally fixed and well known by neighborhood residents, but they may change or discontinue their service according to their own priorities rather than following

a fixed schedule. Multiple individuals who participated in the study mentioned being dropped off in what they considered to be high-risk areas late at night because their drivers decided not to complete the established route. As a result, although utilizing private and public transportation to travel both short and long distances is generally considered to be a low-risk way for residents to move around Soacha, it can also be relatively unreliable. This instability in access to safe transportation exposes residents to additional security challenges associated with walking through insecure areas.

Particularly in low-income areas and to move within neighborhoods, residents travel by foot, using a number of different practices to reduce their risk of being the victim of a crime. Some residents change their walking routes, crossing the street or using another route altogether to avoid risky groups or areas, such as corners known for delinquent activities. Those who cannot change their routes rely on other options. In a focus group with adult and elderly women, one participant from Comuna 4 suggested that she alters her schedule when traveling to neighborhoods that she associates with higher levels of violence and crime; specifically, she gets up earlier than other inhabitants in order to avoid the *raponeros*, or rappers, who congregate along the road. Another resident from Comuna 3 mentioned that she generally waits for a group to pass by along the route she intends to take and then follows them closely to appear to be part of their group, thereby reducing her risk of being targeted. Others simply walk faster, trying to get through questionable areas as quickly as possible. An adolescent male from Comuna 3, José, suggested that as his route to high school does not have alternatives, his best option is to simply keep his eyes open and be on the lookout for potential threats, mostly in parks and on street corners. In the cognitive map below, José illustrates the locations he associates with a higher risk of violence and his security strategy for each.

Not only is getting around by foot considered risky in terms of individuals' safety in that it exposes them to potential robberies, assaults, or sexual violence, but residents also have concerns about the level of traffic in Soacha. Vehicular traffic was seen as a major risk

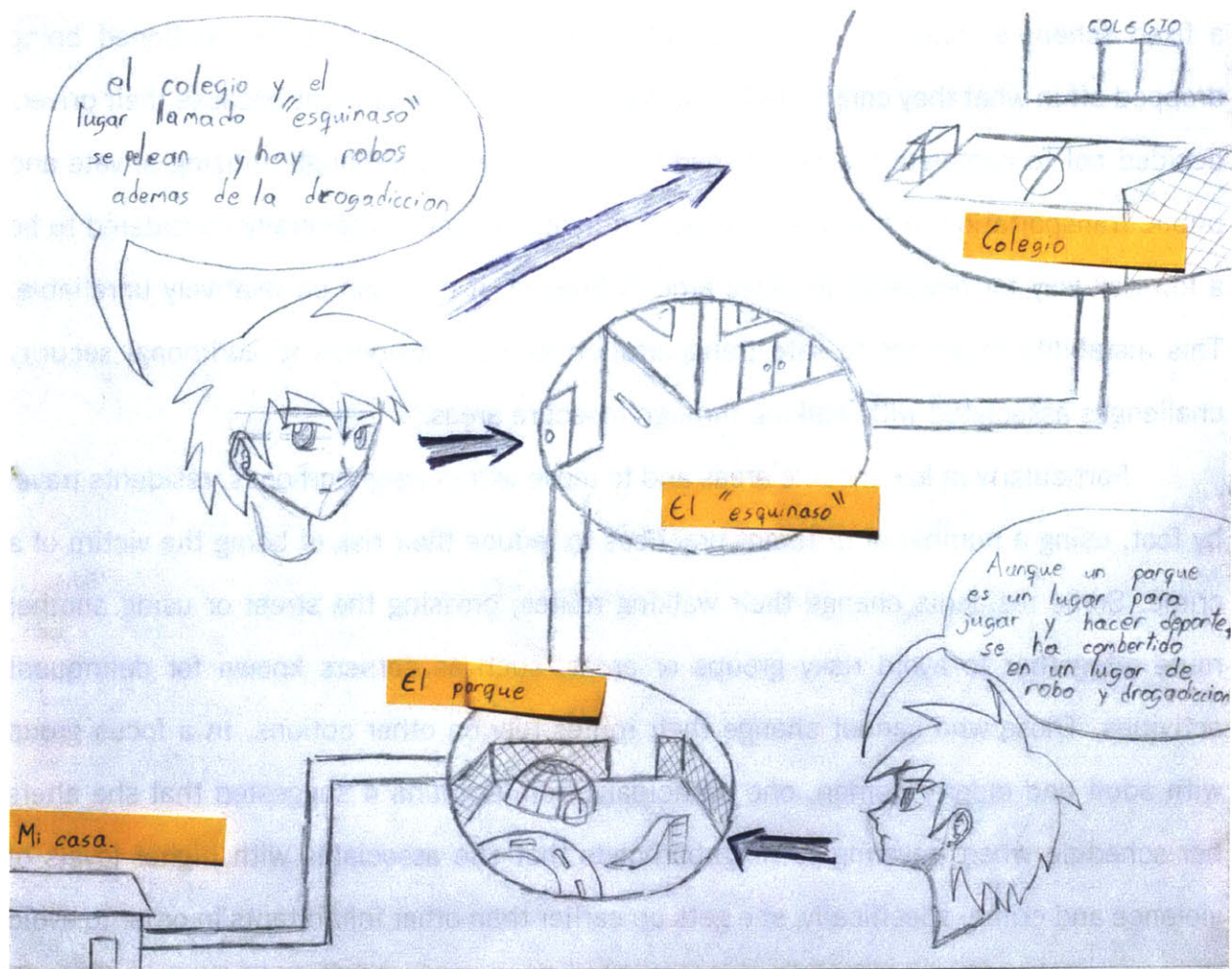


Figure 9. Cognitive map completed by Comuna 3 resident, José.

Key locations (appearing in yellow) include his house, the park, el esquinaso or the crazy street corner, and his high school. The text associated with the street corner and the high school reads “At the high school and the place called the crazy street corner, people fight, there are robberies, and also drug addiction.” In the text in the lower right, referring to the park, José suggests that, “although a park is a place to play around and play sports, it has become a place for robbery and drug addiction.”

area, and 7 of the 21 residents who completed cognitive maps expressed fear regarding crossing high-traffic roads. The main road is the Southern Highway that runs through the center of Soacha, generating significant industrial and commuting traffic. For residents who live on the other side of the highway from the city center, that is, in Comunas 4, 5, or 6, taking on the risk of being involved in a traffic accident is a necessity in order to access the services, commerce, and cultural spaces in the center of the city.

As is the case for most residents of Soacha, family networks play key roles in these kinds of spatial adaptations. Multiple participants in the study mentioned taking time

in the evening to meet their family members as they return from work, school, or other activities, and accompany them to their homes. These group security adaptations, then, have implications not just for individuals, but for their families, as well, mainly with regards to livelihoods. In the case of José, his mother, Milena, is actively involved in his security strategy, as she accompanies him to school on a regular basis, something she has done for some time. In order to better “keep an eye on her children,” or more precisely, walk her son and daughter to school and accompany them to the park and friends’ houses in the afternoon, she decided she could no longer work intensive hours in her home, and instead chose to close her confection business.¹⁷ Other residents mention similar situations in which they have foregone potential earnings in order to provide additional security to their family members. As the story of José and Milena demonstrates, this type of mobility-based adaptation can have significant effects on the livelihood security of residents, as protecting family members from risk sometimes comes at the cost of securing a stable income.

Depending on their age, sex, neighborhood, and access to resources, some residents simply stay at home to avoid risk in public places, foregoing the activities and interactions that occur in the city. One woman in Comuna 4 mentioned that her neighbor, an elderly woman, does not leave the house if she does not have sufficient money to take a bus both to and from her destination. Most others suggest that staying inside their homes is the most common response to insecurity at nighttime, when the places identified as unsafe during the day become even more so, and streets are occupied by gangs and paramilitaries. Carolina describes her reaction to a series of murders in her neighborhood in Comuna 4 associated with an increased paramilitary presence, years earlier: “I almost never went outside... I was terrified of the nighttime – terrified... I just waited for the sun to rise to feel safe. The daytime brings security. Every night at 8, I put bars on the doors and windows, it was very complicated.” Considering their inability to avoid such severe violence, residents simply turn inward, shutting out the outside world in an effort to ensure their immediate survival.

17 See Appendix 3 for Milena’s cognitive map, as well as those of other participants.

This form of adaptation, unlike adjustments in travel patterns that still allow people sufficient sense of safety to carry on with their daily lives albeit in a restricted fashion, means that residents are severely limited in their ability to engage with the people and institutions surrounding them. It restricts their participation in civic and economic life, and essentially removes them from the debate regarding the issues that affect their lives. It also means that with the circulation of people throughout the city limited by their survival strategies, the spatial segregation of the poor in marginal neighborhoods persists. Both the inward focus that characterizes individual and family adaptations as well as the continued division between the poor, violent neighborhoods and the rest of the city reinforces the lack of social cohesion and fragmentation that dominates in Soacha.

Moving Or 'Getting Out'

When ongoing risks become serious enough, residents and families may look for options to move, changing residences and, in most cases, neighborhoods. Movement for security reasons generally occurs toward the center of the city, that is, people seek out housing options in the central neighborhoods of Soacha, where there is generally better security infrastructure in terms of lighting and police presence. During the course of this study, this type of adaptation was mentioned in three interviews, and in all of those cases, it involved moving from the *altos* of Comunas 4 and 6 to other neighborhoods as a result of ongoing threats from illegal armed actors. News stories from Soacha, Bogotá, and other Colombian cities report that this is a growing trend, as armed groups have generated significant intra- and inter-urban displacement using death threats, extortion, recruitment of young men, and outright violence to maintain territorial control (Elespectador.com 2008).¹⁸ This type of move, then, could be seen as a type of violence exercised by armed groups rather than an adaptation selected by residents. However, the participants in the study all describe situations in which they hit a breaking point and, as Carolina recounted,

¹⁸ News reports suggest that in 2008, 76 cases of displacement were reported in Soacha (Elespectador.com 2008).

“just couldn’t take it anymore,” which suggests that the timing of their move, at the very least, involved their own discretion.

While moving out of dangerous neighborhoods allows residents to improve their own security, it also involves many sacrifices in the form of connections with friends and neighbors. In many cases, people have developed social networks in their neighborhoods that can act as tools of resilience in the face of insecurity. The case of Eugenia, who participated in a focus group as part of this study, illustrates how neighborhood or place-based connections serve security purposes. She explained that after inadvertently witnessing a murder at a party in the *altos* of Cazucá, Comuna 4, her son received a death threat by the perpetrators of the crime. As a way to protect him, Eugenia was organizing a series of temporary stays for him in the homes of family, friends, and neighbors, moving him around every couple of days so that he would not be found. While moving her family to a more central location or outside the city would undoubtedly reduce the risk of violence against her and her family, she might also lose another tool that is key to survival. Her story indicates that place-based networks are also implicated in the survival strategies that residents use, and changing locations could put those relationships at risk, affecting both the sense of belonging that Eugenia and her family enjoy in their neighborhood and the ability to rely on friends and neighbors for help during times of crisis.

As these cases illustrate, mobility is key to the adaptation strategies employed by residents. Moving around to avoid risks, whether in terms of transportation or housing, is the most direct way that residents deal with concerns regarding insecurity. The largest obstacle to moving around safely or ‘getting out,’ however, is economic. Residents, including Eugenia in her attempts to save her son, cite the lack of financial resources as key to their inability to successfully avoid risks in their violent surroundings. Whereas taking a bus or private transport, or even moving to a different neighborhood, would likely prevent residents from being victims of crime, their adaptation options are limited by their ability to pay. At the same time, inconsistent access to safe transport, limited timeframes within

which one can move about, and extensive commuting times make some livelihood options inaccessible, and prevent many citizens from pursuing anything more than their most basic necessities. This means that the low-income neighborhoods that are disproportionately affected by violence are also the places in which residents have fewest mobility-related tools to guarantee their immediate safety.

From Networks to Social Organizations: Sociopolitical Adaptations

Reliance upon Identity- and Place-Based Networks

Networks play a critical role in facilitating individual and group adaptations to insecurity in Soacha; residents frequently rely on family, friends, neighbors, and other contacts to mitigate the many types of risk they encounter. Although networks exist in all forms throughout the world, they are used in different, security-driven ways in Soacha in response to the high levels of poverty and violence. Through a series of links, residents may exchange security strategies, contacts, or know-how, depending upon their needs. Networks may be based on bonds that citizens inherit, such as family connections, or acquire through the activities in which they participate (Prukayastha and Subramaniam 2004). They are also frequently place-based, that is, related to the solidarity generated among individuals residing, working, or interacting in the same place.

In Soacha, residents repeatedly highlight the significance of exchanging information and contacts through social networks in order to gain access to state services. A high proportion of the population is unaware of the various offerings of the various local and national governmental entities with programming in the city and the complex processes through which one must pass in order to be attended by officials (CENTRAP 2008). As such, guidance on how to access various services that is based on intricate local know-how is very important, especially to recent migrants. Networks facilitate the expansion of personal contacts, which is also critical to ensuring access, as even basic services may not be extended to people unless they know someone in the office. In this sense, networks

play a critical role in residents' ability to adapt to economic and physical insecurity, though their formation is more a function of social relations in general than the presence of violence in the city.

The character and strength of social networks varies across the city according to a number of factors. According to Granovetter (1973, 1361), the strength of the link or "tie" that connects individuals in social networks is the sum of "the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize [them]." A key aspect of this definition is that it suggests that stronger ties involve longer time commitments, which presents an interesting puzzle for Soacha, as the social networks in many areas are relatively new due to its rapid growth. Based on this understanding, one might assume that in more established neighborhoods, where individuals have long-standing relationships, such as the central areas of Soacha, social ties might be stronger. In contrast, in the more violent, peripheral areas of Soacha, there is a large population of recent economic and forced migrants and the settlements themselves are much newer than in other parts of the city. One would think that this would result in weaker, more "loose-knit" networks given the existence of so many different groups that have come together out of necessity instead of through long-standing relationships.

However, the immediate task of survival acts as a powerful element with regard to creating social alliances; the urgency and intensity that violent conditions involve may call into question what constitutes a strong tie. Resident Carolina reported in her interview that her closest friends in the city, whom she calls her family, are people she met upon arrival in Altos de Cazucá a decade ago. She cites the sense of common struggle among the women there as an essential source of solidarity; it was primarily her relationships with her neighbors – despite the fact that she had known them for a very short time – that gave her the strength and know-how to move forward in a very violent and economically depressed hilltop neighborhood. Although she has since moved to avoid threats and have better access to economic opportunities, she continues to visit the people there. Her story

and the others like it suggest that perhaps time commitments may be outweighed by the relative significance of the other constitutive elements of the strength of a bond in violent conditions. The level of mutual confiding, reciprocal exchange of economic and security strategies, and particularly the emotional intensity that accompanies the presence of high levels of violence in a given area may, in fact, result in strong ties between residents.

On the other hand, both loose and close-knit networks serve security purposes for Soacha residents. The close networks of family and friends act as key elements in facilitating mobility-based adaptations that allow individuals and groups to mitigate risk. As the experience of Eugenia moving her son from home to home to ensure his safety illustrates, strong bonds, especially family relationships, act as the primary mechanism by which residents provide for their safety. However, loose networks that are created through the participation in neighborhood and civil society activities serve to expand residents' contacts, which can also act as assets in terms of residents' longer term security strategies, allowing them to gain access to government services, for example. In this way, the strong bonds between family members and close friends in violent areas may be the most useful to residents' pursuit of effective security strategies in an immediate sense, but weak ties may serve a secondary purpose in bolstering resident livelihood and personal security, as the following section shows.

Institutionalization of Networks in Community-Based Organizations

Some individuals, through their membership in social networks, have come to form part of community-based organizations (CBOs). These may include local organizations made up of members of the same neighborhood, local groups organized around a common goal or theme, formalized networks of organizations working on similar topics, or local chapters of national associations. In all of these groups, the local plays an important role; for most of the women who participated in the study, their involvement in civic organizations began within their neighborhoods and then expanded to include participation in groups with a broader geographic reach. All of these groups, which residents refer to as social organizations, are

critical spaces for individuals to share livelihood strategies, local knowledge, and personal contacts that might facilitate others' efforts to move forward in the city.

On the individual level, CBOs provide a context in which residents develop and reinforce their various goals and identities, thereby creating a sense of solidarity among members. They develop relationships as women, youth, displaced persons, heads of household, and community leaders, among many other signifiers, as well as through common interests or causes that might be affecting their community. Underlying much of these relationships, however, is an awareness of class membership; there is a distinct sense that identifying with the *clase popular* is central to what unites them. As Carolina describes, “honestly, the poor with the poor. It sounds very cruel, but that’s how it is.” After moving to Altos de Cazucá because the low cost of living allowed her to support herself and her family, she then met other women with similar struggles. There, she began to participate in social organizations, and eventually began to work in a local NGO. Class, then, in addition to the other groups that residents identify with, is central to the ways in which members of CBOs relate and how they characterize their demands and interests.

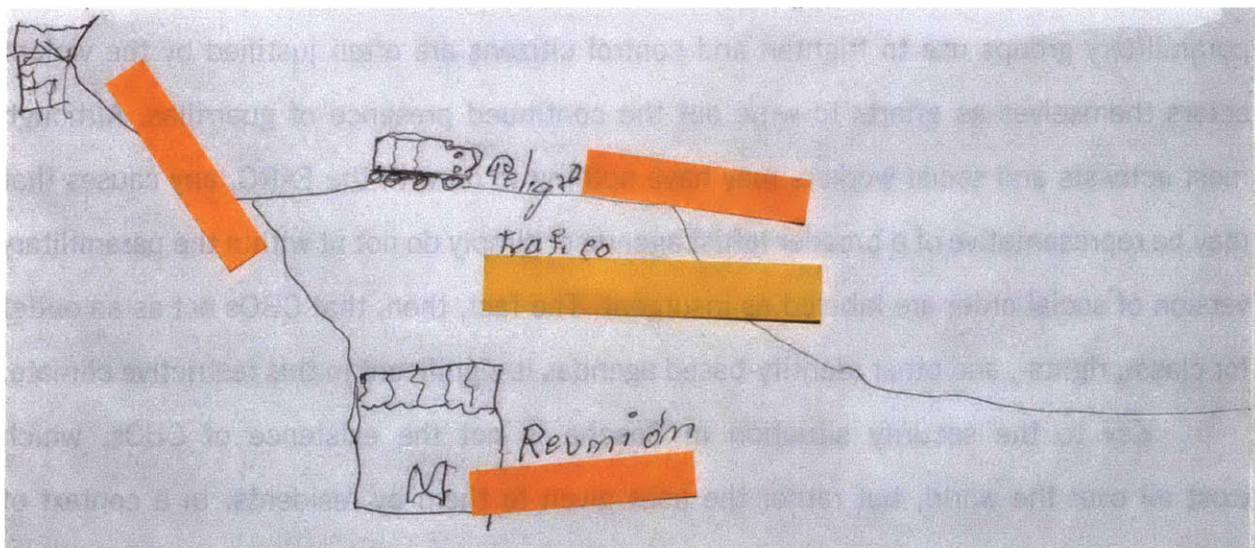


Figure 10. Cognitive map prepared by resident of Comuna 4, Isabel.

The locations indicated include her house (unmarked) and the reunión, or meeting. Risks encountered are noted in orange and yellow, and refer to ‘danger’ and traffic. As the map completed by Isabel indicates, for older residents, going to CBO meetings may be one of the few activities that bring them out of the house and keep them engaged with residents and activities outside of their neighborhoods.

Embedded in the discourse of most of these groups is a rights-based conception of their common agenda. Here, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what effects state and development agency interventions have had in shaping this discourse; many governmental, non-governmental and international agency programs and services are accompanied with capacity-building sessions that are based on a human rights framework. This understanding of citizenship is particularly strong in Colombia, where the national armed conflict has drawn significant attention to the human rights abuses that citizens have suffered. Efforts to make demands on the State are frequently framed in this language and laced with references to the specific laws that protect them as individuals or groups who legally require special attention, such as female victims of violence or displaced persons.

In Soacha, women's organizations have adopted this framework as an advocacy tool, and the right to a life free of violence has become a recurring theme in the discourse of CBOs. In a violent context, the fact that both class awareness and rights-based proposals for improved security are included in CBO discourse is significant, as in neighborhoods controlled by armed groups, most types of collective expression or action are limited. Using legal and class-based language is especially risky on the local level, as the threats that paramilitary groups use to frighten and control citizens are often justified by the violent actors themselves as efforts to wipe out the continued presence of guerrillas. Although most activists and social workers may have nothing to do with the FARC, any causes that may be representative of a broader leftist agenda or simply do not fit within the paramilitary version of social order are labeled as insurgent. The fact, then, that CBOs act as an outlet for class-, rights-, and other identity-based agendas is significant in this restrictive climate.

Key to the security situation in Soacha is not the existence of CBOs, which exist all over the world, but rather the uses given to them by residents. In a context of violence, CBOs are used to express generalized fears regarding the types of insecurity that people experience and are not able to denounce or express as individuals, for fear of repercussions from aggressors, especially illegal armed groups or abusive partners. The

example of violence against women is particularly representative, as women may not press charges against aggressors as individuals, but they argue collectively for the incorporation of anti-violence provisions in public policy, using the CBO as a platform. In this way, the CBO becomes a mechanism for collective action around the kinds of violence that affect the city, especially its most marginalized population groups. The claims made by their members serve to challenge the use of violence as a mechanism of social control and to offer alternative proposals for order in the city. This is a particularly important function of CBOs in violent areas where the 'law of silence' makes speaking out about these issues extremely dangerous for individuals. As Prukayastha and Subramaniam (2004, 9) write, these community groups "allow [people] to rework ideas and themes from the dominant culture in ways which bring forth hidden and potentially subversive dimensions," and "serve as catalysts to bring the power of the mobilized community onto a stage of broader action." In the violent context of Soacha, the fact that both class awareness and rights-based proposals for improved security are included in CBO discourse is significant because armed groups limit most types of collective action, especially around class identity because of its (legitimate or illegitimate) association with the leftist guerilla movement.

The use of CBOs as a platform and outlet for collective demands about violence has various effects as an adaptation to insecurity. On the individual level, the combination of relationships of mutual support with their *compañeras*, or colleagues, with a basic understanding of the laws that protect them against abuse, have allowed a number of women to subvert traditional power dynamics in order to get out of violent relationships or family situations. In their individual interviews, residents repeatedly referred to the specific anti-violence laws, information they gained through participation in civic organizations, stating that these give them confidence in their decisions to confront the violence. Similarly, while participation in social organizations may actually increase individual residents' risk of being threatened by armed actors aiming to curb their influence and maintain their territorial control intact, CBOs provide residents with a more extensive web of contacts upon which

they can call in times of crisis. Some of these connections may actually be with individuals who provide substantive help in the form of financial or technical resources that may allow them to protect themselves from these threats. Resident Sandra used the connections she has to local NGOs through her work with displaced communities to apply for support from international agencies that would allow her to move in order to avoid ongoing threats from armed actors. This type of tie, not just with neighbors and family, but with people who have similar interests and access to institutions, then, can act as an important resource in developing security strategies.

Banding together in the form of CBOs to express their agenda against violence expands residents' access to political discussions and decision-making spaces, as well. As organizations, not only is their risk of violence lower, but their power vis-à-vis municipal entities is also enhanced. Using the organization as a platform and formalizing their demands by way of an agenda using the language of human rights allows CBO leaders, many of whom have low levels of formal education and minimal experience with political action, to interact with government officials more effectively. Referring to the recent formulation of a proposal for a municipal public policy on women and gender, Soacha resident Sandra argues, "to have a basis, to have a document that shows that we no longer have to keep saying that we need this because of this or that but actually, it's written here and we deserve it by law, that is why we want the public policy on women and gender." In this sense, it is not just the potential for collective action that social networks provide, but also the power that the formalization of these networks and their discourse generates that has allowed these women to express their security-related demands in government forums.

The same strategy has been used from the CBO perspective to support claims made by displaced people, as well. The internally displaced are the subjects of a municipal plan and a number of national laws, policies, and programs designed to protect their rights. Efforts by these organizations and other NGOs and foundations have been influential in generating support for *la convivencia*, or peaceful coexistence, as a central tenet in a

number of city level policies and cultural events. In a number of cases, then, CBOs in Soacha acting in concert, armed with discourses based in a class consciousness and the human rights framework, have been able to successfully incorporate their agendas into municipal structures in addition to acting as spaces for support and knowledge exchange among residents.

Certainly a part of the effectiveness of some of these efforts has been related to alliances that local organizations have forged with national and international development agencies. Using not only their personal connections, but also the links that have been established between the State and larger civil society organizations has allowed them to insert their priorities into the debate over the direction that Soacha will take as a city. The ability to create and maintain these alliances is related to the capacity-building experiences within and outside of the formal education system that CBO members have accessed through national and international civil society organizations. Whereas all of the women who participated in this study had reached only a high school level of education, and most in fact had far fewer years of formal education, all had continued to educate themselves in the form of trainings and workshops. A few had done this through a service provided by the national government that offers technical training in a variety of fields, and all had participated in capacity building processes led by NGOs. The latter included a range of social, political, and economic topics such as human rights, violence against women, rights of displaced populations, HIV/AIDS, business administration, accounting, and marketing, among others. After participating in a series of these trainings, members of some CBOs then replicated the trainings with other residents, sharing their skills and knowledge once again through their family-, place- and interest-based networks and preparing residents to better face the challenges at hand.

Not only do these alliances with national and international entities serve residents by providing them with trainings on relevant topics, but they also may serve as bridging opportunities for individuals. While the strong ties associated with family and neighborhood

relationships may be most useful in short-term survival strategies, alliances with institutions such as NGOs and development agencies may provide residents with better long-term options. As is the case for women leaders involved in the formulation and approval of the public policy on women and gender, these could include mechanisms for the incorporation of their anti-violence proposals into municipal agendas, which could contribute to a decrease in violence in Soacha over time. This type of weaker connection could result in employment opportunities for residents in social and community work on a larger scale, as was the case of Carolina. This strengthens individual and family adaptations to insecurity by stabilizing their economic livelihood. In either case, network- and organization-based connections can be leveraged as part of resident adaptations to violence with the possibility of expanding their immediate and longer-term social, economic, and physical mobility.

Livelihoods: Economic Adaptations to Violence

In response to the panorama of violence and insecurity in which they live, residents are hard-pressed to find viable livelihood options that allow them to generate income while remaining safe. In addition to financing their spatial security strategies, such as riding the bus or changing residences, the economic activities in which residents engage have direct implications for their exposure to threats of violence. Whether they are required to travel long distances and at what time of day as well as who they interact with and in what capacity are all critical components of their safety. Economic change and growth is crucial to mobility in a broader sense, as well. The types of activities, including the respect or stigma associated with them and the extent of their potential to generate income, have implications for residents' capacity to develop their skills, access institutional offerings, and move through society in a comprehensive sense. Violence is an integral part of the context that shapes their options, and residents use their economic activities to improve their position in the urban ecosystem and reduce their risk of being victimized.

Creation of local microenterprise

One approach to securing a livelihood that has become common among residents according to those who participated in the study is the creation of microenterprises dedicated to the sale of a variety of goods, including textiles, confection, food preparation, equipment rental, arts, and craftwork. Especially given the young age at which women are no longer eligible for formal service employment in Soacha and Bogotá, microenterprise allows all residents and particularly women a certain amount of flexibility. The permanence of the businesses varies; some are seasonal, as is the case of making Christmas decorations for sale before the holidays, and others are year-round projects. Businesses are frequently run directly out of family homes, and in some cases, clients come to purchase goods in the same space in which production occurs during specific hours. Others, such as the sewing business that resident Paula runs, have distribution agreements with consumers or small companies. In these cases, the business owners are allowed a higher level of stability and security in their income, as customers make orders ahead of time, and residents are able to produce just enough to cover the demand. When all else fails, family members might bring goods to sell on the street in the center of the city.

Running businesses out of their homes provides residents with a number of benefits. They are able to stay relatively safe, as generally minimal travel is needed, and family members are frequently involved in the functioning of the business, which means that it becomes easier for parents to keep an eye on their children during the day. The earning potential for these businesses varies, but is generally considered low; because of the existence of many such enterprises in Soachan neighborhoods and the low level of income overall, competition is heavy and some barely cover their costs. Getting the products to a market of consumers with enough resources to generate significant demand is a continual issue, and profit margins can be quite low. However, as resident Paula suggests, some have generated enough income to pay for food for the family and send their kids to school, which represents a definite step forward for many individuals and their families, as this is

certainly not a given for many residents of Soacha.

A number of the women who participated in this study transitioned to this kind of microenterprise after being involved in higher risk economic activities, such as vending goods on the street or in buses. These activities imply a series of occupational hazards that made them unviable for them in the long-term; cases of verbal and sexual assault as well as robberies or muggings are not uncommon among street vendors. A number of men, however, still carry out work that involves a higher safety risk both for them and for their families, as they travel in some cases to the north of Bogotá to sell their goods very early in the morning and are gone all day in order to earn enough to return. Other respondents report that they carried out domestic work for other families, particularly in Bogotá, in order to make a living before starting their own small businesses. While the risk of violence in these positions may be lower, they require significant physical energy and time as inputs, with very low returns in terms of income. In some cases, residents used the skills they developed while working on domestic chores to open their own business dedicated to cooking, cleaning, or other related services.

One critical function of social networks in this context is that they facilitate the exchange of economic know-how between residents with diverse experiences and interests. Women in Soacha exchange their knowledge on a variety of social and economic matters, from where to buy the cheapest fruit to how to create and sustain an urban agriculture business. In this way, they can learn from one another and create relationships of mutual support that allow everyone to move forward. These types of relationships are especially critical for the recent migrants, as families frequently arrive in Soacha with minimal assets and limited contacts. One resident, Sandra, who arrived to Soacha after being displaced from her home in Nariño, highlighted the challenges involved in transitioning to city life and the value of interacting with other women. “It is hard for us *campesinos* ... For example, [in the country] I knew what to do. When the cow was sick, when it was pregnant, when I should take it to give birth, when the horses were sick... but coming to a city, now

I have to be always looking around to make sure I don't get robbed." In Soacha, Sandra developed relationships through networks and social organizations that allowed her to improve her livelihood. "I have learned that I have to look for the cheapest things," she explained, "[t]hat is why I like to talk with women. I ask them, hey, what can I buy? What can I cook? What can I do? So as they learn from me, I learn from them."

Alliances with Illegal Actors and Participation in Criminal Activities

In a context dominated by few legitimate options for income generation, residents also choose to participate in illegal activities to earn a living and protect themselves. While no respondents in the study reported having resorted to crime, a few had family members, almost exclusively young men, who had developed or joined an informal group dedicated to carrying out economic crime. The benefit of this course of action is intimately related to security, as forming part of a small group or formal gang means gaining the protection of a group of cohorts. Participants in the study as well as NGO reports suggest that not only do young people face severe challenges in earning an income in their violent surroundings, but participating in illegal activities is seen by some youth as an attractive choice on a number of levels (FEDES 2008). The coordinator of a community center run by a Colombian foundation in neighboring Ciudad Bolívar, a neighborhood in the south of Bogotá, explained the logic of some of the youth with which she has worked. Seeking out illegal activities can act as a source of social status. Having witnessed their parents' struggles to provide for their family, they reject the prospect of being involved in such energy- and time-intensive, low skilled and low paid jobs. Instead, they join groups dedicated to street crime, which they consider to require more strategic thinking in order to be successful and are associated with a higher income and social status than their parents' forms of employment.

This type of adaptation, though economically beneficial for those who utilize it, has a number of problematic implications for both the individual and his or her community. Engaging in illegal activities in order to guarantee one's livelihood may initially result in an

increased sense of security for individuals as it expands their immediate social network to include others who are experienced in the use of crime and violence for wealth generation and self-protection. However, over time, it greatly increases the risk of receiving threats or being the victim of violence by other irregular armed groups, social cleansing groups, and State security forces. As the threats against Eugenia's son demonstrate, the bonds that are created through connections to those involved in illicit activities can in fact increase risk for everyone in their immediate network, especially family members. In this sense, one individual engaging in crime and violence as a way to get by in an insecure environment can act as a liability to the many people he or she interacts with on a daily basis.

Mixed results for mobility

Until this point, the analysis has been based on the assumption that these adaptations have some positive effects for residents; the very fact that residents have taken these actions to protect themselves implies that they are at least minimally effective in reducing personal risk. In the medium and long terms, however, they have varied results for residents. Whereas developing close knit and extended networks clearly provides residents with additional assets that they can leverage to develop their security strategies and expand their socioeconomic horizons, participating in illegal activities has very limiting effects for the individual in the long term, both with regards to personal safety and social and economic mobility. On the other hand, spatial adaptations that allow residents to protect themselves effectively in the short run may restrict individual growth over time. The ideal, then, is to identify the types of adaptations that expand mobility in a comprehensive sense, allowing for better physical safety and increased access to diverse social, economic, and political spaces.

CHAPTER 5

Transformative Cities?: Implications for Soacha and other ‘Survival Cities’

“We want a Soacha, as [the municipal officials] say, ‘to live better.’ But better means without violence, without so much insecurity.”

- Angela, Resident of Comuna 5, June 11, 2010

In the previous chapters, I have explored how the trends toward rapid urbanization, increasing inequality and exclusion, and a government failure to manage both have served to facilitate the emergence of widespread violence in Latin America. We have also seen how these region-wide dynamics have mapped onto the spatial and political reality of Colombia, where the continual pursuit of macroeconomic policies that drive up income disparities have intensified the plight of the poor, who have responded by moving to the urban periphery in order to escape the violence of poverty and armed conflict. In Bogotá, they have joined the masses of the *clase popular* in marginal areas like Soacha. There, residents encounter a striking lack of livelihood options and experience violence in the public, private, and institutional spheres. In this context, citizens respond to the restrictions that insecurity implies with strategies that involve spatial, social, political, and economic components that are intimately related to their relative positions in the urban ecosystem. These adaptations have varied results for individual residents, particularly in terms of their socioeconomic and physical mobility. However, in order to make recommendations for the various actors involved in promoting development in Soacha, it is critical to first answer another question: what kinds of implications do these types of adaptations have for the city as a whole?

The following matrix presents a summary of the types of resident adaptations to violence and insecurity that emerged during the course of the study and how they shape the urban landscape of Soacha in four key areas: the proliferation of violence, social integration, livelihood security, and civic engagement. It also summarizes the effects that each type of adaptation may have for the city as a whole. By evaluating resident security strategies in each of these areas, potential policy recommendations emerge for government officials on the municipal, departmental, and national scales as well as non-governmental development agencies. With limited human and financial resources that generally pale in comparison to the severity of the humanitarian situation in Soacha, these actors struggle to design programming that responds to a wide variety of issues. With this in mind, I argue that using citizens' adaptive security strategies as a base for policy development allows decision-makers to design responses that aim at a wide range of development outcomes through a limited number of interventions that expand resident mobility.

Summary of Adaptations to Violence and Insecurity and their Implications for Soacha

TYPE	MANIFESTATIONS	POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR RESIDENTS AND THE CITY				
		Proliferation of Violence	Social Integration	Livelihood Security	Civic Engagement	City as a whole
Spatial	Alteration and limitation of transport patterns	Allows individuals to reduce risk; no apparent effect on citywide violence	Increases inward focus and social fragmentation	Adds to spatial segregation of the poor in marginal neighborhoods	Limits public participation beyond neighborhood bounds	Limits use of public space; adds to spatial poverty gap; weakens city identity
	Moving or 'getting out'	Allows individuals to reduce risk; no apparent effect on citywide violence	Destabilizes place-based networks; contributes to fragmentation	Increases individual earning potential; adds to spatial segregation	Removes citizens from key discussions; reduces capacity for collective action	May result in abandoned housing in violent areas; reduces pressure on city to deal with violence
Sociopolitical	Reliance upon identity- and place-based social networks	Facilitates individual and group risk reduction; may contribute to reduced insecurity citywide	Creates greater sense of belonging for individuals; contributes to community life	Depends on the network type and strength; can improve economic options via expanded contacts	Facilitates flow of information between residents; may form the basis for collective action	Strengthens social infrastructure; may increase number of residents accessing state services
	Institutionalization of networks in the form of social organizations	May increase individual risk; challenges forms of institutional violence that prevent access to state resources	Promotes social integration, solidarity through collective identification of challenges and priorities	Expansion of networks and potential for collective action may expand individual and group access to services	Supports engagement; allows for the incorporation of group needs and interests in government policy	Challenges control of violent actors; puts pressure on local administration to respond to citizen needs
Economic	Creation of local microenterprise	May make illegal activities less attractive, increase opportunity cost of violence	Economic exchange may increase integration of marginalized groups	Expands economic participation of marginal groups	May enhance sense of ownership of space, facilitate collective action	Provides alternative to criminality; may expand tax base of city
	Participation in illegal activities	Increases overall level of violence and insecurity; increases individual risk in time	Adds to generalized fear and distrust, which intensifies fragmentation	Generates income for illegal actors; increases citywide economic insecurity	Intensifies fear associated with the public expression of needs and interests	Solidifies perception of Soacha as insecure; makes difficult extension of services to violent areas

Mobility as Key to Security Strategies

Resident perceptions of risk are most frequently tied to moving throughout the city, and as a result, their first response to avoid threats is to change their transport patterns. While these adaptations might improve individual security in an immediate sense, they do not necessarily have positive outcomes for the city. In fact, the same strategies that allow people to avoid risk by, for example, crossing the street or changing their route to avoid groups of young men, emphasizes the inward focus that characterizes many security strategies and detracts from social interaction and understanding. Furthermore, it reinforces the stigma associated with these groups, which perpetuates the conditions of inequality and social exclusion that breed violence to begin with. Furthermore, moving to avoid violence

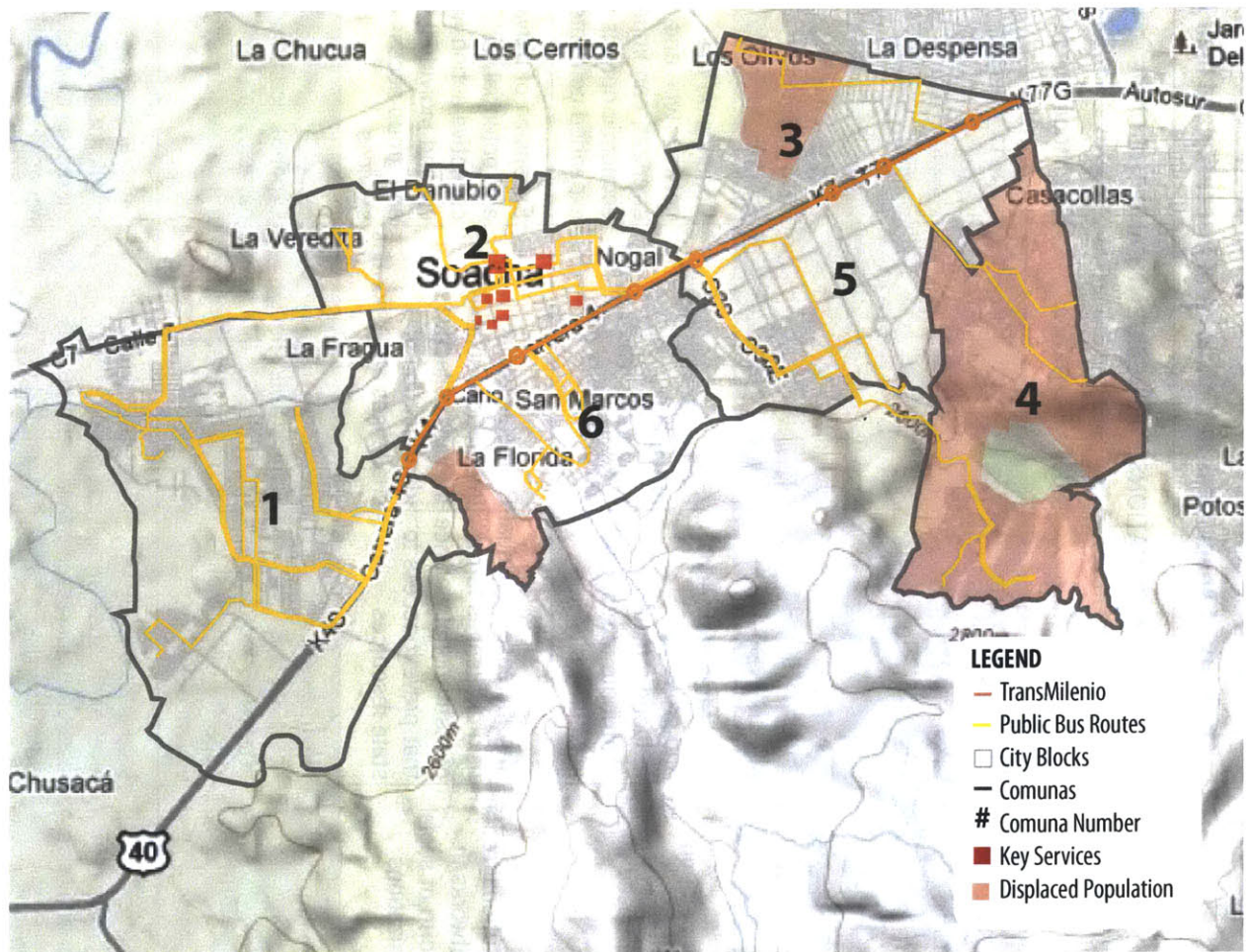


Figure 11. Topographic Map of Public Bus Lines, Proposed TransMilenio Extension, and High Concentrations of Displaced Persons in Soacha. Adapted from: Secretariat of Planning and Land Use, Municipality of Soacha. Topographic image from Google Maps

can also be detrimental. It can detract from the prospect of collective action against the violence that affects the community, generating the impression that there is no hope and the only way to minimize risk is to flee. These types of adaptations, though effective in an immediate security sense, act to reinforce the climate of fear within the city. The numerous examples of how restricted physical movement limits social interaction, political expression, and economic development make this a priority area for the improvement of security conditions in the city.

The *provision of safe, reliable, and affordable transportation to peripheral areas* therefore represents a critical part of improving security in Soacha and a key responsibility of the Department of Cundinamarca. Large strides in this area have been made in Bogotá, where city officials have effectively improved mobility for citizens in recent years with the TransMilenio, a bus rapid transit system hailed for its efficiency and used as a model for cities in developing countries. The system has gone a long way toward “reclaiming the streets” of Bogotá for residents, only 15% of which own cars (Brown 2002, McColl 2002). The TransMilenio currently reaches the edge of Soacha, and construction is underway to extend one of its lines through the city, along the same route that the South Highway takes, dividing Comunas 2 and 3 from 4, 5, and 6. This represents, of course, a positive step towards improving access to Bogotá and its many resources and opportunities from the center of Soacha. However, it does not do much to improve mobility within the comunas that are considered especially high-risk, and can therefore be seen more accurately as a significant starting point for a more systematic exploration of the transportation needs of Soacha residents.

While efforts to improve accessibility for residents of peripheral areas are certainly costly, which acts as a significant challenge for the small capacity of the Municipality of Soacha, plans to use *non-traditional technologies* and *coordination across municipal and departmental lines* may provide an important alternative. Initial plans have been announced to design and construct a cable car system that would go through Ciudad Bolívar in Bogotá,

the *altos* of Comuna 4, and the center of Soacha. This system, conceived in the image of a similar one in Medellín and the product of ongoing discussions between officials in both Bogotá, Soacha, and Cundinamarca, could be an important first step in improving the transport infrastructure within the comunas of Soacha. Beyond enhancing their ability to travel safely and transport goods between neighborhoods, extending public transit to the more marginalized and violent areas of Soacha could contribute greatly to residents' access to the center of Soacha and, by extension, Bogotá. Conversely, it could also draw the attention of Bogotá residents, generating more movement into Comuna 4 and potentially more demand for the goods that local entrepreneurs produce. In these ways, improving mobility represents a step toward the incremental dismantling of the severe inequalities and overwhelming insecurity in the city.

Social Networks and the Potential for Collective Action

From the results of this analysis, the availability and strength of social networks stands out as a key ingredient of effective security strategies. Those who can rely on both family and place-based connections as well as more extended networks of colleagues and acquaintances have access to contacts that facilitate the development of a variety of strategies in the economic, spatial, social, and political realms. These networks play a particularly essential role for recent migrants. Contacts in the city provide incoming families with advice and orientation in a number of areas, including how to gain access to government services, that act as critical elements in providing individuals with additional options beyond participating in illegal activities and gaining protection through alliances with armed groups. The social fabric of the violent city, then, is a critical area to continue to study.

It is one thing to analyze the formation and function of social networks, however, and another thing altogether to design interventions that support them. In Soacha, it is clear that the participation in community-based organizations provides individuals with an outlet to express their demands without incurring additional individual risk of violence. It

also acts as a formal platform to advocate for the incorporation of these needs and interests into government policy. However, the attention given to the proposals made by individual CBOs among the municipal administration is irregular. As a result, thinking more seriously about establishing an ongoing mechanism for government officials to engage with social organizations could be a strategic priority for the local and national governments.

Working with networks of organizations, such as the Consortium of Women's Organizations of Soacha, provides a way to touch base with the variety of organizations and perspectives that function in the city without developing projects for each one, again minimizing the financial and human resources necessary to pursue effective programming. Considering the role that these organizations play in connecting citizens to one another across the various neighborhoods and *comunas* that make up the city, there is almost certainly a ripple effect associated with supporting and interacting with these groups. These formalized networks of organizations facilitate the transfer of many types of information, including constructive security strategies, which are of particular use for individuals and families who have recently arrived to violent areas of the city. They also form the structural basis for a broader discussion around urban violence that enhances the potential for collective action, which is a key component of moving beyond individual security strategies to broad and sustainable support for citywide security planning and programming.

International development agencies and NGOs that, until this point, have focused their efforts on trainings and other capacity-building activities organized around instilling a knowledge and understanding of the human rights framework may find new outlets for their support when considering the critical role that organizations play as a counterbalance to urban violence. Instead of focusing exclusively on education around the existing legal frameworks, which certainly has benefits for residents on the individual level, it may be beneficial to *expand capacity building in areas that allow for the institutional strengthening of social organizations*. By supporting the creation and implementation of improved administration, management, and fundraising capacity in these organizations,

the humanitarian community can contribute to the sustainability of these key community actors. In this way, they would be supporting the expansion of local networks while also ensuring that effective counterweights to the 'law of silence,' with the capacity to articulate demands and interface with government entities, continue to exist in Soacha.

Bolstering Entrepreneurs and Securing Livelihoods

As the matrix above shows, the adoption of illegal activities in order for residents to cover their basic needs has a number of negative impacts on the city, particularly in its public spaces. It clearly contributes to insecurity in Soacha in a general sense, feeding into the many sources of fear that restrict residents' transport, social, and economic patterns throughout the city. As youth gangs generally operate in public spaces such as street corners or parks, they also change the quality of urban space by increasing the risk of being victimized there. This contributes to many of the trends that have been discussed throughout this thesis, namely, the limitation of community cohesion, civic engagement, and livelihood security, while adding to the severe stigma attached to living in Soacha.

On the other hand, by *supporting the infrastructure for small businesses in the city*, national and city officials may be able to offer viable alternatives to violent behavior, thereby increasing the opportunity cost of participating in violence. One way to make progress in terms of promoting a better quality of life for Soacha residents is to ramp up efforts to provide training to residents, especially in technical areas such as entrepreneurship and business administration. The Colombian National Learning Service (SENA) provides free and low-cost education in a number of these areas to residents. Whereas providing focused job training does not make sense for a city where employment options are minimal and the extension of formal education may be equally irrelevant, technical education provides a promising alternative. Supporting micro business owners to better provide for themselves and their families in this way could be a significant contribution to the development of local skills and also represents an important opportunity to capitalize on existing local strengths in the area of entrepreneurship.

In order to support the effective functioning of home-based microenterprise, it is important to consider the *extension of public services to irregular areas*, as well. Without regular access to water, electricity, effective sewage systems, and telephones, it is improbable that small businesses would be sufficiently viable so as to prevent residents from turning to illegal activities. As service provision is a responsibility of both the municipal and departmental governments, coordination is needed to further develop a strategy for the formalization of illegal settlements. The importance of this kind of change with regards to providing for the development of secure and healthy communities cannot be understated. With an understanding of how physical and sociopolitical security strategies function, ensuring the livelihood security of citizens becomes even more important to violence reduction, as the ability of residents to move around the city safely and express their security-related concerns in civil society organizations is largely dependent upon income stability.

Other Considerations: the Administrative Divide

A critical component of any attempt to deal comprehensively with the challenges facing the city must also consider the various administrative divisions that frame, limit, and condition government action. Whereas there is a popular acknowledgement of the interconnectedness between the challenges of Bogotá and Soacha, they are divided along administrative lines. Currently, the city of Soacha is affected by many of the trends that are being seen in Bogotá, but does not have the financial or administrative capacity of the capital city. Similarly, the continued presence of armed actors and persistence of illegal activities in Soacha, particularly drug and arms trafficking, have serious implications for the proliferation of violence in Bogotá. Coordination, then, has been carried out on an ad-hoc basis, as certain needs arise and as challenges grow in the “peri-urban” areas of the metropolis (Aguilar and Ward 2003), although both governments may have an interest in a more permanent and institutionalized form of coordination.

In this context, the need for a *regional government mechanism* that can provide large-scale infrastructure in the Bogotá region becomes clear. This type of entity does exist in some other parts of the country; Medellín, for example, forms part of the Metropolitan Area of the Aburrá Valley, an official administrative entity that performs essential functions in terms of transport provision, urban environmental management, and overall planning. As such, it is clear that the legal framework exists to support this kind of administrative change. The formal constitution of a Bogotá Metropolitan Area could go a long way in reducing the severe inequalities in institutional capacity between the city of Bogotá and its neighboring municipalities, and counteract the uneven development that decentralized planning processes have inspired not only in Colombia, but in other major Latin American cities (Libertun de Duren 2006). In order to reduce contestation between municipalities over resources and responsibilities and begin to truly make progress in reducing the rampant violence, the constitution of a metropolitan planning agency is a critical step in addressing the series of security and humanitarian challenges that currently face both Soacha and Bogotá.

Rethinking the Dominant Security (and Planning) Paradigms

As Cynthia Enloe (2007, 43) suggests, “the government-centred, militarized version” of security “remains the dominant mode of policy thinking.” This is especially true in Colombia, as its ongoing internal conflict on the national scale has made the operations of state and non-state armed actors the main focus of security discussions for decades. This continued emphasis on traditional security actors does not consider how their strategies of territorial control map onto the spatial reality of the city, shaping and constraining residents’ sociopolitical, livelihood, and security options. In this context, it is well documented that groups in poor and peripheral areas bear the brunt of the insecurity burden, both directly in terms of the incidence of violence and indirectly with regards to the overwhelming climate of fear that permeates their neighborhoods (Koonings and Kruijt 2007). In this sense, looking to the experiences of marginalized communities as an entry

point for the study of urban violence represents an inversion of the traditional security logic. By putting residents at the center of the discussion of both manifestations of and responses to violence, I aim to generate support for a new approach to the study of urban conflict that allows for a more comprehensive view of the diverse ways in which violence affect residents' daily lives and highlights the frequently innovative ways in which they respond to overwhelming adversity to ensure their protection and livelihoods.

Taking citizens seriously as security agents leads us to question some of the fundamental assumptions embedded in traditional responses to widespread violence. The pervasive nature and the variety of manifestations of urban violence that emerge in this study suggest that limiting the discussion of potential policy responses to militarized confrontations with criminal agents is not only short sighted, but potentially detrimental to lasting peace. Additionally, as many cities like those in Colombia become increasingly violent and unequal despite incremental increases in national GDP, arguments for a continued focus on national economic growth as a way out of the 'conflict trap' have not been borne out, either. Not only do militarized or macroeconomic responses to violence not challenge the large-scale historical and structural forces that have generated conditions of exclusion and inequality, but they also provide minimal assistance to urban residents who, as the preceding chapter shows, are developing their own strategies to mitigate their personal risk across space and expand opportunities for collective dialog. As we move forward in the development of plans and policies that support constructive adaptations in the face of multi-faceted forms of violence, it is essential to continue to disaggregate and re-examine the diverse experiences with and adaptations to insecurity in designing policies that respond to them. With this in mind, both spatial and gender relations acquire renewed importance, as identity is a key component of the individual and community values and perspectives that inform security strategies. These adaptations, in turn, drive spatial, social, economic, and political interactions, thereby shaping the city.

In view of the direct and indirect connections between violence and insecurity on one hand, and urban development outcomes on the other, the sectoral and stationary logic of urban planning is also called into question by the results of this study. Considering the importance of mobility in the development of effective adaptations to violence, security programming and investments in physical infrastructure, for instance, can no longer be viewed as unrelated. Significant work has been done that recognizes the connection between violence and housing, for example, using slum upgrading to encourage place attachment in an effort to combat rule by violent actors. However, resident security strategies in Soacha suggest that beyond policies aimed at improving the structural quality of urban neighborhoods, which are undeniably important to quality of life, efforts to enhance citizens' ability to move throughout the city may be more directly beneficial to their security in the short- and medium-term. As illegal actors use violence to exercise their control over fixed territories, expanded mobility in a physical sense can be tied to citizens' ability to interact and progress across social, economic, and political boundaries, as well, which serves as a platform for the collective formulation of alternative visions for the city.

In this sense, considering security at the intersection of planning issues requires a more fluid and flexible approach to city development. Despite the practical challenges that this assertion presents, the interrelated nature of the problems faced may in fact serve as an opportunity for planners and policymakers. Building upon the constructive security strategies that residents have adopted in the form of policies and programming represents not just an attempt to make individuals safer in their daily lives, which is of course a critical goal, but also, a chance to work toward a number of key outcomes through a focus on enhancing security. The improvement of urban security infrastructure and especially the extension of transport routes into and through marginal areas is a key example of this, as it could also better position residents for economic opportunities and reinforce their participation in important community decision-making spaces. By adopting a more holistic view of both security and planning that is based on an understanding of

how current manifestations of violence and exclusion have been shaped over time and grounding analyses in how these dynamics are lived and experienced by residents in contested spaces, much stands to be gained by those involved in urban development. With this in mind, planners and policymakers on the local, national, and global scales will be better equipped to support innovative and informed security interventions that improve citizen mobility in a comprehensive sense, thereby laying the groundwork for a more integrated urban fabric.

GLOSSARY

Altos:

Hilltop neighborhoods composed largely by informal settlements.

Altos de Cazucá:

Neighborhood in the hills of Comuna 4; characterized by a high poverty rate, the presence of illegal armed groups, informality, and violence. Abuts the Bogotá slum of Ciudad Bolívar.

Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC):

Loose alliance of paramilitary organizations responsible for severe atrocities across the country; officially demobilized in 2006.

Bacrim:

Term used to refer to criminal gangs, particularly those that have emerged following the demobilization of the AUC; short for *bandas criminales*.

Clase popular:

Literally the 'popular class,' this is a term used to describe the massive lower class in Colombia and Latin America.

Community-based organization (CBO):

Local organizations of a social, political, cultural, or economic nature; may refer simultaneously to foundations, associations, or any kind of group with an established organizational structure.

Comuna:

Administrative division used in the urban part of Soacha; larger than a neighborhood and smaller than a municipality.

Ciudad Bolívar:

Neighborhood or 'locality' that abuts Comuna 4 of Soacha but forms part of the city and department of Bogotá; characterized by many of the same challenges as those facing Soacha.

Department:

Largest administrative division in Colombia below the country level; Soacha is part of the Department of Cundinamarca and Bogotá belongs to its own department, the Federal District of Bogotá.

Falsos Positivos:

Recent political controversy in which members of the national military killed young men from Soacha and other poor areas, transported their bodies to rural areas and dressed them in guerilla clothing in order to bolster military statistics in the conflict with the guerillas.

Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC):

Most prominent guerilla group in the country; while its membership numbers are significantly lower than they were in decades past, it still operates on the national level and in urban areas.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs):

Civilians who have been forced out of their homes by threats or acts of violence by armed groups and migrated to other parts of the country for security purposes.

La Violencia:

Era preceding the current armed conflict that involved violent confrontations between the two dominant political parties in Colombia, the Liberal and Conservative Parties, that occurred roughly between 1948 and 1958.

Muisca:

Indigenous population that occupied the area where Bogotá and Soacha currently lie before Spanish colonization.

Social cleansing groups:

Armed squads that carry out extrajudicial killings of groups they define as criminal, sometimes at the behest of local leaders who cannot control the illegal activities in their neighborhoods through legal means. Targets include delinquents, youth, the homeless, drug users, homosexuals, and sex workers.

Toque de queda:

Curfew imposed by social cleansing groups and other armed gangs after which individuals outside their homes may be attacked or killed.

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APPENDIX 1: Methodology

This study was designed to measure and document resident perceptions of violence as well as the ways in which they adapt to insecurity in a qualitative and spatial way, with a focus on how gender relations and spatial dynamics play into both of these issues. In order to better understand violence from the point of view of those who experience it, between May and July 2010 and in January of 2011, I worked with 12 community leaders from the *Mesa de Organizaciones de Mujeres de Soacha*, a consortium of women who lead small, community-based foundations and organizations throughout the Municipality of Soacha. The *Mesa* is made up of one or two representatives from each of ten different organizations, which span all of the six *comunas* of Soacha. It acts as a space for leaders to get together and exchange strategies, advice, and contacts, as well as to plan advocacy activities and small projects with external financing. These women participated in all of the components of my study and acted as my primary informants and guides to the city.

As leaders of community-based organizations, these women are directly involved in a variety of kinds of social and political work that allow them to interact with a wide variety of groups within Soachan society, thereby becoming familiar with the social, economic, and political panorama in the city. In the same way that we might traditionally direct questions about the conditions of a certain population to local government officials due to their expertise in local dynamics, as respondents, these women drew upon their extensive knowledge of the diversity of experiences with insecurity in Soacha as spokespeople for their neighborhoods. Looking to leaders with a more informal type of power that is reflective of their role as community caretakers allowed me to highlight how everyday individual and family experiences with and adaptations to insecurity are conditioned by gender and spatial dynamics that frequently escape the broad and generally optimistic descriptions that elected officials provide. In this sense, this thesis represents an effort to capture and reflect on the vast knowledge that local female residents hold, while also drawing out the variations in experiences with violence and insecurity across gender, age, and spatial lines

that largely go unnoticed in many security studies. As Cynthia Enloe (2007, 47) writes, “if we take seriously the lives of women – their understandings of security – as well as on-the-ground workings of masculinity and femininity, we will be able to produce more meaningful and more reliable analyses of ‘security’ – personal, national and global.”

Participant Observation

Part of the research was done in coordination with the Colombia office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and involved a series of other activities related to work on UN interagency programs on human security in Soacha. As a part of this work, I led a series of six capacity-building workshops on the development of project proposals and strategic planning with the women of the *Mesa*. These sessions involved in-depth discussions between the women on the priorities of the consortium and its member organizations that very much informed my understanding of the role that community-based organizations play in strengthening individual adaptations and acting as an outlet for community concerns. Both my participation in UN meetings, seminars, and site visits in the various *comunas* as well as my ongoing engagement with the *Mesa* allowed me to better understand the broader security dynamics in Soacha and these insights form part of this thesis.

Individual Interviews

I carried out 10 interviews of 1-1.5 hours length with representatives of each of the organizations that make up the *Mesa*, as well as another four women who participate in other community-based organizations. The interviews focused on the life stories of the women, from their municipalities and departments of origin, to their adjustment to life in Soacha, to their views for the city in the future. Questions were designed to understand the women’s personal trajectories, family structure, economic activities, and to spur the women’s reflections on the issues of insecurity that they face. The results of these interviews were also compiled in a systematization document on the organizational history of the

Mesa, which will be published by UN Women in 2011. In addition to working directly with women leaders, I carried out formal interviews with five individuals representing local government and NGOs in Soacha as a way to capture information on the broader panorama of insecurity in the city. Participants in these interviews include the Coordinator of the municipal program on Women and Gender from the Secretariat of Social Development of Soacha, the director of the *Centro de Apoyo Popular*, a Colombian NGO with a long trajectory of work in the municipality, the Director of the *Fundación para la Reconciliación*, a foundation that works on issues of reconciliation and non-violence in marginalized neighborhoods in Soacha and Bogotá, and the coordinators of a community center run by the foundation in Ciudad Bolívar, a southern neighborhood of Bogotá that abuts Soacha. The results of these interviews informed both the contextual information presented here, as well as the last chapter, which deals with conclusions and recommendations.

Cognitive Mapping and Focus Groups

Inspired by participatory mapping methodologies used by scholars and development agencies to document urban insecurity in the developing world as well as the work of Kevin Lynch, in January of 2011, I carried out cognitive mapping workshops with four community-based organizations of Soacha that are run by women who participated in the individual interviews: the *Mesa*, *Fundación Gotitas de Amor por Ti*, *Fundación Familias para el Progreso*, and the Soacha chapter of the *Asociación de Mujeres Colombianas para la Paz*. The participants in the workshops were asked to make a mental list of all of the places they go on an average day. They then drew their route, based on this list of places, as well as what mode of transportation they used in each case. They were then asked to think about the places or routes where they experienced some kind of threat or risk, which they included on their maps. Finally, they were asked to reflect on the strategies they use to avoid those risks, and document those as well. Each participant then explained their map, what the notations mean, and a group discussion about security ensued. In total, the four sessions with community-based organizations involved approximately 48 participants, and 21 cognitive maps were produced as part of the process.

Translations and confidentiality

The quotations from residents that appear in this thesis are my translations from Spanish-language interviews. These are not always literal translations, but represent general trends or individual experiences with insecurity in Soacha. Additionally, the sensitive nature of the information provided in the interviews, maps, and focus groups makes confidentiality critical; all names that appear in the thesis have been changed to protect the identity of study participants. The details surrounding the identities of respondents may also have been changed to avoid the possibility of them being identified by their neighborhood, occupation, or any other personal information.

Limitations of the study

The concept of adaptations presents some challenges for researchers. If one intends to study how citizens react to violence and insecurity, presumably he or she would need to know what types of activities residents would be undertaking in the absence of violence in order to determine a causal link between the insecurity that residents face and the strategies they devise. In order to interpret the results of this type of study, he or she would also need to analyze the results of the adaptations both for individual security and citywide trends in order to determine whether it improves the social, economic, and spatial mobility of citizens. Furthermore, studying urban violence means asking questions about sensitive material, which requires the development of relationships of trust between the researcher and city residents. All of these realities make intensive longitudinal research in the field nearly essential for the study of adaptations; given that reality, this study represents an initial step in the long-term work needed in order to better understand how adaptations to violence contribute to the many outcomes that urban planners are interested in, such as security, economic growth, social cohesion, and civic engagement.

Furthermore, using social organizations as an entry point to study urban violence provided me with invaluable relationships with individuals who are very much in touch with their communities, but it also contributed to bias in the perspectives represented

in the thesis. First of all, with the exception of individual interviews, group discussions on insecurity in the city were common during the course of my work. Despite the value of this exchange in generating group reflections on violence in Soacha, it could have obscured different individual views. This is particularly important in the context of the cognitive maps, as although the participants drew their own maps, they did so in a group setting, and frequently discussed their maps with other participants while making them. The very social and interactive nature of these spaces to begin with, of course, means that this was the most comfortable way for individuals to map their experience. However, it is worth noting that the cognitive maps that emerged as a part of this study should be seen not necessarily as truly personal expressions, but rather as individual interpretations of a broader, group reflection that were produced in a specific space and time and included the presence of an outsider, myself, in their making.

Secondly, and perhaps most notably, the vast majority of the members of social organizations are women. While a small number of men also participate in these organizations, particularly those whose mission and activities are related to productive projects, that is, microenterprise, the number is still small. As a result, only two men were actively involved as participants of this study. It was clear throughout my research that female respondents were reflecting not only on their own experiences with violence, but on those of their male family members, friends, and neighbors. However, the analysis presented here regarding the challenges that men face in Soacha is largely based on women's perceptions of that reality, which of course has its limitations.

Finally, additional research is needed on how individual and community experiences with violence and resilience vary over different ethnic groups. Although the indigenous and afro-Colombian populations are not large in Bogotá and Soacha, these groups are often disproportionately affected by the national armed conflict in the form of forced migration. Their experiences adapting to urban insecurity, then, are particularly important to filling out the panorama of challenges that residents face and how they go about overcoming them.

Carrying out additional research of this kind is also essential to the design of inclusive plans and policies. Residents who are ethnic minorities suggested during the course of this study that they also face additional obstacles in accessing government resources, employment opportunities, and safe housing; it is very important that scholars and practitioners delve further into the complex dynamics of ethnic, gender- and age-based exclusion to ensure that their responses will effectively challenge the dominant, violent regimes that currently operate in marginal neighborhoods.

APPENDIX 2: Geographic Maps

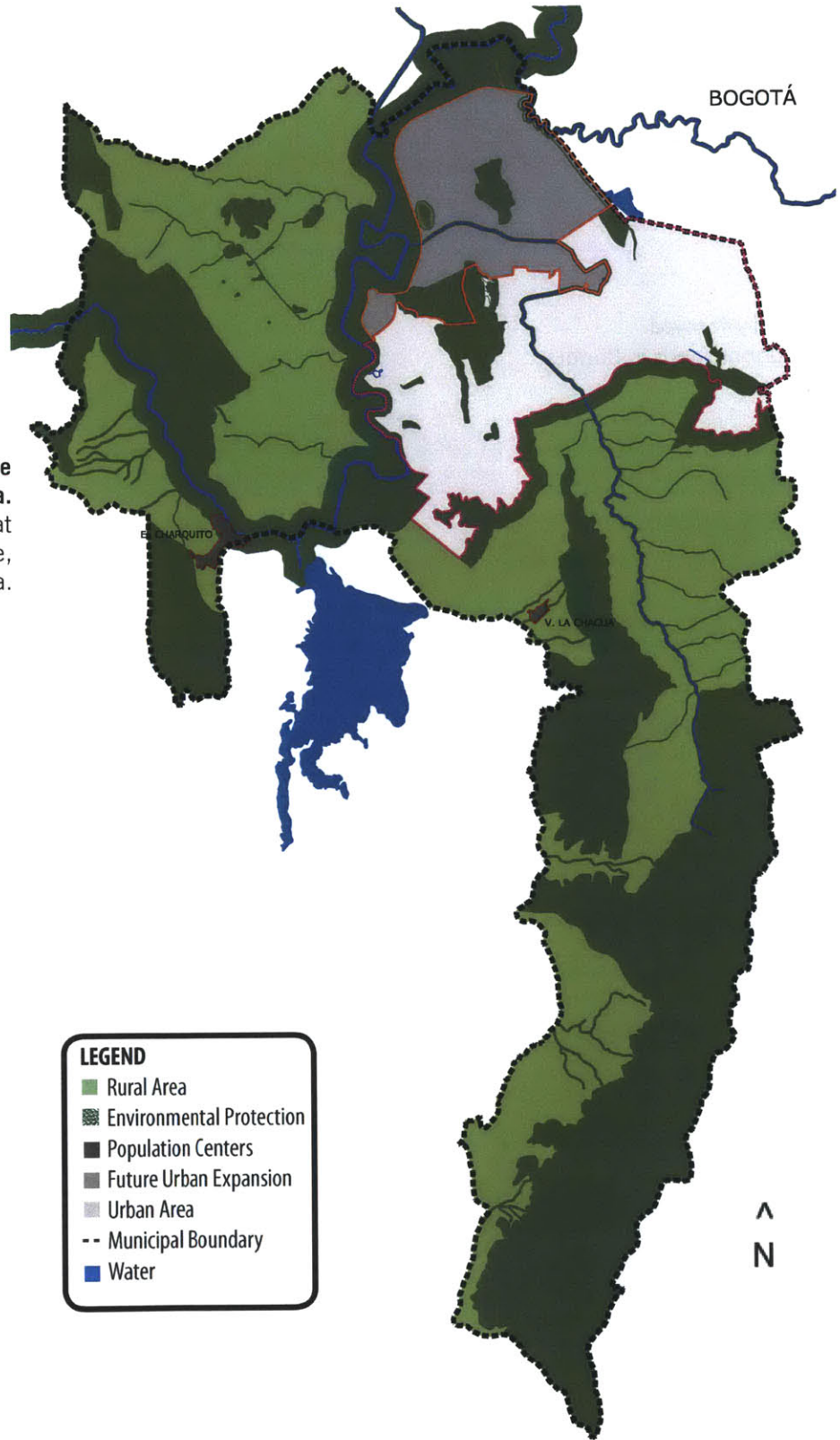


Figure 12. Map of the Municipality of Soacha.
Adapted from: Secretariat of Planning and Land Use, Municipality of Soacha.

LEGEND

- Rural Area
- Environmental Protection
- Population Centers
- Future Urban Expansion
- Urban Area
- Municipal Boundary
- Water

Illegally-formed neighborhoods in Bogotá 2000

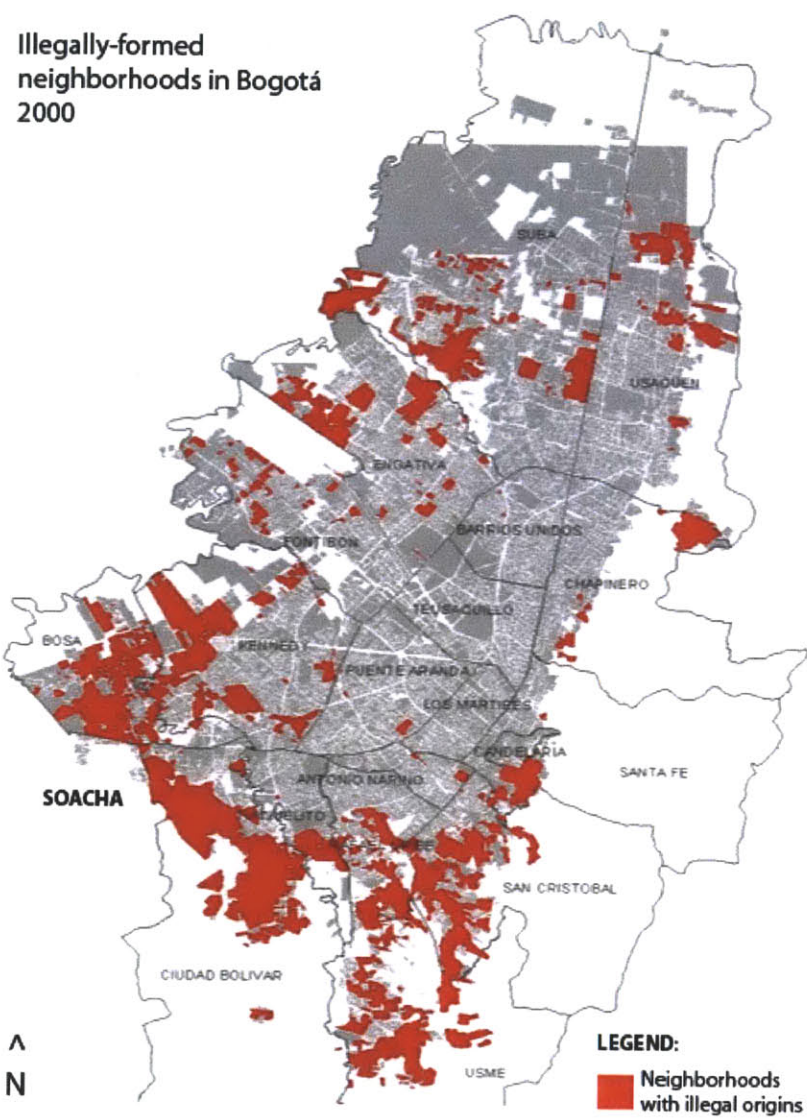


Figure 13. Spatial distribution of illegally formed settlements in Bogotá, 2000

Note the heavy concentration of neighborhoods in the south and southwest of the city that were formed illegally. If the map were to include Soacha, its neighborhoods would be roughly 50% red. Adapted from Torres Tovar (2008).

APPENDIX 3: Cognitive Maps

Soacha residents generated these cognitive maps between January 17 and January 22, 2010. They depict their daily routines and the forms of violence and insecurity they face in the various parts of the city, and in some cases, the strategies they employ to protect themselves. While they expressed their individual routes in diverse ways, many used colored notes to denote risk.

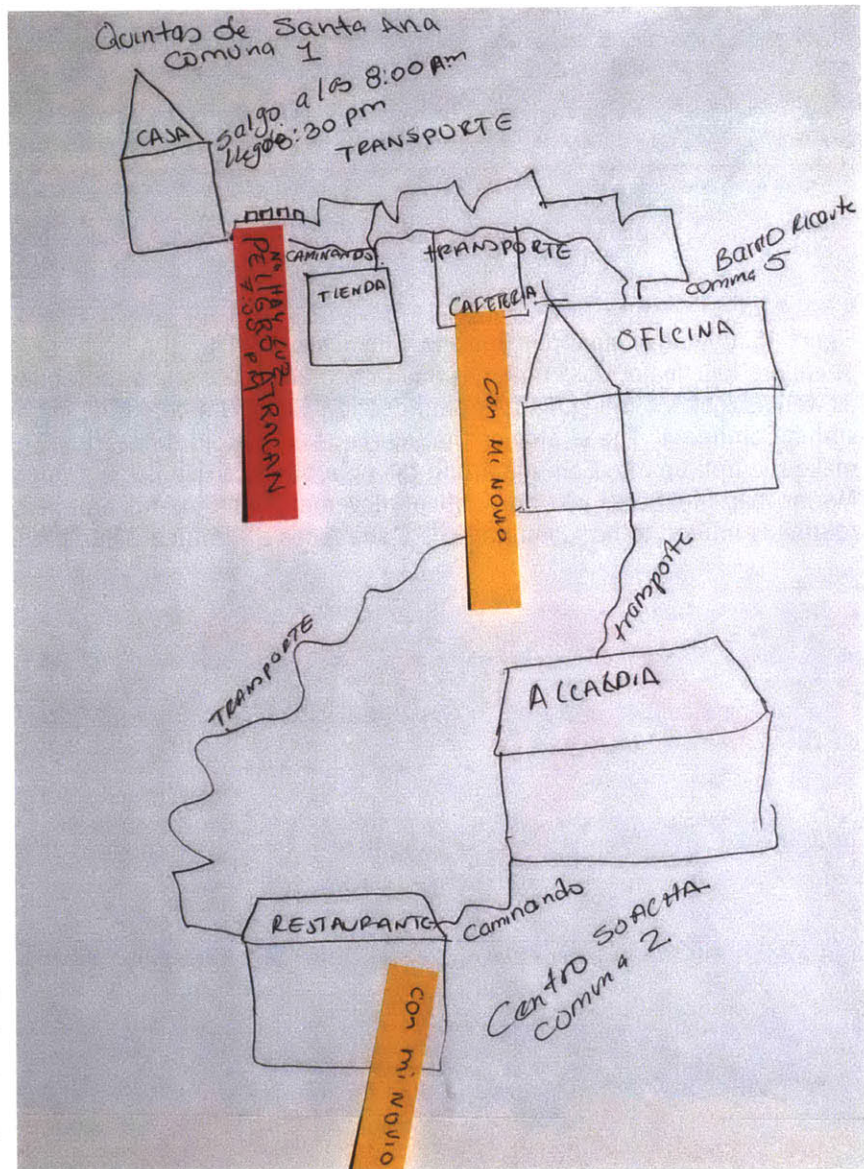


Figure 14. Cognitive map from Comuna 1 Resident, Carolina.

Key locations in her map include her house, the store, a cafeteria, her office, the mayor's office, and a restaurant. The jagged line represents the indirect nature of her commute, which she does by taking *transporte*, or a bus, and *caminando*, walking between three different *comunas*. The major threat in her daily routine, denoted in pink, refers to the risk of muggings that occur near her home after 7:00 pm once there is no longer any light. Carolina also notes meetings with her boyfriend in yellow.

Casa. me levanto sali de mi casa

me fui para canjear al Banco y luego a pagar
servicios Trallecto Paso por un parqueadero

Por atraco y Robo
falta vigilancia

siempre tengo que devolverme y paso por el mismo
ledo no hay otra Ruta. y luego me voy por las
calles Pero no paso por un callejon
Peligroso por los ladrones o Raptores Peligro Robo y atraco

Otra calle para ir
mas Tranquila por la gente

Barrio
Leon Trece Soacha

Comuna 3

luego ala casa de mi amiga luego
salgo y me voy para donde mis padres

Calle Peligrosa por
falta de vigilancia

Pero llega con una estrategia espero
gente para acompañarme y poder
cruzar de vuelta mis hermanas y
mi mamá me regresan a acompañar si
se me hace tarde y busco la misma es-
trategia para llegar ala casa de
Regreso.

Figure 17. Cognitive map from Comuna 3 Resident, Tatiana.

Tatiana experiences major risk of mugging and robbery in taking out money from the bank and traveling to the homes of her family and friends within her comuna. She avoids threats by avoiding empty streets, taking alternate routes, and waiting for other groups of people to pass.

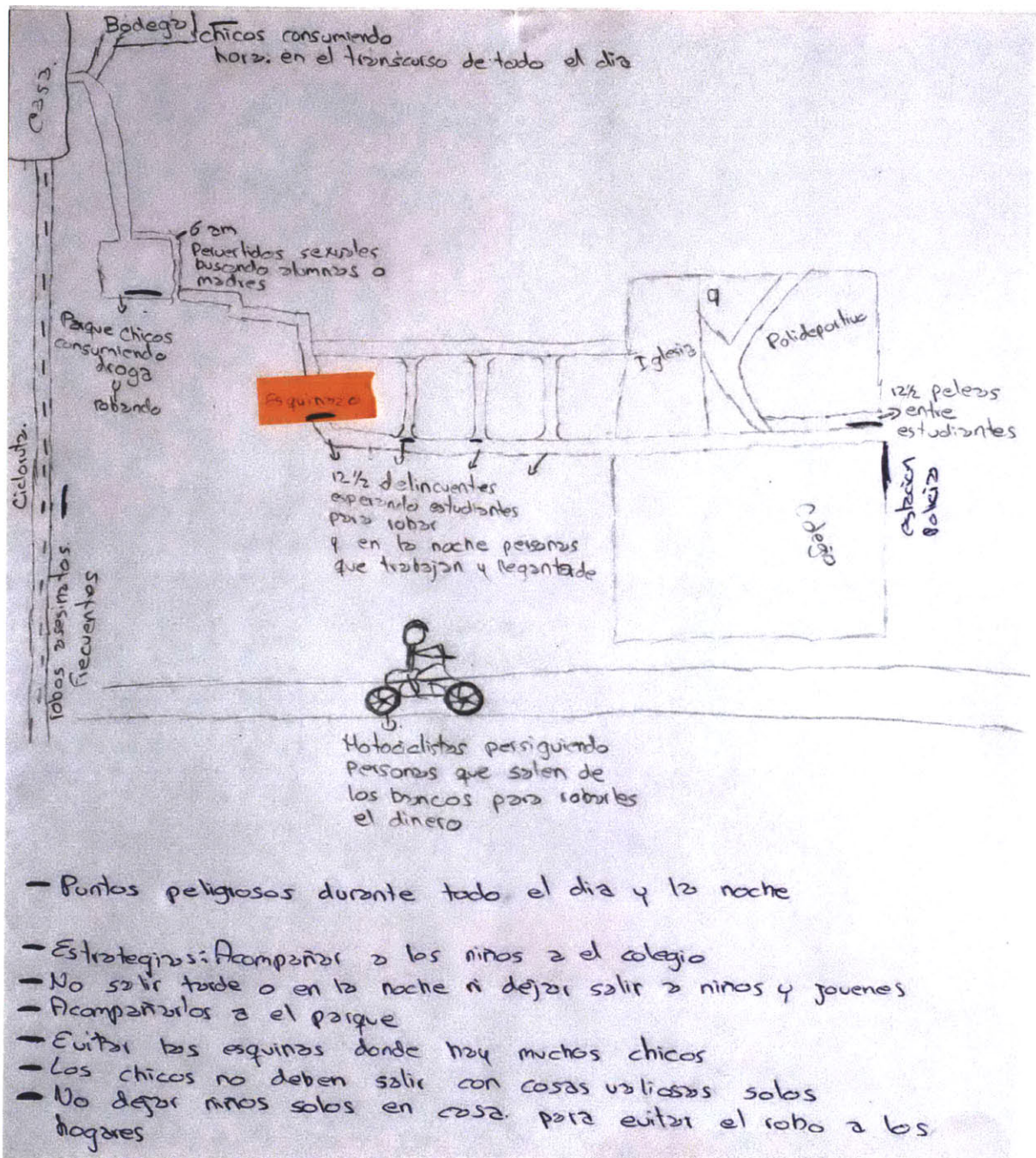


Figure 18. Cognitive map from Comuna 3 Resident, Milena.

As her map shows, Milena is especially aware of the security challenges associated with her neighborhood; lines marked with blue pen represent “dangerous points all during the day and night.” Around 6:00 am, she passes a park where youth use drugs and rob people, and there are “sexual perverts” looking out for mothers and female students on their way to school. In accompanying her son, José, to school, she also passes by the ‘crazy street corner’ where delinquents wait for students to pass in order to rob them. This corner also is known for crime at nighttime, when people arriving home from work are targeted. Interestingly, she also indicates that there are many fights between students by the high school, despite the fact that a police station is located right next to it. She also notes frequent murders and robberies along the main highway that divides the city. Her strategies include accompanying her children to school and to the park, not allowing her children to leave the house with valuable items, not going out late at night, and avoiding street corners where there are groups of boys.

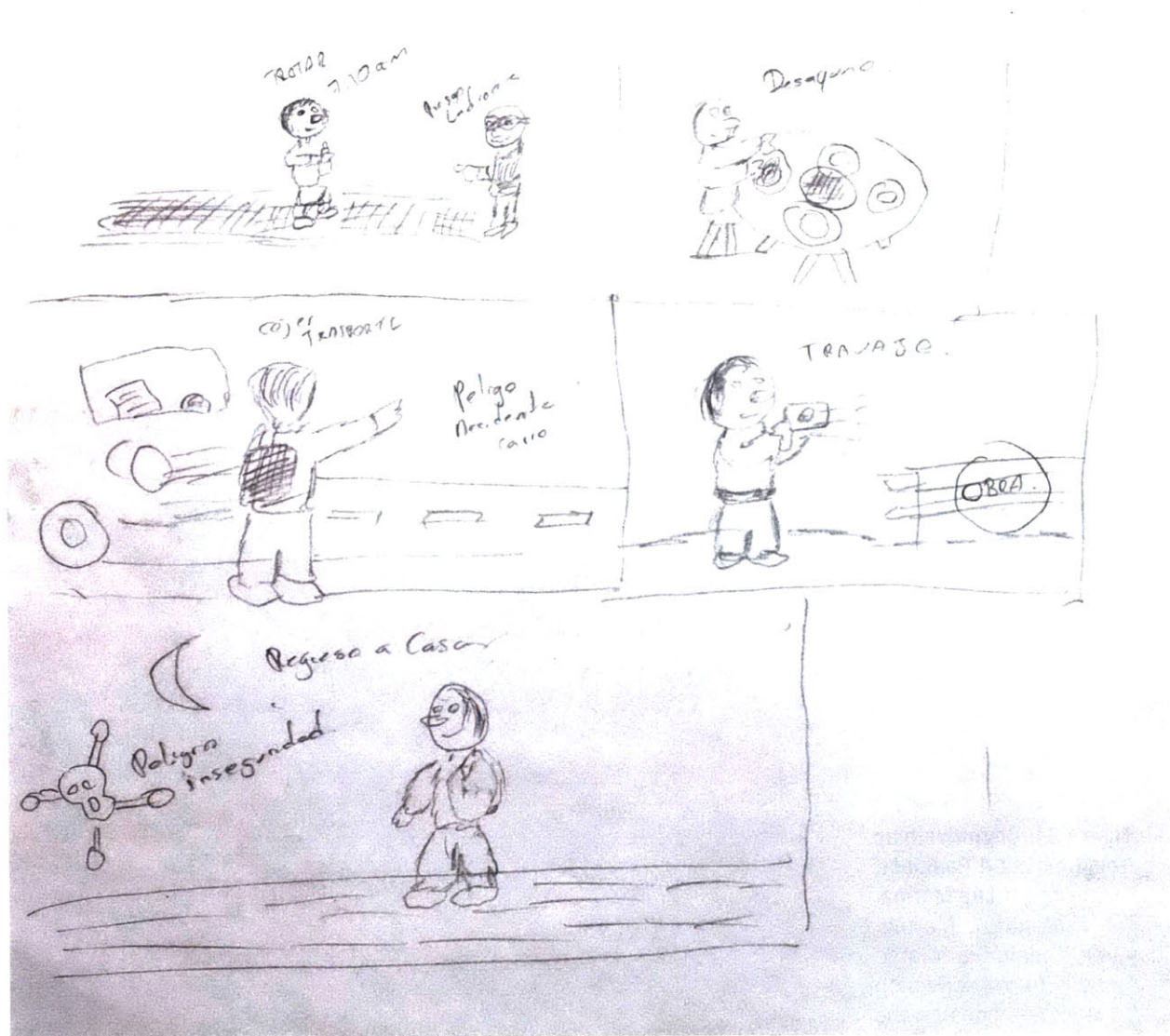


Figure 19. Cognitive map from Comuna 3 Resident, David.

David encounters the threat of economic violence while running in the morning and coming home at night from his job as a construction worker. His indication of threats associated with traffic as he attempts to catch a bus is interesting, as it indicates that not only are elderly citizens affected by this type of risk, but young adults also perceive them to be major issues in their day.

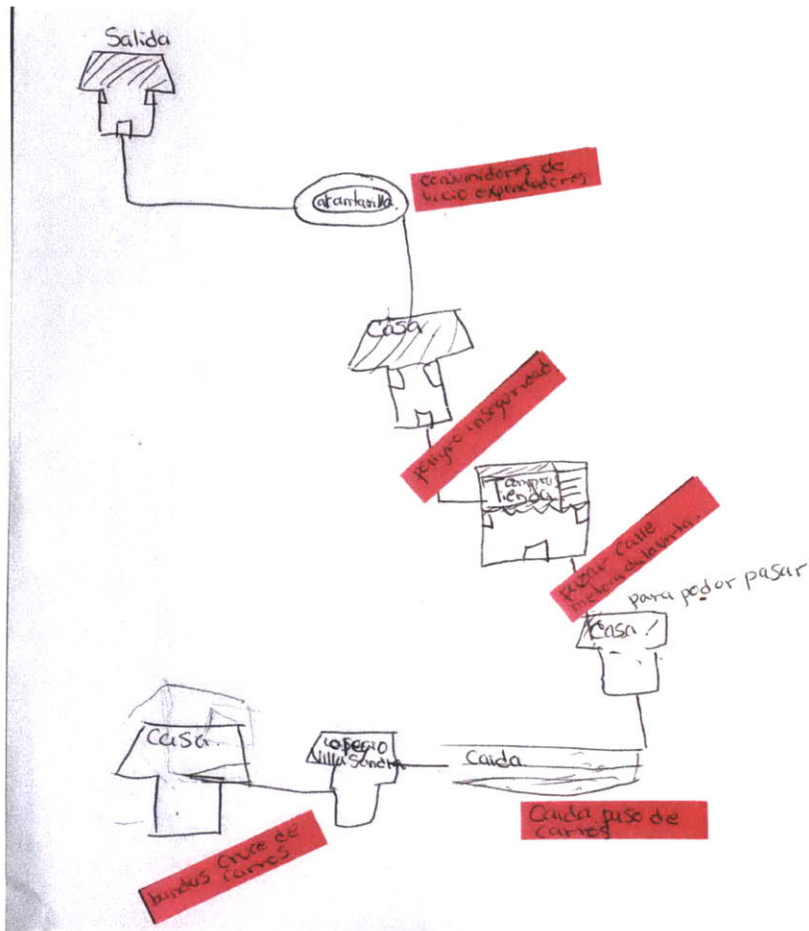
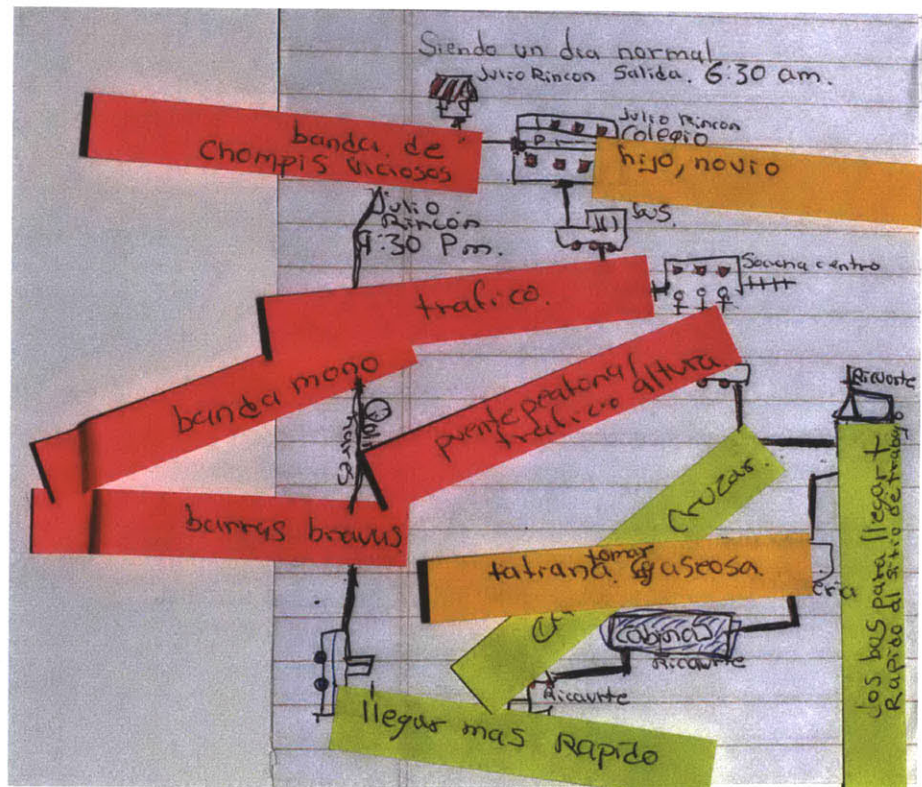


Figure 20. Cognitive map from Comuna 4 Resident, Alejandra. This resident indicates threats associated with drug sales and consumption in her neighborhood, traffic, and gang territory through which she must pass to arrive home at night. It appears that a prominent gang operates next to a high school by her house, which makes her routine that involves paying bills and going to the store particularly risky, as she returns home between each of her activities during the day.

Figure 21. Cognitive map from Comuna 4 Resident, Luz Marina. For resident Luz Marina, daytime threats are related largely to traffic, which she experiences as she crosses from Comuna 4 to the center of the city. She mitigates her risk by taking two buses to arrive at her place of work. On her way home, she also takes a bus to pass through the territory of three different gangs: the *barras bravas*, *banda mono*, and *chompis viciosos* before arriving home at around 9:30 pm.



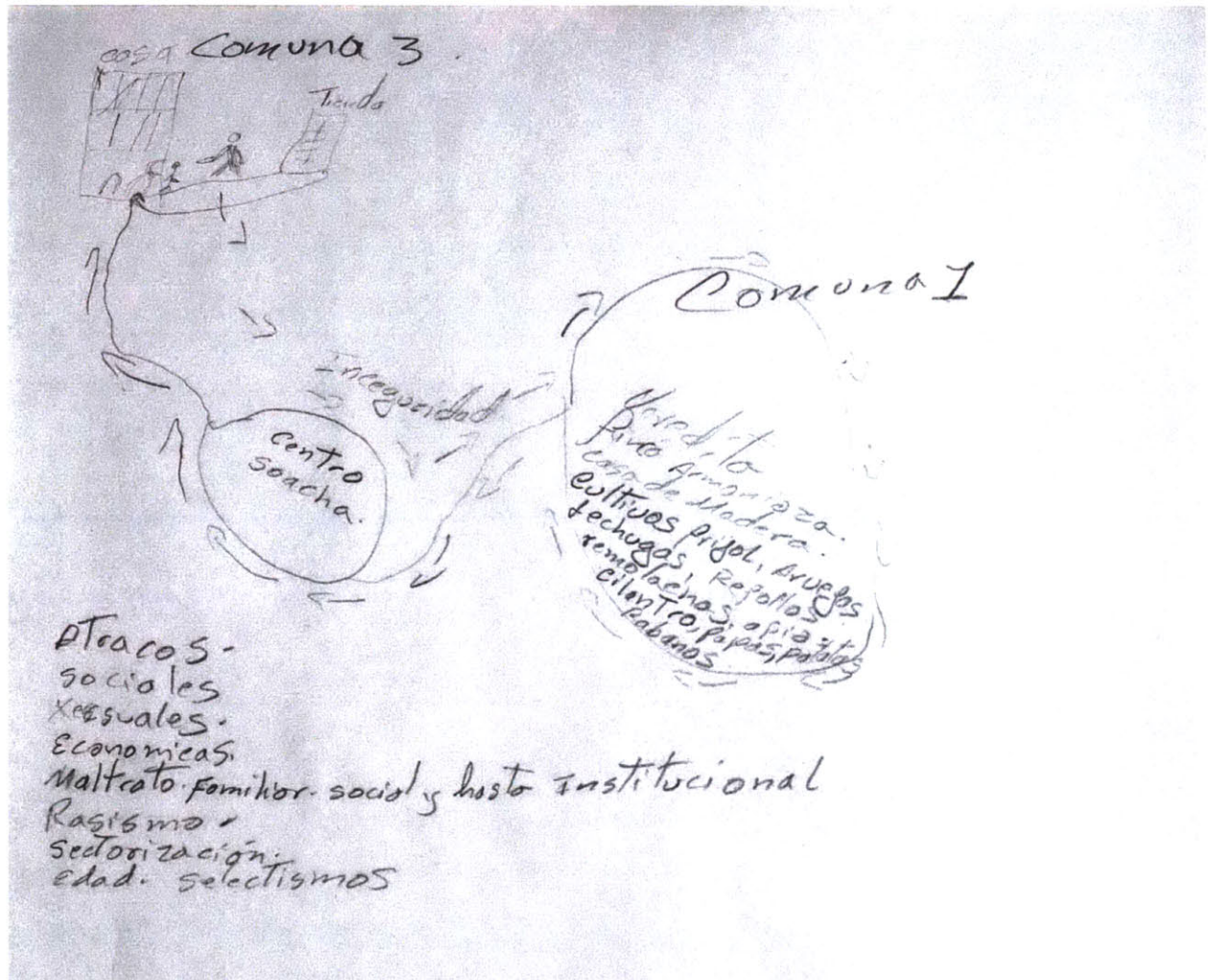


Figure 22. Cognitive map from Comuna 3 Resident, Claudia.

In her map, Claudia indicates that her main destinations include the store, a small farm that she operates as part of a social foundation that she founded, and the center of Soacha. Along her daily route, which she travels by walking, she notes significant insecurity around the center of town. She mentions the prevalence of a number of types of violence and discrimination as part of her map: social, sexual, and economic attacks, family abuse, racism, and age-based discrimination. It is unclear whether she experiences these threats directly in her daily routine or if her notes are meant to reflect broader trends in the city.